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**The Fantastic in Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* and
*Joseph und seine Brüder***

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Prefatory Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

The body of the text amounts to 79, 613 words and does not therefore exceed the limit set by the Modern and Medieval Languages Degree Committee.

Abstract

The thesis includes an introductory survey of recent relevant secondary literature and a coda dealing with the fantastic as a manifestation of Schiller's 'Spieltrieb'. Its main body, however, is comprised of three substantial chapters prosecuting two interlinked arguments: (1) that *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph und seine Brüder* are fantastic narratives and (2) that the fantastic in these narratives works hand in glove with Mann's philosophical concerns.

In order to demonstrate that the first of these propositions is correct chapter II is devoted to showing how much *Der Tod in Venedig* has in common with works which are acknowledged to be part of the fantastic genre (as defined by Todorov and refined by Brooke-Rose): 'The Black Cat', 'The Turn of the Screw' and 'Der Sandmann'. This chapter also attempts a hermeneutics of the fantastic by discussing each of the above mentioned stories in relation to morality, meaning and intention. Attempts to dismiss the putatively supernatural elements in *Der Tod in Venedig* are considered in the light of the critical debate as to whether 'The Turn of the Screw' should be considered a ghost story or just an account of hysterical hallucinations. This chapter also broaches the topic of the relationship between the metaphysical and the supernatural.

Chapter III is an investigation of the meaning of *Der Tod in Venedig* in the light of Mann's philosophical development. The question of whether he is more properly to be regarded as a Nietzschean or Schopenhauerian is raised, as is the influence of each on Mann's earlier (i.e. pre-*Tod in Venedig*) fiction. It is suggested that neither of these philosophers could provide Mann with the sense of purpose vital to his literary creativity, and that he began casting around for an alternative to Nietzsche's value-free naturalism and Schopenhauer's value-free metaphysics. Two candidates are proposed: Plato (elements of whose philosophy Mann adopts without irony) and Schiller (as a synthesis of Platonism and Kantianism). Schiller's interpretation of the contrast between a metaphysics of value on the one hand and a natural world with its own claims to respect on the other is advanced as the model for the 'Geist/Natur' distinction which lies at the heart of Mann's world-view. Mann, it is argued, having begun to apprehend the deficiencies of both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer while not yet fully embracing the Schillerian categories he would later make his own, includes putatively supernatural elements in *Der Tod in Venedig* which can be understood both in terms of Schopenhauer's 'Wille' and also in terms of a Platonic empyrean, so that it seems that two different metaphysical systems compete for space with one another. However, a Schillerian solution – involving the 'Spieltrieb' – to this apparently unsatisfactory situation is at hand.

Chapter IV deals with *Joseph*, and it follows the analytic procedure established in the previous two chapters. Firstly it demonstrates that there are good reasons to suspect the presence of the supernatural in this novel. Secondly, it establishes the meaning of the supernatural by considering the philosophical background alluded to by the novel's events and commentary. Numerous examples of the putatively supernatural are considered, as is the ubiquity of something that looks like providence throughout the tetralogy, and various naturalistic critiques are evaluated. The Schopenhauerian interpretation of the novel is discussed in the light of Mann's 1937 essay on this philosopher, and is shown to be insufficient to explain the work as a whole. The importance of 'Geist' is emphasized. Complementing the proto-Christianity which has always been acknowledged as playing a role in *Joseph* a proto-Platonism is proposed as one of the novel's main preoccupations, and the metaphysic behind the supernatural in *Joseph* is shown to be as Platonic as it is Christian. However, a certain Hegelianism (which Mann understands in a dualistic fashion) at work in *Joseph* suggests that direct access to a 'Geist' outside of the secular world (which is what Joseph apparently has) lacks the validity and staying-power of a 'Geist' realized through earthly struggle. This, the thesis suggests, is the reason that Juda rather than Joseph receives Jacob's blessing.

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The person who most deserves gratitude and recognition is my PhD supervisor, Dr Michael Minden, whose unfailing encouragement, intellectual acumen, sound advice and practical support have been indispensable throughout the composition of this thesis. Without his intervention it might well have run aground in its early stages, and if it has been brought successfully into harbour, then because of his readiness to take the helm when my own navigational skills proved insufficient. My PhD advisor, Dr David Midgley, also deserves thanks. He has been kind enough to devote considerable time and mental energy to reading and critiquing various draughts of this thesis, thereby casting fresh light on difficulties which too-long familiarity with the subject-matter might have led me to overlook. I should also like to thank Professor Nicholas Boyle, who was kind enough to supervise an MPhil essay of mine dealing with Kant and Nietzsche, for encouraging a literary-philosophical orientation crucial to the composition of this thesis.

Amongst friends and acquaintances, Anna Magdalena Elsner and Lukas Kahl have spared time to read and critique the thesis, and special thanks are due to Dr Martin Worthington, Junior Research Fellow at St John's College, who has provided invaluable advice concerning the structure and presentation of the arguments expounded in it.

Abbreviations

Abbreviated References to Works by Thomas Mann

References to the *Gesammelte Werke in Dreizehn Bänden* have Roman numerals for the volume number. For example: (X, 423).

References to the *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* have Arabic numerals with a decimal point for the volume number. For example: (13.1, 221).

References to the *Briefe* have 'Briefe' followed by the volume number in Roman numerals. For example: (Briefe III, 78)

References to the *Tagebücher* have 'TB' followed by the volume number in Roman numerals. For example: (TB III, 312)

Abbreviated References to Works by other Authors

In general, the author-date system is employed throughout this thesis. However, an exception has been made when more than one volume of a multi-volume work or edition is cited.

References to Kant's *Werke in sechs Bänden* include a Roman volume number after the author's name. For example: (Kant II, 81)

References to the *Sämtliche Werke* of Schopenhauer include a Roman volume number after the author's name. For example: (Schopenhauer III, 212)

References to the *Kritische Studienaufgabe* of Nietzsche's collected works include a Roman volume number after the author's name. For example: (Nietzsche I, 512)

References to Frederick Copleston's *A History of Philosophy* include a Roman volume number after the author's name. For example: (Copleston VII, 132)

Chapter I: Introduction

Göttingen and Two Currents of Mann Criticism

Between the third and the fifth of September 2010 a colloquium entitled ‘Der Zauberer und die Phantastik. Thomas Mann und das phantastische Erzählen’ took place in Göttingen’s Paulinerkirche. After an introductory session devoted to an explanation of what the fantastic entails – a state of ambiguity between naturalistic and supernatural interpretations of fictional events – various speakers over a period of three days reviewed some of Mann’s works with a view to making a ruling on their fantastic credentials. The only one granted ‘official status’, so to speak, as genuinely fantastic was a very early short story entitled ‘Der Kleiderschrank’ – none of the major fiction was admitted to the canon.¹ *Buddenbrooks*, Heinrich Detering conceded, perhaps included fantastic ‘Grenzfälle’, Andreas Blödorn made it clear that *Der Tod in Venedig* should be excluded on the grounds that the only material which we might take to be fantastic occurs in the story’s ‘Binnengeschichte’, i.e. before its third-person narrator can take the stage unchallenged after Aschenbach’s death. Luca Crescenzi suggested that the fantastic played no role in *Der Zauberberg* and explained that all the events in the novel are mere figments of Hans Castorp’s imagination and those seven years in the sanatorium but a dream hurriedly prepared by his subconscious in the last second or two before the ‘Donnerschlag’ of the last chapter heralds the return of the waking world. Stephan Stachorski declared that, notwithstanding all evident signs to the contrary, *Doktor Faustus* ought not to be considered a work of the fantastic on the grounds that Mann would never have been so irresponsible as to suggest that the catastrophes of the Third Reich were caused by anything but human agency. Consequently, the novel’s ambiguously supernatural

¹ This story was identified as fantastic by Marcel Brion in 1954: ‘Parmi les nouvelles de Thomas Mann il en est une intitulée “Le Placard” qui met en évidence le fantastique latent dans ses autres œuvres.’ (Brion 1955, 49) Its disorientated protagonist descends from a train in an unfamiliar north German town, hires a room in a pension, and discovers a naked girl in a wardrobe who night after night recites poetry and tells stories to him. An explanation is at hand for these events which, while not being definitely supernatural, are none the less hard to account for naturalistically: ‘Wer weiß auch nur, ob überhaupt Albrecht van der Qualen an jenem Nachmittage wirklich erwachte und sich in die unbekannte Stadt begab; ob er nicht vielmehr schlafend in seinem Coupé erster Klasse verblieb und von dem Schnellzug Berlin-Rom mit ungeheurer Geschwindigkeit über alle Berge getragen ward?’ (2.1, 203) However, as we have already been informed that various doctors have given van der Qualen only a little while to live, we might wonder if this dream takes place at death’s threshold, or even beyond it.

elements are to be attributed to Mann's source materials – the Faust-legends etc. – and are not to be attributed to the author himself.²

There would be little purpose in engaging with all these arguments at this point, especially as some of them concern works scarcely touched on by this thesis. But one cannot help registering surprise at a near definitive rejection of the fantastic in *Der Tod in Venedig*, *Doktor Faustus* etc., given that Mann's use of the ambiguously supernatural is an open secret amongst some of the most important critics to have examined his works. For example, Reed in *The Uses of Tradition* points out at the end of a discussion of the various types of ambiguity which are maintained throughout *Der Tod in Venedig* that Mann employs similar techniques in his later fictions too:

There is the Naturalistic surface of the Joseph novel, showing how all that 'really' happened, but with underlying suggestions of mythical re-enactment. And a yet more radical doubt and suggestiveness surround *Doktor Faustus*. Are Adrian Leverkühn's inspirations the product of syphilis or of a pact with the devil? The dubiousness itself parallels the two interpretations of Germany's descent into Nazism: pathological and mythical. (Reed 1996, 178)

And Dierks makes a similar point in *Studien zu Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann*. He believes that the strange goings-on in 'Der Kleiderschrank' are best explained in terms of a regression from the world of the senses into the metaphysical substrate which creates that world, but points out too that this early short story establishes Mann's policy of never allowing such a force into his fiction without the support of a naturalistic alibi:

Nie wird in der Folge bei Thomas Mann eine Primärwirklichkeit durchlässig, weil sich Individuation in eine Hinterwelt entgrenzt, ohne daß das Motiv des korrumpierenden Rausches, einer Intoxikation der Vernunft, erklärend und wertend dabei fehlt. (Dierks 1972, 45)

One should not be misled by Reed's use of the word 'myth' or Dierks' allusion to a 'Hinterwelt'. Each of them is describing a narrative technique which allows the coexistence of two perspectives, the one being naturalistic and the other being the

² Also present was Marianne Wünsch, author of *Die fantastische Literatur der frühen Moderne (1890-1930)*, one of the few books to connect Mann to the fantastic – although its treatment of him is limited to Joachim's reappearance in *Der Zauberberg*, which is an unambiguously supernatural event.

opposite of naturalistic: a *supernatural* perspective. It is true that their reception of this supernatural dimension in the stories in question is by no means effusive, and Reed denies the ‘radical doubt’ he attributed to *Doktor Faustus* when he returns to the novel later in his treatise.³ All the same, we should not lose sight of the fact that two leading Mann critics effectively conceded the role of the fantastic in Mann’s works more than thirty years ago.

However, Reed’s and Dierks’ implied admission that certain of Mann’s novels and short stories exhibit fantastic ambiguity is not the only element which the present work takes over and develops, for their treatment of Mann’s problematic stance with regard to values and moral purpose must also be acknowledged. Reed, for example, points out that Mann’s early adoption of Nietzsche’s nihilism leaves his early fiction bereft of a positive moral pole: ‘Its negations depend logically on the existence of contrary positions, and if one cannot get back to these through the implications of the ironic phrasing, irony is left as a rhetorical structure hanging in the air.’ (Reed 1996, 14) He regards this all-pervasive irony as a problem chiefly for the reader, but this thesis will argue that it was an even greater handicap for Mann himself, who more than most writers needed to set himself positive and not just negative goals, to feel a sense of mission. And it will also argue that, in order to achieve such a sense of mission, Mann reached beyond both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer to an older philosophical tradition. This is a possibility identified by Dierks who, in his treatment of ‘Goethe und Tolstoi’, writes of the ‘Geist’ depicted in that essay:

Hier wäre Thomas Manns pathetische Vindizierung des Geistes zu orten, als ethische Notwendigkeit in der Immanenzwelt des Menschen, bei steter Einsicht in die Schwäche des Geistes. Im Grunde ist das eher Schillers Freiheitspathos, also ein Rückgriff hinter Schopenhauer auf Kant. Ein notwendiges Postulat steht gegen philosophische Einsicht, jedoch genügt es Thomas Mann, die Position des Geistes als gleichberechtigt gegen die Natur

³ ‘The adequate and undeniable explanation of Adrian’s fate remains, despite the “systematic ambiguity” of a conception which must keep the devil in play, his disease.’ (Reed 1996, 395) This conforms to a pattern amongst Mann scholars, whereby the supernatural element is admitted to be ambiguously present only to be then dismissed as actually absent. For example, Rolf Günter Renner, in an article promisingly entitled ‘Thomas Mann als fantastischer Realist’, first notes that ‘Die vertauschten Köpfe’ represents a challenge to naturalistic explanation, and then comes to the following conclusion: ‘Ohne Zweifel gehen diese äußeren Spannungen aus einer inneren hervor; sie weisen auf das Unbewußte, und zeigen die Erfahrungswirklichkeit als eine “verstellte Realität.”’ (Renner 1986, 74)

(‘Willen’) zu setzen. Im *Joseph*-Märchen heißt es schließlich: ‘Aber das Ich ist von Gott und ist des Geistes, der ist frei.’ (Dierks 1972, 74)

That is a view which the present work seeks to vindicate: that ‘Geist’, and the ‘Geist/Natur’ conflict which dominate Mann’s theorizing during the First World War and after are indeed of Schillerian provenance and have little to do with either Nietzsche (for whom, as an uncompromising naturalist, ‘Geist’ is just a particular expression of mankind’s phenomenal make-up) or Schopenhauer (who dislikes the word ‘Geist’ and who typically conceives ‘Intelligenz’ to be a submissive hand-maid to the ‘Wille’). And Dierks is naturally quite right to discern Kant’s thinking behind Schiller’s – though, as we shall demonstrate in chapter III, Schiller’s philosophy has other sources too.

This thesis, then, is positively indebted to Reed’s and Dierks’ scholarly efforts. Its central arguments: that some of Mann’s greatest works belong to the fantastic genre, and that the supernatural and the metaphysical are closely associated with one another in his fiction, are implied in the statements cited above. But it is negatively indebted to them too, in that they articulate positions with which it can fruitfully disagree. For it is evident that their recognition of the possible presence of the supernatural and of a Kant-derived metaphysic such as Schiller’s (‘Ein notwendiges Postulat steht gegen philosophische Einsicht’), is a reluctant concession to something they can scarcely tolerate. Both are hostile to the supernatural whenever it announces itself unambiguously. As we shall see in chapter II, Reed finds the return of the deceased Joachim Ziemssen in *Der Zauberberg* to be quite unacceptable, and Dierks too regards the episode as unworthy of serious consideration: ‘Wir können uns eine detaillierte Interpretation des Spiritismuskapitels “Fragwürdigstes” ersparen,’ mentioning merely that it is informed by both Schopenhauer and Mann’s own occult experiences. (Dierks 1972, 113)

Reed and Dierks can be regarded as representing and fostering two important currents in Mann criticism. On the one hand, there are those scholars who, like Reed, view Mann and his literary achievement from a ‘progressivist’ perspective. That is, they regard him to be an author with a sharp eye for social and political realities doing his best, during a period of prolonged crisis, to promote a humanitarian outlook. They do

not dispute that his intellectual background was morally complex and even suspect, nor do they pretend that the positions he came to adopt in his maturity were reached without a struggle. But so far as they are concerned that merely underlines the validity of those positions. Such scholars take the values they see Mann as championing for granted. Is it not axiomatic, for example, that Aschenbach's inability to moderate either his obsessive self-discipline or his erotic passion is a bad thing, that Joseph's provision for Egypt's hungry is a good thing? Accordingly, while critics of this persuasion regard it as their duty to identify the means by which Mann brings about the realization of progressive maxims in his fiction, they are by no means anxious to question those maxims, and still less to regard them as dependent on some metaphysical or religious authority. If a humanitarian outlook is shown to derive from some supernatural power which ever fewer people take seriously, then will it not fall by the wayside when its guarantor is exposed as a sham? No wonder they view with dismay anything in *Der Tod in Venedig* which might suggest that Aschenbach's experiences are the result of other than natural processes, anything in *Joseph* which would suggest that God might be more than a figment of the collective imagination.

On the other hand there are those critics who, like Dierks, see in Mann first and foremost the promoter of a Schopenhauerian philosophical outlook unconcerned with life's ephemeral glitter except in so far as it can be shown to arise from a grisly metaphysical reality: the 'Wille'. Perhaps the best known of them is Hans Wysling who for more than thirty years directed the Thomas Mann Archive in Zurich, and whose 1990 monograph *Narzissmus und illusionäre Existenzform* presents Mann's last novel as a thoroughgoing exercise in Schopenhauerian thinking.⁴ The most

⁴ That Wysling brought the full force of his scholarly eminence to bear on *Felix Krull* has had, perhaps, unfortunate consequences for Mann criticism. He begins his study with a list of reasons for choosing *Felix Krull* as a worthy subject for analysis, all of which (with the exception of the last, which invokes the unusually complete state of the notes for *Felix Krull*) have to do with the novel's *typicality*. The implication is that an understanding of Mann's last novel throws an especially revealing light on the rest of his work. But there are several (as we shall see, very closely related) reasons for disputing *Felix Krull's* typicality. Firstly, it is a work which Mann himself felt to be unsatisfactory, a work which he abandoned for more than thirty years and, having recommenced it, never managed to prosecute with any conviction. This suggests the absence in it of ingredients present in the works he did find satisfactory and could prosecute with conviction. And in fact we know that he only undertook to continue *Felix Krull* as a last resort, as a diary entry for 25th November 1950 makes clear: 'Ich kann nicht nichts tun. Doch zögere ich, das alte Material wieder vorzunehmen, aus Besorgnis, es möchte mir nach all dem inzwischen Getanen nichts oder nicht genug mehr sagen, und ich möchte gewahr werden, daß mein Werk tatsächlich getan ist.' (TB VIII, 295) Secondly, it is a 'Schelmenroman' and as such constitutes a fictional holiday from the ethical concerns which are a preoccupation of *Der Zauberberg*, the later novels in the *Joseph* tetralogy, and *Doktor Faustus*. That Mann saw the novel in

uncompromising critic of all in this respect, however, is Børge Kristiansen, whose view of *Der Zauberberg* has led Wolfgang Schneider – by no means averse in principle to an appreciation of the role played by Schopenhauer in Mann’s fiction – to register in his treatise on Mann’s fictional characterization the following protest: ‘Wenn die philosophische Hinterabsicht des Erzählers im Verrühren des Erzählten zur “Ewigkeitssuppe” bestünde, hätte sich der Autor allzuviel Arbeit gemacht mit der distinkten Gestaltung seiner Figuren und ihrer geistigen Welt.’⁵ More recent critics in the same lineage, have been more accommodating of non-Schopenhauerian elements in Mann’s fiction, but regard them as boughs grafted onto a Schopenhauerian trunk. Always there is the tendency to see Mann not as a novelist inspired by and interested in Schopenhauer in the same way that he was inspired by and interested in other thinkers, but as the philosopher’s apprentice struggling to find adequate fictional expression for his master’s truth.

Both of these approaches to Mann have their merits and drawbacks. The merit of the progressivist perspective is that it allows us to seize the political commitment of, say, *Der Zauberberg* and the *Joseph* novels – novels written, as we know, with the dynamics of Germany’s and the world’s history in mind. Despite his protestation that the partisanship of *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* should be regarded as ‘unpolitical’ it is clear that from the outbreak of the First World War onwards Mann was anything but indifferent to political and social change and that he felt an obligation to use his influence as a writer and public figure for a greater good. The progressivist critic’s assumption that the events in Mann’s fiction are of moment, that

this light is apparent from a letter he wrote to Agnes Meyer in October 1947: ‘Das Komische, das Lachen, der Humor erscheinen mir mehr und mehr als Heil der Seele; ich dürste danach, nach den nur notdürftig aufgeheiterten Schrecknissen des “Faustus” und mache mich anheischig, bei düsterer Weltlage das Heiterste zu erfinden.’ (Briefe III, 557) If we limit our appreciation of Mann’s most achieved novels to what they have in common with *Felix Krull* we will overlook their moral purpose and meaning altogether. Thirdly, Mann’s last novel does not participate in the evaluative dualism which reigns in Mann’s greatest works. Although *Felix Krull* (like ‘Die vertauschten Köpfe’) alludes to ‘Geist’ occasionally, it does not make the philosophical concessions which would allow it to be an authentic alternative to ‘Natur’.

⁵ (Schneider 1999, 126) It is only fair to add that with time Kristiansen has become more appreciative of Mann’s philosophical complexity. For example he is one of the few critics to remark the importance of Hegel to the *Joseph* trilogy (a matter to which we shall return in chapter IV): ‘In der Geschichte Josephs, die einer Dialektik Hegelscher Observanz folgt, so daß im Laufe der Entwicklung immer höhere geistige und kulturelle Positionen erreicht werden, setzt sich mit der Geschichte Mut-*em-enets* Schopenhauers pessimistische Willensphilosophie durch, und vor diesem Hintergrund bleibt uns scheinbar nur die Feststellung übrig, daß der Joseph Roman kein einheitliches Werk ist.’ (Kristiansen 1993, 22) We might at this point expect him to exclude the Hegelian in favour of the Schopenhauerian – but he surprises us by doing the very reverse.

they spring from a concern with the present and future, that there is something *at stake* in them is, surely, vindicated by the fact that they have always enjoyed a numerous readership – after all, the public at large has little appetite for ‘Ewigkeitssuppe’. Its drawback is that it assumes that Mann’s own moral perspective in *Joseph*, for example, can do without further validation, whereas the searching naturalism which prevails in key passages of that novel allows no such complacency. As an example, let us consider H  l  ne Vuillet’s analysis of Joseph and his triumph.

Like many progressivist critics she assumes Freud to have influenced the tetralogy in a decisive manner and as a consequence takes for granted the relevance of his pronouncements to the effect that psychoanalysis has completed the work of Copernicus, Darwin etc. in demolishing man’s sense of his own worth. Having lost all centrality with regard to the observable universe, having lost all distinction with regard to the biological world, he now receives a ‘dritte Kr  nkung’: (Freud 1940, 8) that his ‘ich’ is no longer master in its own house – what he has traditionally regarded as a supernatural ‘soul’ is just a cerebral activity competing for dominance with a host of others. Having noted this, Vuillet adds:

Mais l   o   les h  ros de la premi  re p  riode de la cr  ation de Mann ne parviennent pas    sortir de l’impasse dans laquelle les conduisaient inexorablement leurs errances labyrinthiques et leur subjugation dionysiaque, Joseph, pour la premi  re fois, trouve une voie: le sujet h  roique parvient    sculpter un destin remarquable    partir du chaos int  rieur, trouve un   quilibre existentiel, se met tout entier au service du bien g  n  ral. Dans ce mod  le d’individuation positive, l’herm  tisme semble offrir un mod  le qui permettrait de rassembler les morceaux dispers  s du sujet moderne. Le roman de formation de Joseph livre donc,    qui voudrait l’entendre ainsi, les cl  s d’une formation capable (peut-  tre) d’aider l’individu    trouver un   quilibre entre les forces int  rieures qui d  chirent son int  riorit  . (Vuillet 2007, 288)

But it is hardly self-evident that to place oneself ‘au service du bien g  n  ral’ and to establish an ‘  quilibre entre les forces int  rieures’ are good and worthwhile things to do in view of what Freud’s analysis implies: that there is *nothing special about human beings* which would make either their general well-being or their personal happiness a valid criterion of worth. Which is to say, the value which Vuillet attributes to Joseph’s development and actions rests on a *pre-Freudian* notion of mankind’s unique

character and status.⁶ Nor is it a reasonable defence to say that, given the widespread recognition of human happiness as a worthwhile end to strive for, a theoretical justification of the same is redundant – for the purpose of Mann’s psychological analysis, in *Joseph* and elsewhere, is to *question* widely held beliefs about the meaning and value of human life, and to demonstrate how often these arise from meaningless and valueless forces.⁷ That is, value has a problematic character for Mann, with the result that the complexity of his novels is not confined to the imagined world the narrator introduces us to with its multitude of characters and relationships – there is in addition, and despite a great show of stylistic authority, complexity *within* the narrator too and his perspective shifts under the influence of the philosophical arguments he presents and allows others to present. So while it is true that Mann is a politically committed writer, it is also true that the values he wishes to promote are always under review and are occasionally obliterated by a naturalism for which all value is illusory. As we shall see, such naturalism is frequently countered by a supernatural and moral perspective in Mann’s fiction – but any analysis which overlooks or denies the validity of that perspective while simultaneously claiming Mann for the party of light runs the risk of superficiality.

The merit of the Schopenhauerian critical tradition is that it draws our attention to a philosophical dimension in Mann’s works which we might otherwise miss. That

⁶ Malte Herwig points out in *Bildungsbürger auf Abwegen*, a treatise on Mann’s relationship with the natural sciences, that the purpose of humanism (understood as an ethical stance) is the ‘Veredlung und Verherrlichung des Menschen’ and that it is ‘offensichtlich, daß eine humanistische Anthropologie im 20. Jahrhundert sich des blinden Fortschrittsglaubens und der uneingeschränkten Verherrlichung des Menschen, dieses “Prothesengottes”, wie Freud ihn nannte, entschlagen mußte, wenn sie auch nur irgendeinen Realitätsbezug beanspruchen wollte.’ (Herwig 2004, 61-62) If, however, the scientific perspective is incompatible with the exaltation (in terms either of a present evaluation or of a future purpose) of mankind, then where is a compatible perspective to be located? Herwig comes to the conclusion that Mann adopts a dualist position: ‘Auch wenn er ein Leben lang Skeptiker blieb, gelang er zu einer ganzheitlicheren Einschätzung des Dualismus der menschlichen Existenz.’ (Herwig 2004, 66) We might add that the dualism in question cannot be that envisaged by Schopenhauer. As Louis Leibrich, in his fiercely anti-Schopenhauerian *Thomas Mann: une recherche spirituelle*, states: ‘la fonction dévolue à l’humanité par le rhéteur misanthrope (car dans son cas on peut vraiment parler de rhétorique) c’est de prendre conscience de l’absurdité du monde, de faire la grève de l’effort évolutif et de briser l’élan vital.’ (Leibrich 1974, 242)

⁷ It is important to understand how widespread this trend – the trend, that is, of taking for granted values which one’s own theoretical position should call into question – has become amongst certain scholars. When Kenneth Hughes, for example, writes: ‘Freuds zentrale Behauptung, daß die Mächte des es neutralisiert werden können, indem man das Unbewußte im Lichte des Bewußten erhellt, verhalf Mann zu einer konkreten klinischen Grundlage, auf deren Basis er an die Fähigkeit glauben konnte, die Gesellschaft positiv zu verändern,’ (Hughes 1975, 19) the implication, once again, is that the forces Mann strove against and exploited (‘die Mächte des es’) are susceptible to and deserve rational analysis whereas the values implied by ‘positiv zu verändern’ can be taken as axiomatic.

dimension imbues the naturalistic side of Mann's thinking with a certain metaphysical dignity: the compulsion of the phenomenal world is complemented and explained by the impulsion of the noumenal force which brings the phenomenal world into being. One might reasonably object that there is no moral distinction between impulsion and compulsion, but Schopenhauer's vision has a grandeur with which scientific naturalism can scarcely compete, and the nay-saying aspect of Mann's thinking gains an authority which it would otherwise lack by his allusions to this bleak metaphysic.⁸ The drawbacks of Schopenhauerian criticism of Mann – apart from the objection we have seen Schneider raise: that it must consider the specifics of fiction in terms of character, social milieu and action as illusory and the timeless, placeless and formless 'Wille' as the only reality – are numerous. One is that it tends to obscure the view we might otherwise have of other philosophical influences. Plato, in particular, fares badly because all too often when critics detect his influence in Mann's fiction they invoke Schopenhauer's 'Platonic ideas' (which actually have very little to do with Plato himself, as Mann well knew), with the result that the discussion returns to the 'Wille' and the types of phenomena it produces. Furthermore, the Schopenhauerian perspective sets an insidious trap for the critics who adopt it, one which they have not always succeeded in avoiding. The trap is to think that because the behaviour of Mann's fictional characters can be explained in a Schopenhauerian way (and Schopenhauer, concerned like all philosophers to understand the world in which we actually live, furnishes an explanation for everything) we should infer a Schopenhauerian intent on Mann's part.⁹ Last but not least: if the progressivist critics gloss over Mann's philosophical doubts and ruminations in their attempt to claim him as a progressive political and social agent, then the Schopenhauerians have difficulty

⁸ Frederick Copleston's unsympathetic study of Schopenhauer puts the matter thus: 'It may be said that Schopenhauer clothes an essentially scientific view of the world[...]in the garments of fantastic metaphysic.' (Copleston 1946, 93)

⁹ Erich Heller's procedure in the *The Ironic German* alerts us to the danger. Here is his interpretation of the expression which appears on Johann Buddenbrook's face upon learning that Tony has never loved Grünlich, and that nothing stands in the way of extricating her and the family from a financial liability: 'Seine Augen blickten erschrocken und traurig, und dennoch kniff er die Lippen zusammen, sodaß Mundwinkel und Wangen sich falteten, wie sie zu geschehen pflegte, wenn er ein vorteilhaftes Geschäft zum Abschluß gebracht hatte.' (1.1, 238) Heller's gloss: 'Although it is not so hard to say what Johann Buddenbrook's expression meant, this is yet admirably done: the eyes reflecting the moral idea, and his mouth the deep satisfaction of the will at getting its own way.' (Heller 1958, 44) Surely one can describe a conflict of baser and higher motives and the mixed facial expression it produces without being a Schopenhauerian? The effectiveness of Werner Frizen's *Zaubertrank der Metaphysik* is somewhat vitiated by the same tendency to read Schopenhauer's philosophy into Mann's fiction and then to read it back out again. See, for example, his Schopenhauerian explanation of Thamar's role in *Joseph der Ernährer*. (Frizen 1980, 413)

explaining why Mann would adopt any political position at all. Schopenhauer's doctrine is pessimistic. Not in the everyday sense of predicting that human endeavours are likely to come to a sticky end, but in the absolute sense of regarding the worst of all possible outcomes – the world we live in – as a 'fait accompli' beyond remedy. And even if we write off Schopenhauer's pessimism as a personality trait extrinsic to the substance of his philosophy, the latter cannot in any case provide a metaphysical basis for authentically moral behaviour. It is easy to see how a philosophy which underwrites value and freedom (for example, that of Plato or Kant) can lead to a determined moral stance and active political engagement. Schopenhauer's meaningless metaphysic, by contrast, must induce at best resignation, at worst permit as morally neutral the kind of behaviour which has been traditionally regarded as selfish, cruel and wicked.

The meaninglessness and pessimism underlying Schopenhauer's philosophy has been noted by many, but by no means all Mann critics. Charlotte Nolte's *Being and Meaning in Thomas Manns Joseph Novels* is a remarkable work which anticipates the present one in significant respects – but its author fails to see how incongruous Schopenhauer's 'Wille' is with the 'meaning' which she so rightly associates with the noumenal realm. Her treatise analyses the tetralogy in Jungian terms but she devotes a section of her introduction to *Joseph's* philosophical background. This begins with the key statement: 'The issue of *being* and *meaning* informs the novel's philosophical framework, which consists of a discussion of reality and essence, of phenomena and noumena.' (Nolte 1996, 13) That is a view of the matter which this thesis wholly endorses, as it does the importance of certain passages in the 'Schopenhauer' essay which Nolte picks out as being of particular significance. Mann's affirmation that 'Plato bedeutet durch diese wertende Unterscheidung zwischen Erscheinung und Idee, Empirie und Geist, Scheinwelt und Welt der Wahrheit, Zeitlichkeit und Ewigkeit ein ungeheures Ereignis in der Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes'¹⁰ is of capital importance for an understanding not only of *Joseph* but of *Der Tod in Venedig* and much else in Mann's oeuvre. Given, however, that this aspect of 'being' and 'meaning' is bound to be something of a side-issue in a treatise which lays its main emphasis on psychological analysis, it is hardly surprising that Nolte is content to

¹⁰ (IX, 533) and (Nolte 1996, 15)

adopt the orthodox view prevailing amongst more philosophically orientated scholars to the effect that Mann approves Plato and Kant primarily as precursors to Schopenhauer.¹¹

Other scholars, by contrast, have noticed the incompatibility of the morally and politically committed stance Mann adopted with the bleak philosophical system he is supposed to have embraced. One way out of this difficulty is to graft onto the Schopenhauerian stock elements of which Schopenhauer would certainly have disapproved. For example, Hans-Dieter Heimendahl, while conceding that ‘die überragende Bedeutung der Philosophie Schopenhauers für Thomas Mann ist unbestritten’ (Heimendahl 1998, 21) devotes much of his *Kritik und Verklärung* to showing that Nietzsche’s aesthetic justification of life as described in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* serves Mann as a counterweight to Schopenhauerian pessimism:¹²

Anders jedoch als bei Schopenhauer, der der Kunst die Aufgabe einer Demontage des Willens zum Leben zuweist, auf die seine Verneinung folgen soll, zielt Thomas Manns Ästhetizismus im Sinne der *Geburt der Tragödie* auf die Darstellung der Welt als Wille und Vorstellung, die zwar höchste Erkenntnis vermittelt, aber nicht zu einer Abkehr führt, sondern das Leben in seiner doppelten Gestalt feiert.¹³

¹¹ It is very much in this spirit that Nolte writes: ‘Whatever name is given to the noumenon – idea, thing in itself or will – and whatever marginal differences between those concepts may be, the philosophies of Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer have in common that they make the division into ideas (noumena) and phenomena.’ (Nolte 1996, 14) However, although it is quite correct to state that idea, thing in itself and will are all noumenal, we need only consult what Mann writes about Plato’s ‘wertende Unterscheidung’ to see that the third of these, Schopenhauer’s ‘Wille’, is distinct from Plato’s ideas and Kant’s thing in itself in that it is non-evaluative. Whereas the chief of Plato’s ideas is the supreme criterion of moral and aesthetic value (το καλόν) and the Kantian subject (a noumenon, a thing in itself) has the freedom to establish valid moral standards, Schopenhauer’s ‘Wille’ is just a blind, impulsive force. In so far as meaning depends upon freedom, intentionality and an authentic criterion of value, it can never be identified with the ‘Wille’.

¹² It should be noted that Nietzsche is not the only corrective to Schopenhauer proposed by Heimendahl: ‘Auch in seiner Konzeption der Natur in “Goethe und Tolstoi” weicht Thomas Mann von der des Willens bei Arthur Schopenhauer ab, bleibt aber als Schüler seines philosophischen Lehrers identifizierbar. Thomas Mann verschmilzt Schopenhauers metaphysischen Willen mit Dmitri Mereschkowskis am Beispiel Tolstois entwickelten Vorstellung einer innerweltlichen Steigerung der sinnlichen Lebensdimension.’ (Heimendahl 1998, 238)

¹³ (Heimendahl 1998, 65) As Julian Young points out, the aesthetic justification of life does not make it a more worthwhile experience for the individual human beings who must endure it: ‘To suggest otherwise would be to suggest that because a concentration camp “justifies” itself it to its sadistic (or perhaps merely playful or mad) commandant as a pleasurable “entertainment”, so too must the inmates find it justified. If Nietzsche’s account of the tragic effect is right, human beings can, with luck, be transported briefly out of the role of protagonist in the tragedy of life and into that of its “sole author and spectator”. But this does nothing to justify the life of an inmate to an inmate. And such a justification indeed – Nietzsche is quite explicit – is not offered.’ (Young 1992, 52)

If we accept that this was indeed Mann's position: that life could be celebrated as an aesthetic phenomenon while being just as full of suffering and as incapable of improvement as Schopenhauer said it was – that would at least explain why he did not renounce the practice of his art, but continued to create characters, situations, plots and so forth. But even if Heimendahl is correct and Nietzsche does indeed contend that human beings can, as an alternative to denying the 'Wille', artistically repeat in their own person its creative impulse (Heimendahl 1998, 118) – how does that add up to a *justification* of their doing so or of a justification for life?¹⁴ How, to put it another way, could one decide between the negation and affirmation of the 'Wille' (by artistic means or otherwise) without a criterion against which negation and affirmation might be judged more or less wanting – a criterion which neither Schopenhauer nor Nietzsche include in their thinking? The question might be irrelevant to a purely decorative artist, but Mann was by his own admission a critical writer and many of his works display a political commitment and a moral concern at odds with the notion that artistic creation is sufficient validation for itself and the world. When it comes to a contest between aestheticism and the morality which finds aestheticism wanting, there can be little doubt where the mature Mann's sympathies lie. To take but one example: the Egyptians of *Joseph* are a thoroughly aesthetic people, but they are not presented as superior – quite the contrary – to the artistically impoverished tribe of Israel. There is really no reason to doubt the sincerity of Mann's declaration in 'Nietzsche im Lichte unserer Erfahrung' with regard to aestheticism and its relationship to both morality and life:

Der zweite von Nietzsches Irrtümern ist das ganz und gar falsche Verhältnis, in das er Leben und Moral zu einander bringt, wenn er sie als Gegensätze behandelt. Die Wahrheit ist, daß sie zusammen gehören. Ethik ist Lebensstütze, und der moralische Mensch ein rechter Lebensbürger, – vielleicht etwas langweilig, aber höchst nützlich. Der wahre Gegensatz ist der

¹⁴ Nietzsche's position from first to last is that life must be affirmed rather than denied. It is the position which lies behind his rejection of conventional religion and metaphysics, which undermine and demean life by setting it standards it cannot reach, behind his championing of the yea-saying 'Übermensch', who has the resolution to embrace the admittedly horrible fate represented by the 'ewige Wiederkehr', and behind the aesthetic 'justification' of life in *Geburt der Tragödie*. Nietzsche, then, does not really propose art as a criterion against which life is tested and found satisfactory. Rather, he accepts life as the criterion against which art, with its power of aesthetic justification, is tested and found satisfactory. He would have been as hostile to an art which failed to justify life as he was to religion and metaphysics.

von Ethik und *Ästhetik*. Nicht die Moral, die Schönheit ist todverbunden, wie viele Dichter gesagt und gesungen haben, – und Nietzsche sollte es nicht wissen?¹⁵

If, however, Nietzsche's aestheticism is an improbable basis for Mann's commitment to and engagement with life, scholars have identified other sources as possible Schopenhauer-complements. In particular, Dierk Wolters' *Zwischen Metaphysik und Politik* is remarkable both for the confidence with which it identifies the faith underlying the *Joseph* novels: 'Die Welt ist entwicklungsfähig, wenn sie dem Geist die Chance läßt, die materiale Formenwelt auf ihr dahinterliegendes metaphysisches Prinzip zu transzendieren,' (Wolters 1998, 113) and for the clarity with which it apprehends how incompatible that faith is with Schopenhauer's doctrine: 'Von einer philosophischen Warte, aus der heraus gesehen die Welt nur dann besser wird, wenn sie gar nicht mehr wird, muß solch ein Ansinnen natürlich absurd erscheinen.' (Wolters 1998, 105) So who or what effected the change in Mann's thinking? Wolters proposes a nowadays little read author by the name of Edgar Dacqué who 'modifiziert den sinnlosen Urgrund der Welt zu einer mystischen, nicht näher erklärten Religiosität. Er fügt Schopenhauers Welterklärung damit eine eschatologische Ausrichtung bei und verkehrt so das negative Vorzeichen dieser Philosophie in sein Gegenteil. Thomas Mann übernimmt dies. Anstelle der blinden Willenswelt steht der Paradiesgedanke.'¹⁶

Wolters, like Nolte, anticipates many of the present work's arguments, especially as they apply to *Joseph und seine Brüder*. His affirmation that the tetralogy proposes a critical and metaphysical alternative to the phenomenal world is correct, as is his identification of that metaphysical alternative with a supernatural element in our psychological constitution.¹⁷ But it is difficult to attribute all this to the influence of

¹⁵ (IX, 696) Strangely enough, although Heimendahl quotes extensively from 'Nietzsche im Lichte unserer Erfahrung', this passage receives no mention.

¹⁶ (Wolters 1998, 105) Notice the similarities between this Schopenhauer-Dacqué amalgam proposed by Wolters and the Schopenhauer-Mereschkowski amalgam proposed by Heimendahl. Neither critic suggests any kind of intellectual route by which Schopenhauer's 'Wille' could be transformed through contact with Dacqué or Mereschkowski into something more: a positive 'Geist' in Dacqué's case, a positive 'Natur' in Mereschkowski's.

¹⁷ (Wolters 1998, 93) Wolters, however, pays little attention to the workings of a supernatural providence let alone to apparently supernatural apparitions such as the 'Mann auf dem Felde'. It is to be suspected that he would have used the word 'metaphysical' instead of 'supernatural', did not 'metaphysical' inevitably (in the context of Mann studies as they have been traditionally pursued) call to mind Schopenhauer's 'Wille'.

Dacqué who, according to Wolters, offers only a vague and mystical religiosity to counter Schopenhauer's powerfully argued doctrine.¹⁸ For whereas one might suspect that an arbitrary conversion of Schopenhauer's doctrines into an optimistic world-view underlies *Felix Krull* – a comic novel, after all, with a mischievous disregard for philosophical propriety – we cannot persuasively account for the dualism of the *Joseph* novels in this way. They make allusion to something more cogent and severe than Dacqué's theoretically unsupported aspirations: a 'Reich der Strenge' and a 'Geist' which are at once the benchmark of all value and the source of all intelligibility. This is not, of course, to say that Mann had no use for Dacqué at all. He was always on the lookout for ideas and doctrines which might help him to articulate his own concerns. But the 'Geist/Natur' antagonism which finds its fullest expression in *Joseph* was a longstanding element of Mann's thinking by the time he read *Urwelt, Sage und Menschheit* in 1924 and, as this thesis will attempt to show, better explained by reference to other thinkers closer to the mainstream of European philosophy.

To sum up: Mann critics are by and large indifferent to the supernatural in his work or downright hostile to it. There are two main strands of Mann criticism: on the one hand a progressivist strand and on the other a philosophical strand which strongly emphasizes the pre-eminence of Schopenhauer amongst Mann's theoretical sources. Whereas one might reasonably expect the two strands to be complementary, so that what is lacking in the first: a firm philosophical foundation for the values Mann wishes to promote, might be supplied by the second – this is not in fact the case. Schopenhauer's philosophy is pessimistic and even if it were not could not underwrite the active moral and political engagement characteristic of Mann's most important works. Various attempts to show how Mann's Schopenhauerian thinking might have been converted into something more positive by the addition of a fresh intellectual ingredient: Nietzsche's aestheticism or the mysticism of Dacqué or Mereschkowski, are less than persuasive. It is against this critical background that the purpose and strategy of the present work should be understood and judged.

¹⁸ Dacqué's allusiveness and imprecision is something he shares with Mereschkowski, according to Heimendahl: 'Thomas Mann bewegt sich im Schatten der suggestiven Thesen Mereschkowskis, die in ihrer symbolisch gedachten Vagheit zu Assoziationen förmlich einladen.' (Heimendahl 1998)

Prospectus

This thesis will attempt to establish that Mann is a fantastic author, and that the two works which it subjects to extensive analysis, *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph und seine Brüder*, not only contain potentially supernatural elements, but depend for the realization of their purposes on the fantastic technique. There are good reasons for the selection of these two works from the numerous candidates for fantastic analysis in Mann's oeuvre. That they have important elements in common has been acknowledged before now: Dierks, for example, considers Mut-em-enet's predicament and fall to be a reworking of Aschenbach's. (Dierks 1972, 188-206) But the similarities between the two works go further than this. In both there is the suggested presence in the phenomenal realm of supernatural heralds from the noumenal realm: the sinister Hermes figures in *Der Tod in Venedig*, the scornful 'Mann auf dem Felde' in *Joseph*. In both there is the presence of more definitely human beings who, regardless of their level of consciousness in this respect, may be incarnations of Hermes: Tadzio and Joseph. In both, the Hermes figures and characters perform the function of Schiller's 'Spieltrieb': to achieve the triumph of 'Geist' through a proper accommodation with 'Natur'. And each of these works throws light upon the other. Having analyzed *Der Tod in Venedig* from the fantastic perspective, we will – without moving from that perspective – be able to make out the same devices and preoccupations when they are revisited in *Joseph*, and conversely, having analyzed *Joseph*, we will have a better retrospective understanding of *Der Tod in Venedig* and be able to recognize at an incipient stage devices and preoccupations more fully developed in the tetralogy. In order to make the case for *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph* as works of the fantastic, however, two subsidiary arguments must be prosecuted.

Firstly, it will be necessary to establish the factors which identify a work as belonging to the genre. Given the evident reluctance to admit Mann's fiction to the fantastic canon on the part of scholars, their objections must be countered by an exposition of what the genre entails at a formal level. It would also be helpful to establish that the presence or suggestion of the supernatural in a work of fiction is not necessarily an endorsement of destructive irrationalism but can be (and traditionally has been) a metaphysical counter to a naturalistic world-view devoid of all value. Helpful at a

rhetorical level: if those critics who have a low opinion of the fantastic could be persuaded of its seriousness and dignity, they might be more receptive to the possibility of its presence in Mann's fiction. And helpful at a strictly argumentative level: if the distinction between 'meaning' and 'being' identified by Nolte reflects the difference between the noumenal and phenomenal realms, and if the supernatural is an expression of the noumenal, then the attraction exerted by the fantastic on Mann is readily explicable.

Secondly it will be necessary to establish that Mann was (from some time before the First World War onwards) increasingly a philosophical dualist with an evaluative metaphysic.¹⁹ That proposition would benefit from the corroboration of a number of auxiliary arguments: that the significant distinction for Mann is between 'Natur' on the one hand and 'Geist' on the other; that 'Natur' is understood to include the whole of the phenomenal realm, but also includes on occasion the metaphysical generative force which brings the phenomenal realm into being (Schopenhauer's 'Wille'), whereas 'Geist' by contrast, represents a noumenal alternative to and critique of 'Natur'; that Schiller's (and not Schopenhauer's) theoretical framework was the chief model for Mann's own in the period of his maturity. The advantages of establishing all this would be numerous.

To begin with, the proposed dualism would be capacious enough to accommodate all sorts of normally incompatible intellectual resources we know to have been important in the composition of *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph*. Nietzsche, Freud and Schopenhauer could all be admitted to the 'Natur' side of the ledger, whereas Schiller, with his Kantian inheritance, and Plato too, could be admitted to the other, the 'Geist' side of the ledger – and it would be they who held out the possibility of a noumenal subject and of an authentic criterion of value which, because they are by definition not part of the natural order, are insusceptible to naturalist analysis. We could also justify the moral discrimination and political commitment which progressivist critics let by 'on the nod', but without having to suppose that naturalists like Nietzsche or Freud, or non-evaluative metaphysicians like Schopenhauer could plausibly underwrite such a stance. Nor would there be any need to suggest that Mann transformed

¹⁹ This term will be used throughout the thesis to denote a metaphysical realm harbouring an authentic criterion of value, such as Plato's το καλόν or Kant's noumenal subject.

Schopenhauer's doctrine with the help of theorizers such as Dacqué or Mereschkowski into something resembling a Schillerian or a Platonic framework, if we could safely attribute that framework to Schiller and Plato directly.

That, then, is the case this thesis seeks to make. But how is it to be made? Several problems stand in the way, some to do with the fantastic, some to do with Mann's philosophical orientation – problems which chapters II and III attempt to overcome. Chapter II deals with the fantastic. Several studies of the genre are available, but they have this defect in common: whereas they understand fantastic literature to be poised between naturalistic and supernatural interpretations, their theoretical framework is only adequate for the first of these alternatives. They take the naturalistic side of the fantastic in their stride and attribute ghosts, demons etc. to the psychology of characters inside the text, but they are far less assured in their treatment of the supernatural alternative, and mostly feel compelled to explain this too as the result of psychological factors; the difference being that in this case the factors lie outside rather than inside the text – for example, a psychosis suffered by the author.²⁰ Chapter II, then, not only outlines the formal qualities fantastic literature must possess, but develops a hermeneutics of the fantastic. It seeks to establish what is at stake in terms of morality, meaning and intention when the reader hesitates between a naturalistic and supernatural reading of a text. It does this chiefly by an analysis of works acknowledged to belong to the genre (which, however, actually extends far further than the limited canon which writers on the topic have come to accept). Having established that the fantastic is by no means a trivial branch of literature, and also that the supernatural does not necessarily cater to the amoral and irrational – and is, in fact linked to morality and spiritual dignity – the chapter then analyzes *Der Tod in Venedig* as a work of the fantastic. A consideration of the *meaning* of the novella is postponed until the following chapter, but the formal characteristics which should win Mann's novella admittance to the genre are analyzed and emphasized. In view of the arguments which have been advanced by Mann critics to exclude it from the fantastic, considerable space is given over to combating both the 'symbolic' reading of the

²⁰ Todorov, theoretician-in-chief of the fantastic, notes the suggestive coincidences which characterize much fantastic fiction, and that these can be accounted for in a naturalistic sense: they are mere coincidence, or in a supernatural sense: a malign fate is at work. The naturalistic explanation he takes for granted. The supernatural explanation, by contrast, is not allowed to stand, but itself subjected to naturalistic analysis: 'Psychoanalysis acknowledges precisely this same seamless determinism in the field, at least, of man's psychic activity.' (Todorov 1975, 161)

novella and the exclusively naturalistic reading. This is greatly facilitated by an extended comparison of *Der Tod in Venedig* and 'The Turn of the Screw' – not just because the two works have a remarkable amount in common, but because the critical reception accorded to them has been in many respects similar.

Chapter III begins with a reorientation of the reader's understanding of Mann's philosophical influences. Taking as its cue the established critical tradition which regards Mann as principally a Schopenhauerian or a Nietzschean, it reconsiders what these philosophers actually stand for, and asks if this is consistent with Mann's mature world-view. In particular, the compatibility of Schopenhauer's philosophy with an evaluative metaphysic is addressed. The case is made that Mann's thinking underwent a profound change, beginning some time before the First World War, from a Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian perspective to a Platonic and, above all, Schillerian perspective. This development is seen in the context of the key term 'Geist' and Mann's problematic use of it. Again: given that there is considerable resistance to the notion that Schiller's thinking had any but the most superficial impact on Mann's, plenty of evidence is provided to support the latter's debt to the former – a debt whose importance can only be revealed by looking beyond *Der Tod in Venedig* to *Joseph* and *Das Gesetz*. Having traced the evolution of Mann's philosophical views the chapter then turns to *Der Tod in Venedig* and establishes that it has precisely the elements we might expect to find in a work which looks backwards to Schopenhauer's value-free dualism and forwards to Plato's and Schiller's value-imbued dualism. The possibility that the supernatural might be an expression of the 'Wille' is examined and Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan' is adduced as an example of this. Then a countervailing possibility is examined: that the metaphysic expressed by the novella's ambiguously supernatural elements might be Plato's. For, given that Tadzio is identified with both the Eros of the *Symposium* – responsible, according to Diotima for leading mortals from the terrestrial and phenomenal realm to the celestial and noumenal – might not the plot in which Aschenbach finds himself embroiled serve the purpose of his salvation rather than his damnation? Thus the difficulties arising from competing metaphysics are discussed, and Schiller's *Spieltrieb* is invoked to solve them. *Der Tod in Venedig*, it is shown, is capable of yielding a coherent meaning, but as in the case of the fantastic fiction

considered in Chapter II that meaning is conditional on the acceptance of the supernatural.

Chapter II and III between them provide the theoretical support for the analysis of *Joseph* in chapter IV, which begins by making the case for the naturalistic and then making the case for the supernatural interpretation of the tetralogy, before coming to this conclusion: a novel which furnishes so much material to sustain these two points of view and studiously refrains from establishing one or other as definitely correct, is a fantastic novel. The different techniques for maintaining supernatural ambiguity: the possibility of psychological distortion and improbable coincidence, are shown to play an important role. The chapter goes on, with the help of Mann's 'Schopenhauer' essay, to demonstrate that the influence which this philosopher is commonly regarded as having exerted on the tetralogy is quite out of proportion to its detectable presence, and a Platonic interpretation of the novel is developed – an interpretation which is supported by a wealth of evidence. The close association of the supernatural and the Platonic metaphysic – with a God who is a supreme criterion of value at its head – is emphasized. In the closing passages of the chapter a Hegelian notion of 'Geist' is brought to light which both complements and competes against that derived from Plato, and this additional perspective, while it neither undermines the novel's fantastic character nor detracts from its commitment to political and social progress, does suggest that we regard Joseph's achievements as being vitiated by a degree of historical impropriety. The thesis concludes with a consideration of the fantastic as a form of 'Spieltrieb'.

Chapter II: *Der Tod in Venedig* in the Context of Fantastic Literature

The Fantastic

Our chief purpose is to identify and understand the fantastic as it appears in the works of Thomas Mann. Before we can turn to those works, however, we must devote some time to explaining what is meant by ‘fantastic’. As a literary-critical term it was coined by Tzvetan Todorov, author of *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. In that treatise he divides the novels and stories under consideration, all of them more or less strange, more or less macabre, into those whose abnormality is revealed to be the result of natural phenomena of some kind (for example: of an hallucination or a coincidence), those whose abnormality is revealed to be the result of a supernatural intervention (for example: of a ghost or a demon), and those whose abnormality cannot be definitely attributed to either natural or supernatural causes, so that the reader hesitates between the two. The naturally occurring abnormal Todorov calls the uncanny, the supernaturally occurring abnormal he calls the marvellous, and the twilight zone of hesitation between the two he calls the fantastic. Todorov was by no means the first to recognize a class of fiction allowing us to see events in both a naturalistic and a supernatural light,²¹ but his tripartite taxonomy has the merit of clarity and will be employed throughout this work, and whenever the terms ‘uncanny’, ‘marvellous’ and ‘fantastic’ occur they will be used in accordance with Todorov’s definitions. Furthermore, Todorov’s view of the relationship between allegory and the supernatural: that they are mutually exclusive categories, has also been adopted as valid.

However, given that we will attempt in this chapter to propound a hermeneutics of the fantastic (a project necessarily at odds with the structuralist approach Todorov champions)²² we must take our bearings from other theorists too, such as Glen Cavaliero whose *The Supernatural in English Fiction* is unusual amongst academic

²¹ For example, Peter Penzoldt’s earlier treatise *The Supernatural in Fiction* recognizes that many apparently supernatural tales can be accounted for in terms of character psychology – hence his name for the genre: ‘psychological horror’. (Penzoldt 1952, 53-56)

²² Given that structuralism is concerned with ‘the abstract codes and conventions governing the social production of meanings’, (Baldick 1990, 245) i.e. looks for the meaningless in the apparently meaningful (for any meaning discovered in the ‘abstract codes and conventions’ would be susceptible to further structuralist analysis) it is inimical to hermeneutics.

works dealing with this subject, in that it makes an effort to give a non-naturalistic justification for the appeal of supernatural literature. We will also attempt a defence of the fantastic in *Der Tod in Venedig* against critics who would deny its presence, a defence inspired by Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*. This work, which develops and modifies Todorov's insights, includes a treatment of 'The Turn of the Screw' and its critical reception which provides a model for the treatment of *Der Tod in Venedig* and its critical reception which takes up the second half of this chapter.

Todorov presents us with the possibility that the fantastic is 'evanescent' – in the sense that though many fictional works dealing with abnormal situations equivocate as to natural or supernatural causation, the majority, before they conclude, come down firmly on one side or the other. For example, plenty of ghost stories begin by presenting the reader with phenomena (banging doors, cold-spots, whispering voices and so on) which, but for their abundance and the fact that they are often accompanied by a sense of apprehension on the part of one or more characters, could be considered purely natural, before finally being revealed as the premonitory signs of some indisputably supernatural presence which emerges towards the end of the narrative. But that is not his last word on the matter:

It would be wrong to claim that the fantastic can exist only in a part of the work, for there are texts which sustain their ambiguity to the very end, i.e., even beyond the narrative itself. The book closed, the ambiguity persists. A remarkable example is supplied by Henry James' tale 'The Turn of the Screw' which does not permit us to determine finally whether ghosts haunt the old estate, or whether we are confronted by the hallucinations of a hysterical Governess victimized by the disturbing atmosphere which surrounds her. In French literature, Mérimée's tale 'La Vénus d'Ille' affords a perfect example of this ambiguity. (Todorov 1975, 43)

That 'The Turn of the Screw' should be considered an outstanding example of the fantastic is no surprise. It is indeed difficult for a twenty-first century reader to overlook the fact that the Governess who narrates the story, though she never seems in any doubt as to the reality of Bly's ghostly revenants, betrays at every turn the sort of overwrought suggestibility which left unchecked might well coalesce into a hallucinatory psycho-drama. But that 'La Vénus d'Ille' should be proposed as its

French counterpart is at first sight surprising.²³ It is true that the presumed animated statue is never seen to come to life, but if the mere lack of direct ocular testimony on the narrator's part to supernatural intervention were sufficient to lift a story out of the category of the marvellous and into that of the fantastic, then would not many stories traditionally regarded as unambiguously supernatural be better regarded as fantastic too? The matter is not negligible, given that Todorov can adduce very few examples of the pure fantastic, and in order to increase their number includes in the genre works which end with a definitely natural or supernatural climax.²⁴ And Brooke-Rose, although she is rightly emphatic (where Todorov is hesitant) that Poe's 'The Black Cat' is a fantastic work, does not add to the stock of fantastic literature.²⁵ There is good reason, however, to suggest that the fantastic is anything but a rarity, and that many examples of what are usually regarded as supernatural fiction belong to the genre.

Take Sheridan Le Fanu's story 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street', included, apparently without a second thought as to its eligibility, in numerous anthologies of ghost-stories. No ghost is witnessed by the narrator of this tale: we are given a second-hand account of one by a friend of his, the narrator himself at one point is almost persuaded that he can make out something large and sinister in a lobby (though there is a disclaimer: 'Now I must be frank, and confess that the cupboard which displayed our plates and cups stood just there, though at the moment I did not recollect it'); (Le Fanu 1973, 42) there is a moment when we anticipate that the supernatural is about to be revealed unambiguously, but the heavy tread which the narrator hears descending the stairs turns out to be the sound of an evil-looking rat hopping from one to the next. However, all of this can be attributed to mere chance on the one hand and to the suggestive atmosphere of the house itself

²³ It clearly perplexes Brooke-Rose: 'Personally, I do not feel that the possible natural explanation in ['La Vénus d'Ille'] has equal weight with the supernatural one.' (Brooke-Rose 1981, 64)

²⁴ 'If we decide to proceed by examining certain parts of the work in isolation, we discover that by temporarily omitting the end of the narrative we are able to include a much larger number of texts within the genre of the fantastic.' (Todorov 1975, 42)

²⁵ The notion that Todorov's original definition of the fantastic excludes all but a tiny number of works is not challenged by Marianne Wünsch in her work on the subject: 'Man hat zu Recht eingewandt, daß damit das Fantastische auf eine sehr kleine Anzahl von Texten reduziert werde; der Einwand ist berechtigt aber nicht sehr erheblich.' (Wünsch 1991, 50) Following Todorov's example, she finds additional examples for the genre by loosening its definition, not by examining more closely works normally regarded as unambiguously supernatural.

on the other. And the same can be said of numerous other ‘ghost’ stories.²⁶ Many are recounted by a first person narrator (who often enough retells somebody else’s story without being able to vouch for it) so that we are bound to consider from the outset the possibility of a psychological rather than a supernatural explanation in a way that would be far less likely if we were reading the words of a dispassionate third-person narrator. Instead of the clear alternative: ‘So-and-so saw the form of a man outlined against the blind’ or ‘So-and-so mistakenly thought he saw the form of a man outlined against the blind’, we are likely to read something much more ambiguous: ‘I thought I could make out the form of a man outlined against the blind’ or even ‘Jenkins always swore that he could make out the form of a man outlined against the blind’. It would seem, then, there are many more examples of the fantastic than the few given by Todorov, some satisfying the genre’s criteria rather better than ‘La Vénus d’Ille’.

However, we could supply a naturalistic explanation for the events recounted in ‘La Vénus d’Ille’ too, if we wished. In fact the determinedly sceptical reader can produce a phenomenal, cause-and-effect account of any fictional work, no matter how unambiguous its representation of the supernatural. The text may give us good grounds to assume that the apparitions represented in it are neither figments of the imagination nor the result of mere coincidence, but nothing can prevent those for whom the supernatural is *a priori* inadmissible – those who take naturalism as their heuristic principle – from making such suppositions as are necessary for the construction of a purely naturalistic explanation. And as we shall see later (in our consideration of Freud’s reaction to ‘Der Sandmann’) the naturalistic critic is sometimes prepared to go beyond the text itself to achieve this.²⁷ It is, then, a

²⁶ Two examples, both taken from an anthology of Victorian ghost stories, show how widespread is the evasion of the definitely supernatural in purportedly supernatural fiction. At the end of one story, ‘Reality or Delusion?’ the narrator ponders the question posed by the title in these terms: ‘Was it reality or delusion? That is[...]did her eyes see a real, spectral Daniel Ferrar; or were they deceived by some imagination of the brain? Opinions were divided. Nothing can shake her own steadfast belief in its reality; to her it remains an awful certainty, true and sure as heaven.’ (Wood 1991, 129) At the end of another, ‘Was it an Illusion?’ the similar question provokes a similar response: ‘Ay, indeed! that *is* the question; and it is a question which I have never yet been able to answer. Certain things I undoubtedly saw – with my mind’s eye, perhaps – and as I saw them, I have described them; withholding nothing, adding nothing, explaining nothing. Let those solve the mystery who can. For myself, I but echo Wolstenholme’s question: Was it an illusion?’ (Edwards 1991, 255)

²⁷ For example, Pentzoldt (who is fond of this sort of speculation) suggests that F. Marion Crawford’s ‘obsession with the “living dead”, “the undead”, is but another device of his subconscious to overcome [its] anxieties. Apparently Crawford feared bodily physical death above all.’ He adds that modern psychoanalysis suggests various motives for such a fear of death, one of which is the threat of castration: ‘Crawford’s fear of physical destruction may thus merely be symbolical of a deeply hidden

condition of the fantastic that the *possible validity* of supernatural explanation be accepted – if this were not the case the ambiguity which marks the genre could never be established. But the possible validity of supernatural explanation of fictional events is just what many critics seem to dispute.

Take ‘The Turn of the Screw’ as an example. As Brooke-Rose demonstrates, for many twentieth-century commentators this is not a work of the fantastic at all: it is an account of a young woman’s madness, and all evidence which might suggest supernatural causation is to be discounted – as a kind of duty, it seems, to the naturalistic world-view. So far as such sceptics are concerned, we cannot take the ‘The Turn of the Screw’ seriously if we believe that ‘The Turn of the Screw’ takes the supernatural seriously. For those of us, however, who are susceptible to the fantastic, who consider it a question of some moment, and not a foregone conclusion, which of the alternative explanations – the natural or the supernatural – of the events recounted in ‘The Turn of the Screw’ is the valid one, the question cannot easily be evaded: *why* are we thus susceptible? Is it a mere matter of psychological suspense? Which is to say: is the hesitation between hypotheses we experience while reading ‘The Turn of the Screw’ in no way different from the hesitation between hypotheses we experience while reading a murder mystery – when we wonder if it was the butler or Lord So-and-so himself who did Lady Such-and-such to death? There is, surely, an important distinction to make between the two kinds of suspense. In the case of the murder mystery the various hypotheses all rest on the same premise: that an event in the natural world – the killing of a human being – must be the result of natural causation. We might lean towards one hypothesis or another according to personal preference or according to our ability to correctly parse misleadingly presented evidence, but nothing challenges our understanding of the world as the calculable and determined place we generally assume it to be – indeed, the requirement that a competently written murder mystery be *soluble* is predicated on this condition. By contrast, the two hypotheses that present themselves in ‘The Turn of the Screw’ differ from those which vie with one another in a murder mystery in precisely this respect: that they rely on irreconcilable premises.

castration anxiety.’ (Penzoldt 1952, 152) This is extremely close to what Freud has to say about ‘Der Sandmann’.

‘The Turn of the Screw’: Supernatural Morality

It is at this juncture in our argument that we need to consider just what naturalism and its opposite entail. A naturalistic view of human beings is scientific in the sense that it regards them as in principle no different from the rest of the observable universe.²⁸ They are determined phenomena, enjoying no freedom whatsoever, and though it is a convention to speak of them as morally responsible for their own behaviour, the terms ‘morality’ and ‘responsibility’ are no more relevant to human beings than they are to asteroids, specks of dust and honey-bees. Not that naturalism is at odds with the reality of freedom and responsibility as psychological phenomena. But there is a world of difference between scepticism vis-à-vis freedom, responsibility and morality, and scepticism vis-à-vis the *belief* in those things, a difference well articulated by Nietzsche: ‘Ich leugne also die Sittlichkeit wie ich die Alchymie leugne, das heisst, ich leugne ihre Voraussetzungen: *nicht* aber, dass es Alchymisten gegeben hat, welche an diese Voraussetzungen glaubten und auf sie hin handelten.’ (Nietzsche III, 91)

Naturalism, then, must reject all moral judgment of human beings as incompatible with the view that they are determined in their behaviour rather than free agents to be held responsible for their actions.²⁹ And once again Nietzsche gets to the heart of the matter when he declares that the naturalist ‘darf nicht mehr loben, nicht tadeln, denn es ist ungereimt, die Natur und die Nothwendigkeit zu loben und zu tadeln. So wie er das gute Kunstwerk liebt, aber nicht lobt, weil es Nichts für sich selber kann, wie er vor der Pflanze steht, so muss er vor den Handlungen der Menschen[...]stehen.’ (Nietzsche II 1988, 103) What, though, are the principles which stand in opposition

²⁸ There is a good deal of congruence between the literary and philosophical conceptions of the term ‘naturalism’. *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines it as ‘a more deliberate kind of realism in novels, stories, and plays, usually involving a view of human beings as passive victims of natural forces and social environment.’ (Baldick 1990, 126) Whereas, referring to Freud’s analysis of morality and religion, Jonathan Lear points out that an account of such things ‘can be broadly *naturalistic* or *super-natural*. Either it limits itself to an account of how something should come to be as a phenomenon of nature; or it draws on a source transcending nature as part of the account of origin.’ (Lear 2005, 192-193)

²⁹ It is true, of course, that few works of literary naturalism succeed in wholly eschewing the moral dimension, and it is doubtful whether even the trained anthropologist and trained psychologist ever manage to view human beings with the same dispassionate attention to cause and effect which the chemist, say, can bring to his subject matter. But all of these *naturalists*: naturalistic author, anthropologist and psychologist, *aspire* to a properly scientific level of disinterested observation.

to naturalism? We suggest that there are two, but that these two have a necessary kinship and are frequently indistinguishable from one another.

The first, evidently enough, is the acceptance of the reality of the supernatural traditionally so-called: that there are such things as ghosts, demons, gods and so on, and that these entities are not subject to the rules which prevail in the natural world. They are, however, normally understood to share *some* characteristics with the creatures of the natural world. For example, a pagan deity, though he may challenge the laws of space by disappearing from one place and reappearing in another at will, may none the less be as time-bound and as incapable of remembering the future (say) as a human being. Or a ghost, though largely insusceptible to the rigid cause-and-effect regime understood by science, may all the same be exorcised through the performance of certain rituals, so that we are bound to conceive a successful exorcism as *somehow* the effect of a cause. It seems that supernatural entities manage to belong to two mutually exclusive worlds, being both within and outside the phenomenal realm which our intellect and our senses normally confirm to us as that in which we exist. How difficult this is to conceptualize can be gathered from Todorov's own attempts to articulate the contrast between natural and supernatural explanation.

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, or a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings – with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. (Todorov 1975, 25)

If we accept that devils, sylphides, vampires etc. are 'an integral part of reality', existing 'precisely like other living beings', even if there is as yet no scientific explanation for their *apparently* supernatural character, then there is no reason to regard them as supernatural at all.³⁰ So it is not, perhaps, surprising that the

³⁰ Interestingly both Todorov and Brooke-Rose regard the wonders of science-fiction as marvellous – as belonging, that is, to the supernatural accepted. But there is surely a crucial difference between presenting some exotic phenomenon as scientifically explicable (even if no persuasive explanation is given) and thus as consistent with the naturalistic world-view, and presenting it as *essentially*

supernatural is often presented in an indistinct and fleeting fashion: the more manifestly present and persistent it becomes, the less likely we are to consider it as challenging the fundamental laws of nature and not just a phenomenon temporarily beyond scientific explanation.³¹ This consideration, we suggest, is what lies behind the fantastic strategy employed in Le Fanu's story and many other ghost stories: the less the ghost is felt definitely to intrude upon reality, the more terrifying the possibility of its presence becomes. As for 'La Vénus d'Ille', the probable reason for the absence of direct ocular testimony of supernatural interference is that a blow-by-blow account of an animated statue's vengeance is more likely to provoke laughter than alarm.³²

The second principle opposed to naturalism is morality, in that the latter's justification must lie beyond the natural world. If human beings are to be elevated above the moral indifference which reigns in the natural world, then they must be exempt from that world's necessity. They must have a real power of choice, and not just the illusion of choice.³³ Furthermore, they must have access to a real criterion of value if those choices are to be valid, and this, like freedom, is not to be found in the natural world. If, for example, the axiom 'it is always right to preserve human life' is to be considered valid, then the qualification 'right' must make reference to justice itself, and not merely to some product of an individual's or a group's psychology going by that name. For why should an accident of psychology – a mere fact of the natural world – constitute a legitimate criterion of value for our choices *in* the natural world?³⁴ How could any priority be established between the proposed criterion and

inexplicable. In Richard Matheson's science-fiction novel *I am Legend*, for example, the protagonist discovers that the vampires who plague his earth are in fact the victims of a disease. They are truly presented as being 'an integral part of reality' and *by the same token* as natural phenomena.

³¹ The article 'naturalism' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica (Micropedia: 15th ed. 1992)* makes a point of stating that naturalism can cope with the supernatural, but only by taking the latter term in the weak sense we have alluded to: 'Although naturalism denies the existence of truly supernatural realities, it makes allowance for the supernatural provided that knowledge of it can be had indirectly – that is, that natural objects be influenced by the so-called supernatural entities in a detectable way. In such a case, the supernatural itself is reduced to a natural status verifiable by science.'

³² The supernatural which can be definitely attested by reliable witnesses lends itself easily to comedy. Wilde's *Canterville ghost* is a case in point: 'I feel bound to tell you, Mr. Otis, that the ghost has been seen by several living members of my family, as well as by the rector of the parish, the Rev. Augustus Dampier, who is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.' (Wilde 1994, 206)

³³ This corresponds to the Kantian focus on the freedom of the subject as a condition for morality.

³⁴ Of course there can be no theoretical objection to a fact of psychology serving as the basis for a *conditional* good: 'Since you want to get to London before midnight, you should take the ten-thirty

the fact it must approve or censure? Unless, of course we say that the notion of justice does indeed correspond to a metaphysical justice *beyond* the natural world.³⁵

Once we understand that naturalism is opposed to both the supernatural traditionally so-called and to morality, we can see why the supernatural and the moral often maintain a close alliance in supernatural fiction. Let's consider 'The Turn of the Screw' in this light. For the Governess, brought up in a parsonage and exposed to a lifetime of religious piety, the ghosts she believes she sees are evil revenants with wicked plans. The view of naturalist critics is that the ghosts are hallucinations and quite possibly the product of a morbid sense of sinfulness. By their account, the tale is amoral: the significance the Governess sees in her experiences are the product of insignificant facts of psychology.³⁶ By contrast if the Governess is right about the ghosts' presence, then both the belief in the supernatural and in the moral are vindicated at a stroke – for in this case we cannot fall back on the naturalist view that what is conventionally called evil is just the predetermined result of certain social and psychological conditions because the ghosts are *not* part of the natural world and *not* subject to its necessity. Furthermore, to accept the Governess's account of the ghosts (as both really present and evil) is to accept that human beings can be conversant with more than the natural, cause-and-effect world, and thus be themselves not wholly *of* that world: that they too may participate in the freedom indispensable to morality. So that in this case at least, the supernatural challenge to naturalism is also a moral challenge to naturalism. And whereas most fiction is a cavalier mixture of naturalism and morality (in the sense that while such fiction makes no formal concessions to the supernatural, its characters are granted a moral dimension excluded by the naturalistic perspective), a fantastic work like 'The Turn of the Screw' polarizes these two elements as in principle incompatible. We can accept a supernatural explanation

train' etc. But this says nothing about whether the desire itself is good or not, and consequently nothing about its validity as a criterion.

³⁵ This corresponds to the Platonic focus on the necessity of criteria of value as a condition for morality.

³⁶ The matter has been eloquently formulated by Thomas J. Bontly in an article on James' tale: 'Ghosts are inevitably creatures of some metaphysical significance, and just as the reality and theological ambiguity of the ghost in *Hamlet* indicates something important about Shakespeare's universe, so the reality or unreality of the ghosts at Bly must be a crucial factor in our determination of *The Turn of the Screw's* ultimate meaning.[...]The psychoanalytic interpretation, consequently, implies more than it might seem at first. For if the Governess is mad and the ghosts hallucinatory we have a world in which evil is an illusion, an irrelevant value judgment, the externalization of inner psychological forces which are, in themselves, neither good nor evil but empirical facts.' (Bontly 1969, 721-722)

which is consistent with a moral outlook, or we can accept the naturalist explanation which shows up the moral and supernatural together as delusional, but we cannot have both. The answer to the question, then, as to why we consider the supernatural alternative advanced against the naturalist one by this novella to be more than a literary hoax for the sceptical critic to see through, the reason why, despite their terrifying challenge to our understanding, we are susceptible to the notion that the ghosts are more than mere hallucinations, is that we *have a stake*, insofar as we are putatively free, putatively moral subjects, in their reality.

Now it is important not to be too dogmatic about this: not every fictional ghost or demon postulates an evaluative metaphysic, for some stories present us with a supernatural lacking any moral dimension at all.³⁷ The eponymous demon in Guy de Maupassant's 'Le Horla', for example, is neither wicked nor benevolent nor pitiable, but merely destructive, and but for the fact that its invisibility makes it harder to anticipate and capture is frightening in the way that a tiger on the loose is frightening. Other stories present us with a supernatural which closely corresponds to a metaphysical realm, but a metaphysical realm without moral implications. This is true of the stories of Arthur Machen, one of which, 'The Great God Pan', we shall consider in the next chapter. But it is a fact that large numbers of fictional ghosts etc. *do* have a strong association with morality. Not just in the sense that being free of the necessity of the natural world they can with propriety be morally evaluated, but also in the sense that they are often the agents or victims of righteousness. There are countless stories of the spirits of men returning to haunt and terrorize those who persecuted them in life, or to right wrongs, or to do an eternal penance for the wicked acts that they, the ghosts themselves, perpetrated during their mortal lives. M. R. James' famous story 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' is typical of the genre in both respects. Its protagonist – a scientific sceptic who cannot bear even talk

³⁷ Apart from any other considerations the etymologies of the words 'supernatural' and 'metaphysical' should alert us to their probable association. Spatial metaphors aside ('super', μετά), both words mean: that which lies outside the natural (i.e. phenomenal) world. It is the connection made by Cavaliero in his treatment of pagan religious 'mystery' which, he says, is 'a metaphysical term. Metaphysics, the intellectual exploration of the spiritual, the intangible, and the unseen, is a study necessarily discredited by the presuppositions of linguistic philosophy and scientific materialism.' And he hits upon a possible cause for the continuing popularity of supernatural fiction when he writes that modern civilization is 'unprecedented in having no theological basis for its undertakings, and in consigning the religious and metaphysical understanding of mystery to the category of superstition.' (Cavaliero 1995, 16)

of the supernatural – removes a whistle, on which the words ‘Thief – blow, and you will weep’ are written in Latin, from the ruins of a church and, blowing on it regardless, encounters something that drives him to the point of insanity.³⁸ The terrible challenge to ordinary reasoning, and the morality which naturalism has no place for are both in full evidence in this story, never more so than when Parkins, the protagonist, noticing a mysterious stranger follow in his steps along the coast at dusk, suddenly recalls a passage from Bunyan:

‘Now I saw in my dream that Christian had gone but a very little way when he saw a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him.’ ‘What should I do now,’ he thought, ‘if I looked back and caught sight of a black figure standing sharply defined against the yellow sky, and saw that it had horns and wings?’ (M.R. James 1987, 63)

‘Oh, Whistle, and I’ll Come to You, My Lad’ presents a more concerted challenge to naturalistic interpretation than many stories of the purported supernatural (like the Le Fanu story discussed above) attempt. How, without the benefit of blatant misinterpretation, is the naturalist critic to explain away the supernatural in such a story? It is told by a third person narrator who maintains an attitude of detachment from the protagonist throughout, it does not limit itself to an account of events which might be due to chance alone (though these abound) or of experiences which might be nothing more than the product of the protagonist’s psychology (though these also abound); instead, at the end of the story the supernatural fleetingly but indubitably manifests itself. In other words, it is hard to detect any naturalistic intention on the author’s part, and one of his purposes seems to be the *humiliation* of the naturalistic world-view as represented by the protagonist. At this point the critic who believes the story worthy of his analysis but at the same time wishes to exclude from that analysis any hint of respect for the supernatural is likely to go outside the story itself and psycho-analyze its author or, indeed, the whole human race.

³⁸ As a matter of fact his slightly tetchy impatience for the mere possibility of the supernatural brings to mind that of the various naturalistic critics of ‘The Turn of the Screw’.

‘Der Sandmann’: Supernatural Meaning

It is precisely this procedure which E. T. A. Hoffmann’s ‘Der Sandmann’ has undergone, for it is famous – above and beyond any merit it might boast in its own right – as being the object of an analysis by Freud himself,³⁹ who decides in his essay ‘Das Unheimliche’ that the support *within* the story for a supernatural interpretation of its own strange events is far too strong to permit the feasibility of a naturalist explanation at a textual level.

Eine ‘intellektuelle Unsicherheit’ kommt hier nicht mehr in Frage:⁴⁰ wir wissen jetzt, daß uns nicht die Phantasiegebilde eines Wahnsinnigen vorgeführt werden sollen, hinter denen wir in rationalistischer Überlegenheit den nüchternen Sachverhalt erkennen mögen, und – der Eindruck des Unheimlichen hat sich durch diese Aufklärung nicht im mindesten verringert. Eine intellektuelle Unsicherheit leistet uns also nichts für das Verständnis dieser unheimlichen Wirkung. (Freud 1940, 242-243)

He then goes on to psycho-analyze both the author’s motivation for writing and our motivation for responding to this story, tracing its unsettling effect back to the infantile fear of having one’s eyes damaged, which in turn is the expression of an even deeper anxiety – that of castration. However, there is in fact no need for Freud to give up so easily on the story as a fantastic work, or to discount the indications the text itself furnishes that a psychological explanation is at hand for the bizarre goings-on it recounts. For the events which definitely defy naturalism, which cannot, that is, be attributed to Nathanael’s strange psychological state on the one hand or to coincidence on the other – the events which lead Freud to discount any natural explanation inherent in the text – do not belong to the ‘sandman’ part of the story but to the interpolated ‘Olympia’ episode. And the humorous, ironic tone which Freud himself notes, (Freud 1940, 238) and the fact that ordinary psychological considerations are suppressed for its duration, might lead us to suppose that the Olympia interlude belongs to a different mode of narration altogether from that which

³⁹ Discussions of Hoffmann’s story as an example of the fantastic usually include a consideration of Freud’s analysis of the work, and the latter often provides the intellectual context for the former. This is true of Irène Bessière’s *Le récit fantastique* (Bessière 1974, 229-232) and also of the various treatments of ‘Der Sandmann’ in *Dimensionen des Phantastischen*, a collection of essays dealing with Hoffmann’s fiction and which includes a valuable analysis of Freud’s theorizing in ‘Das Unheimliche’ by Louis Vax. (Vax 1998, 40-41)

⁴⁰ This is Todorov’s fantastic by another name.

prevails in the rest of the tale: namely to allegory, which because it ‘is not to be taken literally’ (Todorov 1975, 32) allows the fantastic no purchase.⁴¹

Allegory is defined for the purposes of this thesis as a work of fiction in which a given concept takes precedence over the narrative and dictates terms to it, rather than arising from the narrative and abiding by its rules. It would include not only many allegories so-called, but works as diverse as Aesop’s fables and Plato’s philosophical myths. In the case of the ‘Olympia’ episode it is the romantic tendency to love-blindness which allegory realizes: that men and women are prepared to devote themselves to quite unworthy love-objects while attributing to those objects qualities that the dispassionate observer cannot discern. Of course, the notion that Nathanael might actually fall in love with an unconscious clockwork automaton lacking even the power to converse, and then defend ‘her’ to his friends (who are also taken in – they may not believe her to be the remarkable woman Nathanael does, but they fail to recognize that she is a mechanical doll) as an exceptional human being, exceeds all probability, but this does not mean that the reader should look for a supernatural explanation to account for such bizarre goings-on. Rather, he is to interpret these deviations from the conventions of naturalism as arising from that deference of narrative to concept which is, to repeat, one of the hallmarks of allegory. Once we leave Nathanael’s infatuation with Olympia aside and concentrate on his experiences of Coppélius/Coppola, we discover an abundance of evidence for a natural, psychological explanation of the protagonist’s apparently supernatural travails. However, we should not relinquish our discussion of allegory before seizing the occasion it offers to accost the subject of *meaning*.

⁴¹ The treatment of allegory which follows owes a good deal to Todorov’s discussion of the same topic in the ‘poetry and allegory’ chapter of his book. His key formulation is: ‘Allegory implies the existence of at least two meanings for the same words; according to some critics, the first meaning must disappear, while others require that the two be present together. Secondly, this double meaning is indicated in the work in an *explicit* fashion: it does not proceed from the reader’s interpretation (whether arbitrary or not).’ (Todorov 1975, 63) This, though close to the mark, is not quite a bullseye: the hallmark of allegory is not that one meaning (i.e. some prior concept) causes the other (i.e. the fictional account) to disappear – if that were the case then, evidently enough, the duality necessary to allegory would no longer obtain. Nor is the hallmark of allegory the unforced consistency of a fictional account with some concept which might be derived from it. If that were so then any fictional account capable of yielding a concept would count as allegory, and such is not the case. For example, ‘X was reprimanded by his boss for clocking on with a hangover’ can yield the didactic concept: ‘over-indulgence leads to unpleasant consequences’, but is none the less not an allegory. What is required – and this is one of the *explicit* indications which Todorov alludes to (the other being humour) – is that the controlling concept should divert the fictional account from the bounds of naturalism.

If we were to ask someone to tell us the meaning of a work of fiction, what sort of reply might we legitimately expect to receive? Clearly a satisfactory answer could not be a proposition exclusively concerned with fictional data: ‘this happened, that happened and as a result something else happened.’ We do not, that is, understand a story’s meaning to be equivalent to the events it relates, or even to events not directly related but which we might deduce from those which are.⁴² If, however, we are not demanding an account of fictional data when we ask the meaning of a story, what is it we wish to know? The question is best answered in the context of allegory, for where allegory is concerned both the focus of the question ‘what does this work mean?’ and the validity or otherwise of a particular answer are unusually easy to discern. The meaning of the Olympia interlude in ‘Der Sandmann’ is that amorous passion renders us blind to the real nature of the object of our passion. That is not a proposition about facts, explicit or implicit in the story, but nor is it merely a universal proposition with which the story happens to conform – if that were so, then we might take the proposition ‘human beings communicate by language’ to be the interlude’s allegorical meaning. ‘Amorous passion renders us blind to the real nature of the object of our passion’ by contrast is an *evaluative* concept – one which can without difficulty be converted into an imperative. In this case that imperative would be: ‘Don’t let amorous passion blind you to the real nature of its object!’ Allegorical meanings imply an ‘ought’ of some kind.

However, the answer to the question of meaning cannot be answered with comparable certainty when the work or episode in question is not the product of a pre-determined didactic policy on the author’s part. Which is not to say, of course, that non-allegorical works are meaningless. On the contrary – irrespective of whether they are entirely imagined, the fruit of lived experience, or a reworking of some other literary work – they are presented to us as full of meaning, but a meaning arising unforced from our consideration of the narrative rather than being thrust upon both the narrative and us. It would be mistaken, however, to claim that, in view of Napoleon’s doomed march on Moscow, the meaning of *War and Peace* is ‘pride goes before a fall’ because, although such an evaluative concept can legitimately be derived from

⁴² Thus the meaning of ‘The Turn of the Screw’ is not given in the statement that ‘the Governess, in thrall to sexual psychosis, is the victim of hallucinations.’ That is a possible factual explanation of the goings-on at Bly, but it does not address the question of meaning.

the text, it is only one of a myriad of possible evaluative concepts which can also legitimately be derived from the text – concepts which, sometimes in harmony with one another, sometimes in conflict with one another, constitute the novel’s stock of meaning. So that, in the absence of clear authorial intention to guide us, the proposed meaning of a sprawling nineteenth century realist novel cannot be summed up in a phrase and indeed cannot be *definitively* summed up at all. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the question ‘what does this work mean’ is as much a request for an evaluative answer when asked with reference to *War and Peace* as it is when asked with reference to the ‘Olympia’ episode.

Evaluative statements, however, can be of two kinds: statements of relative evaluation and statements of authentic evaluation – which can be converted into hypothetical and categorical imperatives respectively. For example, the meaning which we gave as a possible interpretation of *War and Peace*: ‘pride goes before a fall’, tells us nothing about whether a fall is a good thing or not. It merely tells us that, should we wish to avoid one, we must guard against the pride which makes it more likely. Another possible meaning of *War and Peace*, by contrast, might be ‘it is unjust to infringe the rights of a sovereign people’, which is a different matter. ‘It is unjust to infringe the rights of a sovereign people’ refers a possible act (the infringement of the rights of a sovereign people) not to some other possible fact (for example: an unhappy outcome for the transgressor) but rather to an authentic criterion of value (justice). Both of these two meanings are compatible with *War and Peace* which, although it is a realist novel concerned, amongst other things, with notions of historical inevitability, never altogether eschews the moral perspective so at odds with that of naturalism. The result is that its conditional meanings gain sustenance by their association with its authentic meanings, and the ‘pride’ of ‘pride goes before a fall’ can be regarded as wicked and not merely inexpedient. From which it will be seen that our attempt to address the question of meaning has brought us back to the question of morality, for the evaluative perspective from which we can detect authentic morality within a text is the same perspective from which we can infer authentic evaluative concepts (which are themselves moral *precepts*) from the text. That perspective is necessarily not a naturalistic one. Naturalism can admit the possibility of belief in morality and of conditional meaning but just as it does not admit the postulates of authentic morality,

so it does not admit the postulates of authentic meaning. It views morality as amoral and meaning as meaningless.

Now, in contrast with the ‘Olympia’ interlude, the ‘sandman’ episodes of ‘Der Sandmann’ are not allegorical – their meaning cannot be located in some single instructive concept imposed on the narrative to the detriment of the latter’s plausibility. Rather, different characters within the story suggest different ways of interpreting its events.

Nur dann, wenn Nathanael bewies, daß Coppelius das böse Prinzip sei, was ihn in dem Augenblick erfasst habe, als er hinter dem Vorhange lauschte, und daß dieser widerwärtige Dämon auf entsetzliche Weise ihr Liebesglück stören werde, da wurde Klara sehr Ernst und sprach: ‘Ja, Nathanael! du hast recht, Coppelius ist ein böses, feindliches Prinzip, er kann Entsetzliches wirken wie eine teuflische Macht, die sichtbarlich in das Leben trat, aber nur dann, wenn du ihn nicht aus Sinn und Gedanken verbannst. Solange du an ihn glaubst, *ist* er auch und wirkt, nur dein Glaube ist seine Macht.’ (Hoffmann 1946, 155)

Nathanael believes that Coppelius is evil itself: ‘das böse Prinzip’, a ‘widerwärtige Dämon’ and so on. He believes, that is, both in the reality of the moral dimension and in the traditionally conceived supernatural. Klara, on the other hand, gives a naturalistic – psychological – explanation of Coppelius: he is a brain-child of Nathanael’s, regardless of any coincidental resemblance he might have with a real-life person of the same name. So what she is proposing is, in fact, a *meaningless* interpretation of Nathanael’s experiences: the development of a psychosis, after all, is an event in nature, and to accept Klara’s argument is to put facts – ‘this happened, that happened and as a result something else happened’ – at the centre of his story. And we have already noted that an account of facts is an inadequate answer to the question ‘what does the story mean’.⁴³ A non-fantastic work might, as we have seen, give rise

⁴³ One might regard the matter in the terms employed by Socrates (Plato’s Socrates of course) to express his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras. According to his reputation the latter had made ‘intelligence’, νοῦς, the creative and regulative principle in the universe and so the young Socrates had assumed that his philosophical predecessor would explain the world’s set-up as fully satisfying a criterion of value. ‘I thought that when he gave the reason for each of these things individually, and for them all collectively, he would explain in detail what was best for each individual thing and what was good for them all together.’ (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 186) But a perusal of Anaxagoras’ actual works revealed the explanations he advanced as being value-free and Socrates felt bitterly disappointed to discover a naturalistic, cause-and-effect account which could never answer the question to which he, Socrates, had sought an answer: not, in truth, ‘how do things come

to many meanings, but at the heart of fantastic works like ‘Der Sandmann’ or ‘The Turn of the Screw’ there lies the stark choice between a supernatural meaning and a naturalistic *lack of meaning*. Once again: because naturalism is value free, it is in no position to suggest meanings beyond those relating to criteria whose own value is forever pending, and must confine itself to statements about the phenomenal world. By contrast, the supernatural which is not part of, or not wholly part of, the phenomenal world, certainly does lend itself to a meaningful interpretation of a work – though it cannot, obviously, ever furnish a cogent account of it in terms of cause-and-effect just because it *defies* cause-and-effect. So that on the one hand, there is Nathanael’s judgment of his predicament: he is the victim of evil forces beyond mankind’s full comprehension; on the other, there is Klara’s: he is mentally deranged. Without wishing to put the matter in too paradoxical a way, the underlying thrust of a fantastic story, if we accept the supernatural, is not that some particular thing is meaningful, but that meaning is possible; conversely, to reject the supernatural in a fantastic story is to dispute not only the meaning attributed by this or that character to particular events in it, but to dispute meaning altogether.

‘The Black Cat’: Supernatural Intention

We mentioned earlier that naturalist critics, in so far as they limit their case to the text itself, explain the apparently supernatural in terms of character psychology on the one hand and in terms of coincidence on the other. In both ‘The Turn of the Screw’ and ‘Der Sandmann’ the psychological element is to the fore because both works are related or partially related by first person narrators whose veracity we have reason to doubt. But there is another way to create the ambiguity typical of the fantastic, a way to which we have alluded but not yet directed our full attention: coincidence. Consider Edgar Allan Poe’s short story ‘The Black Cat’, which Todorov tentatively

to be’ but ‘wherein lies their value?’ The only way, according to Socrates, to explain *meaningfully*, to explain worth and not just existence, is to bring into play a metaphysics of value. ‘I can no longer understand or recognize all those other clever reasons. If somebody tells me the reason something is beautiful is because it is brightly coloured, or because of its shape, or anything of that sort, I have no time for all that. I get confused by all those other things. In my simple, unsophisticated, possibly naïve way I cling to the fact that the only thing making it beautiful is that beautiful I’ve just mentioned – its presence or communion, or whatever exactly the connection is. It isn’t something I’m prepared to be dogmatic about. All I know is, it is the beautiful which makes all beautiful things beautiful.’ (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 189) (Wherever Griffiths translates ‘beautiful’ Plato gives a grammatical variation of καλός.)

and Brooke-Rose emphatically claims for the fantastic.⁴⁴ It is told in the first person, but not, as happens in the case of ‘Der Sandmann’ and ‘The Turn of the Screw’, by a protagonist making bold claims for the supernatural, but instead by one who concedes at the outset that a naturalist explanation might after all be found for the mysterious conspiracy that seems to beset him.⁴⁵ So why are both Todorov and Brooke-Rose prepared to accept it as fantastic at all? The answer is that the multiplication of coincidences makes a naturalistic explanation so far-fetched that we find ourselves tempted to countenance an apparently more probable though scientifically impossible one. After Pluto, the narrator’s one-eyed black cat is hanged, what appears to be his silhouette appears on the wall of a partially burned house. Then another, partially blinded, cat appears – in all respects identical to Pluto except that it has an emblematic gallows on its chest. This second cat is instrumental in bringing to justice the murdering protagonist after he accidentally walls it up alive with his wife’s cadaver. Thus we are tempted to see some kind of intention behind these events, and to regard the gallows-mark on the cat’s chest as a premonition and not some random trick of pigmentation. But we can only feel this temptation if we are in some way susceptible to it – and our susceptibility is bound up, as we have seen, with our sense of morality and our hunger for meaning. A genuinely naturalistic critic, concentrating solely on phenomenal explanation and indifferent to morality and meaning, would conclude that the story does nothing more than relate a number of quite unrelated facts – some of them unfortunate for the narrator, others having nothing to do with his miserable end.

But our attribution of these events to supernatural intention in ‘The Black Cat’ does not imply a direct supernatural intervention of the kind the ghosts are supposed to perpetrate in ‘The Turn of the Screw’ or Coppelius in ‘Der Sandmann’. Such an intervention *might* have taken place. The ‘strong’ supernatural hypothesis to explain the story’s events would be that the black cat itself – to whom the narrator’s imprecation: ‘But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend’ (Poe 1984, 596) may be taken to refer – has returned from the grave as an avenging

⁴⁴ (Todorov 1975, 48) (Brooke-Rose 1981, 117)

⁴⁵ ‘Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace – some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effect.’ (Poe 1984, 597)

demon. But there is a ‘weak’ supernatural hypothesis too: that one could trace back all of the story’s strange events (the silhouette on the wall, for example, which the narrator does his best to explain in a matter-of-fact way) to a natural cause and still be unable to shake off the suspicion that a supernatural intention might be at work behind them. So that the real perpetrator would be not the black cat – which, by this reckoning, would be two domestic animals innocent of all ill intent – but a *destiny* (sometimes referred to in its more benevolent aspect as ‘providence’) which never shows its hand. It would seem that the considerations which lead us to accept in our own lives the notion that some things are ‘meant’ to happen, though no supernatural intervention can be discovered, make us equally susceptible to the same notion in fiction.

What are those considerations? Why should we feel tempted to attribute to the non-human world an intention unknown to science, and whose workings no amount of investigation could uncover? And what, anyway, is meant by ‘intention’? Evidently both naturalists and non-naturalists agree on the human capacity to act in accordance with a consciously conceived programme of behaviour. But there is a crucial difference in their outlook. The naturalist does not concede that human beings exercise real autonomy in the conception and fulfilment of their purposes. He does not, of course, deny that they believe their behaviour arises out of intentions for which they must take responsibility, but he would insist that such a belief is mistaken. A human action is simply the perceptible extremity of a chain of cause-and-effect which can be identified with intention for a link or two, perhaps, but finds no ultimate origin in the moment when that intention was conceived. It can be traced back through and beyond it. By a naturalistic account, intention is revealed to be just another example of the necessity which governs the whole natural world – its only distinguishing mark being a consciousness which, in so far as it is an object for scientific analysis at all, is likewise a matter of cause and effect. The non-naturalist, by contrast, is in a position to insist that human beings bear the ultimate responsibility for their actions, that their intentions are *their own*, and also that consciousness can do more than accompany causation, and is indeed capable of originating intentions on its own account. It is the autonomy of consciousness we implicitly invoke whenever we talk about ‘conscientious behaviour’.

We can now see the kinship between intention, morality and meaning. In each case, the term in question can be taken in a relative sense, so that what looks like morality, meaning and intention turns out to be but a manifestation of the amoral, the meaningless, the unintentional. Or it can be taken in an authentic sense, with the implication that human beings because they are free to determine their own purposes can perform actions susceptible to moral judgment and live meaningful lives. These two perspectives cannot easily be reconciled, so that we normally find ourselves alternating between them. However, there have been some impressive philosophical attempts to bring them into some sort of synthesis, and one in particular can help throw light on stories such as ‘The Black Cat’ with their invocation of a fatality whose presence can be suspected but never detected.

Man, according to Kant, has no experience of himself as subject but nonetheless draws the conclusion that all the inner phenomena which he can detect (emotions, memories etc.) must correspond to something non-phenomenal – and that this something, his non-phenomenal self, is free from the necessity which holds the phenomenal world together. It is no good, of course, looking for this subject amongst phenomena: these relate only to one another and cannot reveal the noumenon which we are bound to think of as giving rise to them. If, for example, we wish scientifically to investigate an allegedly wicked or meritorious action on the part of a human being, a chain of events in the phenomenal world is all we can hope to find. But having gone so far as to hypothesize something in ourselves subsisting beyond the world of necessity and yet somehow affecting it, there is nothing to stop us making the same assumption with regard to the non-human world, and of attributing to it the same capacity for genuinely meaningful behaviour, especially when certain chronologically and topographically associated phenomena (like those which confront us in ‘The Black Cat’) would seem so apt to bear an intentional interpretation.

Dergleichen Schluß muß der nachdenkende Mensch von allen Dingen, die ihm vorkommen mögen, fallen; vermutlich ist er auch im gemeinsten Verstande anzutreffen, der, wie bekannt, sehr geneigt ist, hinter den Gegenständen der Sinne noch immer etwas Unsichtbares, für sich selbst Tätiges zu erwarten, es aber wiederum dadurch verdirbt, daß er dieses Unsichtbare sich bald wiederum versinnlicht, d. i. zum Gegenstande der Anschauung machen will, und dadurch also nicht um einen Grad klüger wird. (Kant IV, 87)

What Kant here describes with reference to the noumenal in human beings holds good for the noumenal in the non-human world too. In the former case we speak of a soul while being careful, if we heed Kant's strictures, to refrain from conflating it with the phenomenal causes which are all that present themselves to the 'Verstand'. In the latter case we speak of 'destiny'. This too is not understood to be a force which perceptibly intervenes to change the course of events, but rather to work hand-in-glove with events – and no more visibly present, indeed, than the hand inside the glove. And we can see that the fantastic which relies on the coincidence of events to suggest a world of intention and meaning, such as we find in 'The Black Cat', accords perfectly both with this conception of destiny and with Kant's admonitions. The 'invisible intentional something' never steps forth from behind a phenomenal tapestry every one of whose meshes seems wholly dependent on those around it.

That there might be a supernatural perspective on the events in 'The Black Cat' is suggested not only by the coincidences referred to above and the narrator's own qualms about them, but also by the evident morality which pervades the story. We have seen that the traditional ghost story frequently associates a metaphysical realm of good and evil with the conventional supernatural: that ghosts return to avenge or do penance for wrongs, and that the challenge to naturalism is also very often a reinstatement of the morality which naturalism disputes. And, but for the absence of any indisputably supernatural manifestation, 'The Black Cat' is faithful to this model. Indeed, Poe places great emphasis on the moral character of human beings, who, despite their apparent thralldom to the laws which govern the phenomenal world, are somehow free to originate and take responsibility for their acts. The narrator is, by his own account, an alcoholic, but whereas a naturalist account might present drink as determining his behaviour, he refuses to accept that it mitigates his guilt in any way, and he attributes instead his execution-by-hanging of Pluto to *perversity*: to the desire, that is, to do evil for its own sake. 'It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to *vex itself*, to offer violence to its own nature – to do wrong for the wrong's sake only – that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute.' (Poe 1984, 599) So in this case the 'intentional something' that never shows its face but still manages to bring a murderer to the gallows would seem to be a just providence.

To sum up: the three stories which have provided the main focus of this discussion are acknowledged classics of the fantastic but they by no means exhaust the genre – as we have seen there are plenty of ghost-stories which make a point of leaving the door to naturalistic explanation ajar. It may well be that writers such as Le Fanu accidentally hit upon the fantastic technique as just a further development of a policy present in virtually all effective ghost stories: the reduction of evidently supernatural elements to the barest minimum. If Le Fanu goes one step further and introduces explicit and implicit disclaimers into his story, then not, we suggest, with the intention of seriously undermining its supernatural content, but rather with the intention of preserving that content from the sort of rational scrutiny which anything described as definitely present invites. What ‘The Turn of the Screw’, ‘Der Sandmann’ and ‘The Black Cat’ all do to different degrees is increase the tension between belief and doubt (which for Le Fanu was but a precautionary inoculation against more determined scepticism) to a crisis, at the same time alerting us to the loss in terms of morality, meaning, intentionality which an absolute rejection of the supernatural entails. Chapters III and IV will seek to demonstrate that the fantastic was employed by Mann as a very suitable vehicle for his deepest philosophical preoccupations – having to do with just such morality, meaning, intentionality – and that it is, in consequence, an appropriate perspective from which to view certain of his works. But before we can tackle the interplay of Mann’s philosophical progress with his increasingly conscious and assured mastery of the fantastic we must demonstrate how much at a formal level *Der Tod in Venedig* has in common with the works we have so far discussed. We cannot legitimately attempt to discover the purpose served by the fantastic in Mann’s novella until we have demonstrated its presence.

The Supernatural Reading of *Der Tod in Venedig*

The critic who wishes to propose *Der Tod in Venedig* as a work of the fantastic can find himself in an embarrassing position, because any fair description of it is bound to prompt the question: ‘How could it be other than a work of the fantastic?’ Accordingly, we will not long detain the reader with a *prima facie* case which really makes itself, before going on to refute some of the presuppositions which have led critics away from a full apprehension of the presence and the function of fantastic elements – the possibly supernatural – in this work. And we will end this chapter with

an appreciation of a certain refinement of the fantastic technique which elevates Mann's novella to one of the most accomplished exercises in this genre.

The fantastic, as we have seen, requires that the reader hesitate between a supernatural and a natural interpretation of the events recounted in a short story, novel etc. And we remember that there are two literary procedures which can be deployed to bring this hesitation about: on the one hand, that of first person narration with all the lack of reliability it entails; and on the other hand, that of the multiplication of coincidences to the point where they seem *beyond* mere coincidence. *Der Tod in Venedig* is not, unlike 'The Turn of the Screw', narrated in the first person, although the question of the extent of the third-person narrator's independence, in terms of thought and opinion, from the protagonist whose adventures he describes, is an interesting one which will have important consequences for our reception of the novella. By contrast, there can be no doubt that the story is full of emphatic coincidences of a kind calculated to tempt us to conclude that they should be attributed to some sort of intentionality rather than to blind chance. And in addition to the general impression that Aschenbach's experiences in Munich and Venice relate to a world of significance and not just to the world of experience, there is a more definite supernatural hypothesis to be considered: that he is haunted and brought to his doom by entities capable of moving back and forth between natural and supernatural worlds.

We are, of course, referring to the various strange figures which confront Aschenbach during his last few weeks of life. The importance of their foreboding appearances is a commonplace of Mann scholarship, but it is our purpose to reconsider them in the context of the fantastic. Right at the beginning of the novella Aschenbach is silently challenged by a man he spies standing on the steps of a chapel overlooking the Ungererstrasse in Munich: a pale-skinned, red-haired, freckled man with a snub-nose and all the accoutrements of the seasoned traveller.

Erhobenen Hauptes, so daß an seinem hager dem losen Sporthemd entwachsenden Halse der Adamsapfel stark und nackt hervortrat, blickte er mit farblosen, rotbewimperten Augen, zwischen denen, sonderbar genug zu seiner kurz aufgeworfenen Nase passend, zwei senkrechte, energische Furchen standen, scharf spähend ins Weite. So – und vielleicht trug sein erhöhter und erhöhender Standort zu diesem Eindruck bei – hatte seine Haltung etwas herrisch

Überschauendes, Kühnes oder selbst Wildes; denn sei es, dass es sich um eine dauernde physiognomische Entstellung handelte: seine Lippen schienen zu kurz, sie waren völlig von den Zähnen zurückgezogen, dergestalt, dass diese, bis zum Zahnfleisch bloßgelegt, weiß und lang dazwischen hervorbleckten. (2.1, 503)

Now this stranger's appearance and demeanour (he stares Aschenbach out of countenance when he catches the latter looking at him) are certainly very odd. Without definitely confirming a supernatural hypothesis regarding his character, origin and intentions, the description of him is none the less an unsettling one. He is suddenly present on the steps of a chapel scrutinized by Aschenbach, who has none the less failed to detect his arrival and must supply with a supposition: 'the stranger must have just emerged from the chapel interior,' a fact he ought to have been able to observe. (2.1, 502) From the first then, then, there is an air of mystery about the figure, and it is only deepened by his rather macabre appearance. With his drawn-back lips and protuberant teeth, his pale but red-freckled skin, his staring eyes with the deep grooves between them, he rather resembles Poe's Red Death in the story of the same name.⁴⁶

In the course of *Der Tod in Venedig* Aschenbach encounters other disturbing apparitions, some of them strikingly similar to the first one. Having arrived at the Piazza San Marco he hires a gondola to bring him to the steam-ship station from

⁴⁶ As a matter of fact *Der Tod in Venedig* shows the influence of 'The Masque of the Red Death'. The association of the disturbing figures (we have the impression it is really one figure under different guises, of course) which cross Aschenbach's path before the backdrop of a cholera epidemic, reflects the association between Poe's personified Red Death and the disease of the same name raging outside Prince Prospero's fortified monastery. The incursion of the red-headed leader of the singing troupe – who reeks of the smell of carbolic disinfectant – into the Lido, an apparently safe redoubt of wealth and privilege, reflects the irruption of the supernatural Red Death amongst the guests at Prospero's ball. And certain of Mann's phrases echo those of Poe. Of his fictional plague Poe writes, 'The Red Death had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal – the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution[...]. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease were the incidents of half an hour.' (Poe 1984, 485) Whereas of the cholera Mann writes, 'Seit mehreren Jahren schon hatte die indische Cholera eine verstärkte Neigung zur Ausbreitung und Wanderung an den Tag gelegt[...]Binnen wenigen Stunden verdorrte der Kranke und ersticke am pechartig zähe gewordenen Blut unter Krämpfen und heiseren Klagen.' (2.1, 578) Nor is *Der Tod in Venedig* the only one of Mann's works to reveal the influence of Poe. That 'The Fall of the House of Usher' is one of the thematic models for *Buddenbrooks* should be obvious to anyone who reads the two works, each of which recounts the exhaustion of a family's vitality, coupled with an increase in its artistic sensitivity, until final extinction and ruin intervene: Poe's short story is expressly referred to in Mann's novel. And the early story 'Der Wille zum Glück' (in which the protagonist, a mortally ill shadow of a man, hangs on to a semblance of life until he has managed to savour the happiness of love – whereupon he dies) is a variation on Poe's 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar'.

which he will take board for the Lido. The gondolier who accepts him as a passenger, however, sets out directly for the Lido across the lagoon with his fare and gruffly refuses to yield to Aschenbach's repeated demands that he return to Venice. He is described in these terms:

Es war ein Mann von ungefälliger, ja brutaler Physiognomie[...]Seine Gesichtsbildung, sein blonder, lockiger Schnurrbart unter der kurz aufgeworfenen Nase ließen ihn durchaus nicht italienischen Schlages erscheinen.[...]Ein paarmal zog er vor Anstrengung die Lippen zurück und entblöbte seine weißen Zähne. Die rötlichen Brauen gerunzelt, blickte er über den Gast hinweg. (2.1, 524-5)

Evidently this is not exactly the same person seen on the chapel steps, but just as evidently the two have plenty in common in terms of appearance and demeanour. And the gondolier is a peculiar enough figure on his own account: his gruff, threatening manner, in particular, is difficult to understand in one reliant for his livelihood on the customer's good-will. Once, however, the gondola does arrive safely at the Lido the gondolier in fear, apparently, that the authorities on the island are about to prosecute him for practising his trade without a license makes off before Aschenbach – who has to go in search of change – can pay him. His disappearance, like the appearance of the man on the chapel steps, is not inexplicable in naturalistic terms, and indeed a naturalistic explanation for it is given. But the very fact that the story dwells on the matter (of no moment to the plot of *Der Tod in Venedig* at all) suggests another significance: that the gondolier does not take money because money was never his object, and that the debt to which he has made sinister allusion ('Sie werden bezahlen') must be paid in some other fashion.⁴⁷

Towards the end of the novel a third such figure appears: the leader of a troupe of street-singers. And in this case, the terms used to describe him do not limit themselves to a general similarity to those used to describe the man on the chapel steps. They are for whole phrases together the same.

⁴⁷ The gondolier is not the only one of his characters to signal his mysteriousness by refusing payment for wayfaring services: the 'Mann auf dem Felde' who leads Joseph and the Ismaeliten to Egypt disappears after bringing them to their goal. 'Genug, als man sich zufällig nach ihm umsah, war er nicht mehr vorhanden, wohl aber das Kamel mit der Glocke, auf dem er geritten, und seinen Lohn hatte der Mann beim Alten nicht eingehoben.' (IV, 711)

Dem weichen Kragen des Sporthemdes, das er zu übrigen städtischer Kleidung trug, entwuchs sein hagerer Hals mit auffallend groß und nackt wirkendem Adamsapfel. Sein bleiches, stumpfnäsiges Gesicht, aus dessen bartlosen Zügen schwer auf sein Alter zu schließen war, schien durchpflügt von Grimassen und Laster, und sonderbar wollten zum Grinsen seines beweglichen Mundes die beiden Furchen passen, die trotzig, herrisch, fast wild zwischen seinen rötlichen Brauen standen. (2.1, 573)

Now, if we bear in mind such stories as ‘Der Sandmann’ and ‘The Black Cat’, we can recognize that Mann is here employing an established fantastic technique – a variant on the coincidence theme, whereby what appears to be very nearly the same person or animal (but which must, if we take the naturalistic view of the matter, be quite distinct persons or animals chancing to have certain features in common with one another) makes multiple appearances. In the Hoffmann story Nathanael, having, as he thinks, put the dreadful Coppelius and his machinations behind him, encounters an Italian lens-polisher going by the name of Coppola who, though he speaks with an outrageous Italian accent, bears a strong resemblance to his near namesake. In the Poe story the protagonist, having mutilated and finally hanged his pet cat Pluto, discovers another cat identical in all respects to the first, except for a white mark on its chest which eventually takes the form of a gallows. Similarly in *Der Tod in Venedig* various figures of strikingly similar appearance, all brutal and impulsive in manner, all strangers to the place in which they are encountered (‘nicht Bajuwarischen Schlages’, ‘nicht Venezianischen Schlages’ etc.), confront Aschenbach at different moments of his adventure. And though Aschenbach does not, as Nathanael and the protagonist of ‘The Black Cat’ do, make a direct connection between them – that is, the third person narration never allows us to overhear Aschenbach thinking: ‘just who or what *are* these pale-skinned, emaciated figures?’ – the impression they make on the reader is that of a supernatural conspiracy.⁴⁸

As has been remarked by many Mann scholars, the apparitions bear the insignia of the pagan deity Hermes (staff and hat) as well as being associated with travel in various ways (the man on the chapel steps is in walking-dress, the gondolier navigates for a

⁴⁸ Aschenbach only once makes an explicit connection between the apparitions and his predicament. ‘Er erinnerte sich eines weißen Bauwerks, geschmückt mit abendlich gleißenden Inschriften, in deren durchscheinender Mystik das Auge seines Geistes sich verloren hatte; jener seltsamen Wanderergestalt sodann, die dem Alternden schweifende Jünglingssehnsucht ins Weite und Fremde erweckt hatte.’ (2.1, 581) At the actual time of the encounter between the man on the chapel steps and Aschenbach, the latter does not, apparently, associate the former with his ‘Wanderlust’.

living, the leader of the troupe of street performers is an itinerant). Now it is common knowledge that pagan deities are supposed to enjoy the power of *impersonation*, and Mann seems to have been particularly intrigued by the prospect of a supernatural being which can assume any identity at will. That would account for much of the delight he took in Kleist's play *Amphitryon*.⁴⁹ In the lecture Mann dedicates to it he pays particular attention to the role of Hermes (referred to by an adaptation of his Roman name, Merkur, throughout the play), who impersonates Sosias the slave in order to perform two important functions.⁵⁰ The one function is that of pander in Jupiter's service, for it is the false Sosias who persuades Charis to drop her bourgeois scruples and who makes vice 'bequem und liebenswürdig' to her. (IX, 190) The other is that of an improvisational creator of the very drama the audience witnesses: 'Dieser feige und drollige Kauz ist ein Dramatiker.' (IX, 191) That is, he both organizes much of the action and heralds (in accordance with his traditional duty) the significance of what is going on. It is surely not hard to see that the Hermes-like figures in *Der Tod in Venedig* play (or seem to) a similar role vis-à-vis Aschenbach: on the one hand by seducing him into an exotic adventure and undermining his sense of bourgeois propriety, on the other hand by marking the significance of the various stages of that adventure. The role of seducer, trickster and subtle herald does not, of course, exhaust the functions of Hermes: there is traditionally a beneficent and educative side to him which often works harmoniously with his more infuriating characteristics.⁵¹ But that is a matter we intend to address later. For the moment it is enough to note that Mann was familiar with and almost ecstatically enthusiastic about a work in which there is no question as to the reality of supernatural entities (*Amphitryon* is a marvellous work, according to Todorov's classification) and of their ability – having adopted mortal guise – to alter the course of human affairs.

The justice of the statement with which we began this chapter: that in order to make the case for *Der Tod in Venedig* as a fantastic work one need only describe it fairly – should now be obvious. The 'strong' supernatural explanation for Aschenbach's

⁴⁹ The intensity of Mann's enthusiasm for *Amphitryon* can be gauged from such declarations as this: '[...]das Gesetzmäßige in dem Verhältnis meiner Natur zu diesem Gegenstande hat sich bewährt: ich bin entzückt, ich glühe. Das ist das witzig-anmutsvollste, das geistreichste, das tiefste und schönste Theaterspielwerk der Welt.' (IX, 187)

⁵⁰ First given as lecture in 1927, but attesting to a long familiarity with the play.

⁵¹ For example, Plato has Hermes deliver Zeus' beneficent laws to mankind in 'Protagoras'. (322-323)

adventure is as unmistakable as it is rarely articulated:⁵² he is being harried by an other-worldly entity in the way Nathanael in ‘Der Sandmann’ feels himself to be – an other-worldly entity we are tempted to identify with Hermes but which need not wholly coincide with that figure of legend.⁵³ But just as we did in the case of ‘The Black Cat’ we can contrast the ‘strong’ supernatural hypothesis with a ‘weak’ one, whereby the man on the chapel steps, the gondolier, and the leader of the singing troupe are not incarnations of a traditionally conceived supernatural force but would prove, could we but examine their lives in more detail, fully human beings who, despite being strangers to Munich and Venice respectively, could boast established identities and flesh-and-blood relationships in their societies of origin.⁵⁴ In this case we must conceive coincidence as the sign of a more diffusely present intention behind the universe of the senses – Kant’s ‘etwas Unsichtbares für sich selbst Tätiges’ – undetectable at a cause-and-effect level but susceptible to that instinctive apprehension which the narrator of ‘The Black Cat’ finds such a burden. By this account it would be destiny which conducts Aschenbach to an end that seems to be signalled at every turn. Signalled not by the Hermes-like figures alone, but by a host of minor characters, incidents and objects – ranging from the aged and effeminate dandy on the ship which conveys Aschenbach to Venice, to the mix-up with the luggage which keeps him there, to the prominence and frequency of the red-coloured

⁵² Hans-Joachim Sandberg comes close (though remaining chary, like most Mann scholars, of the word ‘supernatural’): ‘Auf der mythologischen Ebene läßt der Autor in Einklang mit der von Euripides dargestellten Strategie den Gott sich verkleiden. Aschenbach, der mit Blindheit geschlagen ‘Schauende’, ist selbst außerstande, die Identität des Gottes in allen jenen Gestalten wahrzunehmen, in denen dieser ihm in den Weg tritt.’ (Sandberg 1991, 109)

⁵³ Dierks places more emphasis on the Dionysian than on the Hermetic attributes of the apparitions, even disputing that the hat of the man on the chapel steps (πέτασος) is an exclusively Hermetic symbol: ‘Seine von Thomas Mann beabsichtigte Beziehung zum einwandernden Dionysos muß aber nicht ausgeschlossen werden.’ (Dierks 1972, 25) Bernd Kraske, by contrast, suggests that Dionysos – though the power behind the apparitions – is never himself manifest in *Der Tod in Venedig*: ‘Die Hermes und Charongestalten[...]sind Werkzeuge und Kumpane des fremden Gottes. Sie locken und führen Aschenbach nach Venedig, dem Ort seines Untergangs.’ (Kraske 1997, 96) Without pretending to a final adjudication in the matter we might point out that it is possible to regard the apparitions as Hermes alone, but a Hermes whose brutal and impulsive nature reflects both the supernatural entity: Dionysos, and the metaphysical force: the ‘Wille’, in whose service he performs his duty as an agent and herald. Even within the confines of *Der Tod in Venedig*, however, Hermes is not associated exclusively with such impulsive and instinctive forces. He is also associated with a Platonic empyrean, the perfection and beauty of which he manifests in the guise of Tadzio psychopompos. Hermes, that is, takes his attributes from the master he happens to be serving.

⁵⁴ Although these two hypotheses do indeed contrast they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. We can take Nathanael’s word for it that Coppelius is the devil in disguise, all the while noting that the latter is abetted in the accomplishment of his wicked ends by apparently chance events which we are not obliged to attribute to any machinations of his.

articles (red hat-bands, red pomegranate juice, red strawberries etc.) which fill the narrative.⁵⁵

The ‘Symbolic’ Objection

That, then, is the case for the role of the supernatural in *Der Tod in Venedig*. What are the alternatives? The most obvious is that the story lists a series of authentically – and not just phenomenally – unrelated coincidences, and that the third-person narrator although formally distinct from Aschenbach is actually retailing the events of the story as filtered through the protagonist’s sensibility. However, a third possibility has been advanced by Terence J. Reed. Here is how he puts the matter in *The Uses of Tradition*: ‘The psychological process is converted into an apparently fated course, it is *realized* in symbolic figures and motifs. This is not to say that fate in any other sense than the psychological is being seriously put forward as the reality of Aschenbach’s death.’ (Reed 1996, 173) And here is how he phrases the same idea in his single-volume study of *Der Tod in Venedig*: ‘All this[...]is a message to the reader rather than to Aschenbach. That remains largely true for the rest of the story: Aschenbach will only feel the disturbing effect of his experiences at the immediate level; he will notice the disturbing episodes and figures accumulate but will not see them as signs, much less glimpse the pattern they constitute.’ (Reed 1994, 31) Reed, then, is not saying that the figures are hallucinations or chance encounters worked up by an over-imaginative protagonist into a psychodrama. But he forbids us from concluding that they are supernatural beings as traditionally conceived or part of a more general noumenal plan. So what *does* he contend? Is he suggesting that *Der Tod in Venedig* is an allegory – that the meaning of the novella was conceived before Mann ever set pen to paper, and that the strange events it recounts are not to be taken literally, but should rather be understood as a direct communication between Mann and the reader with no bearing on the novella’s fictional reality?

The matter is important because, as we have seen, deviations from naturalism can be accounted for in terms of the supernatural or in terms of allegory. In the first case, we

⁵⁵ Partially explicable in terms of the allusion to Poe’s Red Death, though red – in particular red hair – seems to have unsettling implications in much of Mann’s fiction: the sinister Gerda von Rinnlingen in ‘Der Kleine Herr Friedemann’, for example, has red hair, as does Sammiel in *Doktor Faustus*.

look for an agent within the fiction's imagined world to account for the violation of naturalism, in the second case we understand that this agent lies outside that fictional world – is the author, in fact. Once we decide for allegory, the flouting of naturalistic norms ceases to be a matter of wonder and we devote our attention to divining the evaluative concept to which those norms are made to yield.⁵⁶ An allegorical interpretation of *Der Tod in Venedig*, then, is a threat to the fantastic interpretation because it eliminates altogether the supernatural ingredient indispensable if the fantastic is to gain any purchase. And the threat is all the more pressing in the light of Mann's undoubted penchant for abstract thinking, for it is quite clear that many of his works – especially amongst the short stories – are exercises in various kinds of intellectual and philosophical discipline. For example, the early short story 'Tobias Mindernickel' is an exercise in Nietzschean thinking (Mindernickel's apparently kindly treatment of a wounded dog is shown to be a form of power-hunger) and the novella 'Die vertauschten Köpfe' is an exercise in Schopenhauerian thinking.⁵⁷ On the other hand, neither of these stories is allegorical: it is one thing for a writer to impose on a story a perspective which is not necessarily his own, in the same spirit he might impose on it the rules of a particular genre, and quite another to make of it the vehicle for an evaluative concept. Mann is generally reluctant to subordinate his fiction to so simple a scheme, and even when naturalism is openly defied in his works (as it is in 'Die vertauschten Köpfe') we search in vain for the kind of determined meaning which allegory serves.

In the light of all this, it is certain that *Der Tod in Venedig* is not an allegory. On the one hand, no didactic programme seems to intervene in the novella's Venice, and it would, indeed, be hard to find a work of fiction so thoroughly ambiguous in terms of a controlling concept. This is not to dispute that we can infer a meaning from it; indeed it will be the purpose of the next chapter to determine what that meaning might

⁵⁶ To return to our example: once we grasp that the 'Olympia' interlude serves an allegorical purpose we cease to wonder why nobody (not just Nathanael) who meets this crude automaton recognizes it for what it is.

⁵⁷ Given that Schopenhauer owes so much to eastern mysticism, Mann no doubt felt that it was appropriate to make an Indian folk-tale a vehicle for his philosophy. As soon as we read that 'man kann von Nirwânâ nur in Verneinungen reden' (VIII, 719) we know whose doctrine animates the narrative, and when we hear Kali addressed in these terms: 'Anfangslose, die vor allen Entstandenen war! Mutter ohne Mann, deren Kleid niemand hebt! Lust- und schreckensvoll Allumfangende, die du wieder einschlürfst alle Welten und Bilder, die aus dir quillen,' (VIII, 747) we know which metaphysical force she personifies.

be. But no analytic effort on our part can hope to exhaust *Der Tod in Venedig's* potential for further interpretation, whereas the meaning of the 'Olympia' allegory is as blatant as it is definitive. And on the other hand, the rules of naturalism are never unambiguously defied in *Der Tod in Venedig* – any more than they are in 'The Black Cat'. In Mann's novella, just as in Poe's story, there is an accumulation of coincidences which suggest to us the possibility of some kind of supernatural intervention. But both stories are careful not to flout the laws of nature, nor do they set at nothing the usual psychology of human beings.

But though *Der Tod in Venedig* is not a work of allegory, Reed still feels that the Hermes-figures and all the other events which apparently conspire to bring about Aschenbach's death are to be understood as realizing purely psychological forces within him, despite the fact that they are not, still according to Reed, the result of those forces. But how can the hypothesis: 'Aschenbach's decline and fall is exclusively psychologically determined' be in any way realized by a narrative which shows that, unbeknownst to the protagonist at the time, he is stimulated to take his journey to Venice at the subliminal suggestion of a freakish-looking stranger, and that he would have left Venice in good time – though with a heavy heart, it is true – if his luggage had not gone astray? If these details of the narrative are not to be traced back to Aschenbach's own psychology, then they must offer support for an *alternative* to the psychological explanation.⁵⁸ And to say that the Hermes-figures and all the other suspicious-looking incidents in *Der Tod in Venedig* are a realization of Aschenbach's state of mind without being in some way the product of that state of mind is to say that one of two mutually exclusive alternatives, the supernatural and the natural, can 'realize' the other.

It would be well to remember that though *Der Tod in Venedig* carries an extraordinarily heavy burden of cultural reference, its genesis lies in Mann's own experiences.⁵⁹ It is these, and not a definitive judgment on them, which he transferred

⁵⁸ Surely the most obvious way to realize the notion that Aschenbach's destiny is the product of his own psychology would be to demonstrate that *such was the case* by, for example, giving a naturalistic account of his state of mind and its impact on his behaviour and choices. The phenomenal is as such real, and nothing can be added to its factuality by clothing it in symbolic garb.

⁵⁹ 'Im "Tod in Venedig" [ist] nichts erfunden: Der Wanderer am Münchener Nordfriedhof, das düstere Polesaner Schiff, der greise Geck, der verdächtige Gondolier, Tazio und die seinen, die durch Gepäckverwechslung mißglückte Abreise, die Cholera, der ehrliche Clerc im Reisebureau, der

from the real Venice he knew to Aschenbach's fictional one: and the reason that he made of such experiences the nucleus of his story is that they struck him as *meaningful*. Schooled as he was by the nay-saying, psychologizing Nietzsche, he of course knew full well that the naturalist view of such 'meaning' was that it was the accidental product of various meaningless phenomenal forces (biology, social conditioning, habitual brain activity) – but to take the naturalist view exclusively would be to dispute his own motive for writing the novella at all. We remember that fiction which on the one hand falls short of strict naturalism (and naturalism's insistence that human beings are nothing more than cause-and-effect creatures, as insusceptible to legitimate moral criticism as a caterpillar or a stone), and on the other hand deals with the close interplay of human beings, has no difficulty in accepting as meaningful the account it gives. After all, it is a universal custom to attribute to men and women the moral autonomy and intentionality which naturalism would deny them, and to grant them such an autonomy is to make a meaningful evaluation of their behaviour possible. But Aschenbach's adventure is not of this kind. During the whole course of the novella we never witness the give-and-take of conversation or the emergence of distinct personalities, so that the protagonist, though surrounded by people, seems infinitely alone. That is, human beings are no more than links in a chain of experiences for Aschenbach and hardly to be distinguished from non-human ones. There is no question of the meaning which emanates from fully human fictional beings like, say, the most prominent members of the Buddenbrook family, emerging from the bit players in Aschenbach's adventure.⁶⁰ When we read *Der Tod in Venedig* we must seek meaning where Mann himself felt its presence during the Venetian

bösartige Bänkelsänger oder was sonst anzuführen wäre – alles war gegeben, war eigentlich nur einzustellen und erwies dabei aufs verwunderlichste seine kompositionelle Deutungsfähigkeit.' (XI, 124)

⁶⁰ Richard Sheppard in an article on *Buddenbrooks* published in the *The Modern Language Review* notes precisely the same improbable plethora of apparent coincidence along with the presence of characters who seem to be supernatural agents in disguise that we have noted in *Der Tod in Venedig*. Grünlich, Sheppard suggest, might be regarded as 'a descendant of the Green Huntsman of Germanic mythology: that is, the Devil,' (Sheppard 1994, 926) and various other figures are seen as portending (Klothilde) or as surreptitiously promoting (Gerda – another sinister red-head, we might add) the family's destined collapse. But in every case we notice that though these characters are vivid enough *apparitions* they are not really known to us as *people*, so that their meaning (unlike that of Tony, Thomas and Hanno) emanates not from the play of free personalities but rather from the supernatural as traditionally conceived or from that noumenal substrate of intention so well described by Kant. In other words, *Buddenbrooks* and *Der Tod in Venedig* have a good deal in common, and Sheppard is quite right to emphasize the continuity between Mann's first novel and his later works in respect of the supernatural.

sojourn which gave rise to the novella: as somehow at work behind the phenomenal world at large.

The reason we devote so much time to Reed's position is not to refute the views of this particular scholar, for the tendency to write-off the potentially supernatural as a mere symbolic realization of the natural is widespread amongst Mann critics – though few engage with the notion as explicitly as Reed does in the passages we have quoted.⁶¹ And it is just because the tendency is widespread that it deserves a proper analysis. The 'symbolic' reading of *Der Tod in Venedig* tacitly accuses Mann of a kind of redundancy, not to say insincerity – its implication being that, convinced as he was that the naturalist account of human beings and their activities was the be-all and end-all, he was prepared nonetheless to clothe the phenomenal truth in a vestment of illusory meaning which he knew could never fit it and of which we, the readers, are supposed to strip it. If Mann, so such a reading gives us to understand, adds to the tale of Aschenbach's psychologically determined self-destruction a surfeit of symbolic details, then not to bring to our attention an alternative to the phenomenal account in which the author really believes, but only to conduct us by a devious route back to that same phenomenal account. 'Leitmotif' as 'Ab-' and 'Umleitmotif', as it were.

The Supernatural and the Metaphysical

The truth is that there is considerable reluctance amongst certain Mann critics to acknowledge the supernatural *as such* in his works. Reed's reaction to the apparition of Joachim's ghost in *Der Zauberberg* is unmistakably hostile: 'Allegory has taken over to the point of doing violence to the surface realism which carries it. Nowhere in Mann's work is the manipulation of reality to make an argument less acceptable.'⁶²

⁶¹ A sort of critical elision is in play. Instead of taking immediate cognizance of the possibly supernatural elements in his fiction, Mann scholars often limit themselves to noting that such elements are the result of Mann's decision to include them. They are the result of such a decision, obviously, but this is no more true of the ambiguously supernatural than of the unambiguously natural in his fiction. But whereas Aschenbach is accepted as integral to *Der Tod in Venedig's* fictional world, the ambiguously supernatural is understood as being in principle extrinsic to it.

⁶² (Reed 1996, 266) Herwig makes a point of answering the accusation: 'Die Erscheinung Joachims während der Séance mußte auch von der Leserschaft der zwanziger Jahre nicht unbedingt in dem Maße als Verletzung des Oberflächenrealismus durch übertriebenes Allegorisieren rezipiert werden.' (Herwig 2004, 130)

Once again, it is important that we understand that Reed is hardly alone in this distaste for the supernatural. Indeed, it is so widespread that it sometimes seems that the very word ‘supernatural’ is taboo, and that other less offensive alternatives are always to be preferred. One such alternative is ‘myth’, and it is quite true that many of the ambiguously supernatural figures who haunt Mann’s fiction can be identified with figures recognizable from pagan religions – for example the Hermes-like visitants in *Der Tod in Venedig*.⁶³ But merely to designate them as mythical is to evade the question of their status within Mann’s fictional reality, because the term can mean two opposite things. It can mean myth exposed: the allegedly supernatural entities accepted by certain individuals and societies as a force to be reckoned with do not exist except as elements of individual and group psychology. Or it can mean myth believed: those same entities are more than just elements of group and individual psychology and are indeed a force to be reckoned with. It is only the latter definition which allows ‘myth’ to function as an alternative to naturalism, while ‘myth’ taken in the former sense actually *constitutes* the naturalistic, psychological explanation of *Der Tod in Venedig*. It is, of course, the term’s very ambiguity which commends it to critics chary of the obvious contrary to natural explanation – which is to say: supernatural explanation.

All this would be dubious enough if Mann were a defiant naturalist. After all numerous writers of ghost stories have avowed their scepticism vis-à-vis their own subject matter.⁶⁴ This does not, however, entitle us to write off every emergence of the supernatural in their works as the mere ‘realization’ of the phenomenal forces which their authors swear by in real life. But, as a matter of fact, Mann was far from being a hardened sceptic with regard to the supernatural, as a perusal of his essay ‘Okkulte Erlebnisse’ demonstrates. In it he, evidently half humorously, declares, ‘Es ist nicht anders: ich bin den Okkultisten in die Hände gefallen’, (15.1, 612) but his more considered opinions are scarcely less compromising for those who would read his works as ‘naturalism plus disguised naturalism’.

⁶³ The index to *The Uses of Tradition* lists twenty entries under ‘myth’ and not a single one under ‘supernatural’.

⁶⁴ H.G. Wells is an outstanding example.

Was mich betrifft, so hatte ich Zeit meines Lebens in Fragen des Okkultismus theoretisch ziemlich weit ‘links’ gestanden, hatte also, im Sinn jenes weitergehenden Skeptizismus, das Verschiedenste für möglich gehalten, ohne mich übrigens persönlich irgendwelcher Erfahrungen auf dem Gebiet des Übersinnlichen rühmen zu können. (15.1, 619)

He then retails – we may feel rather credulously – his experiences at a séance held in the house of one Baron von Schrenck, at which, after various disappointments and a final agonizing struggle, the supernatural manifests itself in the form of a handkerchief and other knick-knacks animated by an unseen hand!⁶⁵ And he mentions that the supernatural is to be understood as an emanation of the metaphysical, though he seems uncertain what kind of metaphysics might be in play. Is it a value-free Schopenhauerian *Wille* as suggested by the flattering reference to *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*? (15.1, 613) Or is it rather a Platonic empyrean as suggested by such phrases as, ‘Man ruft, mit anderem Worte, einen Hilfsbegriff von platonischem Zauber, nicht ohne schmeichelhafte Eigenschaften für das Ohr des Künstlers, der schnell bereit sein wird, nicht nur sein eigenes Handwerk, sondern auch die gesamte Wirklichkeit als ideoplastisches Phänomen zu deuten’? (15.1, 614) Or is it, again, a Hegelian ‘Geist’?

Es war Hegel, der gesagt hat, daß die Idee, der Geist als letzte Quelle anzusehen sei, aus der alle Erscheinungen fließen; und diesen Satz zu beweisen, ist die supranormale Physiologie vielleicht geschickter als die normale – ja, sie unternimmt es, den philosophischen Beweis des Primats der Idee, des ideellen Ursprungs alles Wirklichen neben den biologischen von der Einheit der organischen Substanz zu stellen. (15.1, 649-50)

We shall return to the vexed question of Mann’s attempts to negotiate the competing claims of various philosophers in the next chapter. At this point in the argument it is enough to acknowledge the attested fact that he took the supernatural seriously in life and that he strongly associated it with metaphysics. Irrespective of the character of the metaphysical realm, the supernatural as traditionally understood (objects that seem to move themselves in the case of the ‘Okkulte Erlebnisse’) is an extension of that realm into the phenomenal world. He is well aware that this is in defiance of all

⁶⁵ (15.1, 638) Mann fictionalized his experiences at the séance in the ‘Fragwürdigstes’ chapter of *Der Zauberberg*, in which the role of the real-life Willi S. is taken by Ellen Brand, that of Mann himself by Hans Castorp, and where the equivalent of the animated handkerchief, bell, musical-box and what-not is Joachim’s ghost.

reason – aware, that is, of the problematic status of the supernatural we considered earlier – but identifies that problematic character as its peculiar attraction: that the supernatural seems to promise a *phenomenal* confirmation of a *metaphysical* truth. ‘Noch einmal möchte ich, gereckten Halses, die Magennerven angerührt von Absurdität, das Unmögliche sehen, das dennoch geschieht.’ (15.1, 652)

The Naturalist Interpretation

To repeat, the only reasonable counter to the supernatural reading of *Der Tod in Venedig* is a naturalist one. And as good a case as can be made for the naturalist hypothesis has been mounted by Ritchie Robertson in an essay entitled ‘Classicism and its Pitfalls’. In it he outlines an interpretation parallel to that developed by certain critics of ‘The Turn of the Screw’ – notably Edmund Wilson in his 1934 essay ‘The Ambiguity of Henry James’.⁶⁶ Wilson sums up his ‘Freudian’ view of ‘The Turn of the Screw’ thus:

[...]we are inclined to conclude[...]that the story is primarily intended as a characterization of the Governess: her sombre and guilty visions and the way she behaves about them seem to present, from the moment we examine them from the obverse side of her narrative, an accurate and distressing picture of the poor country parson’s daughter, with her English middle-class class-consciousness, her inability to admit to herself her natural sexual impulses[...]Remember, also, in this connection, the peculiar psychology of Governesses, who, by reason of their isolated position between the family and the servants, are likely to become ingrown and morbid.

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⁶⁶As a matter of fact the two stories have a good deal in common beyond their fantastic ambiguity. In both cases the protagonist is isolated from his or her usual social context (the Governess at Bly, Aschenbach in Venice), in both cases there is a suggestion of frustrated sexuality (the Governess has a crush on the absent Master of the house, Aschenbach has lost his wife and found no replacement), in both cases the protagonist idolizes and yearns for a child or adolescent of a particular stamp. Compare, for example, Aschenbach’s infatuation with Tadzio with the Governess’s idolization of Miles: ‘I remember feeling with Miles in especial as if he had had, as it were, no history. We expect of a small child a scant one, but there was in this beautiful little boy something extraordinarily sensitive, yet extraordinarily happy, that, more than in any creature of his age I have seen, struck me as beginning anew each day[...]Of course I was under the spell, and the wonderful part is that, even at the time, I perfectly knew I was.’ (Henry James 1996, 657) Both Aschenbach and the Governess are prepared to endanger their loved one in order to remain in possession of him – Aschenbach refuses to alert the Polish family to the presence of the cholera in Venice, the Governess actually helps bring about Miles’ death by forcing him to confront the ghost she is sure he is aware of. And it is hard to overlook the physical similarity between Quint (red-haired, pale-skinned, and with an unmistakable air of challenge) and the apparition on the chapel steps who grimaces so menacingly at Aschenbach.

⁶⁷(Wilson 1952) Brooke-Rose’s highly critical response to Wilson forms the nucleus of ‘“The Turn of the Screw” and its Critics’ which details the apparent inability of many critics to refrain, when

And here, by comparison, is how Robertson explains the apparitions which confront Aschenbach:

In *Death in Venice*, ‘mythic’ experience is shown by the sceptical narrator to be projected onto his actual experience by the increasingly enraptured Aschenbach. If a day on the beach is ‘strangely exalted and mythically transformed’, that is because his view of Tadzio colours his view of the scene around him. The wanderers who cross Aschenbach’s path likewise derive their disturbing aura from his emotional projections. Not only are these figures wanderers, like Aschenbach, but they also share some of his traits: the slight build, the loose mouth and the short nose. They represent the unacknowledged and unwelcome shadow-side of Aschenbach himself, the rootless, bohemian aspect which he has done his best to repress. Jung has shown that the heightened sensibility accompanying a mid-life crisis can generate precisely such visionary embodiments of psychic forces. (Robertson 2002, 101)

It is not, of course, necessary that we accept Freud’s authority as Wilson does, or Jung’s as Robertson does, in order to grasp that a psychological explanation of *some kind* is necessary in the case of the ghosts at Bly, and highly appealing in the case of the apparitions in Venice. If the ghosts are not, in point of fact, supernatural entities intent on corrupting two children in order to perpetuate their wickedness beyond the grave, then they must by some means or other be the product of the Governess’s psychology. And as we are indeed informed that she is sexually and romantically inexperienced, (Henry James 1996, 639) easily ‘carried away’, (644) and has a rather melodramatic notion of sinfulness, (648) a possible connection between the Governess’s state-of-mind and her experiences is hard to overlook. By the same token, if the apparitions in *Der Tod in Venedig* have no objective significance – if they are neither the impersonations of a pagan deity nor phenomenal indications of a noumenal destiny – then we have to ascribe their presence in the novella either to a string of unlikely coincidences or to Aschenbach’s peculiar perspective. And as we are informed that he is a man who has reached the verge of exhaustion, (2.1, 501) has sacrificed his life to the struggle for literary creation, (512) and is a lonely widower, (515) and given, furthermore, that as a writer he is bound to possess abnormal powers of imagination, a possible connection between Aschenbach’s state-of-mind and his

confronted by fantastic fiction, from deciding for a naturalist or supernatural reading (usually the former). (Brooke-Rose 1981, 128-157)

experiences is equally hard to overlook. Such indications that a psychological explanation might be available for the apparently supernatural in the two novellas are clearly not accidental. Both James and Mann are keen to maintain the feasibility of a naturalist interpretation for 'The Turn of the Screw' and for *Der Tod in Venedig* respectively, so that if we are determined to read these works in a non-supernatural fashion we can find justification in the authors' evident intentions.

There are, however, obvious objections to be made against both Wilson's and Robertson's approach. In the first place, if we are ready to set store by authorial intention as expressed through the text itself, then we are obliged to recognize that both James and Mann seem as inclined to promote the supernatural as they are the naturalist understanding of these stories. The argument outlined earlier against Reed's 'symbolic' reading is just as valid in countering a purely naturalistic reading: if either author had intended his fiction to be read in a spirit of untroubled naturalism then why did he introduce material which could only weaken such an interpretation? In the case of 'The Turn of the Screw', the *prima facie* case for a supernatural interpretation is so strong that it hardly occurred to a whole generation of readers to regard it as other than a ghost story. But even now, when the countervailing case for a naturalistic reading of the novella has become common knowledge, we should not forget that the Governess's account of a supernatural adventure is neither self-contradictory nor refuted by anybody else.⁶⁸ We can, on the strength of her own admissions, make the case that she is prone to delusions, but we cannot with justice convict her whole account on the strength of suspicion alone. If we once admit the possible validity of supernatural explanation, we must concede that the Governess's account is as consistent with an experience of visitations from beyond the grave as it is with an experience of a series of hallucinations. Nor should we forget that James – in a problematic fictional manoeuvre to which we will return later – has the Governess give an apparently accurate account of Quint's appearance despite never having seen him during his lifetime. And though this awkward fact can, with some ingenuity and a readiness to supply details that the text leaves out, be explained away,

⁶⁸ There are still those who defend an unambiguously supernatural reading of 'The Turn of the Screw'. For example, Edward Wagenknecht, in his *Seven Masters of the Supernatural Fiction* says that James 'wrote no word about "The Turn of the Screw" to indicate that he ever thought of it as anything but a ghost story.' (Wagenknecht 1991, 39) That is no doubt correct, but it misses the point: why would James have included so much evidence to undermine the Governess's credibility if he intended that her testimony should be regarded as absolutely trustworthy?

it would surely be as absurd to claim that James includes it in his story *in order* that it be explained away as it would be to suggest that Conan Doyle includes in his novel an exposure of the supposedly phantom hound which haunts the Baskervilles as a flesh-and-blood animal covered in phosphorus *in order* that we conclude it was a supernatural entity after all.

Now it is quite true that, so far as the supernatural is concerned, the reception of *Der Tod in Venedig* has been dissimilar to that of 'The Turn of the Screw'. Whereas James' tale was for a long time considered a traditional ghost story, the haunted atmosphere of Mann's novella has been explained in any but properly supernatural terms – for example in terms of symbol, leitmotif and 'myth'. But Robertson's explanation of the visitants, signs and portents that accompany Aschenbach's progress in terms of psychological projection is, surely, an admission that they are integral to *Der Tod in Venedig's* fictional world. And once we start to weigh the balance between the naturalistic and the supernatural hypotheses, we find that Mann, like James, has been careful to provide evidence for both.⁶⁹ And in so far as Mann's novella charts a move away from scepticism and towards supernatural credulity (while 'The Turn of the Screw' foregrounds the Governess's affirmation of the supernatural before vitiating it with caveats) it resembles Poe's 'The Black Cat'. In both stories support for a naturalist reading consists firstly in the fact that nothing overtly supernatural is seen to occur, and secondly in the general principle that the only valid explanation for events, no matter how strange, must rely on phenomenal cause-and-effect, no matter how implausible. If we leave these two considerations aside, we discover a wealth of evidence to undermine the naturalist reading. There is the curious recurrence of figures whose extreme similarity of manner and appearance suggest the intervention of some superhuman entity with the power of impersonation, or at the very least a noumenal intention at work behind the phenomenal surface of things. There is the great difficulty we find in supposing that such unlikely coincidences are wholly the result of Aschenbach's psychology – for surely Robertson is not suggesting that the apparitions (which according to him bear a

⁶⁹ Reed sees that *Der Tod in Venedig* frequently strains against naturalism, and concludes not that this is because Mann wishes to advance a supernatural hypothesis at the expense of the naturalistic one, but that the man on the chapel steps and the brutal gondolier 'cannot be declared "real" by the criteria of realistic narrative.' (Reed 1994, 30) Which is to say that he avoids the trap – as he would see it – of discussing what kind of status these events have within *Der Tod in Venedig's* fictional world by denying that they are really part of it.

distinct resemblance to the novella's protagonist)⁷⁰ are hallucinations? And most tellingly of all, perhaps, there is the fact that so far as we can tell Aschenbach scarcely notices the many strange events and coincidences which the alert reader picks up on.

The Protagonist and the Narrator

But is it really the case that Aschenbach is so passive and unobservant a witness? The question is an intriguing one, because it is the peculiar narrative technique of *Der Tod in Venedig* in terms of *authorization* which raises it to the first rank of fantastic literature. We noted earlier that many traditional ghost stories meet the conditions of Todorov's fantastic. Like 'The Black Cat' they refrain from the explicit representation of the supernatural and content themselves with the multiplication of coincidence. Or like 'The Turn of the Screw' they forfeit the authority of a third person and employ instead a first person narrator – i.e. an inhabitant of the very fictional world he or she is supposed to give us an account of, and whose veracity and perspicacity cannot be taken for granted. However, the writer wishing to construct a story of sustained fantastic ambiguity by the latter means will find his way beset with difficulties because, although it is true that first person narrators are in principle dubious in a way that third person narrators are not, we are nonetheless likely to give them the benefit of the doubt unless we see good reason to disbelieve them.⁷¹ After all, a fictional first person account may not be susceptible to scrutiny in the light of independent testimony, and such is the case in 'The Turn of the Screw', for example. With the consequence that fantastic first person narrators will themselves have to give us cause to suspect their good judgment and impartiality if there is to be serious hesitation between naturalist and supernatural explanation.

⁷⁰ 'Not only are these figures wanderers, like Aschenbach, but they also share some of his traits: the slight build, the loose mouth and the short nose.' (Robertson 2002, 101) The identification of Aschenbach and the stranger can, however, be taken too far. As Pierre Brunel points out: 'L'étranger ressemble à Aschenbach en ce qu'il a de banal (stature moyenne, maigre). Au contraire, il en diffère radicalement par ce qui en lui sort de l'ordinaire: son nez camus s'oppose au nez aquilin et ramassé du protagoniste.' (Brunel 1997, 69-70)

⁷¹ A first person narrator cannot speak with the authority which the third person narrator of *Der Zauberberg*, for example, vindicates when he says, 'Will man glauben, daß unser schlichter Held nach so und so vielen Jährchen hermetisch-pädagogischer Steigerung tief genug ins geistige Leben eingetreten war, um sich der "Bedeutsamkeit" seiner Liebe und ihres Objektes *bewußt* zu sein? Wir behaupten und erzählen, daß er es war.' (5.1, 987) The fictional reality of *Der Zauberberg* exists *by the grace* of its third person narrator, whose judgments cannot reasonably be gainsaid.

That is precisely what happens in James' story, of course: the account of the Governess includes information regarding her background and character likely to undermine her credibility – so much so that Wilson declares, 'When one has once got hold of the clue to this meaning of "The Turn of the Screw" one wonders how one could ever have missed it.' (Wilson 1952, 94) Such a strong presumption of unreliability would capsize the story into Todorov's uncanny: it would be a strange tale, but with a naturalist core beneath an only apparently supernatural surface.⁷² The only way this impression can be kept at bay is the provision of evidence tending to fortify the Governess's account. Such countervailing evidence cannot, however, come from her alone: given our doubts as to her veracity everything she affirms in support of her supernatural account must support to the same degree our presumption of natural causation. But it can come from the testimony – as related by the Governess herself – of third parties. And this, surely, is James' purpose in having Mrs Grose confirm the Governess's description of Quint, whom the latter has never seen during his lifetime. Of course we may invent evidence of our own to discredit this apparently forceful corroboration of the supernatural hypothesis (for example John Silver's contention that she has learned of Quint's appearance while making enquiries in the village) but such explanations have the disadvantage of implying that the Governess is not merely deluded but actually deceitful. (Brooke-Rose 1981, 148) If it had been her intent to deceive she would hardly have permitted the intrusion into her narrative of those compromising details which aroused our suspicions in the first place. The end result is that, despite the evident textual intention to write a story balanced between natural and supernatural explanation, the Governess's clairvoyance at this point in the narrative so strongly favours the latter over the former that the fantastic is in danger of going by the board.⁷³

Der Tod in Venedig avoids the destabilizing oscillation at work in James' first person narrative by a special use of free indirect discourse. Although Aschenbach focalizes our experience of the world of the novella, the commingling of his consciousness and that of the third person narrator often makes it difficult to decide whose commentary

⁷² As we have seen, many critics, including Wilson, argue that 'The Turn of the Screw' is, in point of fact, a strange but naturalistic tale.

⁷³ In the 1961 film *The Innocents*, Jack Clayton's adaptation of James' tale, this deficiency of fantastic technique has been corrected: the Governess sees a miniature portrait of Quint before encountering his ghost. (Clayton 1961)

on events we are reading. Some thoughts and impressions are directly attributed to the protagonist: ‘Mit Erstaunen bemerkte Aschenbach, dass der Junge vollkommen schön war.’ (2.1, 529-30) ‘In diesem Augenblick dachte er an seinen Ruhm und daran, daß viele ihn auf den Straßen kannten.’ (540) Other thoughts and impressions are so critical of Aschenbach that they can only be those of the narrator himself: ‘So dachte der Enthusiasmiertere; so vermochte er zu empfinden.’ (554) But the attribution of many passages of *Der Tod in Venedig* to one or the other is a matter of conjecture. Is this, for instance, to be attributed to Aschenbach or to the narrator? ‘Seltsamer, heikler ist nichts als das Verhältnis von Menschen, die sich nur mit den Augen kennen, – die täglich, ja stündlich einander begegnen, beobachten und dabei den Schein gleichgültiger Fremdheit grußlos und wortlos aufrechtzuhalten durch Sittenzwang oder eigene Grille genötigt sind.’ (560) It is well known that Aschenbach is an avatar of Mann himself – he is the figure Mann might have become had he chosen to follow the path of classical restraint and exemplary morality to the bitter end. And the narrator too is another such avatar: although author and narrator are formally distinct, in that the former regards the events of the novella from outside the text as being his own literary creations while the latter regards them from within the text as being real, they cannot be further distinguished. Unlike Zeitblom, the narrator of *Doktor Faustus*, the narrator of *Der Tod in Venedig* is not a fictional character with a biography and personality of his own. Rather, he is Mann’s fictional mouthpiece. If the mentality of the narrator and the mentality of the character whose thoughts are channelled through free indirect discourse are decidedly different, then there will be no difficulty telling their thoughts apart. But if, as here, both narrator and protagonist are projections of the same authorial sensibility, then the problem of attribution can become insoluble.

This has a number of interesting consequences. One is that despite his centrality to the story we never feel assured that we are getting to know Aschenbach in the way we can be confident of getting to know characters who narrate in their own person (such as the Governess in ‘The Turn of the Screw’) or who, though they do not narrate the story directly, have a sensibility – as expressed through turns of thought, phrase and vocabulary – which can clearly be distinguished from that of the third person narrator. And another is an insuperable difficulty in distinguishing between events in and of themselves strange and events whose strangeness is attributable to Aschenbach’s

distorted view of them. Take for example the last of the visitants, the leader of the troupe of street-singers, whose description is identical in many respects with that of the man on the chapel steps. We can make the assumption that the whole scene is not just focalized by Aschenbach – in the sense that everything the reader learns of it is within the field of the protagonist's experience – but is also a vehicle for his sensibility. And in this case the reason that the troupe-leader is described in terms identical to those applied to the earlier visitant is that consciously or unconsciously Aschenbach (who by this time has made a connection between the man on the chapel steps and his Venetian experiences), *wishes* that he were taking part in a supernatural drama and does everything he can to locate and exaggerate similarities between two persons whom no impartial observer would regard as much resembling one another. If, by contrast, the nearly identical descriptions are mandated by the third person narrator on his own account and not on Aschenbach's, then they can be taken as indicating an identical reality: the two visitants are so genuinely similar as to suggest that some kind of supernatural intention, and not blind chance, is at work in *Der Tod in Venedig's* fictional world. If the first hypothesis were shown to be true, then we would have to conclude that the meaningful narrative which the novella had seemed to promise was in fact no more than a chimera. What had seemed meaningful turns out to be meaningless. The intimations of Hermes; Aschenbach's spiritual and erotic pilgrimage through the descending circles of intoxication and humiliation; the culmination of a near impossible artistic vocation in that final Platonic vision of Tadzio with his gesture towards the 'sea of beauty' beyond the sandbar – all that is the delusory product of sparking synapses. If the second hypothesis were shown to be true, then we would have to conclude that Aschenbach – unbeknownst to himself, perhaps – has wandered into a world of significance where the moral and aesthetic moment of his life receives a terrifying but dignifying confirmation. As with all the fantastic works we have so far considered, there is a burden of significance riding on the supernatural reading of *Der Tod in Venedig*. And what that significance may be we will now consider.

Chapter III: *Der Tod in Venedig* in the Context of Mann's Philosophical Orientation

Nietzsche, Schopenhauer?

If the arguments laid out in the previous chapters regarding the connection between the supernatural and meaning in works of the fantastic are valid, and if we accept that *Der Tod in Venedig* is indeed a fantastic work, then it follows that the novella's possible significance is dependent on the presence or absence in it of the supernatural. But *which* meaning? The answer is a complex one, and it cannot be attempted without plotting the course of Mann's philosophical and intellectual development during the early years of the twentieth century – because, as we shall argue, *Der Tod in Venedig* was written in the midst of a sea-change in Mann's thinking. To understand this development, however, it will be necessary to challenge the prevalent view of Mann's relationship with philosophy, a relationship which is usually understood as being by and large limited to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer,⁷⁴ with some critics (such as Reed) leaning heavily towards the view that not Schopenhauer but Nietzsche sets the intellectual tone for Mann's fiction,⁷⁵ and others (such as Børge Kristiansen) downplaying Nietzsche's role as being fundamentally incompatible with Mann's (as they see it) pessimistic and nay-saying attitude to life.⁷⁶ Of course the presence of Platonic references in e.g. *Der Tod in Venedig* has not gone unremarked, but the notion that Mann was prepared to take Plato's thinking seriously in the way that he took Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's thinking seriously receives scant consideration. Mann's borrowings from *Symposium* in that novella, which are well inventoried by Reed, (Reed 1996, 171-178) are generally understood to be ironic or mere window-dressing. We will shortly attempt to show that such a view of Mann's philosophical orientation does him a serious injustice, but before we can do so we should ask ourselves a couple of preliminary questions.

⁷⁴ For example: 'Schopenhauer und Nietzsche sind, wie man ebenfalls weiß, die Philosophen gewesen, die ihn ein Leben lang beeindruckt und mitbestimmt haben – aber bezeichnenderweise gibt es kaum Wandlungen in den beiderseitigen Verhältnissen, keine Zunahme an Erkenntnis oder einen Wechsel der eigenen Position.' (Koopmann 1988, 21)

⁷⁵ According to Reed, after 1895 'Nietzsche was to dominate his work' (Reed 1996, 18)

⁷⁶ 'Der Protest, der somit der Ironie inhärent ist, ist NIETZSCHEs Lebensbejahung fremd; er entspricht vielmehr dem bösen Blick SCHOPENHAUERs, der das sinnfremde absurde Lebensgeschehen nicht wollte.' (Kristiansen 1995, 263)

Firstly, what do we mean when we say that he was ‘influenced’ by the above mentioned (or indeed any other) philosophers? It is all too easy when we make Mann the passive subject of a verb which anyway has overtones of irrational persuasion to think of him as yielding to the authority of a greater intellect than his own, as meekly accepting Nietzsche or Schopenhauer as a mentor. And it is quite true that Mann was a child of his times, and absorbed many ideas – amongst them ideas derived from Nietzsche and Schopenhauer – before he had the maturity to criticize them. But Mann’s relationship with his philosophical resources became more active and restless as time went by. He was always on the look-out for material he could adapt to his own purposes, memorable phrases he could employ to express his own ideas, philosophical frameworks into which he could fit his own preoccupations. He was nobody’s pupil and never wished to be regarded as such: ‘Ich bin kein Systematiker, kein Doktrinär; ich fröne nicht dem schändlichen Irrwahn des Rechthabens, und nie werde ich mich mit einer Wahrheit, die ich für *die* Wahrheit erachte, zur Ruhe setzen, um für den Rest meines Lebens davon zu zehren.’ (13.1, 190) Both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer discuss at length philosophical systems consistent or at odds with their own, and whether they are praising this philosopher as a genius or denouncing that one as a charlatan always they point backwards to alternatives to their own doctrine. Nietzsche expressed more truth than he knew, and could have been referring to himself, when he wrote: ‘Es ist gewiss einer der grössten und ganz unschätzbaren Vorteile, welche wir aus Schopenhauer gewinnen, dass er unsere Empfindung zeitweilig in ältere, mächtige Betrachtungsarten der Welt und Menschen zurückzwingt, zu welchen sonst uns so leicht kein Pfad führen würde.’ (Nietzsche II 1988, 47) While reading Nietzsche Mann discovered elements of Schopenhauer which struck a chord with his imagination and interests and so was naturally drawn to their original source where they could be found in greater abundance. While reading Schopenhauer he likewise discovered non- or pre-Schopenhauerian elements accordant with his own preoccupations, and once again he was tempted to engage with them in their original context. Instead of thinking of either Nietzsche’s or Schopenhauer’s doctrines as constituting Mann’s intellectual homeland it would be better to consider them as some of the most well-charted terrain in a more wide-ranging voyage of philosophical exploration.

Secondly, which Nietzsche and which Schopenhauer do the opposing critics have in mind as Mann's theoretical pole-star? For the key positions of both these thinkers are not easy to pin down. To begin with, the post-*Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche is unique amongst major thinkers in that the philosophical outlook (ruthless naturalism) which he accepts and the philosophical project (the establishment of new values) which he announces are wholly incompatible. Nietzsche's critique of established values consists in showing that whereas people believe them to proceed from this religious revelation or that metaphysical principle, they are the result of purely phenomenal factors, as are religion and metaphysics themselves. All three – morality, religion and metaphysics – can be explained as ingrained custom arising from society's need to perpetuate itself,⁷⁷ or as an attempt to enrich with illusion lives otherwise hardly worth living,⁷⁸ or as a form of self-dominance.⁷⁹ The examples Nietzsche provides are as various as they are abundant, but all have this in common: never is the religious accepted as essentially religious, the metaphysical as essentially metaphysical. Naturalism excludes such a possibility. But it also excludes in advance the establishment of genuine new values to replace the fraudulent old ones – for from a naturalist perspective all values are contingent.⁸⁰ What emerges from this incompatibility between philosophical outlook and philosophical ambition are *two* Nietzsches: Nietzsche the sound naturalist and Nietzsche the unsound visionary able to proceed only in so far as he forgets his former principle: that to reveal a value as proceeding from a social imperative, an instinct, a psychological state etc., is to expose its credentials as fraudulent. It is the former of the two, Nietzsche the naturalist, to whom Mann owed a life-long debt.⁸¹ In his notes for the 'Literatur Essay', for example, he declares:

⁷⁷ 'Wie das Herkommen *entstanden* ist, das ist dabei gleichgültig, jedenfalls ohne Rücksicht auf gut und böse oder irgend einen immanenten kategorischen Imperativ, sondern vor Allem zum Zweck der Erhaltung einer *Gemeinde*, eines Volks.' (Nietzsche II, 93)

⁷⁸ 'Leute, welchen ihr tägliches Leben zu leicht und eintönig vorkommt, werden leicht religiös; dies ist begreiflich und verzeihlich.' (Nietzsche II, 118)

⁷⁹ 'Diese Unterordnung ist ein mächtiges Mittel, um über sich Herr zu werden' (Nietzsche II, 133)

⁸⁰ Arthur C. Danto absolves Nietzsche of the charge of attempting to derive unconditional 'ought' statements from factual 'is' statements, on the grounds that 'he holds that there are no such distinctions to be drawn, not because there are no moral facts, but because there are no facts at all.' (Danto 1965, 136) But if we accept this as a valid defence of Nietzsche, then we must accept it as a valid defence of the morality which Nietzsche attacked – for the burden of his accusations is that purportedly moral precepts have been improperly derived from phenomenal imperatives. That is, Nietzsche's attack on traditional morality relies on a distinction between factual 'is' and unconditional 'ought' statements.

⁸¹ In any case, as Peter Pütz points out, Mann's interest in Nietzsche has more to do in the philosopher's personality than his doctrines: 'Es sind nicht allein Nietzsches Schriften, auf die Thomas Mann fortwährend Bezug nimmt, sondern auch Person und Schicksal des Autors beschäftigen ihn in

Wir um 70 Geborenen[...]Unser Nietzsche ist der Nietzsche militans. Der Nietzsche triumphans gehört den 15 Jahre nach uns Geborenen. Wir haben von ihm den psychologischen Radikalismus, den lyrischen Kritizismus, das Erlebnis Wagners, das Erlebnis des Christentums, das Erlebnis der Modernität, – Erlebnisse, von denen wir uns niemals vollkommen trennen werden, so wenig wie er selbst sich je vollkommen davon getrennt hat. Dazu sind sie zu teuer, zu tief, zu fruchtbar. (Mann 1967, 208)

Reed, then, is broadly correct when he writes that ‘The essence of Nietzsche which Mann took in may be summed up in Nietzsche’s own description of his works as a “constant and imperceptible exhortation to reverse customary values and valued customs”, as a “school of suspicion and even more of contempt” inculcating “mistrust of morality”.’⁸² This reception of the naturalistic Nietzsche, however, does not take Mann so very far from the mainstream of European thought, which has always been fed by currents of psychological insight, distrust of traditional morality, out-and-out cynicism etc. They form part of a millennia-old intellectual fund. Nietzsche’s attempts at positive philosophizing, by contrast, and to which the adjective ‘Nietzschean’ is generally taken to refer: the yea-saying attitude to life, the admiration, not to say idolization, of the brutal and the beautiful etc. are treated with irony (Mynheer Peeperkorn in *Der Zauberberg*, Hermann Institoris and others in *Doktor Faustus*), or toyed with as philosophical curios, or dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders.

Schopenhauer, too, though he is evidently not as erratic in his thinking as Nietzsche, is inconsistent in his philosophical doctrines. There is a ‘Vorstellung’ side and a ‘Wille’ side to his philosophy, of course, but he characteristically writes as though the former were created by and subordinated to the latter, and most of the notions we associate with Schopenhauer’s doctrine: that the world is as bad as it feasibly could

einem Maße wie keine andere Gestalt der Geistesgeschichte. (Pütz 1971, 229) It was a personality which, says Copleston, embodied ‘the predicament of the man for whom traditional beliefs and values have lost their meaning and relevance and who is searching desperately for something to take their place.’ (Copleston 1975, 224) This is the view of Nietzsche which informs the artistic travails of Adrian Leverkühn in *Doktor Faustus*. Just as Nietzsche detects in morality anything but what is intrinsically moral, so Leverkühn detects in the composer’s art anything but what is intrinsically beautiful. But, like Nietzsche, he finds it far easier to see through and mock the pretensions of established values than he does to justify new ones which might take their place – and this is why his ‘invention’ of the twelve-tone scale is presented as such a desperate and dubious enterprise.

⁸² (Reed 1996, 18-19) One might take issue with ‘reversal of customary values’ – Mann shows no sign of thinking that one can establish authentic new values simply by reversing fraudulent old ones. What he takes from Nietzsche is not the revaluation of values but the *devaluation* of values.

be, that progress is impossible, that the pretensions of human ‘Intelligenz’ to gain independence from the blind, striving metaphysical force which created it are in vain – all this depends upon an emphasis on ‘Wille’ at the expense of ‘Vorstellung’. As Golo Mann, expressing the general view, puts the matter:

Die Welt als Wille – darauf kam es ihm an. Die Welt als Wille zu sein, zum Leben, der in jeder Kreatur ganz da ist mit schrecklicher Kraft und Angst, in jeder Kreatur sich auch heimlich für das ganze hält, so daß die Vielheit der Individuen in Raum und Zeit im Grunde Traum und Illusion ist und trotzdem ein Kampf aller gegen alle ist, ein Überlebenwollen jedes um jeden Preis auf Kosten der anderen; und so die Welt nichts anderes ist als ein Fressen und Gefressenwerden – das ist Schopenhauers Vision. (Golo Mann 1959, 282)

It is true that Schopenhauer came to change his mind about the absolute primacy of ‘Wille’ – and his doctrine of the ‘Verneinung des Willens’ seems to postulate some self-determining principle such as Kant’s autonomous subject.⁸³ But these elements of his thinking are not distinctively Schopenhauerian: he holds them in common with Kant and the German idealists. It is important that the distinction be made because Mann sometimes adopts characteristic Schopenhauerian thinking: we see it to the fore in works like *Felix Krull* and, in an extreme form, in ‘Die vertauschten Köpfe’, and sometimes adopts non-characteristic Schopenhauerian thinking: for example that the ‘Wille’ is ultimately free rather than just an impulsive metaphysical drive towards life. In the latter case, Mann’s partiality to Kantian and idealist thinking as manifested by the later Schopenhauer leads him to find it in other authors – for example Schiller – of whom it is far more typical. And we suggest that in the crucial matter of ‘Geist’ – always a key term for Mann but one whose meaning undergoes significant change in the course of his career – thinkers characteristically committed to a philosophy of freedom and value came to play a greater role than those characteristically committed to a philosophy which conceives necessity to be ineluctable and values to be a chimera.

⁸³ Julian Young explains Schopenhauer’s later position thus: ‘What the mature Schopenhauer realises is that if ultimate reality really were the evil will, if Book II was the absolute end of the story, then there would be not just nothing knowable by us but absolutely nothing beyond the will. He realises that the claim that his metaphysical will represents *ultimate* reality commits him to an absolute nihilism – existence is both evil and eternally inescapable – in which case there would be no point in his bothering to write his philosophy. What Schopenhauer realises, in other words, is that his youthful claim that in Book II he had cracked the problem of the Kantian thing in itself is inconsistent with the doctrine of salvation propounded in Book IV and, for this reason, too, has therefore to be abandoned.’ (Young 2005, 101)

Negative ‘Geist’

Why did Thomas Mann, writing his notes for the never-to-be published ‘Literatur Essay’, declare civilization to be ‘Vernunft, Aufklärung,[...]Sänftigung, Sittigung, Skeptisierung, Auflösung’ and then sum up all that in a single word: ‘*Geist*’? (Mann 1967, 215) Why, having identified it as the polar opposite of art in the same notes, does he add that ‘Der Geist, mit seiner Tendenz zur Zerstörung der Leidenschaften, will letzten Endes das reine Nichts’? (Mann 1967, 184) What is the meaning of ‘Geist’ in these passages? It seems to denote the intellect in rebellion – the intellect which, created to meet and regulate the phenomenal needs of mankind, has somehow developed enough critical independence to judge the world altogether insufficient, and to turn away in disgust, dragging with it the organism it was supposed to serve. It is a concept quite different from that of an autonomous Kantian subject or a Platonic soul, for both of these can positively intervene in the world of the senses to make it more conformable to themselves or the ideas they apprehend. They certainly do not long for ‘das reine Nichts’. But it is a concept shared by Nietzsche and Schopenhauer in their different ways for, while dismissing the pretensions of the intellect to be something altogether distinct from the rest of the phenomenal world, each recognizes that it sometimes shows itself to be implacably hostile to that world.⁸⁴

This rebellious tendency of ‘Geist’ dismayed Nietzsche and led him to view man’s striving to live in accordance with a putatively other-worldly discipline as the symptom of a perverse strain in the ‘Wille zur Macht’. Schopenhauer, by contrast, is full of praise for ‘Erkenntnis’, the intellect’s foreswearing of life. But though these two thinkers react so differently with regard to the same fact, it could be argued that the contrast between them in this respect is more a matter of taste than principle. For does Schopenhauer’s metaphysical perspective provide the authentic criterion – something which Nietzsche’s naturalism perforce lacks – which would make the rejection of the phenomenal world a cause for celebration? Does his noumenon furnish a benchmark of value comparable to those of Plato and Kant, a benchmark against which this or that fact, or life itself, could be found wanting? It does not.

⁸⁴ It is important to bear in mind that although, according to Schopenhauer, the intellect springs from the ‘Wille’, so does the rest of the observable world. That is, the intellect enjoys no metaphysical distinction.

Although Schopenhauer's 'Wille' is similar to Plato's ideas and to Kant's thing in itself in subsisting beyond the world of the senses, it is in every other salient respect dissimilar to them.⁸⁵ The chief of Plato's ideas is το καλόν, and is understood to be a real criterion of value against which the things and deeds of the phenomenal realm (not to mention other ideas in the noumenal realm) may be found more or less satisfactory. Kant's 'Ding-an-sich' refers – apart from that thing-without-qualities which the subject works up into definite entities existing in time and space – to the perceiving subject himself who is likewise beyond the natural world and, enjoying freedom from that world's necessity, has the power of moral choice and action.⁸⁶ But Schopenhauer's 'Wille' is in no sense an evaluative alternative to the realm of the phenomena, for it evinces exactly the same moral nullity that characterizes the natural world – which, after all, it creates according to its own character. And whereas Kant has a non-phenomenal subject with an independent ontological status, Schopenhauer, while he sometimes writes as if it is the intellect which creates the phenomenal world from the 'Wille' (implying that the latter has no positive input into the complexion of the phenomenal world), more characteristically insists that it is the 'Wille' which creates the intellect.

Zuförderst also sagen wir: die Welt ist nicht mit Hülfe der Erkenntnis, folglich auch nicht von außen gemacht, sondern von innen; und dann sind wir bemüht, das punctum saliens des Welteies nachzuweisen. So leicht auch der physikotheologische Gedanke, daß ein Intellekt es sein müsse, der die Natur geordnet und gemodelt hat, dem rohen Verstande zusagt, so grundverkehrt ist er dennoch. Denn der Intellekt ist uns allein aus der animalischen Natur, folglich als ein durchaus sekundäres und untergeordnetes Prinzip in der Welt, ein Produkt spätesten Ursprungs: er kann daher nimmermehr die Bedingung ihres Daseins gewesen sein noch kann ein mundus intelligibilis dem mundus sensibilis vorhergehn; da er von diesem allein seinen Stoff erhält. Nicht ein Intellekt hat die Natur hervorgebracht, sondern die Natur den Intellekt.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ It is true that Schopenhauer also includes in his system what he calls 'Platonic ideas' but these are not criteria aiding the ψυχή in its attempts to establish the quality of things in the phenomenal world, but more like Aristotelian teleological causes.

⁸⁶ For example: 'Man kann ihnen [i.e. those who point out the incompatibility of human freedom with the necessity of the phenomenal world] nur zeigen, daß der vermeintlich von ihnen darin entdeckte Widerspruch nirgend anders liege als darin, daß, da sie, um das Naturgesetz in Ansehung menschlicher Handlungen geltend zu machen, den Menschen notwendig als Erscheinung betrachten mußten und nun, da man von ihnen fordert, daß sie ihn als Intelligenz auch als Ding an sich selbst denken sollten, sie ihn immer auch da noch als Erscheinung betrachten.' (Kant IV, 96-97)

⁸⁷ (Schopenhauer III, 360) This is evidently not the place for an exhaustive criticism of Schopenhauer's theorizing, but we might note in passing that he presents the conversion of the 'Wille'

The result is that there is no possibility of recourse to independent criteria of value in Schopenhauer's system: neither in the 'Wille' itself nor in the phenomenal world which it creates (with or without the help of its hand-maid, the intellect). And though Schopenhauer is keen to explain the compatibility of his system with what is conventionally *called* moral behaviour he in no sense attempts to justify such behaviour as intrinsically moral but rather shows it to proceed from the enlightened self-interest of the 'Wille' in certain of its instantiations – instantiations which more or less clearly recognize that as all phenomena are expressions of the same metaphysical entity there can be no real distinction between one individual's suffering and that of all the world. And this recognition issues in *sympathy* – the root, according to Schopenhauer, of all the other moral virtues. But it is surely evident that self-interest (no matter how enlightened) cannot underwrite morality, for self-interest is exclusively a matter of 'wollen' and not of 'sollen' – so that Schopenhauer's explanation of the moral demoralizes it just as surely as does the explanation of the anthropologist who declares that it is no more than the manifestation of certain biological and social imperatives, or of the economist who explains it in terms of the advantages accruing to a reputation for honesty. Schopenhauer makes no bones about this matter:

Man wird mir vielleicht entgegensetzen wollen, daß die Ethik es nicht damit zu tun habe, wie die Menschen wirklich handeln, sondern die Wissenschaft sei, welche angibt, wie sie handeln *sollen*. Dies ist aber nachgerade der Grundsatz, den ich leugne, nachdem ich genugsam dargetan habe, daß der Begriff des *Sollens*, die *imperative Form* der Ethik, allein in der theologischen Moral gilt, außerhalb derselben aber allen Sinn und Bedeutung verliert.⁸⁸

The purpose of our question, as to whether the difference between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer was really just a matter of taste, should now be clear. Neither Nietzsche nor Schopenhauer includes in his philosophical outlook the postulates of genuine morality, and they are in no position to say that anything *ought* to happen, only that they would personally *like* something to happen. And, once again,

into natural entities in two incompatible ways. Part of the time such entities are conceived as mere *phenomena* – as objects for a subject, part of the time they are conceived more matter-of-factly as *phenotypes* – as subsisting in their own right.

⁸⁸ (Schopenhauer III, 726) With these words Schopenhauer seems to turn his back on one of the two great philosophical domains distinguished by Kant: 'die theoretische als *Naturphilosophie*, die praktische als *Moralphilosophie*.' (Kant V, 242)

Schopenhauer is frank enough to admit that he cannot, while remaining true to his own system, advocate a rejection of the world (both ‘Wille’ and ‘Vorstellung’) in the name of this or that criterion of which it falls short, but that he can only advocate negation for negation’s sake – as an impulse of disgust and nothing more.

Diesem [i.e. philosophy as distinct from theology and mysticism] nun entspricht es, daß meine Lehre, wann auf ihrem Gipfelpunkte angelangt, einen *negativen* Charakter annimmt, also mit einer Negation endigt. Sie kann hier nämlich nur von Dem reden, was verneint, aufgegeben wird: was dafür aber gewonnen, ergriffen wird, ist sie genötigt[...]als Nichts zu bezeichnen.⁸⁹

Many of Mann’s early works take this view – either directly from Schopenhauer or from Nietzsche writing in a Schopenhauerian spirit. ‘Tonio Kröger’ is a fine example. It tells the story in fictional terms of Mann’s own, immensely difficult, literary vocation – difficult because the writer’s art entails a disillusioned analysis of the actual motives of human beings and the detection of abject origins behind the ‘values’ which make the bourgeois world go round. When Lisaweta Ivanovna praises ‘Die reinigende, heiligende Wirkung der Litteratur, die Zerstörung der Leidenschaften durch die Erkenntnis und das Wort’ (2.1, 275) Tonio responds:

Es gibt etwas, was ich Erkenntnisekel nenne, Lisaweta: Der Zustand in dem es dem Menschen genügt, eine Sache zu durchschauen, um sich bereits zum Sterben angewidert (und durchaus nicht versöhnlich gestimmt) zu fühlen, – der Fall Hamlets des Dänen, dieses typischen Litteraten. Er wußte, was das ist: zum Wissen berufen werden, ohne dazu geboren zu sein. Hellsehen noch durch den Thränenschleier des Gefühls hindurch, erkennen, merken, beobachten und das Beobachtete lächelnd bei Seite legen müssen. (2.1, 276)

The immediate literary source for ‘der Fall Hamlets des Dänen’ is a comment by Nietzsche in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*,⁹⁰ and Mann declares in ‘Freud und die Zukunft’ that ‘Tonio Kröger’ has ‘gut Nietzsche’sches Gepräge’,⁹¹ but what Tonio

⁸⁹ (Schopenhauer II, 783-784) Schopenhauer concludes this extraordinary passage by advising those of his readers who feel the need for a positive reason to renounce the world that they will find what they seek among the mystics and mystical philosophers – such as Plotinus.

⁹⁰ ‘In diesem Sinne hat der dionysische Mensch Aehnlichkeit mit Hamlet: beide haben einmal einen wahren Blick in das Wesen der Dinge gethan, sie haben *erkannt*, und es ekelt sie zu handeln, denn ihre Handlung kann nichts am ewigen Wesen der Dinge ändern.’ (Nietzsche I, 56-57) This is an excellent example of the Schopenhauer to be found in Nietzsche.

⁹¹ As Reed notes: ‘Aus dem eigentümlichen Schülerverhältnis NIETZSCHES zu SCHOPENHAUER und den strukturellen Ähnlichkeiten ihrer Systeme[...]ergibt sich die Quasi-Unmöglichkeit, den Einfluß

describes in the above passage suggests nothing of the ‘Rausch’ which Nietzsche attributes to the Dionysian’s insight into the ‘Wille’ – it suggests only that disenchantment with and forswearing of life which Schopenhauer extols. But at this point the problem of a purely negative attitude, a renunciation lacking any evaluative guarantee, an ‘Ekel’ and nothing more – becomes apparent. Just because Tonio’s ‘Erkenntnis’ is Schopenhauerian in character he has nothing to offer by way of positive alternative to the naïve but misguided beliefs of Hans Hansen, Ingeborg Holm and all the thousands like them. So that, realizing the inadequacy of his position, he hopes with all his might that Hans Hansen never did make the mistake of reading ‘Don Carlos’, hopes that his old friend will ‘frei vom Fluch der Erkenntnis und der schöpferischen Qual leben, lieben und loben in seliger Gewöhnlichkeit!’ (2.1, 311) ‘Tonio Kröger’ is, amongst other things, the renunciation of a renunciation. And yet there can be no question of Tonio (or Mann) participating as a writer in the sentimentality of the good folk he so admires, which would be a ‘Pfuscher-Irrtum’ (2.1, 271) – with the result that the story ends in a kind of stalemate. For how is it possible simultaneously to accept the world on its own terms while obeying the literary command that the world *never* be accepted on its own terms – even though (according to both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche) those are the only terms to be had?

It is a commonplace of Mann criticism that the period between the publication of *Buddenbrooks* and *Der Tod in Venedig* was, with certain exceptions such as ‘Tonio Kröger’ and ‘Tristan’ (which treats of the same theme as did the earlier story but in a register of Nietzschean irony rather than of Schopenhauerian regret), a time of thwarted and misbegotten literary ambition, of imaginative and critical works undertaken but not brought to completion – while the one achieved novel, *Königliche Hoheit*, has been described scathingly by Reed as a ‘a single idea developed from an image, a symbolic bee in the writer’s bonnet, with no reference beyond himself.’⁹² But we have not far to seek if we wish to find the cause of this unsatisfactory state of

oder Quellenwert des früheren Denkers festzustellen, ohne dabei seinen abtrünnigen Schüler und Umdeuter mitzunennen. (Reed 1995, 122)

⁹² (Reed 1996, 118) Reed’s view of *Königliche Hoheit* is an extreme one, but even the book’s apologists tend to be half-hearted in its defence. Klaus Haupprecht, in his biography of Mann, describes it as ‘ein Unterhaltungsroman im schönsten Sinn des Wortes[...]Dem leitmotivischen Spiel mit knappen Charakterisierungen und den Wiederholungseffekten gab sich der Autor bis an die Grenze der Übertreibung hin, doch die schwebende Grazie des Buches wurde durch die Verliebtheit in solche Art “Wirkung” kaum gefährdet. Die Qual der Niederschrift war dem heiteren kleinen Werk nicht anzumerken.’ (Haupprecht 1995, 294)

affairs, because ‘Tonio Kröger’ has already made us acquainted with the nature of the problem: that Mann had assimilated a philosophical point of view from both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer which made any sense of creative *mission* extremely difficult to maintain. A writer in this position may well have personal motives for creating and publishing his works: he might need the money, he might crave public adulation etc. – but he will never feel the assurance that he *ought* to be engaged in such activity. And though there are no doubt plenty of authors who are quite unconcerned that their motives for writing are wholly a matter of need and appetite and not at all of duty, though writers such as Guy de Maupassant and H.H. Munro (‘Saki’) are happy to publish a plethora of fiction in celebration of the humiliation of the purportedly moral and spiritual, and never feel the want of a positive alternative to what they are lampooning, – Mann was not a writer of this stamp. This is not to say that he was insensible to the purely personal satisfactions that a successful literary career brings with it: he was by no means averse to making and spending money, and he was partial to public adulation.⁹³ But the desire for both proved an insufficient mainspring for his literary activity.⁹⁴

This could be supplied only by the conviction that his writings might count – a conviction dependent on another: that things *can* count, that they can be measured against a criterion of value (an authentic criterion, not ‘did this book make me a profit?’ or ‘did it increase my fan-base?’) and found wanting or satisfactory.⁹⁵ And that things can legitimately be so measured is a concession that no Nietzschean or Schopenhauerian can ever make while remaining a Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian. It seems that Mann’s mental world during these years was lacking an ingredient vital to the success of his creative faculties: an ‘Erkenntnis’ which was also a ‘Bekenntnis’,

⁹³ *Königliche Hoheit*, for example, seems to have been motivated by the desire to procure the literary satisfaction of purely personal wishes (the narcissism implied by the national writer/popular prince comparison is obvious, as is the self-congratulation implied by ‘das erlaubte Glück’), and by the desire to write a refined best-seller. Michael Minden refers to the novel as a ‘market ploy’, intended to please the public at large without compromising Mann’s elevated literary reputation. (Minden 1995, 20) But, as Harpprecht notes, Mann found the novel exceptionally difficult to write, and seems to have shared the reservations of those who considered such an enterprise unworthy of his talent.

⁹⁴ This, we suggest, explains why he found ‘das leichte[...]besonders schwer.’ (Harpprecht 1995, 294)

⁹⁵ ‘“Himmel wie er sich wichtig nimmt!” – zu diesem Zwischenruf gibt mein Buch allerdings auf Schritt und Tritt Gelegenheit. Ich habe dem nichts entgegenzustellen als die Tatsache, daß ich ohne mich wichtig zu nehmen nie gelebt habe noch leben könnte; als das Wissen, daß alles, was ich je leistete und wirkte, und zwar der Reiz und Wert jedes kleinsten Bestandteiles davon, jeder Zeile und Wendung meines bisherigen Lebenswerkes – so viel und so wenig dies nun besagen möge – ausschliesslich darauf zurückzuführen ist, daß ich mich wichtig nahm.’ (13.1, 18)

a 'Geist' which could represent a positive alternative to the phenomenal realm, so that the critical attitude which he was quite sure was the writer's (his kind of writer's) lot could be maintained in the name of something and not in the name of nothing-but-disgust.⁹⁶

The Evolution of 'Geist'

This impasse did not, however, last forever. It is quite clear that Mann comes in time to reject the value-free world-views of his earlier philosophical mentors.⁹⁷ He continues to believe, of course, in the realm of the phenomena, but he rejects the Nietzschean contention that there is nothing beyond it, and rejects too the Schopenhauerian contention that there is something beyond it, but that this something, the 'Wille', has exactly the same character (amoral, blind, ceaselessly striving) as the natural world it creates. As an alternative to Nietzsche's value-free monism and Schopenhauer's value-free dualism, he invokes a 'Geist' which is neither a mere element of naturalistically-conceived human psychology nor an impulse of self-negation on the part of the 'Wille'. A glimpse at a lecture which Mann devoted to *Joseph und seine Brüder*, in which he expounds his analysis of the deepest causes of the Second World War, eliminates all doubt in the matter:

⁹⁶ Here is Reed's summary of Mann's predicament: ' "Blendwerk der Maja", "Schleier der Maja", are terms for the illusory character of all appearance which Schopenhauer borrows from Indian religious philosophy and which Nietzsche in turn took over from him.[...]In the note for *Krull*, the belief in illusoriness is put as radically as by Schopenhauer, the pessimism goes deeper than mere scepticism about the artist's relations with his gullible audience. His activity is valueless because it is a response to an illusory world; his efforts are pitiful in advance. His techniques and his achievements are merely emulation of the world's deceit, and their purpose is to help maintain a life which has been seen through. If the radical pessimism is akin to Schopenhauer's, the resolve to go on serving illusion, if necessary by the creation of yet more illusion, is an exact equivalent to Nietzsche's "transcending" of Schopenhauer, which takes the continuing of life as an overriding value.' (Reed 1996, 111-112) No wonder Mann had difficulty bringing anything to artistic fruition during this period! How can a writer of Mann's stamp ascribe value to his own activity, and thus prosecute it with any conviction, if he is all the while conscious that *value itself* is a delusion? Nietzsche's 'transcendence' of disbelief is a logical impossibility – an attempt, as it were, to push and pull at the same time – and it is no wonder that Mann considered the outright rejection of scepticism which he has Aschenbach carry through in *Der Tod in Venedig*. When Mann, in his twilight years, resumed *Felix Krull* where he had left off (and in more or less the same Schopenhauerian spirit), he was confronted by exactly the same sense of meaninglessness which had checked the novel's progress more than thirty years before. In a diary entry for July 1951 he writes: 'Nagende Zweifel ob es "Sinn" hat, den Krull-Roman fortzusetzen. Geistiger Hintergrund fehlt bis auf das Künstlertum, das abgeschmackt ist.' (TB IX, 77-78)

⁹⁷ Peter Pütz, in an article significantly entitled 'Der Ausbruch aus der Negativität', identifies *Der Tod in Venedig* as marking a decisive step towards a more positive philosophical position: 'Thomas Mann [erarbeitet] spätestens seit dem *Tod in Venedig* eine Position[...], von der aus jenseits rückloser Erkenntnis ein Ethos der Arbeit und Anstrengung erstrebt wird, das sich einer relativistischen oder gar nihilistischen Ausschweifung mit aller Kraft entgegenstemmt.' (Pütz 1988, 8)

Daß immer der Geist der Wirklichkeit voran ist, daß die Materie ihm nur schwerfällig folgt, das versteht sich. Aber eine so krankhafte, so unverkennbar gefahrdrohende Spannung im politischen, sozialen und ökonomischen Leben der Völker zwischen Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit, zwischen dem im Geiste längst erreichten und vollzogenen und dem, was sich Wirklichkeit zu nennen erlaubte, hatte es vielleicht nie zuvor gegeben, und in dem närrischen Ungehorsam gegen den Geist, oder, religiös ausgedrückt, gegen Gottes Willen, haben wir gewiß die eigentliche Ursache der Wetterentladung zu suchen, die uns betäubt.⁹⁸

‘Geist’, then, is not part of the world of things (for if it is ‘der Wirklichkeit voran’ it is evidently not ‘Wirklichkeit’ itself) and at the same time it is a productive and progressive force with a sovereign right to regulate the phenomenal realm.⁹⁹ As a matter of fact, the notion that human beings can be wholly accounted for in naturalistic terms is quite unacceptable to Mann in his later years, as the following declaration from his 1946 essay on Dostoevsky makes clear:

Wir wollen es aussprechen: Eine Humanität reift heran oder stellt sich aus der Vergessenheit wieder her, die den Begriff des Lebens und seiner Gesundheit der Biologie, die ein besonderes, ein ausschließliches Anrecht daran zu haben glaubt, aus den Händen nimmt und ihn auf freiere sowohl wie frömmere, vor allem auf wahrheitsgemäßere Weise zu verwalten sich anheischig macht. Denn der Mensch ist kein bloß biologisches Wesen. (IX, 666)

And although such statements were made more than thirty years after Mann’s most intensely Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian period, they cannot be dismissed as a sort of philosophical and religious conversion brought on by intimations of personal mortality. On the contrary, the first steps towards this wholly different attitude towards the other-worldly can be traced back to before the First World War. An examination of ‘Geist’ in works such as *Betrachtungen* and *Der Zauberberg* reveals that Mann, although he occasionally writes as though it is just another name for life-denying ‘Erkenntnis’, most often accuses it of having a positive agenda of its own: precisely as though it were a noumenal entity bent on imposing its order willy-nilly on the phenomenal world. This line of thought is already discernible in the ‘Literatur Essay’, which alludes to the opposition between ‘Zivilisation’ which is seen as a life-denying emanation of ‘Geist’ and ‘Kultur’ which is seen as the converse: an accretion

⁹⁸ (XI, 669) The lecture was delivered in the Library of Congress in 1942.

⁹⁹ Evidently, what Mann says in this address has a Hegelian ring, a matter which will be addressed in chapter IV.

of uncriticized customs and habits. That is: ‘Natur’ as expressed in human society.¹⁰⁰ By the time Mann comes to write his patriotic article ‘Gedanken im Krieg’ it is clear that the opposition between ‘Natur’ and ‘Geist’ which in ‘Tonio Kröger’ seems a problem for literary artists and no-one else, has become an explanatory principle valid not just for the First World War but for all sorts of other conflicts:¹⁰¹ ‘Zivilisation und Kultur sind nicht nur nicht ein und dasselbe, sondern sie sind Gegensätze, sie bilden eine der vielfältigen Erscheinungsformen des ewigen Weltgegensatzes und Widerspieles von Geist und Natur.’¹⁰²

This notion – that ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ are ‘Weltgegensätze’ – provides the key to *Betrachtungen*. Once we grasp that Mann’s denunciations of ‘Zivilisation’, of the ‘Literat’, of the entente powers etc. are actually denunciations of a metaphysical principle, and once we understand that, conversely, his celebrations of German ‘barbarism’ are due to a belief in the identity of his fatherland and ‘Natur’ (so that a defence of one must entail the defence of the other) then we can begin to make sense of what would otherwise be a deeply enigmatic tract.¹⁰³ It is, of course, sometimes difficult to make out this antithesis because, firstly, Mann is by no means a clear or systematic thinker and, secondly (as the open letter to Romain Rolland, the ‘Gegen Recht und Wahrheit’ chapter, frequently implies), he comes to modify some of his initial assumptions as the course of the war and as the composition of *Betrachtungen* unfolds. For example, he sees that describing Germany as lacking ‘Geist’ is to do its artistic and intellectual heritage a disservice, and sometimes he seems to want to argue

¹⁰⁰ ‘Kultur ist offenbar nicht der Gegensatz von Barbarei[...]Kultur kann Orakel, Magie, Päderastie[...],den buntesten Greuel umfassen’ (Mann 1967, 215)

¹⁰¹ In the novella the preferred term is ‘Leben’ rather than ‘Natur’ – but both words refer to the same thing.

¹⁰² (15.1, 27) Note that of all the opposita listed in the ‘Literatur Essay’ these two have been singled out as subsuming all the rest.

¹⁰³ For example: ‘Und nochmals: erweise ich denn der Zivilisation nicht Ehre? Man hat sie materiell genannt: ich leugne, daß sie es sei. Man hat sie einfach als den staatlich geordneten und gezähmten menschlichen Zustand zu bestimmen versucht: auch das genügt mir nicht, denn ich sehe, daß sie ein viel zu geistiges Prinzip ist, um beim Staate halt machen zu können, viel zu sehr Wille zur Auflösung, um nicht nach der Auflösung des Staates zu streben. Sie sind Franzose, und Sie leugnen das? Die Zivilisation wird sich nicht damit begnügen, den Staat aufzulösen. Sie wird die nationalen Leidenschaften einschläfern und zur Ruhe bestatten. Sie wird die pazifizierte Esperanto-Erde schaffen, auf welcher der Krieg unmöglich ist, – ich glaube an sie, wie Sie sehen; ich glaube an ihrer Zukunft, und wie sollte ich nicht. Sie ist die Zukunft und der Fortschritt selbst.’ (13.1, 187) Notice that though ‘Geist’ is presented as unappetizing – ‘Esperanto-Erde’ and so on – it already displays some of the characteristics (it is a progressive, impersonal force which will one day inherit the earth) which Mann will later vindicate on its behalf.

that there are different kinds of ‘Geist’ in the world.¹⁰⁴ But the most important of such reconsiderations is surely this: the gathering persuasion that the forces represented by Germany and her opponents need to be brought into some kind of balance or accord with one another, and that any chance of a happier European future depends on this happening.

Man glaube es mir oder nicht: ich bin des Gedankens fähig, daß der Haß und die Feindschaft unter den Völkern Europas zuletzt eine Täuschung, ein Irrtum ist, – daß die einander zerfleischenden Parteien im Grunde gar keine Parteien sind, sondern gemeinsam, unter Gottes Willen, in brüderlicher Qual an der Erneuerung der Welt und der Seele arbeiten. (13.1, 530-531)

And this statement, though it might seem a sudden renunciation of the anti-‘Geist’ rhetoric which characterizes so many passages of *Betrachtungen*, is by no means discordant with the implied principles of the work. For *Betrachtungen* marks a clear development in the conception of ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ as expounded by the ‘Literatur Essay’, in which both principles were seen as equally valueless: ‘Geist’ being no more than hostility to ‘Natur’ and ‘Natur’ just a blind affirmation of itself. Mann’s war-time tract, by contrast, does not treat these opposites as being valueless. Rather, it suggests that both have their place in the world but that the defeat of Germany by the allies would result in a perilous preponderance of the one over the other.¹⁰⁵ And it is against this danger that Mann feels compelled to struggle. It is true, of course, that as a writer his only means to ward off such a catastrophe is a verbal polemic against ‘Geist’ itself, and he uses every rhetorical weapon in the armoury to this purpose.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Wir können aber unmöglich umhin, uns zu verwundern und einen gewissen Anstoß daran zu nehmen, daß die Verkündiger der “Solidarität aller Geistigen” so tun, als gäbe es nur eine Art Geistigkeit, einen Geist an sich, und es sei[...]der Geist der Aufklärung und des Fortschritts.’ (13.1, 351) This is an example of Mann’s readiness to undermine the structure of his own argument for a momentary polemical gain. If ‘Geist’ can be found on both sides of the universal struggle which Mann claims to see in every conflict, then it cannot represent one of the struggle’s oppositional principles.

¹⁰⁵ In Mann’s copy of the *Marbacher Schillerbuch* (published in 1905 on the anniversary of the dramatist’s death,) we find the following passage in Adolf Baumeister’s essay ‘Schillers Idee von seinem Dichterberuf’: ‘Die alte Welt hatte die Natur, die griechische schon die beseelte, und so verlangte es sie nach ihr. Sie ist naiv, und ihre Kunst ist es mit. Das mittlere Alter verlor die Natur im Ringen um den Geist, an dem allein ihm letztlich gelegen. Die Zukunft, die “selige Zeit”, wird Natur und Geist besitzen und versöhnen.’ (Schwäbischer Schillerverein 1905, 25) Mann, having underlined the passage, has furnished it further with a double exclamation mark, either of recognition or of inspiration, in the margin. Tschol-Za Kim, in an article which attempts to trace the relationship between ‘Natur’ and ‘Geist’ in Mann’s works, remarks: ‘Im Spätwerk versucht Thomas Mann “Natur” und “Geist” in Verbindung zu setzen, so daß “Natur” und “Geist” synthetisch erscheinen und sich gegenseitig erfordern.’ (Kim 1975, 72) However, the change in the relationship between ‘Natur’ and ‘Geist’ which Kim correctly identifies would have been unthinkable without a corresponding change in the theoretical content of the two terms, and in particular of ‘Geist’.

But, as he makes clear in the above passage, he is not an implacable enemy of ‘Geist’ as such: rather he is against its absolute dominion.

Which brings us to *Der Zauberberg* – a novel of encyclopaedic richness and complexity, but whose main *ideological* purpose is the proper accommodation of ‘Natur’ and ‘Geist’. This is not, however, to say that we should look to see the two opposing principles unambiguously embodied by fictional characters. Though we feel tempted to identify Claudia Chauchat, whose character is marked by warm but ruthless instinct, with ‘Natur’, or Settembrini, whose conversation consists mostly of uplift and abstraction, with ‘Geist’, the fact of the matter is that each is a compound of both principles.¹⁰⁶ Settembrini, for example, sometimes champions ‘Geist’ in the most unambiguous way:

Eine Macht, ein Prinzip aber gibt es, dem meine höchste und letzte Ehrerbietung und Liebe gilt, und diese Macht, dieses Prinzip ist der Geist. Wie sehr ich es verabscheue, irgendein verdächtiges Mondscheingespinnst und –gespenst, das man ‘die Seele’ nennt, gegen den Leib ausgespielt zu sehen – innerhalb der Antithese von Körper *und Geist* bedeutet der Körper das böse, das teuflische Prinzip, denn der Körper ist Natur, und die Natur – innerhalb ihres Gegensatzes zum Geiste, zur Vernunft, ich wiederhole das! – ist böse – mystisch und böse. (5.1, 378-9)

But confronted with the truly pitiless ‘Geist’ propounded by Naphta – who exhibits a medieval relish for the sufferings of the flesh at the instigation of other-worldly dictates – he takes up the cudgels for ‘Natur’. To Naphta’s ‘Aber es hieße immerhin Geist in die Natur tragen. Sie hat es nötig,’ Settembrini replies, ‘Die Natur[...]hat Ihren Geist durchaus nicht nötig. Sie ist selber Geist.’ (5.1, 565) Indeed, it seems that Mann’s purpose in introducing Naphta to Settembrini is not to play off ‘Natur’ against ‘Geist’, but rather to show an unreflective proponent of the latter both its metaphysical character and its disregard for human frailty. In order to fend off the little Jesuit Settembrini is obliged to embroil himself in contradictions so obvious that

¹⁰⁶ As Schneider points out, it is a mistake to think of all Mann’s characters as limited to the ideological positions indicated by the leitmotifs associated with them. The latter should be regarded as ‘Anspielungen, die durchaus in einem Spannungsverhältnis zur Darstellung einer Figur stehen können’ but not as ‘die eigentlich gültigen Aussagen über sie.’ (Schneider 1999, 125)

even the moderately intellectually gifted Hans Castorp can divine them.¹⁰⁷ And yet we should not be surprised to see Settembrini prepared to change sides in this way, remembering how impossible Mann finds it in *Betrachtungen* to keep the two principles discrete in his consideration of the nations involved in the First World War, and how he allows Germany – at first seen as the wholehearted champion of ‘Natur’ – a degree of ‘Geist’ too. If we take Mann’s view that ‘Geist’ is part and parcel of human beings then it is hard to see how it can be wholly absent from their attitudes and behaviour, and the ‘Weltgegensätze’ must operate within them as well as between them.

In nobody is this struggle more evident than Hans Castorp himself. He feels a deep attachment to German ‘Kultur’, that accretion of hallowed *fact* which his cousin Joachim would consider it impious to critique, and his ‘Sympathie mit dem Tode’, as Reed points out, should be understood as shorthand for such attachment.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, his snow vision is an imaginative emancipation from the traditional ties that bind. The world of the ‘Sonnenkinder’,¹⁰⁹ who are shown conducting a life characterized by ‘leichte und unter Lächeln verborgene Ehrerbietung, die sie einander, unmerklich fast und doch kraft einer deutlich durch alle waltenden Sinnesbindung und eingefleischten Idee, auf Schritt und Tritt erwiesen’ (5.1, 742) seems very different from the Esperanto-world that Mann had prophesied in *Betrachtungen*, but it is none the less an expression of ‘Geist’. Now, though, it seems infinitely desirable, while ‘Natur’ (in its social guise ‘Kultur’) is presented under its worst aspect: two old women – speaking a *German* dialect – ritually devour a baby!

Given, then, that Mann’s understanding of and attitude towards ‘Geist’ does change during this period, the question arises: which are the literary and philosophical

¹⁰⁷ ‘Hans Castorp[...]fragte, was denn aber bei solcher Bewandnis mit Plotinus los sei, der sich nachweislich seines Körpers geschämt, und mit Voltaire, der im Namen der Vernunft gegen das skandalöse Erdbeben von Lisabon revoltiert habe? Absurd? Das sei auch absurd gewesen, aber wenn man alles recht überlege, so könne seiner Ansicht nach das Absurde recht wohl als das geistig Ehrenhafte bezeichnen, und die absurde Naturfeindschaft der gotischen Kunst sei am Ende ebenso ehrenhaft gewesen wie das Gebaren der Plotinus und Voltaire, denn es drücke sich dieselbe Emanzipation von Fatum und Faktum darin aus, derselbe unknechtische Stolz, der sich weigere, vor der dummen Macht, nämlich vor der Natur abzudanken.’ (5.1, 597)

¹⁰⁸ ‘On the one hand, that original chink in the armour of Hans Castorp’s normality has now become his prime quality; on the other, it has become Thomas Mann’s catch-phrase for all those deeper characteristics which distinguish Germans from their western enemies and critics’ (Reed 1996, 242)

¹⁰⁹ Both the Mediterranean and the sun itself, the symbol of Platonic enlightenment, are strongly associated with *Geist* for Mann.

sources which help him reformulate one world-view proposing nothing but a negative dilemma – between a valueless world of the senses and a valueless rejection of the same – into another quite different world-view proposing a genuine metaphysic of value as a counterweight to a natural world which itself is understood to have a claim on our respect?

Plato

One source is evident enough from the passages already cited in this chapter: Plato and the Platonic tradition – a tradition which offers a more-or-less elaborate metaphysic but whose central thrust is that the imperfect realm of experience can only be found meaningful by reference to another one, necessarily hidden from the senses, to which human beings as partly noumenal entities can have access. Above all, the Platonic metaphysic can test the ultimate validity of evaluative statements (and of actions in accord with such statements) by offering an independent criterion of value – το καλόν. Whereas the naturalist necessarily traces back the human experience of beauty and morality to things which can have no claim to either (evolutionary pressure, blind custom, brain activity etc.) the Platonist refers them to the beautiful and the moral as metaphysical truths. And once the existence of such truths is granted, then so is the possibility of progress (rather than simple change, which is all that is left once we discount the possibility of making a valid estimate of it) in human affairs. Diotima's Eros-doctrine as related by Socrates in *Symposium* – a work which is, as Reed points out, an extremely important source for *Der Tod in Venedig* – consists in promoting the soul from an appreciation of beautiful bodies, through the appreciation of beautiful customs and institutions, until it can set sail at last on what she calls the πέλαγος, the 'open sea', of beauty. But she insists that the individual seeker after το καλόν should not become obsessed by beauty in its lower instantiations to the neglect of the higher ones.¹¹⁰ In fact any possible instantiation of the criterion of value must be considered as no more than a means to reaching and realizing and becoming one with the criterion itself: 'When a man has reached this

¹¹⁰ She mentions in passing that Eros, conceived as the search for το καλόν, has an important social dimension too. It inspires the thoughtful artist, of course: 'However, under the general heading "thought", by far the finest and most important item is the art of political and domestic economy, what we call good judgement, and justice.' (Plato (translator: Tom Griffith) 1997, 43) In other words, Plato's criterion of value makes possible political and not just individual progress – a notion further developed in *Republic*.

point in his education in love, studying the different types of beauty in correct order, he will come to the final end and goal of this education. Then suddenly he will see a beauty of breathtaking nature, Socrates, the beauty which is the justification of all his efforts so far. It is eternal, neither coming to be nor passing away, neither increasing nor decreasing.’ (Plato (translator: Tom Griffith) 1997, 45) So she is only being consistent when she puts Socrates on his guard against an infatuation with beautiful bodies, referring to them as phantomatic εἰδωλα – useful if they help bring us closer to το καλόν itself, noxious if they ensnare our attention and thus prevent further progress. We need only bear such strictures in mind to grasp what a perversion of true Platonism Aschenbach is guilty of in worshipping his ‘Idol’ in a manner such as this:¹¹¹

Seine Augen umfaßten die edle Gestalt dort am Rande des Blauen, und in aufschwärmendem Entzücken glaubte er mit diesem Blick das Schöne selbst zu begreifen, die Form als Gottesgedanken, die eine und reine Vollkommenheit, die im Geiste lebt und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war. (2.1, 553)

If we are prepared to accept that Mann considered Platonist evaluative thinking to be more than intellectual deadwood worthy only of pity or irony (which is surely how a Schopenhauerian or Nietzschean would consider it), then we can see its marks and repercussions throughout, for example, *Betrachtungen*. Schopenhauer’s ‘Intelligenz’ either serves the ‘Wille’ or rejects it, but cannot perceive an alternative to it, and as for historical progress Schopenhauer denies that such a thing is possible. Yet Mann’s ‘Geist’ is, as we have seen, distinguished by ideality, universality and progression. Nor can we legitimately propose that Mann identifies ‘Geist’ with the persistent *delusion* that such a thing might exist, for he explicitly rejects any such explanation – even when he is defending ‘Natur’ against ‘Geist’ and it would surely serve his turn to denounce the latter as a mental figment and no more. When Schopenhauer derides

¹¹¹ Aschenbach’s famous ‘kleine Abhandlung’ is composed ‘im Angesicht des Idols und die Musik seiner Stimme im Ohr.’ (2.1, 556) Both the term ‘Idol’ and the reference to music, rather than visual beauty, suggest that he is a very different sort of person from the Socrates with whom he sometimes identifies. Mark Pearson points out that the text is full of clues as to how distorted Aschenbach’s view of the philosopher is. In the first Socratic interlude, ‘Mann [lässt] seinen Aschenbach vom Beginn der Umschreibung an die Formulierung “des Fühlenden ” gebrauchen. Dies ist ganz offensichtlich “un-Platonisch”.[...]Würde er sich streng an die platonische Doktrine halten, müßte Aschenbach beispielsweise “Das Schöne ist der Weg des Wahrnehmenden zum Geist ” sagen.’ (Pearson 2003, 53)

‘Geist’ (Hegel’s – but Schopenhauer’s strictures are just as pertinent to Plato’s) in these terms: ‘Geist? Wer ist denn der Bursche? und woher kennt ihr ihn? Ist er nicht etwa bloß eine beliebige und bequeme Hypostase, die ihr nicht ein Mal definiert, geschweige deduziert oder beweist?’ (13.1, 333) Mann’s rejoinder is unambiguous: ‘Wir sind weit entfernt, sie [Schopenhauer’s opinion of ‘Geist’] uns zu eigen zu machen’.

Schiller

Plato is not, however, the only source for the evaluative metaphysic which comes to form so important an element in Mann’s world-view. In 1905 Mann was commissioned by the satirical and literary periodical *Simplicissimus* to write the fictional study of Schiller which was to become ‘Schwere Stunde’,¹¹² and as a preparation Mann acquainted himself, or perhaps reacquainted himself, with Schiller’s theoretical works.¹¹³ This much is not disputed. What is disputed, however, is that Schiller’s aesthetic philosophizing had any deep or lasting impact on Mann’s outlook. Reed, for example, reviewing Sandberg’s *Thomas Manns Schiller Studien*, is quite emphatic: ‘Schiller was scarcely an influence on Mann. Even the categories *naif/sentimentalisch* were late interpretative labels of great prestige but not

¹¹² Mann’s annotated edition of *Symposium* was published in 1903, so it is likely that his reconsideration of Schiller’s theoretical writings and his developing interest in Platonic thought were contemporaneous. It should be noted, in passing, that this thesis is concerned with Schiller as a theoretician rather than as a personality with a good deal in common with Mann’s own. Paul Bishop, in an essay on Mann’s intellectual background, rightly remarks that in terms of sensuality and extraversion on the one hand and ideality and introversion on the other hand, Mann was far closer in spirit to Schiller than to Goethe, (Bishop 2002, 39) and a biographical study of the parallels between Schiller and Mann might prove worthwhile and enlightening. This thesis, however, is concerned chiefly with Schiller’s influence on the evolution of Mann’s philosophical world-view.

¹¹³ In his treatise on Mann’s relationship to Schiller, *Thomas Manns Schiller-Studien* (a treatise which downplays the importance of that relationship in order to emphasize instead a continuing debt to Nietzsche) Sandberg writes, ‘Die spärlichen Schiller Notizen in diesem Material [i.e. the notes for the ‘Literatur Essay’] sind gewiß Niederschläge der Lektüre, zu der Thomas Mann während der Vorbereitung für die Schiller-Studie angeregt worden war.’ (Sandberg 1965, 61) He then goes on to list references and quotations from *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*, and a little later claims that Mann’s acquaintance with *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* dates from the same period. It is quite true that the ‘Literatur Essay’ contains fewer references to Schiller than to, say, Nietzsche. But they are of importance none the less, starting with a quotation from *Gedanken über den Gebrauch des Gemeinen und Niedrigen in der Kunst* on the first page (‘Gemein ist alles, was nicht zu dem Geiste spricht und kein anderes als ein sinnliches Interesse erregt’) (Mann 1967, 152) and culminating in the following defence of Schiller against his detractors: ‘Mit der schönsten Gerechtigkeit, Einsicht, und Würde hat er seine Art gegen die des realistischen Nachbarn abgegrenzt, nicht abgewogen, und seine wundervolle Untersuchung “Über naive und sentiment. Dichtung” ist, trotz Nietzsche, eine Künstlerschrift in Vergleich mit welcher die Schriften Wagners nur ein ehrgeiziges Geflunker sind.’ (Mann 1967, 202-203)

a constitutive element.’¹¹⁴ And once again, Reed is typical of a more general trend, for although recognition of Mann’s debt to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer is a critical commonplace, works which take seriously the Schiller connection, which see it as anything more than peripheral to Mann’s thinking, are extremely rare. For the most part discussion relating to the influence of Schiller’s theoretical works on Mann is limited to the respective artist-typologies of the two writers.

It is not our intention to minimize Mann’s debt to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer – their influence is detectable in virtually all of his fiction. If Reed is right – and he surely is – to attribute Mann’s scepticism, his determination that customary beliefs and values be psychologically scrutinized, to Nietzsche’s doctrines, then the whole of Mann’s oeuvre testifies to Nietzsche’s influence. As for Schopenhauer, Mann shows a continuing interest in what one might term that philosopher’s ‘mystical naturalism’. By which we mean the notion that the objective (i.e. independent of a legislating subject) phenomenal world is the creation of a metaphysical generative force. Whenever Mann considers the natural world, and whenever he considers human beings as part of that world, his thinking takes on, if not the Schopenhauerian terminology, at least a Schopenhauerian tenor.¹¹⁵ It is, however, our intention to argue that much that is most characteristic of the later Mann’s world-view is as irreconcilable with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer as it is consistent with Schiller. This is not to say, of course, that Mann’s discovery (or rediscovery) of Schiller’s theoretical works – any more than his fresh acquaintance with Plato – brought about an immediate revolution in his thinking, and Sandberg is no doubt right to feel that many of his earliest reactions to *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen* and *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* are qualified by a previous reading of Nietzsche. Instead of a sudden change of heart – an outright

¹¹⁴ (Reed 1967, 569) This opinion seems to have attained the status of orthodoxy. Koopmann’s article ‘Thomas Manns Schillerbilder – Lebenslängliche Mißverständnisse’ approves without reservation Sandberg’s ‘immer noch maßgebende[n] Schiller-Studie.’ (Koopmann 1999, 126)

¹¹⁵ During the visit to Lisbon’s Natural History Museum, for example, Felix Krull’s admiration expresses itself in the following terms: ‘Wir[...]betraten rechtshin eine Flucht ungleich großer Rümer, wo denn nun freilich der “Sinn für die Formen und das Charaktere des Lebens”, dessen ich mich gerühmt hatte, sein Genüge, ja ein bedrängendes Übergenüge finden mochte, so dicht und den Blick der Sympathie fangend auf Schritt und Tritt war Zimmer und Saal von je und je dem Schoß der Natur entquollenen Bildungen, welche neben dem trüben Versuch sogleich auch das genauest Entwickelte, in seiner Art Vollendetste gewahren ließen.’ (VII, 573) But when Professor Kuckuck – in response to Felix’s insistence that he be shown ‘den Menschen’ – invites his young guest ‘hinab’ into the subterranean galleries with their exhibition of prehistoric humanity, the reply is distinctly, if playfully, unSchopenhauerian: ‘“Hinauf, wollen Sie sagen,” schaltete ich geistvoll ein.’ (VII, 578)

rejection of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and a declaration for Schiller – we witness a gradual realization on Mann’s part over a period of years that Schiller’s analysis and fundamental assumptions in these essays offered what was missing from the analysis and fundamental assumptions of Mann’s earlier philosophical masters. These had, we remember, given him the choice between an uncritical ‘Bejahung’ of the phenomenal world or an uncritical ‘Verneinung’ of it – uncritical in the most literal sense of ‘lacking a valid criterion’. By contrast Schiller, following in the footsteps of Kant and of Plato too,¹¹⁶ emphasizes again and again that the human being as subject – a concept he refers to as ‘die Person’ – is not part of the phenomenal world, not susceptible to its necessity, and is therefore capable of making valid evaluations *concerning* the phenomenal realm.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, it can intervene in the phenomenal realm by the application of authentic criteria of one kind or another: can this proposed action stand the test of a Kantian categorical imperative, is that proposed creative undertaking consistent with a Platonic-sounding ‘ideal’? As we have seen, this is precisely the kind of theoretical framework the later Mann takes for granted, and although Nolte is mistaken in trying to accommodate the theoretical division between being and meaning characteristic of the ‘Joseph’ novels to Schopenhauer, she is absolutely right to see that division as consistent with Plato and Kant.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ That Schiller owes an important debt to Plato is argued by David Pugh in an article dealing with the relationship between these two thinkers, and his gloss of a passage in *Über das Erhabene* is convincing: ‘Man has a rational and a natural part. We feel beauty when the two parts are in harmony, and we feel the sublime when the rational part is dominant. But reason and nature here are only superficially psychological terms. In fact, or so I would claim, they stand for the intelligible and material worlds, the borderline between which is man’s assigned place in the cosmos. These are ontological terms, and Schiller’s use of them is indicative of his adoption of the entire apparatus of Platonic ontology.’ (Pugh 1991, 283) We might add that the ‘ideals’ which serve the sentimental poet as artistic benchmarks are far more easily accommodated by a Platonic than by a Kantian framework, as is the Schillerian notion that the physically beautiful serves as an appetizing invitation for us to ascend to the morally worthy. For, terminological differences notwithstanding, this is the same doctrine (το καλόν in the world of physical bodies leads the soul on to το καλόν in the social and political sphere and beyond) expounded by Diotima in *Symposium*.

¹¹⁷ As explained in the eleventh letter of the *Ästhetische Erziehung*.

¹¹⁸ It is improbable that Mann had much direct knowledge of Kant’s philosophy. In *Betrachtungen* he describes Kant’s style as ‘furchteinflößend’ (13.1, 191) and seems baffled, if not abashed, by Rolland’s attribution to him of a sound understanding of this philosopher (with the implication that Mann should know better than to engage in the nationalistic irrationality exhibited by ‘Gedanken im Krieg’). Having done his best to assimilate Kant’s categorical imperative to Nietzsche’s ‘Moralkritik im Zeichen des Lebens’ (13.1, 208) Mann goes on to say: ‘Von dieser Denkweise und geistigen Struktur, diesem zugleich *ironischen und kategorischen Begriff* der Politik habe auch ich, ohne im mindesten “Philosoph” zu sein, irgendwie irgend etwas abbekommen.’ It may well be that after this exchange with Rolland Mann came to feel he had a duty, as an eminent German man of letters, to better appreciate his country’s most renowned thinker. Such a cultural obligation would help explain his continuing interest in Schiller’s theoretical works – which reformulate key elements of Kant’s philosophy in a more stylistically palatable form.

But Schiller is more to Mann than a conduit for Kantian and a reinforcement for Platonic thought:¹¹⁹ he is a theoretical innovator and certain characteristic preoccupations and mental habits of his are easily identifiable in Mann's fictional and non-fictional works. In particular, Schiller does not have the contemptuous attitude towards the phenomenal realm ('Natur' as he customarily calls it)¹²⁰ that both Plato and Kant are bound to have, given that they locate all value in the noumenal realm, and he sharply distinguishes his point of view in this matter from that of Kant which he summarizes so: 'Aus dem Sanktuarium der reinen Vernunft brachte er das fremde und doch wieder so bekannte Moralgesetz, stellte es in seiner ganzen Heiligkeit aus vor dem entwürdigten Jahrhundert und fragte wenig darnach, ob es Augen gibt, die seinen Glanz nicht vertragen.' (Schiller 1992, 368) Whereas Schiller's own project is to effect a reconciliation of the phenomenal and noumenal:

Bis hierher [i.e. that beauty is no guarantor of morality] glaube ich, mit den Rigoristen der Moral vollkommen einstimmig zu sein, aber ich hoffe dadurch noch nicht zum Latitudinärer zu werden, daß ich die Ansprüche der Sinnlichkeit, die im Felde der reinen Vernunft, und bei der moralischen Gesetzgebung, völlig zurückgewiesen sind, im Feld der Erscheinung, und bei der wirklichen Ausübung der Sittenpflicht, noch zu behaupten versuche. (Schiller 1992, 366)

In *Über Anmut und Würde* Schiller's defence of 'Natur' is relatively modest: a necessary condition for the full realization of noumenal morality is that its introduction be tempered to the character of the phenomenal realm. Such a tempering lies at the heart of Schiller's concept of 'Menschheit', which he understands as an unforced accord between humanity's empirical self and its 'Person', so that the former subsumes the latter, just as the latter subsists in the former. But whereas this earlier justification of the respect due to 'Natur' seems predicated on little more than the phenomenal self's readiness to adopt morality so thoroughly as to transmute the latter into a *second nature*, the last of Schiller's great theoretical works, *Über naive*

¹¹⁹ Frizen writes of Mann's knowledge of Kant and Plato in the 'Schopenhauer' essay: 'Allzu intim[...]ist die Kenntnis der beiden Philosophen nicht gewesen: bis 1938 wird Thomas Mann die "Kritik der reinen Vernunft" nicht in die Hand genommen und auch Plato kaum als Philosophen gelesen haben.' (Frizen 1980, 21) But Mann had access to Kantian thinking through the medium of Schiller's theoretical writings, and Frizen's affirmation that he never read Plato 'als Philosophen' is simply gratuitous.

¹²⁰ Schiller and Mann both equivocate on this word. Sometimes it has the theoretical sense of 'den ganzen Gegenstand aller möglichen Erfahrung', (Kant III, 162) i.e. the phenomenal realm generally, sometimes it has the usual sense of 'unspoilt fauna and flora'.

und sentimentalische Dichtung goes much further in its vindication. For there ‘Menschheit’ is not the result of the careful impression of the metaphysical onto the physical, but actually *precedes* the degeneration which calls forth the ideals of the ‘sentimental’ as a necessary correction. That is: both ‘Natur’ and ‘Menschheit’ as its human expression are represented as a state of prelapsarian purity with a claim to temporal, ethical and aesthetic priority of the sort that Rousseau would have recognized. Their only drawback is that they are incapable of sustaining themselves against the decadence to which the whole world is prey.

Das naive Dichtergenie bedarf also eines Beistandes von außen, da das sentimentalische sich aus sich selbst nährt und reinigt; es muß eine formreiche Natur, eine dichterische Welt, eine naive Menschheit um sich her erblicken, da es schon in der Sinnesempfindung sein Werk zu vollenden hat. Fehlt ihm nun dieser Beistand von außen, sieht er sich von einem geistlosen Stoff umgeben, so kann nur zweierlei geschehen. Er tritt entweder, wenn die Gattung bei ihm überwiegend ist, aus seiner Art, und wird sentimentalisch, um nur dichterisch zu sein, oder, wenn der Artcharakter die Obermacht behält, es tritt aus seiner Gattung, und wird gemeine Natur, um nur Natur zu bleiben. (Schiller 1992, 780)

Both of these attitudes: on the one hand the distrust of a severe morality which takes no notice of the complexion of the phenomenal realm, on the other hand the persistent and ever bolder championing of ‘Natur’ as worthy of respect – both these attitudes run like golden threads through Schiller’s theoretical works. Golden threads we find woven, too, into the text of Thomas Mann’s literary endeavours.

Let us begin with a consideration of ‘Natur’. We have seen, in our analysis of ‘Tonio Kröger’, that Mann hungered for the very life which falls prey to the writer’s duty of ‘Erkenntnis’, and there can be no doubt of his devotion, at a purely human (i.e. non-literary) level, to the national and class ‘Kultur’ he had grown up in. But though he felt himself attached to it, he was well aware that the entanglement of one set of phenomena (his own phenomenal self) with another set of phenomena (the things, habits and customs amongst which he had grown up) could never justify a literary commitment to them. What he finds in Schiller, by contrast, is a theoretical (though, it must be admitted, not a very closely argued) justification for affirming ‘Natur’ to have valid claims which can with good conscience be defended against those of the evaluative metaphysical realm. Mann, as we have seen, came to accept that ‘Geist’

was more than the mere negation of ‘Natur’. And though such a change of heart may have had its deepest origins in his creative dependence on a sense of moral consequence which both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer only succeeded in undermining, the realization of that change of heart could never have been achieved in the form it actually took had Plato and Schiller not been at hand. Likewise, though his reasons for wanting to vindicate and protect ‘Natur’ (in the form of middle-class ‘Leben’ or German ‘Kultur’) were personal, without Schiller’s authoritative – if unclear – theorizing it is doubtful whether Mann could have set it up as a positive alternative to an equally positive ‘Geist’.

As for a distrust of the tendency of unchecked ‘Geist’ to tyrannize ‘Natur’ – the selfsame sentiment can be found throughout *Betrachtungen* and constitutes Mann’s main complaint against ‘Zivilisation’, the ‘Zivilisationsliterat’ etc. Compare Schiller’s evident distaste for ‘Würde’ – which entails the mastery of ‘Geist’ over ‘Natur’ rather than a reconciliation of the two principles – in such passages as ‘Die Anmut läßt der Natur da, wo sie die Befehle des Geistes ausrichtet, einen Schein von Freiwilligkeit; die Würde hingegen unterwirft sie da, wo sie herrschen will, dem Geist,’¹²¹ or: ‘Der Barbar verspottet und entehrt die Natur, aber verächtlicher als der Wilde fährt er häufig genug fort, der Sklave seines Sklaven zu sein,’ (Schiller 1992, 567) with Mann’s:

Vernunftwürde – ein schönes Wort! Ein humanes, ein Humanistenwort. Und dennoch – wenn Würde, die gefestigte Würde geistiger Tugend ein hoch und edelbürgerlicher Zustand ist: ein eigentlich moralischer, ein religiöser oder künstlerischer, kurz, ein sehr menschlicher Zustand ist sie nicht, und – man muß es aussprechen – sie schließt in sich die Gefahr der Verhärtung.
(13.1, 424)

But Mann’s debt to Schiller goes beyond a ‘Geist-Natur’ theoretical framework wherein each principle has positive claims which its counterpart should be encouraged to respect, and it even goes beyond the adoption of a characteristic attitude and terminology in respect of those principles. Above all, Mann takes from Schiller the conviction that the desired reconciliation of opposita is the special duty of the artist. The main purpose of *Ästhetische Erziehung* is to demonstrate that *art*

¹²¹ (Schiller 1992, 381) It will be seen that Schiller is using the self-same terms, ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’, in the self-same way that the mature Mann does.

(which Schiller defines extremely broadly, in line with Plato's τεχνή) can bridge the gap between the noumenal and the phenomenal world, the noumenal and the phenomenal self. He had already touched on this matter in *Über Anmut und Würde*, because it is clear that 'Anmut' (as opposed to 'Würde') is the most sensuously acceptable expression of 'Geist' in human comportment. But art not only allows the gap between the individual's 'Natur' and 'Geist' to be bridged; it also heals the rift between the two principles as they obtain within social structures, institutions, political movements etc. And this because the artistic instinct, which Schiller refers to as the 'Spieltrieb', is a special aspect of 'Geist', free from both the necessity which governs the phenomenal world and that which governs the Kantian noumenal realm.¹²² That is: it belongs to neither world wholly, but has the power of free communication and negotiation between the two:

Da nun aber bei dem Genuß der Schönheit oder der *ästhetischen Einheit* eine wirkliche *Vereinigung* und Auswechslung der Materie mit der Form und des Leidens mit der Tätigkeit vor sich geht, so ist eben dadurch die Vereinbarkeit beider Naturen, die Ausführbarkeit des Unendlichen in der Endlichkeit, mithin die Möglichkeit der erhabensten Menschheit erwiesen. (Schiller 1992, 659)

Schiller sees not only the poet, the painter, and the sculptor as artistic practitioners, but also the statesman, with the consequence that he reserves his approval for those political initiatives and institutions mediated by the 'Spieltrieb': 'Der Staat soll nicht bloß den objektiven und generischen, er soll auch den subjektiven und spezifischen Charakter in den Individuen ehren und, indem er das unsichtbare Reich der Sitten ausbreitet, das Reich der Erscheinung nicht entvölkern.' (Schiller 1992, 565)

These concepts too are echoed with great fidelity in *Betrachtungen* and elsewhere in Mann's work. His definition of the nature and role of art – and its relationship to politics – is practically a paraphrase of Schiller's:

¹²² In Mann's copy of the collected works of Schiller (published 1911-12) the initial definition of the 'Spieltrieb' as an intermediary between the noumenal and phenomenal realms (along with many other passages from *Ästhetische Erziehung*) has been marked (with exclamation marks) as significant: 'Derjenige Trieb also, in welchem beide verbunden wirken (es sei mir einstweilen, bis ich diese Benennung gerechtfertigt haben werde, vergönnt, ihn Spieltrieb zu nennen), der Spieltrieb also würde dahin gerichtet sein, die Zeit in der Zeit aufzuheben, Werden mit absolutem Sein, Veränderung mit Identität zu vereinbaren.' (Schiller 1911, 249)

Ihre Sendung beruht darin, daß sie, um es diplomatisch zu sagen, gleich gute Beziehungen zum Leben und zum reinen Geist verhält, daß sie zugleich konservativ und radikal ist; sie beruht in ihrer Mittel- Mittlerstellung zwischen Geist und Leben. Hier ist die Quelle der Ironie...Hier ist aber auch, wenn irgendwo, die Verwandtschaft, die Ähnlichkeit der Kunst mit der Politik: denn auch diese nimmt, auf ihre Art, eine Mittlerstellung zwischen dem reinen Geist und dem Leben ein, und sie verdient ihren Namen nicht, wenn sie nichts als konservierend oder radikal-destruktiv ist! (13.1, 620-621)

Critical consideration of Mann's debt to Schiller's theoretical works usually begins and ends with the question of artist-typology,¹²³ and it is indisputable that Mann owes an enormous debt to *Über Anmut und Würde* and *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* in this regard. But the extension of terms customarily limited to the definition and explanation of matters aesthetic to politics and society at large has the effect of universalizing Mann's analysis of the artistic vocation and its travails. There is no hint in 'Tonio Kröger' that the dilemma of its eponymous hero should be of concern to anybody but himself and the tiny number of authors who find themselves in a similar predicament. By contrast it is evident that Adrian Leverkühn's destiny is not his alone, but that the creative difficulties he faces foreshadow and accompany those political difficulties with which German society was confronted in the first half of the twentieth century, and it is equally evident that the catastrophic remedy he attempts should be understood as an anticipation in miniature of a historical and political disaster.

However, Mann goes further than emphasizing the political dimension of art. In line with Schiller's analysis, he comes to see that agitators, statesmen, politicians of every stamp can best be understood as artists in the social realm. And if we examine two figures from his later fiction: the Joseph of the tetralogy and the Moses of 'Das Gesetz' we will see how unreservedly he took some of Schiller's pronouncements to

¹²³ Horst Daemmrich's 'Friedrich Schiller and Thomas Mann: Parallels in Aesthetics' is a good example, and has the merit of emphasizing the nearly identical theoretical frameworks sustaining *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* and 'Goethe und Tolstoi'. Daemmrich also points out that the failure of critics to appreciate the extent of Schiller's influence on Mann is a natural consequence of their willingness to take 'Mann's oft-repeated assertion that Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, and in later years Goethe, were the dominant and informative influences in his life' (Daemmrich 1965, 227) as the final word in a matter which should really be decided by an unprejudiced analysis of Mann's texts. And when Mann *does* declare his admiration for and indebtedness to Schiller critics feel at liberty to dismiss his protestations as 'große Worte,' and assure us that 'man soll solche Gelegenheitsformulierungen nicht zu hoch bewerten.' (Koopmann 1999, 122)

heart, for the two figures are (amongst other things, of course) a realization of the different kinds of artist listed in the fourth letter of *Ästhetische Erziehung*. These are: the mechanical artist, who is well within his rights to show no consideration for his material as such; the fine-artist, who must awaken the impression that he has such a consideration, for this helps the realization of that purpose which is his only real concern; and the political artist, who must devote as much real consideration to the material he moulds – given that it is in fact a multitude of subjects – as to the purpose for which it is to be moulded. (Schiller 1992, 565-6)

The Moses of ‘Das Gesetz’ is a political leader, evidently enough, and, in line with Mann’s belief that politics is a matter of negotiating between ‘Leben’ (which, let us remember, is just another name, like ‘Natur’, for the phenomenal world) and ‘Geist’, his main task is to make of his people an instrument of the divine will,¹²⁴ and everything about his demeanour suggests the ‘Würde’ of the man incapable of synthesizing his noumenal and phenomenal selves but insistent on the absolute primacy of the former over the latter – so much so that his movements and speech are impulsive, ill-judged and lacking all grace (necessitating the employment of his brother Aaron as a public speaker to persuade the recalcitrant Jews on his behalf). And this tyranny of ‘Geist’ over ‘Natur’ is not, of course, limited to his own person: it is Moses’ plan to entirely subjugate the society he is trying to form to other-worldly dictates. In the pursuit of this aim he either constrains his followers to do God’s bidding (like the mechanical artist) or, less radically, gives them to understand that he has their own interests at heart (like the fine-artist), while in fact having no respect for them at all.¹²⁵ And he is likened to a sculptor, his people to the block of stone he must work on: ‘Er selbst hatte Lust zu seines Vaters Blut, wie der Steinmetz Lust hat zu dem ungestalten Block, woraus er feine und hohe Gestalt, seiner Hände Werk, zu metzen gedenkt.’¹²⁶

¹²⁴ ‘Von den Implikationen der Unsichtbarkeit, also der Geistigkeit, Reinheit und Heiligkeit, sagte er ihnen nichts und wies sie lieber nicht darauf hin, daß sie als verschworene Diener des Unsichtbaren ein abgesondertes Volk des Geistes, der Reinheit und Heiligkeit würden zu sein haben.’ (VIII, 810)

¹²⁵ Michelangelo was Mann’s ‘model’ for Moses, as demonstrated by Klaus Makoschey in his essay on the topic. (Makoschey 1998, 99-121)

¹²⁶ (VIII, 810) Later in the story the people are described as a block of stone, and ‘der Klotz ist nicht auf des Meisters Seite, sondern gegen ihn, und gleich das Früheste, was zu seiner Formung geschieht, kommt ihm am allerunnatürlichsten vor.’ (VIII, 847)

If, by contrast, we examine the Joseph of the tetralogy, we see a statesman-artist mediating between ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ in a quite different fashion. If Moses is all ‘Würde’ then Joseph is surely the finest example of ‘Anmut’ in the whole of Mann’s fictional canon. We may be tempted to compare him in this regard to Felix Krull, but despite their similarities: their shared beauty, charisma, tolerance of human frailty, cultural and linguistic lability – despite all this their cases are fundamentally dissimilar on account of the different philosophical contexts which frame the two characters. *Felix Krull* was begun when Mann’s thinking still bore a Schopenhauerian stamp, so that there can be no question of its hero – though he is likened by the Marquis de Venosta to Hermes (VII, 514) just as Joseph is likened to the self-same god by Pharaoh (V, 1454) – being an intermediary between an evaluative noumenal realm and the valueless phenomenal realm.¹²⁷ Rather, he is like the Merkur of Kleist’s *Amphitryon* (which, we remember, made such an impression on Mann): a plausible impostor and seducer who makes vice ‘bequem und liebenswürdig’. If he serves any other-worldly power at all, then certainly not ‘Geist’ (which he humiliates, or abets in its self-humiliation in chapter nine). In the tetralogy, by contrast, the possibility that there is indeed such a world (‘Das Reich der Strenge’ and so on) is constantly implied and sometimes stated outright. And there can be no doubt that Joseph is its intermediary. Primed by Eliezer and his own visions and dreams, he believes himself to have a magnificent destiny – a destiny which consists in the realization of God’s will in the societies in which he finds himself. But he does this gently, taking into account the weaknesses and delusions of the men and women whom he has to cajole into the paths of righteousness, and he understands the crucial importance of the aesthetic as an intermediary between stern, unyielding morality and the weak flesh of humankind. It is his personal beauty, grace of bearing and pitch-perfect eloquence which persuade so many of the influential people he needs to win over that there is something other-worldly about Joseph and which impel them to seek and heed his advice. He is just as surely as Moses an artist (consider his playwright’s interest in constructing a scene like that of the reunion with his brothers) but unlike

¹²⁷ As Dierks remarks, Mann’s early intention in *Felix Krull* was probably to present its protagonist as an ‘Eingeweihten des Willensmysteriums’. (Dierks 1972, 49) In the later parts of the novel he seems to regard himself as an ambassador of the ‘Wille’ to the phenomenal world. That, at least, is what passages like the following (a classic of Mannian double-talk) suggest: ‘Welche Gunst ist es doch über einen polierten und gefälligen Ausdruck zu verfügen, der Gabe der guten Form teilhaftig zu sein, die mir jene geneigte Fee mit zarter Hand in die Wiege legte und die mir für das ganze hier laufende Geständniswerk so sehr vonnöten ist!’ (VII 562)

Moses he always respects the material he has to work in – appropriately, in view of the fact that the material is humanity itself. The implication of Pharaoh's comparison is not that Joseph is a mere trickster, for the Hermes of *Joseph und seine Brüder* is far more than this.

Denn er sei ein Gott des freundlichen Zufalls[...]und des lachenden Fundes, Segen spendend und Wohlstand, so redlich oder ein bißchen auch fälschlich erworben, wie es das Leben erlaube, ein Ordner und Führer, der durch die Windungen führe der Welt, rückwärts lächelnd mit aufgehobenem Stabe. (V, 1428)

The implication is rather that the young man's 'Anmut' and artistry – the fusion of the worldly and other-worldly in his person, the gentle reconciliation of 'Geist' and 'Natur' which it seems to be his destiny to effect in the world – perfectly fit him for the role of political artist.¹²⁸ And if we bear in mind the importance of Schiller's 'Spieltrieb' and what it entails, then we shall be in a position to gauge the full force of Jacob's death-bed declaration to Joseph: 'Breite Lieder sollen strömen, die deines Lebens Spiel besingen, immer aufs neue, denn ein heilig Spiel war es doch.' (V, 1804)

As a conclusion to this evaluation of Mann's debt to Schiller, we should consider 'Goethe und Tolstoi' – an essay begun in 1918 but not published in its final form until 1925.¹²⁹ It is sustained by a reading of *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, a work which Mann enthusiastically declares to be the 'klassischer und umfassender Essay der Deutschen.'¹³⁰ (15.1, 812) The taxonomy of Schiller's essay is adopted – though Mann generally prefers the terms 'Plastik' to 'Naiv' and 'Kritik' to 'Sentimental'. However, differences in vocabulary notwithstanding, there can be no

¹²⁸ As Jacob says: 'Das ist ein seltener Segen, denn meist hat man die Wahl, Gott zu gefallen oder der Welt; ihm aber gab es der Geist anmutigen Mittlertums, daß er beiden gefiel.' (V, 1804)

¹²⁹ The 1925 version is closer in spirit to the even-handedness of *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* and more theoretical than the 1921 version – which by and large limits itself to a championing of Goethe and Tolstoy while leaving Schiller and Dostoevsky relatively unconsidered.

¹³⁰ The debt owed by Mann's essay to Schiller's is described in these terms by Herbert Lehnert and Eva Wessell in their treatise on 'Goethe und Tolstoi': 'Er übernahm[...]die Kategorien "naiv" und "sentimental" selbst und machte sie zur Basis seiner Diskussion von poetologischen Typen in den Kapiteln "Krankheit", "Plastik und Kritik" und "Freiheit und Vornehmheit". Damit transzendierte er nicht nur das überwiegend historisch-kritische Modell Mereschkowskis, er fügte ein typologisches hinzu und konstruierte auf diese Weise eine Viergruppierung, welche gewissermaßen beide essaysistischen Vorbilder, Schillers und Mereschkowskis, zusammenfaßt.' (Lehnert/Wessell 1991, 118)

doubt that Mann justifies the typological distinction between Goethe and Tolstoi on the one hand and Schiller (considered as a poet and dramatist rather than as a theoretician) and Dostoevsky on the other, in terms of the kinship of each pair to ‘Natur’ and ‘Geist’ respectively.

Offenbar gibt es zweierlei Erhöhung und Steigerung des Menschlichen: eine ins Göttliche, von Gnaden der Natur, und eine ins Heilige – von Gnaden einer anderen Macht, die der Natur entgegensteht, die die Emanzipation von ihr, die ewige Revolte gegen sie bedeutet: von Gnaden des Geistes. (15.1, 832)

Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung displays broadly similar preoccupations and tendencies to those in Schiller’s other essays on matters aesthetic and moral. There is the same emphasis on the distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal (the ‘ideals’ of the sentimental poet – whether we trace the origin of the concept back to Plato or to Kant – are a matter of ‘Wahrheit’, not ‘Wirklichkeit’). (15.1, 832) There is the same insistence that the two realms are worthy of respect (this goes without saying for the noumenal realm, of course, but Schiller, as we have seen, strengthens the case for ‘Natur’ as a positive principle in its own right). There is the same tendency to see artistic and moral questions as intimately associated (the essay ends with a consideration of naïve and sentimental agents in the moral realm, where they are referred to as realists and idealists respectively). And, finally, there is the same impulse towards the unification of opposites (it is quietly conceded that sentimental poets have to be naive poets to a degree and vice-versa).¹³¹ And we should not by now be surprised to find Mann following Schiller’s example in respect of all of this. It is true that ‘Goethe and Tolstoi’ devotes more space to its eponymous subjects than to Schiller and Dostoevsky, but Mann is careful to emphasize the esteem

¹³¹ Of a sentimental poet: ‘Was indessen von dem Charakter sowohl dieser als aller sentimentalischen Dichter im Ganzen wahr ist, schließt natürlicherweise darum keineswegs das Vermögen aus, im Einzelnen uns durch naive Schönheit zu rühren: ohne das würden sie überall keine Dichter sein.’ (Schiller 1992, 752) Of a naive poet: ‘Er tritt entweder, wenn die Gattung bei ihm überwiegend ist, aus seiner Art, und wird sentimentalisch, um nur dichterisch zu sein, oder, wenn der Artcharakter die Obermacht behält, es tritt aus seiner Gattung, und wird gemeine Natur, um nur Natur zu bleiben.’ (See page 86) All this is in line with Schiller’s earlier pronouncement that the aesthetically valuable consists in the ‘Gleichgewicht der Realität und der Form’, which can, however, be but rarely established. ‘In der Wirklichkeit wird immer ein Übergewicht des einen Elements über das andere übrigbleiben, und das Höchste, was die Erfahrung leistet, wird in einer *Schwankung* zwischen beiden Prinzipien bestehen, wo bald die Realität, bald die Form überwiegend ist.’ (Schiller 1992, 615) All poets necessarily participate in the phenomenal and noumenal realms, but the naïve poet leans more towards ‘Realität’, the sentimental poet more towards ‘Form’.

due to both ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ authors. Mann, like Schiller, includes in an essay ostensibly devoted to artistic matters a consideration of moral matters, on the grounds that the different philosophical perspectives which distinguish one kind of artist from another must also distinguish one kind of moral agent (Schiller has individuals in mind, Mann individuals and nations) from another. ‘Goethe und Tolstoi’ includes in its chapter on ‘Bekenntnis und Erziehung’ a long meditation on the possibility of a *rapprochement* between France and Germany,¹³² which Mann evidently felt to be intimately associated with the rapprochement between individual ‘Naturkinder’ and ‘Geistessöhne’ – for this too: the drive towards the synthesis of opposites, is as great a concern for Mann as it is for Schiller.¹³³

There is, however, something new and unexpected to be found in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, and it is this: it takes a *superphilosophical* view of the sorts of poets and moral agents it taxonomizes.¹³⁴ In earlier essays the suggestion is always that, for example, ‘Anmut’ and ‘Würde’, or the ‘Naturtrieb’, the ‘Moraltrieb’ and the ‘Spieltrieb’ all have their place in the same philosophical system. The principles of this purported system are, it is true, often difficult to discern, but the implication is that the whole subject-matter of a particular essay is being considered from a single philosophical point of view, and Schiller goes to great lengths to harmonize his pronouncements. But that synthesis is more a matter of rhetorical effort than of genuine compatibility between key propositions. We have seen that the respect Schiller accords ‘Natur’ is not really consistent with either Kantianism or Platonism: both Kant and Plato reject the notion that the phenomenal world can be valuable *in itself* – and each looks for criteria beyond it (whether these be noumenal ideas, or the will of a free and self-legislating subject) so that actions may be

¹³² We have already noted the passage in *Betrachtungen* which looks forward to an equitable European peace, and mentioned its clear implication: that ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ must learn to properly accommodate one another. Throughout *Betrachtungen* Mann’s position is that ‘Geist’ (i.e. the entente powers and those, like the ‘Zivilisationsliterat’, who support their cause in Germany) is preventing the establishment of such an accommodation. In the 1924 version of ‘Goethe und Tolstoi’ Mann takes another tack: that ‘Natur’ is being given too free a reign: ‘Der anti-liberale Rückschlag ist mehr als klar, er ist kraß. Er äußert sich politisch in der überdrußvollen Abkehr von Demokratie und Parlamentarismus, in einer mit finsternen Brauen vollzogenen Wendung zur Diktatur und zum Terror.’ (15.1, 928)

¹³³ According to Mann the mutual attraction of opposite philosophical principles lies behind, for example, the friendship between Goethe and Schiller.

¹³⁴ Where the other essays are purportedly *catholic* in their theorizing *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* is avowedly *ecumenical*. It is characterized not just by a dualistic outlook, but by a dualistic outlook which includes as one of its elements a monistic outlook.

determined to be good or evil,¹³⁵ objects may be determined to be beautiful or ugly.¹³⁶ In *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* Schiller concedes that this is so, and identifies the sentimental poet and personality (the idealist) with the Kantian/Platonic perspective, the other kind – the naïve poet and personality (the realist) with – what? From a strictly theoretical (rather than practical) point of view, with what we have called ‘naturalism’, if we are to judge by Schiller’s definition of the realist’s mentality as ‘ein nüchterner Beobachtungsgeist und eine feste Anhänglichkeit an das gleichförmige Zeugnis der Sinne.’¹³⁷ And though Schiller understands full well that no single philosophical point of view can incorporate the postulates of the idealist (who is a dualist) and the realist (who is a monist), he none the less states that both points of view are necessary to the artistic creator and the moral agent.¹³⁸

It is important that we remark this changed emphasis because it finds its counterpart in Mann’s essay. Both ‘Natur’ writers like Goethe and Tolstoy and ‘Geist’ writers like Schiller and Dostoevsky have a claim to high approbation, but these claims can only be recognized from mutually exclusive points of view. If we deny the reality of a metaphysic of value and insist that all analysis of aesthetic experience and of apparently moral behaviour be limited to the phenomenal world, then clearly we must strip the ‘Adel des Geistes’ of its honours. If we deny, not the reality of course, but the value of the phenomenal world, then we cannot in conscience esteem artistic works which are the uncritical products of that world. Schiller in *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* and Mann in ‘Goethe und Tolstoi’ adopt an alternating philosophical perspective (rather than the synoptic perspective with two aspects which

¹³⁵ Both Kant and Plato

¹³⁶ Plato only. According to Kant the relationship between the good and the beautiful (whereby the latter analogizes the former) is not one of identity. Schiller, however, following what looks like an undeclared programme to reformulate Platonic notions as Kantian ones, sees it as his duty in *Kallias* to show how criteria of beauty might be derived from some sort of ‘aesthetic categorical imperative’: ‘Die Schwierigkeit, einen Begriff der Schönheit objektiv aufzustellen und ihn aus der Natur der Vernunft völlig a priori zu legitimieren, so daß die Erfahrung ihn zwar durchaus bestätigt, aber daß er diesen Ausspruch der Erfahrung zu seiner Gültigkeit gar nicht nötig hat, diese Schwierigkeit ist fast unübersehbar.’ (Schiller 1992, 276)

¹³⁷ (Schiller 1992, 798) Schiller also suggests that such naturalism may provide the basis for some kind of morality by making an unexplained distinction between the ‘Notwendigkeit’ and the ‘Nötigung’ of the phenomenal world. Probably the distinction is only that between unenlightened and enlightened self-interest, for Schiller says later in the same essay, ‘Der Realist wird fragen, *wozu eine Sache gut sei?* und die Dinge nach dem, was sie wert sind, zu taxieren wissen: der Idealist wird fragen, *ob sie gut sei?* und die Dinge nach dem taxieren, was sie würdig sind.’ (Schiller 1992, 803) That naturalists recognize and act on hypothetical imperatives is, of course, not in dispute, but it is hard to see how hypothetical imperatives can form the basis for morality.

¹³⁸ See footnote 28 of *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*. (Schiller 1992, 798)

characterizes Schiller's earlier essays). There is an obvious correspondence in all this with the dual perspective we see at work in so much fantastic fiction, in which we find a concurrence of purely naturalistic and supernatural/evaluative explanations for the strange events recounted. It is true that it is possible – remembering what Kant had to say about the limitation of the 'Verstand' to cause-and-effect explanations in the phenomenal realm so that it must leave the noumenal realm unscrutinized – to accommodate this duality-of-vision to a single theoretical framework, but the naturalistic *tenor* of certain passages in, for example, 'Der Sandmann' alternating with the supernatural *tenor* of others, indicates an alternation of two points of view which, though theoretically reconcilable, are felt to be mutually exclusive. That is, just as readers of the two essays under discussion are not allowed to settle into a unified framework, so the reader of certain works of fantastic literature is prevented from adopting a synthetic position by the strong emphasis by turns on naturalism and on the supernatural.

But 'Goethe und Tolstoi' is more than an essay in Schillerian thinking. It marks an important stage in the systematization of Mann's own theoretical world – in particular with regard to the relationship between science and 'Geist'. We remarked in the context of *Betrachtungen* Mann's tendency to use the word 'Geist' in inconsistent ways. On the one hand, it can mean mere *descriptive intelligence* so that, for example, psychology (with its tendency to undermine the beliefs and activities of human beings by exposing the real origins of such beliefs and activities) can count as 'Geist'. And on the other hand, it can refer to *prescriptive intelligence* which judges phenomena and finds them more or less wanting. Which is to say that the term wavers between the Nietzschean/Schopenhauerian conception which colours Mann's thinking in the years before 1914, and the Platonic/Schillerian conception which comes to dominate it after 1918. Mann himself was aware of this ambiguity: 'vordem [wollte und durfte man] Geist und Tat, Erkenntnis und Tat als etwas sehr Verschiedenes und schlecht Verträgliches auseinanderhalten[...]Das ist der Geist als AntiRevolutionär. Heute erklärt er sich mit der Revolution, der politischen Revolution.' (13.1 538-539)

'Goethe und Tolstoi' distinguishes between its eponymous subjects as representatives of 'Natur' and Schiller and Dostoevsky as representatives of 'Geist'. But Mann is by

no means suggesting that Goethe and Tolstoy are less *intelligent* than Schiller and Dostoevsky, that they lack that descriptive penetration previously associated with ‘Geist’. Rather, he is suggesting that the former two are entirely *worldly* in their outlook, devoted to the phenomenal realm and enjoying a semi-mystical union with it (so that the religious belief best suited to the ‘Natur’ artist, should he need one, is the pantheism – God as world – which Goethe in fact cultivated).¹³⁹ (15.1, 904) And he also makes much of the fact that Goethe in particular sees no distinction in principle between human beings and the rest of the observable universe, between human beings and other animals, recounting of him that:

Der Zwischenkieferknochen, sagt er, der bei den Tieren, je nach Umständen und Bedürfnis, verschieden gestaltet sei, – zuletzt, im Menschen, dem edelsten Geschöpf, verberge er sich schamhaft, ‘aus Furcht, tierische Gefräßigkeit zu verraten’. Idealistischer Menschenstolz könnte einwenden, dann sei es recht inhuman, das schamhaft Verborgene zu entdecken. (15.1, 906)

And Tolstoy, though never a scientist in the way Goethe was, displays an equally secular orientation, and indeed seems to be almost an animal himself: ‘Tolstois sinnliche Begabung, persönlich gesprochen, muß die eines edlen, von der Natur aufs vollkommenste ausgestatteten, hochempfindlichen Tieres gewesen sein, – verstärkt, sublimiert durch das reflektierende Bewußtsein des Menschen.’ (15.1, 900) From all of which we can conclude the following: observation and analysis (no matter how mystically motivated and ecstatically experienced) of the phenomenal world have ceased to count as ‘Geist’ for Mann. It has been definitively classified as ‘Natur’.

¹³⁹ Heimendahl writes of Mann and his conception of ‘Geist’ in the following terms: ‘Er folgt Schopenhauers Entlarvung des Intellekts als eines Rechtfertigungsautomaten der Begierden, die ihm schon durch Nietzsche vertraut war, und teilt Schopenhauers geistkritische These von der Abhängigkeit des Intellektes vom Willen. Wo Schopenhauer aber seinem eigenen System zuwiderhandelt und einen weiteren Intellekt postuliert, der zur Verneinung des Willens in der Lage sei, und mit dem Schopenhauer die asketischen Traditionen vom Stoizismus bis zum christlichen Mittelalter rehabilitiert und eine erneute Herrschaft des Intellektes etabliert, bleibt Thomas Mann Nietzsche treu und verneint die Verneinung des Willens. Es gibt keinen Geist, der eine willensferne Wahrheit für sich in Anspruch nehmen könnte und nicht einer psychologischen Entlarvung anheimfiel. Geist bleibt für Thomas Mann eine Erscheinungsform des Willens und damit eine Angelegenheit der Leidenschaft.’ (Heimendahl 1998, 234) But it is evident that there could be no ‘Natur/Geist’ conflict at all if the latter were entirely a manifestation of and in thrall to the former. Heimendahl is quite right to point out that ‘Intelligenz’ as Schopenhauer typically conceives it is a handmaid to the ‘Wille’, but the conclusion to draw from this observation so far as Mann is concerned is not that ‘Geist’ is bound to the ‘Wille’ (on the grounds that ‘Geist’ is just another word for ‘Intelligenz’) but that ‘Geist’ and ‘Intelligenz’ are two distinct things. The independence of ‘Geist’ and its opposition to ‘Natur’ is a constant theme in Mann’s fiction and non-fiction.

Conversely the ‘Geist’ of Schiller and Dostoevsky has nothing to do with their powers of observation, analysis and deduction in the world of the senses: it has rather to do with the fact that they critique the world of the senses according to a standard beyond it: a Kantian/Platonic realm of freedom and value in Schiller’s case, a Christian God in Dostoevsky’s.

The Meaning of *Der Tod in Venedig*

We are now in a position, having traced an evolution in Mann’s thinking which, in time, assumes the dimensions of a *revolution*, so that one world view (according to which a value-free ‘Geist’ attempts to negate a value-free ‘Natur’), gives way to a quite different world view (according to which an evaluative ‘Geist’ must come to an accommodation with a ‘Natur’ which is also to be respected), – we are now in a position to reconsider *Der Tod in Venedig*. For Mann published it in 1912, after abandoning the ‘Literatur Essay’, but before beginning the composition of *Betrachtungen*, and it alternates between the Schopenhauerian/Nietzschean¹⁴⁰ perspective which predominates in the first of these works and the Platonic perspective which predominates in the second. We should not let Mann’s persistence in using the same terms – in particular ‘Geist’ – for quite different concepts mislead us into thinking that the novella’s various philosophical inspirations can easily tolerate one another. That Mann does indeed find a way of including them in a single imaginative system is a remarkable achievement, but it is likely to be overlooked if the difficulties obstructing it go unrecognized.

We should remember, however, that no matter which philosophical framework obtains in a given episode of the novella, no matter which *meaning* such a framework might advance, its validity depends on the reality of the supernatural. We can suppose that Aschenbach, like Mann himself, was a keen reader of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, and attribute apparently significant incidents to his unconscious realization of the doctrines of those two philosophers. To take such a view is to

¹⁴⁰ The Nietzsche of *Geburt der Tragödie* is evidently still very close in philosophical outlook to Schopenhauer. Though he later, in ‘Versuch einer Selbstkritik’, claims that *Geburt der Tragödie* owes little more than its terminology to Schopenhauer, the distinction between Dionysos and Apollo derives what dramatic and explanative force it has from the abyss which divides the worlds of ‘Wille’ and ‘Vorstellung’. Without Schopenhauer’s philosophical dimension they are just novel names for certain psychological conditions and the kind of art they generate.

accept that the story itself is not a straightforward confirmation of the Schopenhauerian/Nietzschean view, any more than 'Der Sandmann' is a straightforward validation of Nathanael's philosophical musings. By the same token, we can suppose that Aschenbach, like Mann himself, was a keen reader of Plato, and conclude that the whole of the erotic adventure with Tadzio – which, as Reed notes, is informed by Diotima's understanding of the power of *το καλόν* – is his realization of notions expounded in *Symposium*. Once again: a story which leads us to believe that its apparent meaning is no more than the manifestation of a character's psychology is, necessarily, a story which refuses to underwrite that meaning. Alternatively, we can accept that the story itself realizes, independently of Aschenbach, sometimes a Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean meaning, sometimes a Platonic meaning. Because *Der Tod in Venedig* does not allow us to adjudicate between a naturalistic and a supernatural interpretation of its events, it refuses to vouch for the metaphysics of which the supernatural is a manifestation.

Perhaps the best route to an interpretation of *Der Tod in Venedig's* meaning is by an examination of its protagonist and the way he is represented. Various critics have taken the view that Aschenbach is an Apollonian writer and understand the classicizing style of parts of the novella to be an expression of the protagonist's own sensibility. Reed points out that this style fulfils a literary ambition which Mann himself had once taken seriously: 'Was there not, among the temptations which Mann-Aschenbach underwent, a pressure to move away from the analytical to the beauties of the surface, to plastic recreation and richness of detail? We know there was.' (Reed 1976, 174) However, the differences between Nietzsche's Apollonian artist and the mature Aschenbach are hard to overlook, for *Geburt der Tragödie* adopts the Schopenhauerian doctrine, according to which a value-free noumenal realm ('Wille') opposes a value-free phenomenal realm ('Vorstellung'), so that neither the Dionysian, as representative of the former, nor the Apollonian, as representative of the latter, recognizes any place for morality in art. *Geburt der Tragödie* is by no means a model of harmonious theorizing, but on this point it is unambiguous. Of Apollonian art Nietzsche says: 'Hier erinnert nichts an Askese, Geistigkeit und Pflicht: hier redet nur ein üppiges, ja triumphierendes Dasein zu uns,

in dem alles Vorhandene vergöttlicht ist, gleichviel ob es gut oder böse ist.’¹⁴¹ But it is quite clear that the mature Aschenbach, considered as a writer, is first and foremost a moralist and not merely a connoisseur and purveyor of beautiful superficialities. If Mann wants us to consider his fictional avatar as ‘Apollonian’, then he and Nietzsche must mean something quite different by the term.¹⁴²

Let us consider Aschenbach’s literary career. He began it in the following fashion:

Er hatte dem Geiste gefrönt, mit der Erkenntnis Raubbau getrieben, Saatfrucht vermahlen, Geheimnisse preisgegeben, das Talent verdächtigt, die Kunst verraten, – ja, während seine Bildwerke die gläubig Genießenden unterhielten, erhoben, belebten, hatte er, der jugendliche Künstler, die Zwanzigjährigen durch seine Zynismen über das fragwürdige Wesen der Kunst, des Künstlertums selbst in Atem gehalten. (2.1, 512 -13)

What is meant by the ‘Geist’ to which Aschenbach was once indentured? Not, surely, that ideal, universal, progressive property which goes by this name in Mann’s later works.¹⁴³ The reference is rather to a Schopenhauerian/Nietzschean power of analysis and exposure which the protagonist of ‘Tonio Kröger’ – a novella which focuses par excellence on the ‘fragwürdige Wesen der Kunst, des Künstlertums selbst’ – believes

¹⁴¹ (Nietzsche 1 1988, 34-35) Nietzsche goes on to say that he means by Apollonian exactly the same thing that Schiller meant by naïve: ‘Wo uns das “Naive” in der Kunst begegnet, haben wir die höchste Wirkung der apollinischen Cultur zu erkennen[...]Aber wie selten wird das Naive, jenes völlige Verschlungensein in der Schönheit des Scheines, erreicht!’ (Nietzsche 1, 37) What Mann, by contrast, means by Apollonian is something close to Schiller’s ‘sentimental’. This very anti-Nietzschean view of the Apollonian had already been proposed by Ricarda Huch in a work known to Mann: *Blütezeit der Romantik*. Sandberg points out that Mann marked the following passage in his own copy of *Blütezeit der Romantik* with ‘Randanstreichung, Unterstreichung und zwei Ausrufzeichen.’ (Sandberg 1991, 88) In contrast to the Dionysian poet, writes Huch, ‘der apollinische Dichter ist ärmer und kälter, aber er hat die Form in seiner Gewalt, und deshalb wird sein Werk die Herzen im ersten Augenblick weniger entzünden, aber es wird leben und dauern. Die Form ist das Organische und wird aus dem Unbewußten heraus geschaffen, die feinste Bildung und Fülle des Geistes kann sie nicht geben; *der Körper muß aus dem körperlichen geboren werden.*’ (Huch 1899, 113-114) The compatibility of that last sentiment with a Platonic aesthetic is hard to overlook.

¹⁴² In the ‘Literatur Essay’ Mann sets up a table of ‘Gegensätze’. There we find ‘Natur’ opposed to ‘Geist’, ‘Wille’ opposed to ‘Vorstellung’, ‘Naiv’ opposed to ‘Sentimental’, ‘Realismus’ opposed to ‘Idealismus’. (Mann 1967, 218) It is clear that these pairs do not fully coincide – we have seen how different Schopenhauer’s metaphysic is from that of Schiller – but it is equally clear that Mann thinks of them all as being in some way equivalent. Certainly he has no compunction about using one set of opposita as a surrogate for another. The result is that Apollo, who for Nietzsche represents the tranquil appreciation of the phenomenal world (‘Vorstellung’), can represent for Mann not only this but also ‘Geist’, the ‘Sentimental’, and ‘Idealismus’.

¹⁴³ But not just in his later works: *Der Tod in Venedig* itself often anticipates such a sense: ‘Nur ewiges Zigeunertum findet es langweilig und ist zu spotten geneigt, wenn ein großes Talent dem libertinischen Puppenstande entwächst, die Würde des Geistes ausdrucksvoll wahrzunehmen sich gewöhnt.’ (2.1, 514)

to be his chief literary duty. If we were to choose a category for the young Aschenbach within Mann's mature analytical taxonomy, then it would have to be that of the 'Natur' artist. For Mann – even in 'Goethe und Tolstoi' which he evidently intends should champion its subjects – goes much further than Schiller in emphasizing the value-free character of such writers, and is happy to point out their amorality, even their wickedness, when seen from the vantage-point of 'Geist'.¹⁴⁴ And we remember that Goethe (always according to Mann) does not merely revel in the phenomenal world, but also takes a sardonic pleasure in showing the human beings who insist on their unique independence from it that they are just one animal species amongst many.

But if the young Aschenbach is a 'Natur' artist, what of his later development? We are told that he rejects his earlier dalliance with naturalism, convinced as he is that 'die schwermütig gewissenhafteste Gründlichkeit des Jünglings Seichtheit bedeutet im Vergleich mit dem tiefen Entschlusse des Meister gewordenen Mannes' (2.1, 513) and it is in this spirit that he writes (amongst other works of a similar character) 'Ein Elender':

Die Wucht des Wortes, mit welchem hier das Verworfenen verworfen wurde, verkündete die Abkehr von allem moralischen Zweifelsinn, von jeder Sympathie mit dem Abgrund, die Absage an die Laxheit des Mitleidssatzes, daß alles verstehen alles verzeihen heiße[...]seltsame Zusammenhänge! War es eine geistige Folge dieser 'Wiedergeburt', dieser neuen Würde und Strenge, daß man um dieselbe Zeit ein fast übermässiges Erstarken seines Schönheitssinnes beobachtete, jene adelige Reinheit, Einfachheit und Ebenmässigkeit der Formgebung, welche seinen Produkten fortan ein so sinnfälliges,¹⁴⁵ ja gewolltes Gepräge der Meisterlichkeit und Klassizität verlieh?¹⁴⁶

He has gone from one extreme to another. If the younger Aschenbach is a literary exemplar of what Schiller terms in *Ästhetische Erziehung* a 'Wilder': someone who recognizes 'die Natur als seinen unumschränkten Gebieter', (Schiller 1992, 567) then

¹⁴⁴ 'Der Geist ist gut. Die Natur ist es durchaus nicht. Sie ist böse würde man sagen, wenn moralische Kategorien in Hinsicht auf sie überhaupt statthaft wären.' (15.1, 871)

¹⁴⁵ It is worth emphasizing that the word 'sinnfällig' has nothing to do with sensuality – which would go against the general tendency of this passage – but refers to ease of *intelligibility*. 'Sinnfällig (Adj.): einleuchtend, leicht verständlich.' (Duden Universalwörterbuch 1989)

¹⁴⁶ (2.1, 513-514) 'Classicism' is another treacherous term whose meaning has to be decided according to the context in which it is employed. Whereas Goethe – no doubt with Homer and the tradition of epic poetry in mind – took it to be an equivalent of Schiller's naïve, Mann – assuredly with Plato in mind – takes it to be an equivalent of Schiller's sentimental.

the elderly Aschenbach is just as surely a literary exemplar of the ‘Barbar’: someone who makes absolutely no compromise with the phenomenal world but subjugates it to the dominion of values beyond it. What, after all, does ‘moralischer Zweifelsinn’ entail if not the persuasion that moral values lack all metaphysical guarantee, in accordance with a philosophical outlook ‘welche es wagt, die Moral selbst in die Welt der Erscheinung zu setzen, herabzusetzen’,¹⁴⁷ what does the ‘Mitleidssatz’ that ‘alles verstehen alles verzeihen heiße’ entail if not the recognition that human beings are wholly natural creatures bound by the same necessity which governs the rest of the observable universe, that they lack the freedom which is a postulate of morality? Conversely, how can a sincere rejection of that ‘moralischen Zweifelsinn’ and that ‘Mitleidssatz’ be accomplished which is not at the same time an acceptance of a noumenal freedom to act in accordance with genuine benchmarks of value? And linked to this moral ‘Würde’ and ‘Strenge’ is his newfound artistic sensibility which is, likewise, a non-phenomenal one. Instead of revelling in a profusion of naturalistic detail the elderly Aschenbach subjects his material to clarification and simplification until it conforms to ideal criteria.

What was it that motivated the change from naturalism to moralism, from the degenerate naïve to the severely sentimental? This insight, surely: that the persuasion that the world is bereft of all meaning necessarily deprives literary endeavour of its sense of mission and leaves the conscientious writer in a state of creative enervation.¹⁴⁸ The matter is well put by Aschenbach’s Socrates who towards the end of the novella explains that, ‘die Erkenntnis, Phaidros, hat keine Würde und Strenge; sie ist wissend, verstehend, verzeihend, ohne Haltung und Form; sie hat Sympathie mit dem Abgrund, sie *ist* der Abgrund.’ (2.1, 589) Such ‘Erkenntnis’, of course, could never sustain a sense of artistic duty, which it would, on the contrary, be bound to regard as vanity. When Aschenbach ‘lets himself go’ in Venice, to the point where ‘der Gedanke an[...]Besonnenheit, Nüchternheit, Mühsal und Meisterschaft widerte ihn in solchem Maße, daß sein Gesicht sich zum Ausdruck physischer Übelkeit verzerrte’ (2.1, 581) he is reliving, at a personal rather than at a literary level this time,

¹⁴⁷ (Nietzsche I, 17-18) The quoted phrase forms part of Nietzsche’s description of an element essential to his own philosophical outlook: that ‘nur als ästhetisches Phänomen die Welt gerechtfertigt ist’. (Nietzsche I, 17)

¹⁴⁸ ‘Es scheint, daß gegen nichts ein edler und tüchtiger Geist sich rascher, sich gründlicher abstumpft als gegen den scharfen, den bitteren Reiz der Erkenntnis.’ (2.1, 513)

that inability to critique and act upon the phenomenal world which once weakened his powers of sustained literary creation.

If the mature Aschenbach is a 'Geistessohn', then he is one by adoption and not to the manner born. And the uncompromising severity of his morality, the ideal purity of his artistry, are best understood in the light of Schiller's disquisition on 'Würde' in *Über Anmut und Würde* – where this quality is defined as essentially defensive. Unlike 'Anmut', which denotes that the noumenal has so thoroughly penetrated the phenomenal that it can realize itself without the least show of effort or severity, 'Würde' denotes the struggle of a noumenal under siege from a phenomenal which threatens to overcome it at every moment. Which is to say that it denotes an insufficiency: 'Da aber das Ideal vollkommener Menschheit keinen Widerstreit, sondern Zusammenstimmung zwischen dem Sittlichen und Sinnlichen fodert, so verträgt es sich nicht wohl mit der Würde, die, als ein Ausdruck jenes Widerstreits zwischen beiden, entweder die besondern Schranken des Subjekts oder die allgemeinen der Menschheit sichtbar macht.' (Schiller 1992, 382) Schiller is not, of course, entirely negative about 'Würde', any more than he is entirely negative about the severity of Kant's view of morality, but he evidently both fears for it and distrusts it – a distrust which finds its expression in his description of the 'Barbar' in *Ästhetische Erziehung*: 'Der Barbar[...]fährt[...]häufig genug fort, der Sklave seines Sklaven zu sein.' (Schiller 1992, 567) The clear implication of 'Sklave seines Sklaven' is that the 'Barbar' is often a hypocrite,¹⁴⁹ and the biography of Aschenbach as writer in the second chapter of 'Der Tod in Venedig' lends substance to the same suspicion with regard to his moralism. For if Aschenbach's decision to reject value-free naturalism in favour of a 'Würde' predicated on the metaphysical and evaluative – if that decision arose not from an unforced belief in 'Geist' but rather from the need to be productive, is it not vulnerable to the accusation of insincerity? We are told that his 'ganzes Wesen auf Ruhm gestellt war' (2.1, 508) so that when it is explained a

¹⁴⁹ This is true of the Moses of 'Das Gesetz', for example, who thinks nothing of laying down the law regarding all sorts of sexual impropriety to the Israelites, but keeps a 'Mohrin' as a mistress. When Miriam and Aaron reproach him with this, though, he answers, 'Was Gott mir auferlegt zu sein, das bin ich. Wie häßlich, daß ihr mir meine Lust mißgönnt und die Entspannung an meiner Mohrin Brüsten! Denn es ist keine Sünde vor Gott, und ist kein Verbot unter allen Verboten, die er mir eingab, daß man bei einer Mohrin nicht liegen solle. Nicht, daß ich wüsste.' To which his accusers reply, 'er suche sich die Verbote aus nach eigenem Geschmack und werde wohl nächstens noch aufstellen, daß es geradezu geboten sei, bei Mohrinnen zu liegen.' (VIII, 857)

little later that an author's success depends on the consonance between his destiny and that of his readership, we wonder whether Aschenbach, fully aware of the fact, has consciously mimicked the public mood. At any rate there is a strong suggestion that his new-found morality is defensive and factitious in character.

Schopenhauer vs. Plato

With this in mind we can see that the supernatural, once its presence in the novella is accepted, might support a Schopenhauerian interpretation. Aschenbach is just a human being, a phenomenal expression of Schopenhauer's 'Wille' – and thus a creature not essentially different from all the others which inhabit the observable universe. When still a novice writer he was only too happy to espouse this truth, but the mature Aschenbach has the hubris to set himself above both the cause-and-effect realm of the senses and also above that striving noumenal force which gives rise to the realm of the senses while imparting to it an identical amoral character. The disguised and recurring Hermes who both launches the adventure and sets his seal on it is just what his close association with Dionysos would suggest he is: an agent for the 'Wille' in the phenomenal world, with a brief to humiliate high-minded moral and aesthetic pretensions. And who would be a more likely quarry for such a Hermes than the mature Aschenbach, with his insistence on the absolute and the ideal? Socrates, in the second interlude, bemoans the fact that the artist's love of ideal beauty ('will sagen der Einfachheit, Größe und neuen Strenge' (2.1, 589) ensnares him by a fatal misapprehension in the toils of sensual beauty (a 'Gefühlsfrevel, den seine eigene schöne Strenge als infam verwirft').¹⁵⁰ But whereas the imagined Socrates explains the matter in general terms, so that according to him the artist's predicament arises naturally from the contradictions in an artistic vocation, who is the particular culprit in Aschenbach's degradation, if not Hermes himself? It is he who inspires Aschenbach with 'Reiselust' (the man on the chapel steps), he who habituates Aschenbach to the idea that he would do better to let things run their course and foreswear intervention

¹⁵⁰ (2.1, 589) Clearly, the notion that the ideal leads to the sensual has nothing to do with Plato's Socrates.

(the gondolier),¹⁵¹ he who sets him on to both recognize and accept the character of his feelings for Tadzio (the leader of the troupe of street-singers).¹⁵²

This is surely a persuasive reading of *Der Tod in Venedig* – and all the more so in the light of Schopenhauer's conviction that his own doctrine is fully compatible with the supernatural (which he takes quite seriously) in a way that a purely phenomenal understanding of the world is not. Here is how he explains ghostly interference in the world of the living:

Wollten wir[...]den von so vielen und so verschiedenen Seiten erzählten und beteuerten Vorfällen, die entschieden eine objektive Einwirkung Verstorbenen anzeigen, einige Wahrheit einräumen; so müßten wir uns die Sache so erklären, daß in solchen Fällen der Wille des Verstorbenen noch immer leidenschaftlich auf die irdischen Angelegenheiten gerichtet wäre und nun in Ermangelung aller physischen Mittel zur Einwirkung auf dieselben jetzt seine Zuflucht nähme zu der ihm in seiner ursprünglichen, also metaphysischen Eigenschaft, mithin im Tode wie im Leben zustehenden *magischen* Gewalt.¹⁵³

And, if *Der Tod in Venedig* is indeed a tale in which the Schopenhauerian 'Wille' manifests itself directly in the world of 'Vorstellung' then it is by no means unexampled in supernatural literature. Arthur Machen, for example, had published in 1890 'The Great God Pan', a short story whose debt to Schopenhauer is hard to overlook. In it a young woman is subjected to an operation which allows her to see the real world underlying the apparent one and promptly goes insane.¹⁵⁴ It transpires

¹⁵¹ 'Was war zu tun? Allein auf der Flut mit dem sonderbar unbotmäßigen, unheimlich entschlossenen Menschen, sah der Reisende kein Mittel, seinen Willen durchzusetzen.' (2.1, 525)

¹⁵² 'Aschenbach ruhte nicht mehr im Stuhl, er saß aufgerichtet wie zum Versuche der Abwehr oder Flucht. Aber das Gelächter, der heraufwehende Hospitalgeruch und Nähe des Schönen verwoben sich ihm zu einem Traumbann, der unzerreißbar und unentrinnbar sein Haupt, seinen Sinn umfängen hielt.' Then, having met Tadzio's gaze: 'Diese kindliche und beziehungsvolle Folgsamkeit hatte etwas so Entwaffnendes, Überwältigendes, daß der Grauhaarige sich mit Mühe enthielt, sein Gesicht in den Händen zu verbergen.' (2.1, 576) The following day, Aschenbach, who has discovered that cholera is abroad in Venice, decides that he would rather know Tadzio in mortal danger, but have him, than be assured of his safety, but lose him.

¹⁵³ (Schopenhauer IV, 369) Plato also accounts for the supernatural in philosophical terms. In *Phaedo* Socrates explains that after death 'the soul which is full of desire for the body[...]hovers around the body and the visible world for a long time, with many struggles and sufferings, before being dragged off, by force and with great difficulty, by its appointed guardian.' (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 200)

¹⁵⁴ 'There is a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision[...]beyond them as beyond a veil. I do not know whether any human being has ever lifted that veil; but I do know[...]that you and I shall see it lifted this very night from before another's eyes. You may think all this strange nonsense; it may be strange, but it is true, and the ancients knew what lifting the veil means. They called it seeing the god Pan.' (Machen 1964, 62) One only need reflect on the etymological implications of the name

in the course of the story that she has gone on to have a daughter (a woman of extraordinary beauty going by the name of Helen Vaughan) who is responsible for a string of suicides: each of the men who dally with her hangs himself in desperation.¹⁵⁵ She is, in fact, an agent of a dreadful metaphysical reality abroad in the phenomenal realm, with a mission to corrupt and humiliate it. When she is finally tracked down and destroyed she demonstrates in her death-agony a complete freedom from any particular phenomenal form, as one of her persecutors, Dr. Matheson, explains.

Here too was all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes. I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed. (Machen 1964, 110-111)

‘The Great God Pan’ is no doubt a rather lurid fictional expression of Schopenhauerian thinking. But there can be no question about its philosophical ancestry, just as there can be no question that it assumes a close relationship between the metaphysical and the supernatural.

In chapter II it was pointed out that traditionally supernatural fiction also assumes a close relationship between ghosts, gods and demons and the metaphysical. But the metaphysic such fiction draws upon is, as one would expect, of the traditional variety: the evaluative metaphysic which we have seen both Plato and Kant try in their different ways to elucidate and organize. Because supernatural beings are not wholly part of the phenomenal world they are not subject to its necessity and are thus susceptible to moral analysis, so that their behaviour can be with propriety lauded or reprehended. Their unambiguous presence in a story lends it a moral complexion, and when the dead return to exact revenge, to right wrongs, or to do penance, they are not merely the rightful subjects of an evaluative regime but also its agents and emissaries. Schopenhauer’s noumenal realm by contrast is in no sense evaluative. The ‘Wille’ understands nothing of right and wrong and though it is of course free of the necessity

Pan to see why Machen chose this pagan god over Dionysos and Hermes as representative of an all-present metaphysical reality.

¹⁵⁵ The connection between ‘Wille’ and sexuality is as clear in Machen’s short story as it is in Mann’s novella.

which governs the phenomenal realm it is not free *of its own character*, a character which begins and ends in blind, ceaseless striving. Schopenhauer's system accounts for what is generally regarded as morality in terms of sympathy, but this is just a feeling – engendered by a reluctance on the part of the 'Wille' in certain of its instantiations to increase its own suffering as experienced by certain other of its instantiations – which, though it sometimes gains the upper hand over egotism, is no better than egotism. As for a belief in a world of values along Platonic lines or in a world of freedom along Kantian lines, Schopenhauer sometimes pours scorn on it, sometimes commiserates with the sorry facts of life which bring it about, but he does not – except, perhaps, at the very end of his philosophical journey, and then grudgingly – subscribe to it.

The result is, that when the Schopenhauerian metaphysic manifests itself as the supernatural it is a wholly amoral force, and its tendency is to annihilate not the morality of the phenomenal realm (for the postulates of genuine morality, freedom and values, are not present there – in this matter at least Plato, Kant and Schopenhauer are in complete agreement) but the *pretensions* to morality which subsist in the phenomenal realm. We mentioned earlier that the mature Aschenbach's unyieldingly worthy classicism might be regarded as hubris by a supernatural agent of the 'Wille', but this should not be taken to imply that he deserves punishment for falling short of some sort of noumenal criterion. For whereas a nineteenth-century ghost story typically lays low its protagonist's scepticism and materialism for his or our alarmed edification, there can be no question of a truly Schopenhauerian supernatural doing anything of the kind. If Aschenbach's pretensions to moral and aesthetic severity are humbled by the 'Wille', then it is to no other purpose than the vindictive exposure of delusory meaning and the affirmation of authentic meaninglessness. What conclusion could Aschenbach draw from such an experience but that, in point of fact, nothing stands in the way of the indulgence of his appetites and emotions but a chimera, or, at its most substantial, a fellow-feeling which though it might sometimes struggle *on an equal footing* against other feelings has no right to preside over them?

That, however, is not how Aschenbach regards his predicament: the second Socratic interlude is an expression of appalled remorse at the betrayal of values still held dear. It is certainly not an expression of disabused complacency occasioned by the

discovery that those values were never more than phenomena amongst phenomena. Which is to say, he regards the exposure and annihilation of morality in a thoroughly moral way. Is Aschenbach's offended propriety in respect of his own conduct to be regarded as nothing more than an inconsistency, as something quite at odds with the general thrust of a Schopenhauerian novella? The answer, it seems, is both 'yes' and 'no'. It would certainly be at odds with an unequivocally Schopenhauerian perspective – which, though it includes the possibility of a life-denying 'Erkenntnis' excludes that of genuinely moral evaluation. But it is not at odds with *Der Tod in Venedig* because the latter deploys throughout a Platonic metaphysic of meaning as a rival to a Schopenhauerian metaphysic of meaninglessness.

Reed points out that *Der Tod in Venedig* owes a good deal to Plato's *Symposium* – in which Eros is declared to be the means of attaining knowledge of the ultimately good and beautiful. Diotima's Eros personifies the state-of-soul of the lover: 'he's always poor, and so far from being soft and beautiful (which is most people's view of him), he is hard, unkempt, barefoot, homeless[...]need is his constant companion' (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 37) but, as she concedes, this is not the way he is traditionally represented, which is, of course, as a beautiful pubescent male.¹⁵⁶ At any rate, there is much to be said for Reed's hypothesis that 'it is even possible to see Tadzio in the role of Eros – the god Plato calls young and delicate – before his function as Aschenbach's guide to death made the analogy with Hermes conductor of souls to the underworld seem more appropriate.'¹⁵⁷ For Diotima herself reveals how fundamentally compatible are Plato's Eros and Mann's Hermes.¹⁵⁸ According to her Eros is

something between a mortal and an immortal,[...]a great spirit, Socrates. Spirits are midway between what is divine and what is human.' *Socrates*: 'What power does such a spirit possess?'

¹⁵⁶ More generally, it is normal to confuse desire and object of desire. If one speaks of 'one's love' one may be referring to the person one loves or the feelings one has for that person.

¹⁵⁷ (Reed 1996, 162) The description of Eros Reed refers to is attributed by Plato to Agathon, whose views in this regard, although they lack the imprimatur of Socrates' approval, are the ones which Mann adopts. Reed notes that the words 'Jung ist der Gott, und seine Gestalt von zarter Bildung' (Plato 1903, 38) – Kassner's translation of νέος μὲν οὖν ἔστι, πρὸς δὲ τῷ νέῳ ἀπαλός (195 c6) – are underlined in Mann's copy of *Symposium*. It is possible that it was the appropriate ambiguity of the word 'Bildung' (which has no counterpart in the original) which drew the phrase to Mann's attention, given that Tadzio as Eros is both delicately beautiful and performs a gently educative function.

¹⁵⁸ Tadzio is a close physical match for the classical Hermes: 'et crines flavos et membra decora iuventae.' (*Aeneid* IV 559)

Diotima: ‘He acts as an interpreter and means of communication between gods and men. He takes requests and offerings to the gods, and brings back instructions and benefits in return. Occupying this middle position he plays a vital role in holding the world together. (Plato (translator: Tom Griffith) 1997, 36)

To express the matter in mythological terms (as Diotima does in the above passage) both Eros and Hermes belong equally to the celestial and to the earthly realm. Their role is to maintain communications between the two and reconcile the differences between them. To express the matter more philosophically (which Diotima goes on to do with regard to Eros) they both lead mankind to a knowledge of and a communion with the authentically valuable, but they do so by the exploitation and education of humanity’s natural tendencies rather than by the denunciation and denial of those tendencies.¹⁵⁹ Both are fitting embodiments of Schiller’s ‘Spieltrieb’, that creative spirit which moves freely between hostile principles to effect an otherwise impossible reconciliation.

What now becomes apparent is that the supernatural (admitting its presence) in *Der Tod in Venedig* will support an interpretation radically different from the Schopenhauerian one. Instead of Hermes being an emissary of the ‘Wille’ he is, on the contrary, an emissary of an ideal realm. He is no longer the malevolent figure whom we saw seduce Aschenbach – abetted by the latter’s delusions of moral grandeur – from the paths of moral and artistic rectitude into an abyss of sensual excess. Instead he is a benevolent figure whom we see charm Aschenbach – abetted by the latter’s carnal frailty – *out* of the abyss of sensual excess and on to higher and better things. Just consider how the novella ends. Socrates in his second interlude confesses to Phaedrus that ‘wir vermögen nicht, uns aufzuschwingen, wir vermögen nur uns auszuschweifen’ (2.1, 589) and bids his companion a shamefaced farewell. But the next and final scene presents us with what Reed calls ‘the suggestion of an apotheosis’. (Reed 1976, 162) Aschenbach looks on as Tadzio – Tadzio, whom he had previously refused to safeguard by warning his mother of the cholera epidemic – is

¹⁵⁹ Eros induces us to seek το καλόν first amongst its lower, then amongst its higher instantiations, as a preparation for an encounter with this principle in its purity. He does not – which is what Schiller accuses Kant of doing – overmatch humanity’s weakness with a precocious revelation of absolute value. And we have seen what Pharaos says about Hermes, that he is ‘ein Gott des freundlichen Zufalls[...]und des lachenden Fundes, Segen spendend und Wohlstand, so redlich oder ein bißchen auch fälschlich erworben, wie es das Leben erlaube, ein Ordner und Führer, der durch die Windungen führe der Welt, rückwärts lächelnd mit aufgehobenem Stabe.’ (V, 1428)

physically overcome by the more virile Jaschu: ‘Entsetzt wollte Aschenbach zur Rettung aufspringen, als der Gewalttätige endlich sein Opfer freigab.’ (2.1, 591) And then Tadzio, who had seemed on the point of expiring altogether, regains his feet and composure, makes his way to the sandbar, stands before the open sea, and looks over his shoulder at his suitor. ‘Ihm war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche Psychagog dort draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke; als ob er, die Hand aus der Hüfte lösend, hinausdeute, voranschwebe ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure. Und, wie so oft, machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen. (2.1, 592) If there is a battle in *Der Tod in Venedig* between Schopenhauerian and Platonic interpretations, then it is clear which has the last word.

The situation, then, is one of unusual complexity. Considering the point in his theoretical development at which this story was written, it is not surprising to find Mann hesitating between a Platonic empyrean and a Schopenhauerian ‘Wille’. And once we accept that different philosophical frameworks do indeed obtain in different episodes, then we can grasp why Hermes seems to be following two contrary policies, each of which is bound to impede the realization of the other. But can we propose this ‘external’ explanation of Hermes and his actions in *Der Tod in Venedig* without conceding that the story is internally inconsistent? Such inconsistency, it is true, disappears the moment we discount the supernatural hypothesis and fall back on a naturalistic, psychological explanation of events. According to this, Aschenbach’s own reading of philosophy and classical mythology leads him to associate an entirely imaginary Hermes sometimes with Schopenhauer, sometimes with Plato – and it is surely not a fault on Mann’s part if the paranoid protagonist of this novella fails to notice the inconsistency of his own delusions. But we have already seen that *Der Tod in Venedig* – though like all works of the fantastic it leaves open the possibility of a purely psychological explanation – provides plenty of evidence to strengthen a supernatural interpretation of Aschenbach’s adventure. Furthermore, as with ‘The Turn of the Screw’, to dispute the supernatural too thoroughly is to dispute that the story has any meaning at all: what was apparently meaningful turns out to be a concatenation of phenomena and nothing more.

Alternatively, we might attempt to vindicate the story by recourse to the weaker supernatural hypothesis mentioned in chapter II, according to which what we have

regarded as various manifestations of Hermes (the red-headed apparitions, Tadzio himself) are nothing of the kind. Rather, they are banal human beings whose mysterious allure would disappear completely if we could investigate their life-stories and personalities, but who none the less play their part in a destiny which our phenomenal analysis is as powerless to detect as our sense of moral consequence is anxious to divine. But this hardly helps matters: such an intentionality would be at war with itself, Aschenbach's destiny being simultaneously to descend into the maelstrom of sensuality and humiliation and to ascend to a seventh heaven of spiritual beauty. And while a Platonic or Kantian evaluative metaphysic is certainly compatible with a sense of destiny (even an evil destiny) the same cannot be said of Schopenhauer's 'Wille', which, while we can well imagine it impulsively projecting Hermes as a cat's-paw into the phenomenal realm to crush there an individual who has dared challenge its might, cannot be credited with the freedom and susceptibility to moral adjudication indispensable to our sense that the world we perceive is as pregnant with meaning as we consider ourselves to be. Would we, then, be justified in considering *Der Tod in Venedig* a rich, intriguing, but theoretically undigested work?

'Spieltrieb'

Perhaps, having tried in vain to reconcile the Schopenhauerian and Platonic interpretations of the novella, we should see what Schiller can do as intermediary. For a good many of *Der Tod in Venedig's* contradictions disappear if we remember that Hermes is a commutative figure and that his back-and-forth between the noumenal and the phenomenal makes of him the perfect mentor for Aschenbach – an artist who has so misunderstood the role of art as 'Spieltrieb', as negotiator between the noumenal and the phenomenal, that his later works are as exclusively devoted to 'Geist' as his earlier ones were to 'Natur'.¹⁶⁰ This devotion to 'Geist', this 'Würde'

¹⁶⁰ It might be objected that Hermes can hardly negotiate between the noumenal and phenomenal realms by allying himself sometimes with a Schopenhauerian 'Wille', sometimes with a Platonic empyrean – for are not *both* of these noumenal? That is so, of course, but we must bear in mind that Mann viewed the 'Wille' as a nature-metaphysic – good for explaining the striving, amoral character of the natural world and of human beings regarded as part of that world, but quite incompatible with the pretensions of 'Geist'. And a nature-metaphysic has this advantage over nature understood as exclusively phenomenal: that it allows for the natural-supernatural – a paradoxical concept but one familiar to Mann, who describes Goethe's uncanny sensitivity to weather in the following terms: 'Sie ist jener fast übertriebenen sinnlichen Begabtheit zuzurechnen und geht ins Okkult-Natursichtige über,

goes beyond a reluctance to forgive every weakness, misdemeanour and crime on the grounds that these are only the inevitable effects of given causes; it refuses to admit them into consciousness – or at least into language – at all. As Hermann Luft (whose treatise *Der Konflikt zwischen Geist und Sinnlichkeit in Thomas Manns 'Tod in Venedig'* informs the perspective on Aschenbach's artistic career adopted here) puts the matter: 'Hier ging eine gewagte Stilisierung des Lebens vor sich, die es ablehnte, das innere Wesen des Menschen zu verstehen, zu erkennen oder zu akzeptieren, weil es Aschenbachs moralischem Ideal nicht entsprach.' (Luft 1976, 25) The policy of rejecting in the name of morality the world's imperfection, rather than morally engaging with such imperfection, is, as the narrator points out, itself ethically dubious, and it has reduced Aschenbach's style to a repetitive caricature of classicism.¹⁶¹

Etwas Amtlich-Erzieherisches trat mit der Zeit in Gustav Aschenbachs Vorführungen ein, sein Stil entriet in späteren Jahren der unmittelbaren Kühnheiten, der subtilen und neuen Abschattungen, er wandelte sich ins Mustergültig-Feststehende, Geschliffen-Herkömmliche, Erhaltende, Formelle, selbst Formelhafte und wie die Überlieferung von Ludwig XIV. wissen will, so verbannte der Alternde aus seiner Sprachweise jedes gemeine Wort. (2.1, 514-515)

The result of such extreme moral and aesthetic intolerance is that crisis of creativity which the very first paragraph of *Der Tod in Venedig* alludes to. At this point in a literary career which has from the beginning been pursued in a spirit of 'Durchhalten' Aschenbach, 'überreizt von der schwierigen und gefährlichen, eben jetzt eine höchste Behutsamkeit, Umsicht, Eindringlichkeit und Genauigkeit des Willens erfordernden Arbeit,' (2.1, 501) writes by dint of effort and determination and nothing else. More than this: it is all-too-evident that will-power can no longer make good the creative deficit which is the inevitable result of excluding from art its phenomenal *matter* in favour of articulating and reiterating immaculate criteria of value. Remembering what Schiller says about that '*Schwankung* zwischen beiden Prinzipien[...]wo bald

wenn er nachts in seinem Schlafzimmer zu Weimar das Erdbeben von Messina wittert. Auch der nervöse Apparat der Tiere vermag ja dergleichen Ereignisse vor- und mitzufühlen. Das Tierische transzendiert. Alle Transzendenz ist tierisch.' (15.1, 901) The 'Transzendenz' referred to is of evidently Schopenhauerian character. Dierks notes the competing metaphysics at work in 'Goethe und Tolstoi', (Dierks 1972, 74) but *Der Tod in Venedig* makes clear that their coexistence was a longstanding element of Mann's world-view by the time he came to write that essay.

¹⁶¹ 'Aber moralische Entschlossenheit jenseits des Wissens, der auflösenden und hemmenden Erkenntnis, – bedeutet sie nicht wiederum eine Vereinfachung, eine sittliche Vereinfältigung der Welt und der Seele und also auch ein Erstarren zum Bösen, Verbotenen, zum sittlich Unmöglichem?' (2.1, 514)

die Realität, bald die Form überwiegend ist,' we can see that Aschenbach has swung so far from the golden mean in the direction of 'Geist' that a compensatory correction, a re-acquaintance with the phenomenal world and with his own phenomenal self – in short with 'Natur' – has become necessary. We can see that, but it is not at all evident that the enervated Aschenbach of the opening paragraphs of the novella shares our insight. For what triggers his decision to begin the journey which will take him to Venice is not the conscious analysis on his part of a creative predicament, but (accepting a supernatural reading of these events) the apparition of Hermes himself, whose role is essentially tutelary. Only after this encounter does he conclude that his present difficulty is the final result of a mistaken artistic policy: 'Rächte sich nun also die geknechtete Empfindung, indem sie ihn verließ, indem sie seine Kunst fürder zu tragen und zu beflügeln sich weigerte und alle Lust, alles Entzücken an der Form und am Ausdruck mit sich hinwegnahm?'¹⁶²

It may seem rather astounding that the Hermes who appears as the snarling man on the chapel-steps, the menacing gondolier and the repulsive troupe-leader should be regarded as benevolent, that the supernatural presence who mocks and humiliates and destroys Aschenbach is really his guardian angel, but this is none the less the case. Hermes has two purposes in *Der Tod in Venedig*, both of them salutary. The less important is to correct the imbalance in the writer's 'Spieltrieb' by leading him into an erotic and sensual adventure absolutely at odds with the moral and aesthetic rigidity which have made of Aschenbach a copy-book favourite in German schools. The at least temporary achievement of this happy artistic medium is testified by the 'Abhandlung' which Aschenbach writes in Tadzio's presence – 'jene anderthalb Seiten erlesener Prosa[...]deren Lauterkeit, Adel und schwingende Gefühlspannung binnen kurzem die Bewunderung vieler erregen sollte.'¹⁶³ (2.1, 556) But an equally

¹⁶² (2.1, 506) Andrea Rudolph is one of few critics to have understood the importance of Schiller's theoretical works to *Der Tod in Venedig*. She writes: 'An die von Schiller beschriebene jeweils einseitige Akzentuierung des Verhältnisses von Geist und Willen auf der einen Seite und Sinnlichkeit und Natur auf der anderen Seite knüpft Thomas Mann sichtlich an, wenn er Aschenbachs Verirrungen beschreibt. Aschenbach hatte einst seine Empfindung "geknechtet", "das Gefühl gezügelt und gekältet", im Sinne Schillers unterdrückt, "was sinnlich ist". Auf diese Weise ist er zwar zu einer "Freiheit" gelangt, die ihm anscheinend wieder "Gelassenheit" ermöglicht. Seine "durch Vernunft und von jung auf geübte Selbstzucht" wird jedoch von "merklicher Gewalt und großer Anstrengung" begleitet.' (Rudolph 1991, 143)

¹⁶³ (2.1, 549) Luft puts the matter thus: ' "Geist und Sinnlichkeit" oder "Gedanken und Gefühl" halten sich die Waage. Die Einseitigkeit von Aschenbachs Künstlerwesen, wie sie im vorhergehenden Kapitel aufgezeigt wurde, ist damit aufgehoben.' (Luft 1976, 74)

strong testimony is that florescence of joyous – rather than forbidding – classical form and imagery which marks, for example, the opening paragraph of the fourth chapter of *Der Tod in Venedig*: ‘Nun lenkte Tag für Tag der Gott mit den hitzigen Wangen nackend sein gluthauchendes Viergespann durch die Räume des Himmels, und sein gelbes Gelock flatterte im zugleich ausstürmenden Ostwind etc.’ Aschenbach is here *living* a balanced sensibility which would, were he able to sustain it, completely transform his literary reputation.¹⁶⁴ But of course he cannot sustain it because, as the reference to Tadzio as ‘Idol’ suggests and as the second Socratic interlude makes clear, Aschenbach is afflicted by an incorrigible bias towards the emotional and the sensual. He has been able to keep this bias in check by the adoption of a rigid and creatively exhausting moral *posture*. But it has not gone away, and the moment he drops his guard lust and lassitude overcome his whole being, so that any sense of moral and artistic calling goes by the board and Aschenbach becomes a creature of appetite, desire, sensation, his classicism a hypocritical camouflage for yearnings that cannot be avowed.

And this brings us to the second of Hermes’ purposes, for which the first was an essential preparation. It is to lead Aschenbach away from a ‘Geist’ which is little more than a defensive and insincere strategy: a determination to say ‘no’ to the meaningless world of the senses in the name of a noumenal realm invoked but hardly believed in – and towards a communion with moral and aesthetic beauty which can only be reached by the full experience of their contrary. Aschenbach is made to drink the cup of disgrace to its dregs: to dog Tadzio through the streets of Venice, to enjoy a sense of complicity with the cholera contaminating the city, to refuse to alert Tadzio’s mother of the danger her child is in, to suffer the fascination of a dreamed Dionysian orgy at which the true character of his own motives is revealed to him, to have his hair dyed and his face smeared with cosmetics. It is because he has made this descent into

¹⁶⁴ In Mann’s copy of Schiller’s collected works, the following passage has been marked as important. What it says of the ‘Spieltrieb’ could as well be said of the Hermes-figures in *Der Tod in Venedig*: ‘Durch die Schönheit wird der sinnliche Mensch zur Form und zum Denken geleitet; durch die Schönheit wird der geistige Mensch zur Materie zurückgeführt und der Sinnlichkeit wiedergegeben.’ (Schiller IV 1911, 262)

the abyss, because his rue, in the character of Socrates, is sincere and not an impressive form of words,¹⁶⁵ that he is granted salvation.¹⁶⁶

This notion: that the mere cognizance of a truth is insufficient, that difficulties such as Aschenbach's must be lived through and not merely thought through, was of personal significance to Mann,¹⁶⁷ and recurs in his writings. An obvious example would be Hans Castorp's snow-dream, which yields the insight: 'Der Mensch soll um der Güte und Liebe willen dem Tode keine Herrschaft einräumen über seine Gedanken.' (5.1, 748) In terms of Castorp's own life this insight is without discernible consequence, and he almost immediately forgets it. But *Der Zauberberg* none the less looks forward to a profound change of heart and behaviour – on the far side of an *experienced* struggle between the forces of 'Tod' and 'Leben', 'Natur' and 'Geist' adumbrated by Castorp's vision and articulated, albeit fleetingly, by his conscious mind. In the last paragraphs of the 'Fülle des Wohllauts' chapter his devotion to the 'Zauberlied' is explained as a devotion to all that the song represents,¹⁶⁸ which is to say: that German tradition and German culture verbally rejected after the snow-dream. On both occasions they are identified with 'Der Tod' because this is how Mann now terms an uncritical attachment to what merely exists.¹⁶⁹ German tradition and German culture are phenomena which happen to have become enmeshed, through the chance of long acquaintance, with Castorp's own phenomenal self, and the continuing adoration of them signifies the hibernation of his noumenal self. The latter might one day come into its own, but only *after* patriotic devotion has reached a crisis of intensity: 'Es war so wert, dafür zu sterben, das Zauberlied! Aber wer dafür starb, der

¹⁶⁵ Instead of a 'Wucht des Wortes, mit welchem[...]das Verworfenen verworfen wurde' (2.1, 513) we hear only Socrates' downcast: 'Und nun gehe ich, Phaidros, bleibe du hier; und erst wenn du mich nicht mehr siehst, so gehe auch du.' (2.1, 589)

¹⁶⁶ It is hard not to be reminded of the crucified Christ in the Gospel of St Matthew (27: 45-6): 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' The most glorious of destinies is reached through the deepest pit of despair.

¹⁶⁷ He clearly believed that his democratic stance in the Weimar period was all the more valuable for having been achieved by way of the conservatism of *Betrachtungen*: 'Ich verleugne die "Betrachtungen" nicht und habe sie mit keinem Worte verleugnet, das ich nach ihrer Beendigung schrieb. Man verleugnet sein Leben, seine Erlebnisse nicht, verleugnet nicht das, was man durchgemacht hat, weil man es "durch" gemacht hat und – wenn nicht wesentlich, so doch willentlich – ein Stück darüber hinausgekommen ist.' (XII, 639)

¹⁶⁸ 'Das Lied bedeutete ihm viel, eine ganze Welt und zwar eine Welt, die er wohl lieben mußte, da er sonst in ihr stellvertretendes Gleichnis nicht so vernarrt gewesen wäre.' (5.1, 987)

¹⁶⁹ 'Tod' is equivalent in this context to 'Natur', which Mann, we remember, identified during the First World War and earlier with both 'Kultur' and Germany. It is also what he refers to as 'Leben' in 'Tonio Kröger'. During that earlier phase it was 'Geist' (Platonism and Christianity) which Mann – in accordance with Schopenhauerian doctrine – associated with death.

starb schon eigentlich nicht mehr dafür und war ein Held nur, weil er im Grunde schon für das Neue starb, das neue Wort der Liebe und der Zukunft in seinem Herzen.’ (5.1, 990) If we bear this pronouncement in mind, then the fact that when we last glimpse Castorp amidst the carnage of battle he is singing the ‘Zauberlied’ becomes intelligible – like Aschenbach he has taken his infatuation to its nadir in order to transcend it.¹⁷⁰

The supernatural in *Der Tod in Venedig*, though it seems to emanate from disparate and, we might object, mutually exclusive metaphysical realms, can none the less sustain the following integrated reading: Aschenbach’s travails are a necessary prelude to his salvation, and the premature assumption of an insincere ‘Geist’ is almost as reprehensible as an uncritical surrender to ‘Natur’. On the other hand, there is little doubt as to the proper upshot of the interaction between the evaluative noumenal and the value-free (but by no means to be despised) phenomenal – it is that vision of goodness and beauty which is Aschenbach’s last on earth. Hermes – for all his back-and-forth – is a celestial being, just as the ‘Spieltrieb’ is a manifestation of ‘Geist’, and it is thither his guidance tends by fair and unfair means. Not, of course, that we are obliged to accept such an interpretation. *Der Tod in Venedig* is not a work of allegory: its provisional meaning emerges freely from its fictional world, whereas the determinate meaning of an allegory is thrust with violence upon its fictional world (so that animals can talk or a young man and his friends fail to notice that a crude automaton isn’t really a young woman etc.) and thereby thrust upon the reader. It is characteristic of the fantastic, after all, to refrain from flouting the laws of nature. But it would be equally mistaken to think of *Der Tod in Venedig* as incapable of yielding a satisfactory meaning. If we look beneath its glossy surface we are at first surprised to discover a struggle of contradictory philosophical assumptions. But if we look yet deeper we can discern beneath the contradictions themselves a sustaining insight which, though it is never forced upon us, is present throughout the work.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Augenblicke kamen, wo dir aus Tod und Körperunzucht ein Traum von Liebe erwuchs. Wird auch aus diesem Weltfest des Todes, auch aus der schlimmen Fieberbrunst, die rings den regnerischen Abendhimmel entzündet, einmal die Liebe steigen?’ (5.1, 1085)

Chapter IV: *Joseph und seine Brüder*

The Naturalistic Reading of *Joseph*

In chapters II and III we asked the following questions in regard to *Der Tod in Venedig*: (1) does this work of fiction belong in the category of the fantastic as defined by Todorov and if it does (2) what kind of metaphysical and philosophical system underpins the supernatural aspect of the narrative? In this chapter the same questions will be asked in respect of *Joseph und seine Brüder*.

To begin with then: does the tetralogy give us any grounds for supposing that the supernatural is at work in the narrative – or is one of its purposes, on the contrary, to demonstrate that episodes which have traditionally been regarded as the result of divine providence can be better explained as the result of human psychology at the group and individual level? That is, ought *Joseph und seine Brüder* to be regarded as ‘The Turn of the Screw’ is sometimes regarded: as an attempt to debunk the supernatural? This question can hardly be evaded in view of the strongly naturalistic tendency of certain passages in the first two books in particular, in which the propensity of characters to accept an apparently destined role is explained in terms of inherited patterns of belief and identity.

Wir geben uns keiner Täuschung hin über die Schwierigkeit, von Leuten zu erzählen, die nicht recht wissen, wer sie sind; aber wir zweifeln nicht an der Notwendigkeit, mit einer solchen schwankenden Bewußtseinslage zu rechnen, und wenn der Isaak, der Abrahams ägyptisches Abenteuer wiedererlebte, sich für den Isaak hielt, den der Ur-Wanderer hatte opfern wollen, so ist das für uns kein bündiger Beweis, daß er sich nicht täuschte – es sei denn, die Opfer-Anfechtung habe zum Schema gehört und sich wiederholt zugetragen. (IV, 128)

Implied in such a hypothesis is the radical meaninglessness integral to naturalism. Isaac’s acts and experiences are not validated, as he thinks they are, by a religious and metaphysical context which lends significance to them. On the contrary those actions only seem meaningful to him by dint of their ingrained familiarity. The narrative traditions of his tribe have taught him how an Isaac typically behaves and when he manages to conform to the established pattern he feels his sense of identity and of his

special place in the scheme of things affirmed. But the pattern is simply a self-perpetuating state of affairs.

Consistent with this naturalistic explanation is Joseph's own sensitivity to myth as a cultural and psychological factor which he can exploit to his own ends. He stimulates the interest and evokes the sympathy of the powerful (whether it be the leader of a commercial caravanserai, the head of an aristocratic household, a prison-governor, or Pharaoh himself) by allusive appeals to the myths which condition their thoughts. For example, right at the beginning of his exile he manages to persuade the leader of the Mitanni-traders not only that he (Joseph) is of noble ancestry and position, but also that he will one day be restored to the glory he has lost. As the narrator explains:

Es ist einmal so, daß der Mensch ganz vorwiegend in Schablonen und Formeln fertigen Gepräges denkt, also nicht wie er sich's aussucht, sondern wie es gebräuchlich ist nach der Erinnerung, und schon indem der Alte von Jenem sprach, der da aus schöner Hoheit in Wüste und Elend getrieben wird, war er ins Göttlich-schablonenhafte geraten. (IV, 677)

And it is with a mind to exploit the tendency of human beings to think in 'Schablonen und Formeln' that Joseph a little later renames himself 'Usarsiph', a combination of his rightful name and Osiris. He has learned from the leader of the Mitanni-traders that the popular deity Osiris represents the power of resurrection for the Egyptians, and 'Usarsiph' slyly implies that Joseph too, though at first sight a lowly foreign minion, is in truth a temporarily eclipsed numinous presence who will one day come into his own. And whenever his superiors gain the impression that they are dealing with someone marked out for a high destiny, they render his path towards the acquisition of actual power and high social standing a little smoother. The leader of the Ismaelites who, persuaded of his slave's future greatness, places him in the house of a noble Egyptian, is only the first of many wielders of influence to help Joseph on his way.

Such passages as these can be called in evidence to support a purely naturalistic account of *Joseph und seine Brüder*. And we are all the more receptive to such an account when we read passages such as this one in 'Freud und die Zukunft' (an

address which is as much concerned, if not more, with the *Joseph* novels as with Freud):

Die Neigung, Wahrheit und Wissen psychologisch zu verstehen[...], die man wohl naturalistisch nennen und der Erziehung durch den literarischen Naturalismus zuschreiben muß, ist mir geblieben, und sie bildet eine Vorbedingung der Aufgeschlossenheit für die seelische Naturwissenschaft, die den Namen 'Psychoanalyse' trägt.¹⁷¹

The naturalistic, psychological interpretation of the tetralogy, then, is easily discerned. It is not the story of a young man who, with supernatural help, accomplishes a divine destiny. Rather, it is the story of a young man who, cherishing the delusion that he is a favourite of the God of his fathers while at the same time identifying and manipulating the religious delusions of others, achieves high social and political standing. And though Joseph himself might make a clear distinction between the superstitions of the ignorant and the God whom he is doing his best to reach and realize, the naturalistic current in the novel allows for no such distinction on our part. From a naturalistic perspective the God of Joseph is wholly explicable in phenomenal terms. He exists in the brains of human beings, nowhere else, and is the product of various material circumstances – biological evolution, cultural change, the quirks of individual psychology etc. The God of Joseph is, the naturalist must insist, as much a chimera as Osiris and Astaroth.

Taking their lead from such passages, certain critics have identified this naturalistic perspective as essential to the novel, while regarding the alternative perspective – the supernatural and metaphysical perspective – as scarcely present and, in so far as it is present, a mistake on Mann's part. Reed, for example, believes that the novel fails to integrate the psychological and the mythical, and declares that the former nullifies the latter. According to him *Joseph* is mostly just 'unmysterious surface-story heavily hinting at a piece of mythology', and he goes on to say, 'in character as well as author, myth and psychology have met. Myth cannot survive.' (Reed 1996, 345) However, given that so much of the tetralogy is devoted to the search for God, and

¹⁷¹ (IX, 481) It will be seen that Mann uses the term 'naturalism' in the same way it has been employed throughout this thesis to mean a strictly phenomenal analysis of human beings and the world they live in. Furthermore he acknowledges the aspiration of psychoanalysis to be a natural science – one which has no truck with the noumenal or the supernatural.

given that this religious mission underpins Joseph's sense of his place and role in the world just as surely as an unconscious adherence to tradition underpinned that of Isaac, does not the strictly naturalist analysis subvert the whole enterprise? Can a story so apparently dependent on a touchstone of meaning – the will and existence of God – for any particular significance it might have survive the destruction of that touchstone?

There have been attempts to answer the question of the tetralogy's meaning without reference to the religious and metaphysical, or which while accepting the terms 'religious' and 'metaphysical' do so only on the condition that their normal meaning be altered out of all recognition and utility. The view promoted by Raymond Cunningham's *Myth and Politics in Thomas Mann's 'Joseph und seine Brüder'* is that we can make out, if we put aside as irrelevant the novel's regrettable supernatural paraphernalia, a political and ethical agenda wholly explicable in naturalistic terms. That agenda prescribes the cultivation in inauspicious circumstances of an 'enlightened' attitude: the canny guidance of mythopoeic tendencies to achieve humanitarian ends. Cunningham concedes, it is true, that terms like 'Geist' and 'Seele' are metaphysical principles for Mann – but then goes on to imply that the metaphysical is simply another name for certain aspects of human psychology and thus not categorically distinct from the natural world (whereas, of course, the whole point of the term 'metaphysics' is to make such a distinction). He interprets the 'Roman der Seele' as a myth 'which depicts not transcendent but human truth' and adds:

it reveals human, psychological truth; and though this is the true function of both the myth and the 'Roman' the term 'myth' carries strong connotations of transcendence, of irrationalism (even more so in Mann's day, when it was a holy term for irrationalist thinkers), whereas the novel is unquestionably the literary mode of rationalism, of enlightenment, of psychological analysis. Implicit in the term 'Roman der Seele' is the idea that all myths are actually 'Romane' – and 'Romane der Seele'. (Cunningham 1985, 191)

And Elaine Murdaugh in her progressivist *Salvation in the Secular: The Moral Law in Thomas Mann's 'Joseph und seine Brüder'* takes a similar view both of the novel's

ethical purpose and the character of the religion which is to bring it about.¹⁷² She explains the latter in these terms: ‘the “religion” of the novel is a secular religion, an oxymoron which itself embodies the double and the union of spirit and life. That is, it is a religion of humanism, and the question of whether a thought system which rejects the priority of the transcendent is still a religion is moot.’ (Murdaugh 1976, 12)

The problems such views of *Joseph* entail are hard to overlook. The first problem concerns morality and meaning. Though terms such as ‘secular religion’ and ‘myths of psychological truth’ are not fully explained, their implication is surely that the secular and the psychological are a sufficient basis for Joseph’s and the novel’s ethical project, but that the regrettable mythopoeic tendency of human beings must needs be satisfied if that project is to be achieved. But this is a strange position to adopt in view of *Joseph’s* naturalistic perspective, which is the perspective Cunningham and Murdaugh are most comfortable with. For given that secular enlightenment can only legitimate itself by reference to the phenomenal world (for any ulterior appeal would be incompatible with its secularity) then all the factors which might thwart it: self interest, emotional imperatives of various kinds, not to mention misplaced religious zeal, would enjoy an equal legitimacy, for they too are the result of phenomenal factors. And whereas naturalism might expose Jacob’s and Joseph’s sense of their own destiny and God’s presence as being just a matter of social conditioning and individual psychology, secular enlightenment could never consistently claim to be *anything but* a matter of social conditioning and individual psychology. The second problem has to do with authorial intention. It is quite true that, for example, Joseph’s behaviour as a prison ‘trustee’ in Zawi-Rê is comparatively ‘humane’, and that his management of the Egyptian economy is ‘enlightened’, if those adjectives are understood in a common-sense way, and ‘progress’ is indeed an important theme in the novel – a theme to which we shall return later in this chapter. But if Mann had intended us to regard humanity, enlightenment and progress as self-evident values in need of no appeal to the religious and metaphysical, the policy of presenting them to us in the context of a young man’s progress towards what he regards as a destiny ordained by providence, and who takes God’s will (and not an

¹⁷² ‘The novel is addressed to a world which it views as democratic, and the moral obligation it imposes on this world is democratic[...]. This view bespoke an optimistic liberalism which was not only in defiance of the intellectual trends of fascist Germany, it was also an attack on the very fundamentals of Western dualistic philosophy since Plato.’ (Murdaugh 1976, 34)

instinct of compassion, say) as his supreme criterion – this policy would have been most inappropriate to the task. The tetralogy's chief concern is Joseph himself, and in what light his personality, thoughts and actions should be understood. We can adopt his own view, that his story is framed by a religious and metaphysical context from which it derives its significance, or we can dismiss the religious and metaphysical context as delusory and accept that the story has no significance, that it is just a procession of meaningless events.

As we have seen, the narrator frequently invites us to take the latter, naturalistic view of the story. Is there anything in the novel which would tend to confirm Joseph's religious and metaphysical view of the matter? Come to that, what *could* confirm the religious and metaphysical assumptions of a character in a work of fiction? The answer to that question is: the supernatural. In chapter II we pointed out that in many tales of ghosts, gods and demons the supernatural represents an evaluative metaphysic. Such apparitions often pursue a positive moral purpose, but even when they are nefarious their freedom from the necessity of the phenomenal realm, to which they only partially belong, makes them as unsusceptible to naturalistic analysis as it makes them susceptible to moral analysis: ghosts, gods and demons can be properly described as good and evil and their presence imparts a moral dimension to the stories in which they figure. It is true that Schopenhauer conceived a metaphysic from which the element of freedom and moral choice was excluded, and we saw in chapter III that such a philosophical development is capable of literary exploitation. But all strictures against undue generalization notwithstanding, it remains true that the supernatural tends to be the guarantor of meaning wherever it crops up in traditional fiction, and that fantastic works such as 'The Turn of the Screw' or 'Der Sandmann' make it difficult for us to reject their supernatural elements by binding them to the narrative's moral import.

However, whereas it is necessary to make a case for the connection between the supernatural and evaluative metaphysics in the context of nineteenth century ghost stories, the contention that Judaeo-Christian religious thinking has for millennia considered God to be at once supernatural and metaphysical hardly needs defending – for nobody would think to deny it. On the one hand He is a personal God who, despite a magical superiority to the laws of physics, none the less betrays phenomenal

character attributes: jealousy, anger, partiality etc. And on the other hand He is a metaphysical essence, beyond time and space (which are His creations, after all) and the uttermost criterion for moral justification: to do right by God is to do right absolutely. It is in regard to God as authentic criterion of value that, firstly, certain of his supernatural emanations (angels, demons and souls) gain their moral complexion and, secondly, certain facts and deeds in the strictly phenomenal world can be adjudicated good or evil. We might wonder, then, if the obvious alternative to a naturalistic and meaningless interpretation of *Joseph und seine Brüder* – given that it is a retelling of a Bible story – might not be a religious one in which a Judaeo-Christian metaphysic is validated by supernatural interventions. We shall, however, postpone until later further analysis of the metaphysic underpinning the tetralogy. Before that matter can be dealt with another must be confronted: are there, in fact, any signs that the supernatural is present in the *Joseph* novels?

The Supernatural Reading of *Joseph*

The answer – as in the case of *Der Tod in Venedig* and the acknowledged fantastic works mentioned in chapter II – is that various facts and events seem so improbable from a naturalistic point of view that we are tempted to attribute them to supernatural agency, especially as that supernatural agency is, as we have seen, the likely guarantor of any meaning the work might have. But none of the facts and events which take place within the narrative proper is inexplicable in naturalistic terms:¹⁷³ they can be attributed to extraordinary coincidence, for example. Alternatively, strange occurrences which the narrator apparently vouches for might be attributed instead to the distorting mentality of one or more characters.

These facts and events make their modest first appearance in *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*. We remember that Jacob, like Joseph after him, has the conviction that, despite Laban's hostile machinations, the God of his fathers will smooth his path to freedom and prosperity, and we also remember that this conviction is borne out in the course of the narrative. Some of his success can be attributed to his own resourcefulness, of course, some to a gift (again foreshadowing Joseph's technique)

¹⁷³ That is, the narrative as it deals with human characters rather than episodes such as 'Vorspiel in Oberen Rängen' etc.

for persuading others that he is a divine favourite and thus worth cultivating, and some to blind chance. But there are moments when Jacob's luck is hard to write off in this way. For example, one of the most important stages in his progress is represented by his discovery of a subterranean well on Laban's property. He suffers something like a seizure while walking the fields at twilight and in its aftermath beholds a vision of Ea-Oannes, a fish-like local deity, drawing water with a bucket from a particular spot. So that is where Jacob digs, and finds the water he seeks. This might be a coincidence: what Jacob takes as a divination is nothing more than a brain-storm entirely unconnected with the actual presence of water. But there is no getting round the fact that his own view of the matter: 'Er fand Wasser[...]wie er wohl wußte, mit Hilfe des Herrn, seines Gottes, obgleich sich Erscheinungen einmischten, die diesem eigentlich hätten zuwider sein müssen', (IV, 257) is confirmed by events. And this is by no means the end of Jacob's startlingly good fortune. He strikes the following bargain with Laban (who is anxious to placate a son-in-law threatening to leave and take his good luck with him): the piebald sheep – those already present and those yet to be born – of the property's flock are to be his. Despite Laban's extremely unfavourable stipulations – black and white sheep are not to be allowed to interbreed and Jacob must pasture the white, rather than the piebald, sheep – Jacob is persuaded that the deal will be to his benefit because he believes he has a certain method of increasing the proportion of piebald sheep in the flock. He has made the 'discovery' that 'der Anblick von Scheckigem sich bei der läufigen Kreatur auf die Frucht warf, die sie bei solchem Anblick empfing, und daß Scheckig-Zweifarbenedes danach zutage trat.' (IV, 356)

Now Jacob for his part may consider the belief that he can influence the chromatic complexion of a burgeoning flock by such means to be valid, but we for ours are bound to regard it as an erroneous assumption only apparently verified by certain irrelevant circumstances – the ewe would have given birth to a piebald lamb whether or not she was gazing at something chequered at the moment of conception. But if we accept that there is no scientific basis for Jacob's confidence, how are we to explain that the narrative justifies that confidence? – for he does indeed succeed in breeding a great many piebald sheep from the white flock and thereby increases his already considerable independent fortune. If we adopt the naturalistic point of view, then we are forced to attribute Jacob's success in this venture to astronomical levels of good

luck. He was lucky to make an erroneous assumption about the nature of colour-inheritance, and he was twice lucky to speculate on the proliferation of piebald lambs amongst a white flock when, as we know, he had no effective means to effect that outcome – lucky because without making those two mistakes he could never have been rewarded by the entirely fortuitous realization of his purpose! As happens so often in fantastic literature, we find ourselves tempted to reject an interpretation which is scientifically possible but astoundingly improbable, and to accept an interpretation which seems less improbable while being scientifically impossible: that a divine providence works to accomplish Jacob's ends even when he himself is ignorant of its agency.

This tendency of events to justify far-fetched expectations on the part of the novel's characters becomes ever more pronounced as the narrative progresses. It is evidently true with regards to Joseph himself, of course, whose adolescent vision of apotheosis foretells, in celestial terms, a destiny improbable indeed for the son of an itinerant shepherd like Jacob. In the presence of the 'Vater der Welt' a voice speaks to him saying, 'Du Menschenkind, tritt auf deine Füße! Denn fortan sollst du vor meinem Stuhl stehen als Metatron und Knabe Gottes, und ich will dir Schlüsselgewalt geben, meinen Arboth zu öffnen und zu schließen, und sollst zum Befehlshaber gesetzt sein über alle Scharen, denn der Herr hat Wohlgefallen an dir.' (IV, 466) This position of second-only-to-the-almighty is, of course, attained by Joseph in *Joseph der Ernährer* when he becomes Pharaoh's lieutenant. Unfeasibly grandiose as the dream seems it never the less comes true. After having recounted his dream to Benjamin he adds that, although his imagined experiences were so intense as to banish all thought of his family, 'über ein kleines, des bin ich gewiß, hätte ich euer gedacht und euch nachkommen lassen, daß auch ihr wäret erhöht worden neben mir, der Vater, die Weiber, die Brüder und du.' (IV, 469) And, lo and behold, once Joseph becomes 'wie Pharaoh' the occasion – in the form of a prolonged drought – to let his family follow him to Egypt does indeed present itself.

We could multiply examples (in the final volume of the tetralogy *Thamar and Jacob* evince considerable prophetic foreknowledge) but there is no purpose in analysing in detail the surfeit of evidence which *Joseph* offers. Clearly, the gift of divination and predestination which various characters take as their birthright has every appearance

of being underwritten by the unfolding of events. It is all very well to say, as Cunningham does, with reference to Joseph's elevation from prison 'trusty' to Pharaoh's most powerful minister that 'the call to the royal presence is, however, no *deus ex machina* turning apparent disaster into joyous triumph through arbitrary authorial (or even divine) omnipotence; it is something Joseph has earned – and planned for – by successfully interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's courtiers at Zawirê' (Cunningham 1985, 138) – no amount of planning and preparation on Joseph's part could have effected this outcome. How can he have prepared the succession to the throne of a young, idealistic but naïve Pharaoh in need of his particular services? How can he have prepared the imprisonment of the royal vintner and baker? How, in the absence of divine guidance, can he be sure of the correct interpretation of their dreams? For although his psychological acumen may well be sufficient to discover that the former is innocent, the latter guilty as charged, he cannot be certain that they will be *found* innocent and guilty as charged. Indisputably Joseph draws on impressive reserves of energy, ingenuity and charisma in the pursuit of what he believes to be his destiny, but those qualities would be quite insufficient without what may be regarded either as an inexhaustible streak of good luck or as the effects of a supernatural power.

Authors have at their disposal two methods by which supernatural and natural explanation may be made to coexist. We have so far examined only one of these methods as applied in *Joseph und seine Brüder*, that of the multiplication of coincidence, with its tendency to undermine a purely naturalistic account of events. It was the method we saw at work in 'The Black Cat'. It suggests that chance, once it reaches a certain degree of persistence and intensity, can no longer be dismissed as *mere* chance but must rather be recognized as the expression of a numinous or noumenal intention – although, in accordance with Kant's strictures regarding the limitations of the 'Verstand', that intention may never be definitely discerned in the empirical realm's unbroken chain of cause and effect. The other method is to advance the likelihood of delusional psychology, with its tendency to undermine a purely supernatural account of events. It was the method we saw at work in 'The Turn of the Screw'. It suggests that strange events might be better attributed to a character's state of mind than to the actual intervention of anything other-worldly. Are there, though,

any other-worldly apparitions comparable to those of ‘The Turn of the Screw’ in the *Joseph* tetralogy?

There is, by general consent, at least one: the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’ who seems intimately concerned with and strangely well-informed about Joseph and his destiny, and whose behaviour and conversation are exceedingly improbable from a naturalistic point of view. He seems, as various critics have pointed out,¹⁷⁴ to be an angel tasked to both announce and to guide,¹⁷⁵ and as such he evidently has much in common with the Hermes psychopompos of *Der Tod in Venedig*.¹⁷⁶ In keeping with this latter quality he displays hermetic insignia (sandals and walking stick), and if he is lacking a pair of angelic wings, their absence is, so he would seem to suggest, purely temporary.¹⁷⁷ His role in the story is by no means limited to accompanying Joseph to Dortan. He watches over the empty well from which Joseph has been rescued in a way which prefigures that of the angel at Christ’s tomb,¹⁷⁸ and, when Ruben asks him in whose commission he has undertaken such an inexplicable duty, replies allusively and evasively: ‘Laß das gut sein, woher so ein Auftrag kommt. Er pflegt durch viele Münde zu gehen, und es frommt wenig, ihn bis zu seinem Urquell zurück zu verfolgen’. (IV, 617) Finally, he guides Joseph and the Mitanni traders to Egypt but – just like the hermetic gondolier in *Der Tod in Venedig* – vanishes before he can receive his salary. Throughout all his appearances he makes great show of having a more than common knowledge of Joseph’s family (he says that the name ‘Israel’ which Jacob carried victorious from his struggle at Jabbok is not the name he most wished to receive in blessing) (IV, 538) and of having insight into certain religious mysteries (he says that if the ‘Kinder des Lichtes’ ever did condescend to lie with the daughters of Eve they did so in a spirit of uttermost contempt). (IV, 543)

¹⁷⁴ Examples: (Murdaugh 1976, 80- 83); (Cunningham 1985, 188); (Swensen 1994, 29-36)

¹⁷⁵ He describes himself as a ‘Bote’ to Joseph (Thomas Mann 1960b, 537): ‘Bote’ = ἄγγελος.

¹⁷⁶ He tells Joseph: ‘Ich führe die Reisenden und öffne ihnen die Wege, das ist mein Geschäft.’ (IV, 537)

¹⁷⁷ ‘“Ich bin vorübergehend gewisser Erleichterungen in meinem Fortkommen beraubt,” setzte er hinzu und rückte die Schultern.’ (IV, 540) If this strange personage had indeed sported a pair of wings, the naturalistic hypothesis would have been much more difficult to maintain. That, of course, is why he does not have them.

¹⁷⁸ Compare: ‘For the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.’ (Matthew 28.2) and: ‘Einer saß neben dem Brunnen, und der war abgedeckt: Der Brunnenstein lag in zwei Hälften auf den Fliesen, eine über der anderen, und darauf saß Einer im Mäntelchen.’ (IV, 616)

It has been objected that the introduction of the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’ is one of Mann’s ‘most shameless stylistic breaks’, (Murdaugh 1976, 81) but this is not the case if the term ‘stylistic break’ is intended to denote the inclusion in an otherwise naturalistic text of something definitely supernatural. For although we are given plenty of evidence which would tend to persuade us that he is indeed a supernatural apparition, we can none the less, if we apply some ingenuity, account for him in strictly naturalistic terms, with the result that the fantastic ambiguity which marks the whole of the tetralogy is not fatally compromised. After all, this personage who talks and behaves as though he were the messenger and agent of a higher power might be no more than a deranged human being – a paranoiac with delusions of transcendental grandeur, who has picked up some stories about Jacob from Joseph’s brothers, who fantasizes about the relationships between the children of light and the daughters of Eve, and whose prefiguration of the angel at Christ’s tomb as related in the gospel is entirely coincidental.¹⁷⁹ It is with explanations of this kind in mind that Mann defends the inclusion of ‘Der Mann auf dem Felde’ in a letter to René Schickele, while conceding how far-fetched such explanations must seem: ‘Zwar habe ich die Hintertür halbwegs offen gelassen, daß er allenfalls doch ein etwas wunderliches Menschenkind sein kann; aber sie ist recht schmal, und man kommt fast nicht hindurch.’ (Mann/Schickele 1992, 71) And this defence, with its recognition that the highly improbable can still be formally compatible with naturalism, is valid not only for ‘Der Mann auf dem Felde’ but for the apparently ubiquitous influence of providence throughout the tetralogy. The reader can take the naturalistic way out if he wishes, but he will have difficulty getting through!

What does distinguish the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’ from the accumulating evidence of supernatural foresight, guidance and reward we discussed earlier is that he is much harder to ignore. The description of Joseph’s juvenile dreams and their fulfilment in his adult experiences, for example, are separated by many hundreds of pages, and in the meantime Joseph’s ingenuity and his determination to achieve what he believes God has in store for him are played up for all they are worth – with the result that the implied challenge to naturalism is comparatively easy to overlook. It is his

¹⁷⁹ An example of psychology and coincidence working hand in glove to create an overwhelmingly supernatural impression which is not, however, underpinned by any unambiguously supernatural elements.

obtrusiveness, we suggest, which has earned the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’ such a hostile reception from critics committed to the secular, and therefore naturalistic, reading of Joseph.¹⁸⁰ But equally hard to overlook – and the object of equal bafflement on the part of many such critics – is the dual character and attitude of the narrator himself, who at times strongly favours a phenomenal cause-and-effect explanation for events, at others calls in aid religious and metaphysical explanations of a kind intolerable to naturalism.

Narrative Perspectives

We have already noted the narrator’s tendency to deflate the apparently fated behaviour of Isaac and his tribe by suggesting that this is determined by a self-perpetuating pattern of thought in essence no more meaningful than the path of a watercourse which each season’s rain cannot help but confirm and deepen. If we leave aside the ‘Höllenfahrt’ overture for a moment, the perspective which prevails in the earlier portions of the tetralogy is one of good-natured scepticism. It is quite true that like many of Mann’s narrators, that of *Joseph* sometimes adopts by means of free indirect speech the thoughts of the characters who focalize the story in a given episode.¹⁸¹ But the opinions he voices on his own behalf seem tailor-made to appeal to a readership of twentieth-century rationalists. The following defence of Joseph’s filial piety is typical in this respect of the earlier parts of the novel: ‘Das, was wir in unserer Sprache seine Vaterbindung zu nennen versucht sind, eine Bindung, desto tiefer und inniger, als sie kraft einer weitgehenden Gleichsetzung und Verwechslung zugleich Gottesbindung war, bewährte sich außerordentlich stark gerade jetzt, – und wie hätte sie nicht in ihm bewähren sollen, da sie sich mit ihm, an ihm und außer ihm bewährte?’ (IV, 818)

¹⁸⁰ Cunningham seems almost to invite us to excise ‘Der Mann auf dem Felde’ from the novel: ‘This figure is superfluous. Joseph could surely have found his brothers without a supernatural guide; the Ismaelites would probably have reached Egypt with only mortal guidance; and Ruben was capable of ascertaining for himself that the well was empty.’ (Cunningham 1985, 187) The effect, evidently enough, of attributing (or slyly getting the reader to attribute) events which might have been – *but were not* – accomplished by known natural causes to supernatural ones, is to encourage credence in the latter. And if one is committed (as Cunningham is) to a secular and naturalistic reading of Joseph, then such credence is indefensible.

¹⁸¹ For example, it is evident from its context that this sentiment: ‘Gott aber war Herr der Äonen, El olâm, und Er war es, der dem Menschen hatte olâm ins Herz gegeben,’ (IV, 405) is to be attributed to Eliezer and to Joseph. It is not underwritten by the narrator himself.

However, this initial narratorial perspective begins to alternate, as the novel progresses, with another one which, far from discerning natural causation behind apparently supernatural intervention, on the contrary discerns supernatural intervention where natural causation – in particular the interplay of Joseph’s psychology with those of other characters – might easily explain a given occurrence. For example, in amongst all the ‘natürliche und nüchterne’ explanations for Mont-Kaw’s initial interest in Joseph the narrator advances this one: ‘Es ist möglich – wir wollen nur eine Vermutung blicken lassen, keine Behauptung wagen –, daß der Gott seiner Väter ein übriges für Joseph tat und ein Licht auf ihn fallen ließ, geeignet, im Herzen des Anschauenden das Zweckdienliche hervorzurufen.’¹⁸² Likewise, he is not content merely to report, by direct quotation and free indirect speech, Jacob’s faith in an ‘Einst’ to come which is as real and important as that of the past, but coins on his own initiative a rhyming aphorism which articulates this by no means naturalistic concept: ‘Wer nicht das Einst der Zukunft ehrt, ist nicht des Einst der Vergangenheit wert und stellt sich auch zum heutigen Tag verkehrt. Dies ist unsere Lehrmeinung, wenn wir sie einschalten dürfen in die Lehren, die Jaakob ben Jizchak der Thamar erteilte.’ (V, 1555) Furthermore, in ‘Vorspiel in Oberen Rängen’ (the prelude to *Joseph der Ernährer*) the narrator implies in passing that he himself is an angel, and speaks of God, Sammael etc. as entities personally known to him, and of whose existence he has not the least doubt.¹⁸³

However, the prelude’s description of this supernatural world is phrased in terms so inappropriate and comic that one suspects that the whole scene is to be taken with a pinch of salt. Cunningham, indeed, suggests that we ought to regard it as an allegorical myth: ‘The apparently deterministic theology of the work, far from contradicting its humanist content, actually re-expresses the same thing in symbolic

¹⁸² (IV, 796) Nolte advances the following ingenious argument to demonstrate that the supernatural perspective implied in such statements is employed to naturalistic ends: ‘If the narrator introduces the idea of divine intervention where the causality of the course of events is actually evident and quite natural, the reader is made to observe a process of *mythologizing*. If then he gives a rational explanation where the course of events appears ‘unnatural’, he *demythologizes* the process. The effect this must have on the reader is “aufklärerisch” without doubt, for in both cases the reader is shown the power of perspective and the relative ease of manipulation. If his aim is to make the reader conscious of this, he succeeds.’ (Nolte 1996, 129) This is to mistake one’s own beliefs and assumptions for those of the author: ‘Mann, like myself, does not take the supernatural seriously. Therefore, whenever he has the narrator attribute an event to divine intervention, it is only in order to demonstrate mythopoeia in action!’

¹⁸³ ‘“Die Engel[...]sind nach unserem Bilde geschaffen, jedoch nicht fruchtbar”[...]Wir waren nicht “fruchtbar”, allerdings nicht. Wir waren Kämmerer des Lichtes.’ (V, 1280)

form – that is, as a myth’ (Cunningham 1985, 193) – and there is nothing in principle to gainsay such a possibility, in view of the fact that we have already come across one work, ‘Der Sandmann’, which includes within a fantastic framework an allegorical interlude. It is not, however, necessary to accept Cunningham’s view that the material mythically transformed must be in origin secular and phenomenal. When, for example, Plato gives a mythical account of the ancestry of love in *Symposium*, or of the tripartite soul in ‘Phaedrus’, he does not do so in the belief that love and the soul are phenomenal entities. To the contrary. He does so because he is persuaded that they are metaphysical entities, which, if they are to appeal to the imagination as well as the intellect, must be granted phenomenal garb: an appearance, a personality, a story. But that such myths are a makeshift, and not to be taken at face value, is signalled by precisely the sort of comedy and absurdity that characterizes ‘Vorspiel’ in passages such as the following, which describes the sour pleasure taken by the heavenly host at the divine punishments reserved for mankind. The foresight of the angels, we are told, is not unlimited, but

es reichte hin, den englischen Mißmut über das ‘ähnlichste’ Geschöpf im allgemeinen zu einer Extra-Gereiztheit gegen den in der Heranbildung begriffenen Wahlstamm sich zuspitzen zu lassen – zu behutsamer Schadenfreude reichte es hin über die kleine Flut und den Schwefelregen, den Man zu Seinem Kummer über ein mit besonderen und weittragenden Absichten ausgestattetes Reis dieses Stammes zu verhängen genötigt gewesen war – in der schlecht verhehlten Absicht freilich, aus der Strafe ein Vehikel zu machen. (V, 1291)

The satirical impression made by this exposure of the angels as creatures animated by pusillanimous ill-will towards mankind, and of God as hypocritical and calculating, is rendered all the sharper by the use of vocabulary (‘englischer Mißmut’, ‘Extra-Gereiztheit’ etc.) ludicrously inappropriate to the heavenly context. But it is just as probable – more probable in the light of Mann’s own religious professions – that the purpose of the absurdity is to remind us of the unworthiness of myth to its subject-matter rather than the subject-matter’s unworthiness of myth.

There are, then, good grounds to consider the ‘Vorspiel’ as formally distinct from the main story and as having an indirect and not easily calculable bearing on it. There is even reason to doubt whether its narrator and the third person narrator (as we have until this point assumed him to be) of the main story are identical. After all, the

narrator of ‘Vorspiel’ presumably shares the heavenly host’s contempt for the tribe of Abraham, whereas the narrator of the main story treats it sympathetically. Conversely, the narrator of the main story gives an unflattering portrait of the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’, whereas a fellow angel would, we might think, be at pains to show him in a favourable light. However, though its relation to the main story is problematic, and though its testimony is undermined by irony, there can be no doubting the overall tendency of the ‘Vorspiel’ to strengthen the supernatural and to weaken the naturalistic perspective on Joseph’s adventures. We might take it to be an allegorizing myth, but should we do so we might find at its core not a psychological but a metaphysical truth. We might suspect that the narrator of the ‘Vorspiel’ and that of the main narrative are distinct entities – without, however, being in a position to definitely affirm this to be the case.¹⁸⁴ And once the possibility of their identity: the possibility, that is, that the whole of the tetralogy is the recording of an angel, gains a hold on our consciousness, we will be ever less surprised by the consistency of the narrator’s point of view (which in the earlier parts of the novel seemed to be that of a twentieth century rationalist) with the religious point of view of the characters to whose sentiments he gives voice through free indirect speech. When Jacob is reintroduced to us in the ‘Fünftes Hauptstück’ of *Joseph der Ernährer*, and we are told ‘Sobald einmal Gewöhnung Platz gegriffen, sein Hadern mit Gott sich erschöpft, die grausame Verfügung dieses Gottes Eingang gefunden hatte in seine anfangs krampfhaft dagegen versperrte Natur, war sie zu einer Bereicherung seines Lebens, einem Beitrag zu dessen Geschichtenschwere geworden’ (V, 1538) we no longer assume that these thoughts are to be attributed to Jacob alone, or even to Jacob at all: they might well be those of the narrator himself. In short, although the ‘Vorspiel’ is insulated from the main story in the ways just described, it none the less induces us to view the last quarter of the tetralogy in a more supernatural light.

The Fantastic

Joseph und seine Brüder, then, goes to great lengths to maintain a balance between the natural and the supernatural: a balance of evidence so far as events are concerned,

¹⁸⁴ Alan Swensen certainly takes this notion seriously and devotes considerable space in his *Gods, Angels and Narrators* to a discussion of their possible identity without, however, coming to any firm conclusions. (Swensen 1994, 13-39)

and a balance of attitude so far as the narrator is concerned. As in ‘Der Sandmann’¹⁸⁵ this balance oscillates dramatically, so that there are moments when one or other of the competing explanations seems on the verge of becoming altogether dominant, its counterpart unfeasible. This, however, is never permitted to happen: each time that the tendency towards one or other of the two elements threatens to become overwhelming, Mann deploys countervailing evidence, along with a countervailing attitude on the part of the narrator, against it, and so restores equilibrium. That this procedure was programmatic and no oversight is an idea which receives some support from ‘Freud und die Zukunft’. Jung, he says in that address, discerned in eastern mysticism an acknowledgement that ‘der Geber aller Gegebenheiten in uns selber wohnt’,¹⁸⁶ before adding, with becoming modesty:

Ja, lassen Sie mich hier auf dieses mein eigenes Werk zu sprechen kommen – vielleicht hat es ein Recht, genannt zu werden in einer Stunde festlicher Begegnung zwischen dichtender Literatur und der psychoanalytischen Sphäre. Merkwürdig genug – und vielleicht nicht nur für mich –, daß darin eben jene psychologische Theologie herrschend ist, die der Gelehrte der östlichen Eingeweihtheit zuschreibt: Dieser Abram ist gewissermaßen Gottes Vater. Er hat ihn erschaut und hervorgedacht; die mächtigen Eigenschaften, die er ihm zuschreibt, sind wohl Gottes ursprüngliches Eigentum, Abram ist nicht ihr Erzeuger, aber in gewissem Sinn ist er es dennoch, da er sie erkennt und denkend verwirklicht. Gottes gewaltige Eigenschaften – und damit Gott selbst – sind zwar etwas sachlich Gegebenes außer Abram, *zugleich* aber sind sie auch in ihm und von ihm; die Macht seiner eigenen Seele ist in gewissen Augenblicken kaum von ihnen zu unterscheiden, verschränkt sich und verschmilzt sich erkennend in eins mit ihnen, und das ist der Ursprung des Bundes, den der Herr dann mit Abram schließt und der nur die ausdrückliche Bestätigung einer inneren Tatsache ist.¹⁸⁷

Mann evidently wishes us to be in two minds about the objective reality of God, and all that God entails, and is careful to sustain both naturalistic and supernatural interpretations with evidence appropriate to each. And this explains the special

¹⁸⁵ And unlike both ‘The Black Cat’ and *Der Tod in Venedig*, which take a synoptic approach whereby significant episodes support the naturalistic and supernatural hypotheses equally.

¹⁸⁶ (IX, 489) It should be noted that although Mann calls Jung’s view as stated here a ‘Schopenhauer-Freud’sche Erkenntnis’ it is actually a form of idealism. Freudian psychoanalysis, by contrast, in line with its scientific pretensions, takes human consciousness to be a product of the phenomenal world. Schopenhauer’s contribution to philosophy is the suggestion that human consciousness is only the expression – along with everything else in the phenomenal world – of a blind, unconscious and impulsive force, i.e. the ‘Wille’.

¹⁸⁷ (IX, 490) This passage appears almost word-for-word in *Joseph* (IV, 428) where it is natural to ascribe its double perspective to Joseph himself. In the Freud address, however, Mann takes personal responsibility for it.

handling of an episode which we might expect to loom large in the retelling of the story of Joseph and his family, but which is not, unlike other events which took place immediately before and after it, related directly: the encounter between Jacob and a mysterious opponent at the ford of Jabbok. The little we are allowed to learn is filtered through Jacob's own feverish sensibility after a long interval of time, so that it is impossible to tell whether the night-long wrestling bout actually took place, or was no more than a dream: 'Ein schwerer, schrecklicher und hochwollüstiger Traum von verzweifelter Süße, aber kein luftiger und vergehender, von dem nichts erübrigte, sondern ein Traum, so körperheiß und wirklichkeitsdicht, daß doppelte Lebenshinterlassenschaft von ihm liegengeblieben war, wie Meeresfrucht am Land bei der Ebbe.' (IV, 95) The reason for this special treatment of an episode, which could just as easily have been narrated directly in the same way that Jacob's flight from Laban was, is that in this way, and in this way only, fantastic ambiguity can be preserved. In the case of 'Der Mann auf dem Felde' we only need suppose that one person – the 'Mann' himself – is deluded in order to shore up an admittedly improbable naturalistic interpretation of events. But in the case of the wrestling bout at Jabbok, we would have to suppose that both Jacob and his opponent shared exactly the same delusion: that the one was a supernatural emissary of God, that the other was God's favourite mortal son, and that the pair of them were to wrestle for a name of special significance. That would be an untenable level of improbability. Mann, if he had chosen direct narration, would have had to give the episode either an unambiguously supernatural treatment (Jacob does indeed meet an angel of the Lord and wrestle with him for a blessed name till daybreak) or an unambiguously naturalistic treatment (Jacob engages for whatever reason in a violent and protracted struggle at Jabbok with some man whom he encounters there, and goes on to embroider these quite mundane events with a religious significance later) but he could not have given it an *ambiguous* treatment.

The case, then, for *Joseph und seine Brüder* as a fantastic work presenting on the one hand a naturalistic aspect and on the other hand a supernatural aspect is surely unanswerable. But, given that Mann did not choose to dispense with the supernatural altogether, and given that this aspect of the story seems to gain in conviction as the narrative unfolds, what purpose does it serve? As mentioned earlier in this chapter, its most obvious effect is to lend credence to Joseph's own religious views and those of

other characters. If there were no supernatural element at all – if, for example, Jacob only discovered his well after methodically testing the whole of Laban’s property for water, or if Joseph had never dreamed his apotheosis many years before it came to pass but was rather amazed that his eloquence had raised him almost as high as Pharaoh himself – then we would have no reason to suppose that the religious beliefs of Jacob and Joseph were anything other than delusions.

The Essay on Schopenhauer

I shall argue that the very particular religious beliefs of the two main protagonists of the tetralogy are indeed what Mann intends first surreptitiously then ever more openly to vindicate in *Joseph*, for the very good reason that their views and his own largely coincide. But such a near-identity of Mann’s perspective and that of the two ‘Gottesfürsten’ is inconsistent with a widely spread critical assumption regarding the philosophical underpinning of *Joseph und seine Brüder*: that it is a thoroughly Schopenhauerian novel. That is true of Dierks (‘die Personen des *Joseph* sind in den Alten Orient versetzte Schopenhauerianer’), (Dierks 1972, 99) Heimendahl (‘Hinter dem “Wesen des Mythos als zeitlose Immer-Gegenwart” verbirgt sich nichts anderes als Schopenhauers Ubiquität des Willens’),¹⁸⁸ and Swensen (‘The Judeo Christian metaphysics first suggested by the presence of the angel behind the narrative, and then by the presence of God[...]begins to take on the pronounced appearance of a Schopenhauerian metaphysics’). (Swensen 1994, 98) There are, however, two important objections to be made against the Schopenhauerian interpretation of *Joseph*. The first is that there is little unambiguous textual support for it, and the second is that Mann, during the course of writing the tetralogy, became ever more committed to a philosophical position quite at odds with the characteristic features of Schopenhauer’s doctrine.

What evidence, then, can be adduced to support a Schopenhauerian reading of Joseph? Of the authors mentioned above only Swensen, we would argue, avoids an insidious hermeneutical trap, which consists in attributing to Mann the policy of viewing events, phrases and attitudes from a Schopenhauerian perspective, when that

¹⁸⁸ (Heimendahl 1998, 281) As noted in chapter I, Heimendahl tempers his Schopenhauerian interpretation by the addition of other intellectual ingredients.

policy is actually the critic's own. Swensen, by contrast, searches the text for traces of explicitly Schopenhauerian thinking, and finds them in the form of the 'veils' of one kind or another to be found throughout the novel – the most important, of course, being Joseph's coat of many colours, Rachel's dowry-dress, the Ketônnet Passîm.¹⁸⁹ This garment, embroidered with colourful scenes from myth and fable, is pointedly referred to as a 'Schleiergewirk' which is bound to make us think of the 'veil of maja': (IV, 297) the shimmering phenomenal world which partially hides and partially reflects the dreadful reality of a ubiquitous and omnipotent 'Wille'. Earlier in the text however, story-telling has already been described as 'des Lebensgeheimnisses Feierkleid', (IV, 54) and Swensen suggests that these two facts taken together: that Joseph's 'Feierkleid' is a 'Schleiergewirk' and that story-telling is a 'Feierkleid', bring us to the conclusion that story-telling must be a 'Schleiergewirk' too. Consequently, could we (but we cannot) peel away the world's phenomenal garments and the myths which have grown up to explain them, we would find the 'Wille' itself lurking beneath! (Swensen 1994, 97-102) As a confirmation of this interpretation Swensen points out the Schopenhauerian significance of a key passage in the 'Höllenfahrt' overture to the tetralogy: 'die Geschichte des Menschen ist älter als die materielle Welt, die seines Willens Werk ist, älter als das Leben, das auf seinem Willen steht.' (IV, 39)

There can be no question but that when Mann employs terms like 'Schleiergewirk' and 'Wille' he does so in the full consciousness of their pedigree – and it is possible that, in the playful, speculative, uncommitted mood which characterizes the first chapters of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*, Mann was prepared to associate Schopenhauerian elements with others (such as 'Geist') which Schopenhauer himself contemptuously dismissed. But even if this were the case, it would not mark an unqualified support for the central tenets of Schopenhauer's philosophy – tenets which he in fact came to regard with a somewhat jaundiced eye, if the 1938 essay which bears the philosopher's name is anything to go by. This enthuses at length about the richness of Schopenhauer's achievement – his psychological acumen, his appreciation of art etc. – while remaining distinctly chary of subscribing to his world-

¹⁸⁹ The fact that the Ketônnet Passîm represents the legacy of Ishtar, as Eizabeth Galvan demonstrates in a treatise devoted to examining what the tetralogy owes to Bachofen, (Galvan 1996, 49-61) is no objection to Swensen's interpretation. 'Die vertauschten Köpfe' provides ample testimony that mother goddesses are an apt embodiment of the instinctive, violent, but ceaselessly creative 'Wille'.

view. Mann makes the remark that ‘Es bleibt viel übrig, wenn man von einem Philosophen seine Philosophie abzieht, und schlimm wäre es, wenn nichts übrigbliebe’, (IX, 535) which suggests that he values Schopenhauer more as a personality and representative of a certain state of mind than as a thinker, although he goes on to say that the ‘Dynamik’ of his truth will never be altogether exhausted. And the same note of scepticism is struck again a little later on when, having praised *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* for being so impressive in its scope and cogency that, as one reads it, the works of other authors seem by comparison ‘fremd, unbelehrt, unrichtig, willkürlich[...], undiszipliniert von der Wahrheit’, he adds, as though in a sudden access of doubt, ‘Der Wahrheit? Ist es denn so wahr? Ja, im Sinne höchster und zwingendster Aufrichtigkeit. Aber das Adjektiv bedeutet ein Ausweichen. Bringt und enthält es die Wahrheit?’¹⁹⁰ The question receives no direct answer. Instead, Mann points out that the truth of Schopenhauer is to be found not so much articulated in his doctrines as projected in the mood he evokes, the ‘geistige Lebensluft der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, – Jugend- und Heimatluft für uns, die wir heute die Sechzig überschritten haben.’ (IX, 558) It seems clear that just as he had done in ‘Freud und die Zukunft’ and just as he would do in ‘Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung’ Mann is exploiting an apparently adulatory address to occupy a position quite distinct from that of the ‘great man’ he comes to praise.

This impression can only be strengthened by what Mann selects for particular emphasis and approval both in Schopenhauer’s doctrines and those of his philosophical forebears. For example, he is much more interested in the Platonic ideas *as Plato expounded them* than in what Schopenhauer turned them into: metaphysical genotypes struggling to realize themselves in the world of the senses. We mentioned in chapter III that the Hermes of *Der Tod in Venedig*, who for so much of the narrative would seem to be a representative of the ‘Wille’, is revealed in the end to be an emissary of a Platonic noumenal realm, and we saw how Mann grants to Hermes the commutative and communicative role which Schiller attributes to art. Now, in the ‘Schopenhauer’ essay, he takes the opportunity to formulate his view of the matter as clearly as possible – and if it is agreed that Joseph is a Hermes figure,

¹⁹⁰ (IX, 557) The adjective is evasive because ‘wahr’ can mean ‘genuine’ and ‘sincere’ as well as ‘correct’.

then there can be little doubt as to the sort of noumenal realm to which he owes his first allegiance.

Und so bietet diese vor-christliche, schon christliche Lehre in ihrer asketischen Weisheit auch wieder einen ungemein sinnlich-artistischen Reiz und Zauber; denn die Auffassung der Welt als einer bunten und bewegten Phantasmagorie von Bildern, die für das Ideelle, Geistige durchscheinend sind, hat etwas eminent Künstlerisches und schenkt den Künstler erst gleichsam sich selbst: Er ist derjenige, der sich zwar lustvoll-sinnlich und sündig der Welt der Erscheinungen, der Welt der Abbilder verhaftet fühlen darf, da er sich zugleich der Welt der Idee und des Geistes zugehörig weiß, als der Magier, der die Erscheinung für diese durchsichtig macht. Die *vermittelnde* Aufgabe des Künstlers, seine hermetisch-zauberhafte Rolle als Mittler zwischen Idee und Erscheinung, Geist und Sinnlichkeit kommt hier zum Vorschein. (IX, 534)

Putting all other evidence aside for the moment, we can see that the ‘Schleiergewirk’ and the ‘Festkleid’ are just as likely to be allusions to the ‘bunte und bewegte Phantasmagorie von Bildern’ in Plato’s phenomenal realm as to those in Schopenhauer’s. Accordingly, the implied noumenal counterpart to the phenomenal realm Mann has in mind is just as likely to be Plato’s ideal empyrean as Schopenhauer’s ‘Wille’. As for the phrase ‘die Geschichte des Menschen ist älter als die materielle Welt, die seines Willens Werk ist’, this too can be explained by reference to the ‘Schopenhauer’ essay. In his discussion of the ‘Verneinung des Willens’, Mann asks ‘Wie war sie möglich? Wie konnte aus dem Leben, das doch durch und durch Wille zum Leben war, die Verneinung des Willens kommen? Es ermöglicht sich eben dadurch, daß die Welt das Produkt eines Willensaktes war und daß ein solcher durch einen negativen, einen Gegen-Willensakt rückgängig gemacht und aufgehoben werden kann.’¹⁹¹ This corresponds closely to what Schopenhauer himself says on the final page of the ‘Ergänzungen’ to *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*:

¹⁹¹ (IX, 547) Mann puts the matter in this way to draw our attention to the difficulty of Schopenhauer’s position – which is that the purported freedom of human beings to deny the ‘Wille’ evidently proceeds from their intelligence (otherwise unintelligent phenomena: animals, trees and inorganic matter, could do the same), whereas Schopenhauer’s typical doctrine is that the intellect is a mere handmaid to the ‘Wille’. Mann had long been aware of the contradiction: ‘Wiederholt, zum Beispiel in der Antwort auf eine Rundfrage des dänischen Journals *Literaturen* im April 1919, bestreitet Thomas Mann die Schopenhauerische Entgegensetzung von Wille und Intellekt: “Nie war die Schopenhauerische Antithese von Wille und Intellekt weniger zeitgemäß als heute. Der Intellekt ist Wille – und durchaus nicht ‘Vorstellung’. Der Intellekt als Wille ist stimuliert.”’ (Heimendahl 1998, 234)

Der Willensakt, aus welchem die Welt entspringt, ist unser eigener. Er ist frei: denn der Satz vom Grunde, von dem allein alle Notwendigkeit ihre Bedeutung hat, ist bloß die Form seiner Erscheinung. Eben darum ist diese, wenn ein Mal da, in ihrem Verlauf durchweg notwendig: in Folge hievon allein können wir aus ihr die Beschaffenheit jenes Willensaktes erkennen und demgemäß *eventualiter* anders wollen. (Schopenhauer II, 829)

This, as we pointed out in the last chapter, is Schopenhauer at his least Schopenhauerian. Given that he has identified the noumenon with the ‘Wille zum Leben’ he cannot consistently claim that the ‘Willensakt’ by which the world comes into being is free. The ‘Wille’ is, it is true, free of the necessity which reigns in the phenomenal realm, but it is not free of its own blind and ceaseless striving towards life. In fact the ‘Wille’ which Schopenhauer calls in aid to explain the otherwise inexplicable ‘Verneinung des Willens zum Leben’ is of *Kantian* and not of Schopenhauerian stamp, and it is to Kant’s autonomous subject subsisting beyond the space and time which it creates that the word ‘Wille’ in the phrase ‘die materielle Welt, die seines Willens Werk ist’ alludes. Nor should it surprise anyone who has read the ‘Schopenhauer’ essay with attention that it is precisely this ill-fitting element commandeered from the metaphysical morality of Kant which is explicitly showcased in ‘Joseph.’ For in that essay Mann declares its subject to be an unfaithful student of Kant, and of Plato too, falling far short of his masters in terms of the ‘Geist’ they championed. He makes a point of saying, for instance, that the identification of Kant’s ‘Ding an sich’ with the ‘Wille’ is something ‘sehr Kühnes, fast Unerlaubtes’, (IX, 537) before adding ‘und doch war Schopenhauer, weil er von Kant das “Ding an sich” und von Platon die “Ideen” genommen hatte bei solcher Einschätzung der Vernunft überzeugt, Kantianer und Platoniker zu sein.’¹⁹²

Christianity and Platonism

We are not, then, obliged to explain the putatively supernatural elements of the tetralogy in terms of the ‘Wille zum Leben’. As we saw in chapter III there is much in Mann’s non-fictional writings to suggest that he had philosophical concerns at odds with Schopenhauer’s world-view, and the novel itself presents plenty of evidence that

¹⁹² This should suffice to demonstrate the implausability of Frizen’s assertion that in this essay, ‘Schopenhauers Plato- und Kantinterpretation gilt als authentisch: Kants Ding an sich und Platos Idee sind “sehr nah verwandt”, Platos Ideen mit denen Schopenhauers identisch.’ (Frizen 1980, 22)

such concerns were at the forefront of his mind when he wrote it. For one of the chief purposes of *Joseph und seine Brüder* is the defence and promotion of ‘Geist’ against ‘Natur’, just as one of the chief purposes of *Betrachtungen* is the defence and promotion of ‘Natur’ against ‘Geist’. And if we consider how Mann characterizes these two opposita then much which might otherwise be puzzling about *Joseph* becomes readily intelligible. In the aborted ‘Literatur Essay’ of 1909 he writes: ‘Geist – Christentum, Platonismus. Sinnlichkeit, Plastik – Heidentum.’ (Mann 1967, 175) And though the tetralogy does not, of course, tell the tale of Christ or Plato, it does give an imagined prehistory of the spiritual and intellectual movements to which they were to lend their names. That premonitions of Christianity abound throughout *Joseph und seine Brüder* is no secret – in addition to the already mentioned ‘Mann auf dem Felde’ and his prefiguring of the angel at Christ’s tomb, there is Joseph’s disquisition on Adonai (‘Er ist der Dulder und das Opfer. Er steigt in den Abgrund, um daraus hervorzugehen und verherrlicht zu werden’), (IV, 449) there is his insistence, in the presence of Potiphar, that his own was a ‘jungfräuliche Geburt’, there is Jacob’s apparently prophetic belief in Shiloh, ‘der einst erweckt werden sollte aus erwähltem Samen, und dem der Stuhl seines Königreiches sollte bestätigt sein ewiglich,’ (V, 1557) and so on.¹⁹³

We can furnish either a natural or a supernatural explanation for all of this. The natural explanation is that strange superstitions and delusions of prophecy among the characters of *Joseph* constitute an unwitting psychological preparation for the life of Christ which, when it comes to be lived and narrated, will take form and complexion from the by then deeply entrenched belief that a messiah must come, must have a certain ancestry, and must behave in a particular fashion. The supernatural explanation is that Joseph and the others are guided in their actions and beliefs by a providence whose plans they can discern and promote. But in any case, we must grasp the fact that Christianity for Mann, who was certainly no conventional church-goer, is important chiefly as the religious counterpart and complement to that philosophical expression of ‘Geist’ known as Platonism. The association of Christianity and Platonism is, of course, no innovation of his: the writers of the New Testament were conversant with Greek culture, and the opening verses of the Gospel

¹⁹³ A thorough treatment of the tetralogy’s allusions to the life and passion of Jesus can be found in chapter IV of Friedhelm Marx’s treatise on Mann’s Christology. (Marx 2002, 129-196)

according to St John present the story they introduce as significant not just in the light of Jewish messianic hopes but also in the light of Greek philosophical aspirations; and Saint Paul tells the Athenians that the αγνωστός θεός, the ‘unknown god’ whom they have been worshipping so piously is none other than the God of Jesus. (Acts: 17, 23) But Mann goes much further than the fairly modest influence of Platonism on the genesis of the earliest Christian texts conceded by religious and intellectual historians. He suggests that Christianity and Platonism have common historical roots, and that, long before the birth of Plato or Christ, the thinking and beliefs that they would champion were developing side by side in the minds of certain select individuals – and in the case of Joseph, in the mind of the *same* individual.

Many of Plato’s dialogues concern themselves with the existence of an ultimate instance of goodness, beauty, or nobility: το καλόν. This is an entity to which the senses have no direct access, but whose reality is implied every time we make an unconditional value judgement. It has nothing to do with the economic management of our phenomenal appetites and emotions in order to obtain the greatest satisfaction from them in aggregate. As Socrates says in *Phaedo*:

This is not the right kind of trade in virtue, trading pleasure for pleasure, pain for pain, and fear for fear – the greater for the lesser, like currencies. I hope there is just the one true currency, namely wisdom, for which one should trade all the others, and that with this currency, wisdom, come true courage, self-control and justice – true goodness, in short, with or without pleasures, fears and everything else of that sort.¹⁹⁴

And Plato and the Platonists make of το καλόν not only the ultimate instance of valuation but also the chief of a host of lesser ideas – ideas to which the fleeting shadows of the phenomenal world can be found more or less to correspond but whose own value is determined only in relation to το καλόν itself, so that sometimes Plato seems to believe the latter to be the paragon of both the metaphysical and physical realms.¹⁹⁵ This notion can be found scattered amongst various dialogues, but is

¹⁹⁴ (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 149) It will be seen that Plato, in anticipation of Kant, is here making a distinction between hypothetical imperatives and categorical imperatives.

¹⁹⁵ The bundle of phenomena before us at this moment corresponds to the idea: ‘visual display unit’, but the worth of the idea ‘visual display unit’ can only be determined by its correspondence to the supreme idea: το καλόν. To say that this is a good visual display unit is not to say that visual display units are good.

summed up well by Frederick Copleston when he writes: ‘The Good or Absolute Principle of Value has[...]the nature of a τέλος, but it is not an unrealized τέλος, a non-existent end-to-be-achieved; it is an existent τέλος, an ontological Principle, the Supremely Real, the perfect Exemplary Cause, the Absolute or One.’ (Copleston I, 181)

If we turn now to *Joseph* we will see that Abraham’s search for God turns precisely on the matter of valuation, of God as value. The established religions of the world Abraham was born into are concerned to win the favour of the gods in order to maintain the material well-being of the worshipping community: deities like Khapi, who ensures the annual flooding of the Nile, or Baal, who ensures the ripening of the crops. But Abraham breaks with the ‘do ut des’ mentality of his epoch, and instead of considering the petty well-being of the body reaches up to a God capable of ratifying a more essential worth: ‘ “Was bin und tauge ich weiter und in mir der Mensch! Es genügt, daß ich irgendeinem Elchen oder Abgott und Untergott diene, es liegt nichts daran.” So hätte er es bequemer gehabt. Er aber sprach: “Ich, Abram, und in mir der Mensch, darf ausschließlich dem Höchsten dienen.” ’ (IV, 425) As a consequence, he is not content to worship gods who personify terrestrial and astronomical forces, but seeks instead that which he considers must reign over them all. However, although Abraham discovers God ‘aus Drang zum Höchsten’ (IV, 426) he has not yet discovered Him in His essence. Abraham, after all, is only the first of a line of ‘Gottesfürsten’, each of whom will inherit the duty to extricate God from the superstitious trappings in which He was brought to light by the first of their order. For Abraham discovers a God who is by no means just an evaluative principle outside of time and space (although the implication is that He is the quintessence of justice)¹⁹⁶ – but the most potent terrestrial deity of the contemporary pantheon, one capable, like His lesser brethren, of jealousy, partiality, anger: ‘Er war nicht das Gute, sondern das Ganze! Und er war heilig! Heilig nicht vor Güte sondern vor Lebendigkeit und Überlebendigkeit, heilig vor Majestät und Schrecklichkeit, unheimlich, gefährlich und tödlich.’ (IV, 430) The God of Abraham has a long way to go before He becomes the God of Joseph, but Joseph none the less understands his forefather’s achievement as

¹⁹⁶ It is against God’s inflexible justice which Abraham inveighs: ‘ “Höre, Herr”, hatte Abram damals gesagt, “so oder so, das eine oder das andere! Willst du eine Welt haben, kannst du nicht Recht verlangen; ist es dir aber ums Recht zu tun, so ist es aus mit der Welt.” ’ (IV, 429)

the discovery of a deity who can impart value and significance to human life. It will be remembered that Mann himself claimed, in *Betrachtungen*, that all that he had ever achieved ‘ausschliesslich darauf zurückzuführen ist, daß ich mich wichtig nahm’,¹⁹⁷ and that we pointed out the impossibility of valuing one’s own behaviour in any unconditional way without calling in aid a *criterion* of value. Joseph sees that this is the key to Abraham’s achievement in his search for God, which he ‘verstand[...]sogleich, und zwar vor allem nach der Seite des Wichtignehmens. Um es vor Gott und Menschen zu irgendwelcher Ansehnlichkeit und Bedeutung zu bringen, war es nötig, daß man die Dinge – oder wenigstens ein Ding – wichtig nahm.’ (IV, 425)

There are – as ever in this novel – two ways of interpreting the process by which the God of Abraham becomes the God of Joseph. The first interpretation is naturalistic: God is just a figment of the tribe’s collective imagination refracted through the psychology of its particular members. The various ‘Gottesfürsten’ inherit a notion of God from their predecessors but, consciously or unconsciously, alter it in the light of their own personalities and interests – so that God is subject to the same vagaries as the stories which are told and retold down the centuries. By this reckoning God as Joseph conceives him is no true improvement on the God of Abraham, for in the absence of that authentic criterion of value with which naturalism has no truck there can be no progress, only trends and changes. The second interpretation is supernatural: Abraham perceives an actually existent God, but through a glass darkly, and attributes to Him qualities at odds with those most properly His. Accordingly, the duty of the successive generations of ‘Gottesfürsten’ is to winnow away such earthly impurities and restore Him to Himself. And we can usefully compare the two different ways of seeing the evolution of God with the two different ways *Joseph und seine Brüder* presents the evolution of story-telling. On the one hand the narrator sometimes seems to suggest that the accumulated strata of inventions, reinterpretations, additions of every kind mark a wandering away from the facts which the story was supposed to account for. In the chapter ‘Wer Jaakob war’, for example, he expresses his doubts as to whether persons whom the Bible considers to be identical were in fact one and the same, and not rather a succession of different

¹⁹⁷ See chapter 3, note 18.

individuals bearing a shared name. And given this unreliability in the most important source for the tetralogy, one might easily conclude that *Joseph und seine Brüder* is just one more retelling – with its own biases and preferences – of a story always at the mercy of particular interests, and perhaps without any basis in truth at all. As we know, however, the narrator has two aspects – a naturalist and a supernatural one – and he has not yet said his final word on the matter. Later on, in a passage where the narrator's role in relation to the story he tells and in which he is involved is compared to God's role in relation to the world He creates and in which He is involved, we come across the following declaration regarding the story of Joseph:

Bevor man sie erzählen konnte, geschah sie; sie quoll aus demselben Born, aus dem alles Geschehen quillt, und erzählte sich selbst. Seitdem ist sie in der Welt; jeder kennt sie oder glaubt sie zu kennen, denn oft genug ist das nur ein unverbindliches und ohne viel Rechenschaft obenhin träumendes Ungefähr von Kenntnis. Hundertmal ist sie erzählt worden und durch hundert Mittel der Erzählungen gegangen. Hier nun und heute geht sie durch eines, worin sie gleichsam Selbstbesinnung gewinnt und sich erinnert, wie es denn eigentlich im Genauen und Wirklichen einst mit ihr gewesen, also, daß sie zugleich quillt und sich erörtert. (IV, 821)

This implies a *progressive* conception of story-telling. In the first instance the story tells itself and is not just a manifestation of the human psychology which, in order to take possession of it, must necessarily do it an injustice. But the successive retellings do not take it further from its source but instead bring it back – by a haphazard route no doubt – to that source. If we adopt for a moment the same supernatural perspective as does the narrator in this passage, we can see that Joseph has as much claim to restore God to His pristine character as the narrator does to restore Joseph's story to *its* pristine character.

The God of Joseph

So what is the character of Joseph's God? In the chapter 'Von Josephs Keuschheit' it is made clear that, though He has stooped to manifest Himself as the most powerful of terrestrial gods to Abraham, what He once was and what He continuously strives with the assistance of His chosen people to become is an entity of an entirely different order.

Der Gott der Väter Josephs war ein geistiger Gott, zum mindesten nach seinem Werdenziel, um dessentwillen er seinen Bund mit den Menschen geschlossen; und nie hatte er, in der Vereinigung seines Heiligenwillens mit dem des Menschen, etwas zu schaffen gehabt mit dem Unteren und dem Tode, mit irgendwelcher im Fruchtbarkeitsdunkel hausenden Unvernunft. (V, 1142)

But what does the term ‘geistig’ mean, in this context? We have argued in chapter III that when the mature Mann (more or less, from *Betrachtungen* onwards) uses ‘Geist’ in opposition to ‘Natur’ it implies (1) that element of humanity which is free from the necessity of the phenomenal world and (2) the evaluative principle implied by moral judgments. ‘Geist’ does *not* mean to the later Mann what it meant to him during his period of heaviest engagement with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, for the former of whom it represents a welcome, for the latter a lamentable, vitiation of vitality. And confirmation of the prevalence of the Platonic/Kantian – *Schillerian* – understanding of ‘Geist’ in *Joseph* can be found in ‘Höllenfahrt’, expressed so explicitly as to leave no room for doubt: ‘Ja, dies [the once and future union of the two opposita] erscheint um so denkbarer, als der Geist von sich aus und ganz wesentlich das Prinzip der Zukunft, das Es wird sein, es soll sein, darstellt, während die Frömmigkeit der formverbundenen Seele dem Vergangenen gilt und dem heiligen Es war.’¹⁹⁸ It is precisely Joseph’s prior attachment to a ‘Geist’ of this kind which keeps him from yielding to the sexual advances of Mut-em-enet. In his heart of hearts Joseph considers the Egypt which she represents, with its worship of dead bodies, its cult of fertility, and its childish abandonment to sensual pleasure, to be a society wholly infatuated with the secular world, and although he must to an extent collude with it if

¹⁹⁸ (IV, 48) The text continues: ‘Wo hier das Leben ist und wo der Tod, bleibt strittig; denn beide Teile, die natur-verflochtene Seele und der außerweltliche Geist, das Prinzip der Vergangenheit und das der Zukunft, nehmen, jedes nach seinem Sinn, in Anspruch, das Wasser des Lebens zu sein, und jedes beschuldigt das andere, es mit dem Tode zu halten: keiner mit Unrecht, da Natur ohne Geist sowohl als Geist ohne Natur wohl schwerlich Leben genannt werden kann.’ We have already noted Mann’s confusing identification of ‘Geist’ sometimes with death, sometimes with life, and this passage can be considered as an apologia for such inconsistency. It is also a recapitulation of Schiller’s main preoccupation in his theoretical writings: the proper accommodation between ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’. Incidentally, various commentators (for example Bernd-Jürgen Fischer on page 40 of his *Handbuch zu Thomas Manns ‘Josephromanen’*) have pointed out that Mann was indebted to Schaefer’s *Islamische Lehre vom vollkommenen Menschen* for the ‘Roman der Seele’ – but we should not forget that Mann was already, through his reading of *Phaedrus*, acquainted with Plato’s mythical rendering of *bipartite* motivation in human beings: the chariot with two horses, one of which represents earthbound, phenomenal appetite, the other of which represents celestial, noumenal ambition, and each reigned in by a charioteer – a figure whom Schiller would no doubt have recognized as of the first importance – seeking to bring the two into some kind of progressive accord.

his ambitions, and God's ambitions for him, are to be fulfilled, never will he allow collusion to become abdication.

Of the two elements mentioned above (1) is more important to Kant than to Plato and (2) more important to Plato than to Kant.¹⁹⁹ And, in line with the tetralogy's Platonic ambitions, it is God as criterion of value which receives most emphasis in *Joseph*. He is described as presiding over an empyrean which is referred to as 'Das Reich der Strenge' – an ethereal empire inhabited by a heavenly host which feels and expresses nothing but contempt for the imperfect mundane 'forms' they are occasionally required to have truck with. The novel's heaven, then, is a religious rendering of Plato's noumenal realm from where ideas – with το καλόν at their head – set standards which the things of the phenomenal realm can approximate but never satisfy. And the comparison can be taken further. For just as the subsidiary ideas acquire value in so far as they accord with το καλόν, so the angels of *Joseph* are only good in so far as they perform the task God prescribes for them, in so far as they are His faithful 'Boten'. These haughty first-born children of the Almighty would happily consign the whole terrestrial realm to destruction, but fortunately for mankind God enjoys an immediate as well as a mediated relationship with the lower world, and if His angels prove recalcitrant He has ways of compelling them to do His bidding.²⁰⁰ At one point 'Der Mann auf dem Felde' is visibly prevented, against his own inclinations, by an unseen disciplinary force from further mockery of Jacob and his pretensions: ' "Übrigens," sagte er plötzlich und vollführte eine höchst sonderbare Bewegung der Augen, die er nicht nur aufschlug, sondern schnell und gleichsam rundum schielend im Kreise herumrollte, "laß es gut sein und nenne deinen Vater nur Jisrael – bitte sehr." ' (IV, 539-540)

¹⁹⁹ Kant attempts to derive the criterion of value from the freedom of the noumenal self, Plato concludes (in *Phaedo*) that the authentic self must be a noumenon since it can communicate with the criterion of value, and this is definitionally not part of the phenomenal realm: 'The soul is most like what is divine, immortal, the object of thought (νοητῶ: νοητόν = νοούμενον), of one single form, indestructible, and remaining ever constant and true to itself.' (Plato (trans. Griffith) 1987, 164) It is as though these two philosophers were attempting to define the relationship between subjectivity and valuation from opposite ends of the problem, Plato moving from deontology to ontology, Kant from ontology to deontology.

²⁰⁰ Just as the relationship of God to the terrestrial realm can be immediate or unmediated, so can the relationship of το καλόν to the phenomenal realm. As David Melling puts it: 'The Idea of the Good is itself knowable as well as being the source of the knowability of all that is knowable.' (Melling 1987, 102) Incidentally, like the Moses of 'Das Gesetz' and the mature Aschenbach, the angels are 'Barbaren' in the Schillerian sense: while professing an unyielding hostility to 'Natur' they secretly lust after its satisfactions – hence their sexual encounters with the daughters of Eve.

Nowhere, however, does the Platonic strain in Joseph's religious thinking announce itself so clearly as it does in the transformation of Potiphar from a would-be virile head-of-household into something altogether less active and more exalted. When we first make the acquaintance of Joseph's new master (in the 'Potiphar' chapter of *Joseph in Ägypten*) he descends with an 'unnötig unternehmenden Absprung' from his chariot and, once Mont-Kaw's eulogy of his full-blooded equestrian skills has run its course, declares that he intends to spend the afternoon hunting the hippopotamus. (IV, 807) And to the reproach that his wife will tremble with anxiety when news of his audacious pastime reaches her, he replies with evident relish: 'Sie zittere'. (IV, 808) This show of masculine bravura, however, is as pitiable as it is embarrassing because Potiphar, as we soon learn if we have not already guessed as much from his description in this chapter, is a eunuch, castrated at his parents' behest in a vain effort to keep up with evolving religious sentiment. 'Armer Potiphar! Er war eine Null in aller Pracht seiner feurigen Wagenräder und all seiner Größe und den Großen Ägyptens.' (IV, 876) However, Joseph's first sardonic reaction on learning of Potiphar's condition is soon joined by another: 'Es mag kindisch zu sagen sein, aber Joseph fand eine zu ähnlichem Mitgefühl auffordrende Verwandtschaft zwischen der einsamen Außerweltlichkeit des Vätergottes und der stolzen, mit Lobgold behangenen Außermenschlichkeit des verstümperten Rubenturms.' (IV, 877)

In the course of time we notice a change come over Potiphar. Once his association with Joseph, who after their initial encounter in the garden becomes his valet and personal reader, begins in earnest, he occasionally allows us to share a newfound insight into the character of his domestic arrangements: that his power in the household is not that brought to bear by force and the threat of force, but rather the power exercised by a criterion of value. When Mont Kaw presents the estate accounts, for example, Potiphar does not examine them with the beady eye of a potentate jealous of his rights, but comments:

Stimmt das hier mit dem Weizen und Spelt? Natürlich stimmt es, ich sehe schon. Ich bin überzeugt, daß du treu bist wie Gold und mir ergeben mit Leib und Seele. Könnte es auch anders sein? Das könnte es gar nicht in Ansehung deiner Natur und in Ansehung der großen Abscheulichkeit, die es bedeutete, mir zu nahe zu treten. Aus Liebe zu mir machst du meine

Angelegenheit zu der deinen – gut, ich lasse sie dir um deiner Liebe willen, du wirst dich nicht selbst verkürzen durch Nachlässigkeit oder Schlimmeres, in eigener Sache. (V, 928)

Potiphar assumes, in other words, that the relationship obtaining between himself and Mont Kaw is motivated on the latter's part by the need to cherish a touchstone imparting worth to his own actions and person. And this, we remember, is exactly the same motivation which drove Abraham to find and serve God. However, we have seen that the God of Abraham was by no means *just* a criterion of value – along with that attribute He possessed phenomenal might and worldly interests. And the truth is that in respect of the balance between secular might and interests on the one hand and the disinterested power which accrues to the source of value itself on the other hand, Potiphar comes closer to satisfying Joseph's notion of God than God Himself ever could so long as His partnership with the comparatively unenlightened Abraham endured.

There is a naturalistic explanation for this, one adumbrated in the text. (IV, 877) Joseph sees his devotion to his new master as a repetition and extension of his devotion to God, and Potiphar, during years of daily intercourse with his new valet (later his major domo), learns to incarnate in his own person the God the young man wishes to serve. The extent of the change which comes over him can be gauged from the following passage. It is a description of Potiphar sitting in the 'Westhalle':

Vollendet der Formgesinnung Ägyptens gemäß waren die bemalten Pfeiler seiner Halle, zwischen denen hindurch er in den Abend schaute. Umgebender Besitz begünstigt die Unbeweglichkeit. Man läßt ihn beharren in seiner Schönheit und beharrt, die Glieder geordnet, in seiner Mitte. Auch kommt Beweglichkeit eher den zeugend gegen die Welt Geöffneten zu, die säen und ausgeben und sterbend sich in ihrem Samen zerpflücken, – nicht einem gleich Petepre Beschaffenen in der Geschlossenheit seines Daseins. Ebenmäßig in sich versammelt saß er, ohne Ausgang zur Welt und unzugänglich dem Tode der Zeugung, ewig, ein Gott in seiner Kapelle.²⁰¹

However, the resemblance between Joseph's conception of God and Potiphar's conceit of himself is not due solely to the effect of the former on the latter. We must

²⁰¹ (V, 1028) Note the play on the word 'Gott' permitted by the universal capitalization of nouns in German.

remember that the task of the ‘Gottesfürsten’ is to identify the true character of God, and it is clear that Joseph is on the lookout for clues as to what that character might be: clues to be found amongst God’s living analogues in the terrestrial realm.²⁰² It is likely that Potiphar takes Joseph’s conception of God as a model for his own spiritual regime, but it is certain that Joseph takes Potiphar as a model for his own conception of God. When, at the eleventh hour, he defeats once and for all Mut-em-enet’s sexual challenge he is held back, yes, by a reluctance to compromise with an Egypt which is all ‘Natur’ and no ‘Geist’, all ‘Kultur’ and no ‘Zivilisation’, but he is also held back by a reluctance to cuckold Mut-em-enet’s husband – which appears to be a quite different order of motivation. In fact, however, the two reasons for Joseph’s ‘Keuschheit’ are one, because Joseph has come to identify his God, who is all ‘Geist’, with Potiphar. That is, these apparently distinct forms of inhibition: a religious imperative against the world of the senses, a sentimental imperative against offending a much-loved friend and master, fuse in what Potiphar has come to represent:

Es ist nicht anders, als daß die feiste, doch edle Person des Sonnenämtilings und Titelgatten der Mut in ihrer melancholischen Selbstsucht diesem träumerischen Kopf als die untere Entsprechung und fleischliche Wiederholung des weib- und kinderlosen, einsam-eifersüchtigen Gottes seiner Väter erschien, der schonende Menschentreue zu halten er, in verspieltem Zugleich und nicht ohne Einschlag verwandter Nützlichkeitspekulation, aufs ernstlichste entschlossen war. (V, 1138)

Once we grasp this: that Potiphar allows Joseph new insight into God’s character in a way which complements that in which Joseph imparts God’s character to Potiphar, we will once again feel the temptation to attribute their meeting to the hand of providence. God – dependent on the offices of the ‘Gottesfürsten’ to bring about an accession to the ‘Geist’ which is truly His – ordains the association between Joseph and Potiphar in order to bring about not just the latter’s apotheosis, but His own too.

²⁰² ‘Ein dringlich sorgendes Bemühen um die Feststellung der Natur Gottes war ihm eingeboren; von Anbeginn in ihm lebendig war ein Keim der Einsicht in des Schöpfers Außerweltlichkeit, Allheit und Geistigkeit, also, daß er der Raum der Welt war, aber die Welt nicht sein Raum (ganz ähnlich wie der Erzähler der Raum der Geschichte ist, die Geschichte aber nicht seiner, was für ihn die Möglichkeit bedeutet, sie zu erörtern) –: ein entwicklungsfähiger Keim, der bestimmt war, sich mit der Zeit und unter großen Anstrengungen zur vollen Erkenntnis von Gottes wahrer Natur auszuwachsen.’ (V, 1290)

The 'Geist' of Pharaoh

Joseph and the 'Gottesfürsten' are not, though, the only inhabitants of their world engaged in winnowing from the dross of religious superstition a 'Geist' free from all that is secular and terrestrial. On various occasions throughout the novel Joseph is made aware that people whom Jacob would no doubt regard as incorrigible infidels are, in truth, kindred spirits. That is true of the priests of On, for example, who maintain a highly intellectualized form of solar cult, and who have elaborated the 'doctrine of the triangle'. At first glance, this teaches only that all the other religions of the world, though lacking the perfection of On's own, can be understood to form a series of triangle-bases from which the convergent sides ascend to the true object of worship – with the result that the followers of other faiths can be welcomed as thus-far unwitting adherents of the sun god. But there is more to the doctrine of the triangle than this: it looks forward to a Platonic, or rather neo-Platonic way, of representing the noumenal realm. 'Neo-Platonic' because although Plato himself does not organize his metaphysic into any definite system, his followers in the ancient and mediaeval world tended to envisage one, with το καλόν (or some even higher principle such as Plotinus' 'One') at the very top and, depending from it, a broadening hierarchy of properties and ideas, each with subordinates of its own, comprising the whole intelligible world. If the evocation of such metaphysics-to-come were not Mann's design, it would be hard to account for the wording of the following description, and in particular for the phrase 'Raum der Zusammenschau'. Having described the bases of the triangle, the priests continue thus:

Darüber aber erheben sich die zusammenstrebenden Schenkelseiten der schönen Figur, und der so eigentümliche Raum, den sie begrenzen, mochte der "Raum der Zusammenschau" genannt sein, ausgezeichnet durch die Eigenschaft, daß er sich ständig verengere[...]. Denn die Schenkel trafen einander in einem Punkt, und dieser Schluß- und Schnittpunkt, unterhalb dessen alle Breiten des Sinnbildes gleichseitig bestehen blieben, sei der Herr ihres Tempels, sei Atum-Rê.
(IV, 735)

The full philosophical significance of these pregnant phrases is not appreciated even by the priests who utter them, just as the full religious significance of the Adonai-cult is not appreciated by the women who practise it. Rather, what the priests' words reveal is an intellectual tendency which will one day *emerge* as Platonism. Their

conception of the supreme object of veneration is, from Joseph's point of view, an important advance on the supposedly divine cadavers and animals which infatuate so many of his contemporaries, but it has a long way to go before achieving its perfection. And indeed we witness a decisive step in the progress towards that perfection later during Joseph's interview with Pharaoh, the most important episode in the novel from a Platonic point of view.

It should come as no surprise that the conversation between these two dreamers proves to be of philosophical and religious significance for both of them. Of Joseph's own tendency to seek the noumenal and evaluative in God we should by this time need no convincing – but in a remarkable development it transpires that Pharaoh too wishes to re-establish religious belief on less worldly foundations. And in point of fact he is rather more inclined than Joseph (who anyway enjoys no such liberty) to devote his life to the contemplation and veneration of the highest.

Joseph wußte sehr wohl daß Jung-Pharaoh[...]den Angelegenheiten der bildenden Weltverzierung eine eifrige, ja eifernde Aufmerksamkeit widmete, – nämlich in genauem Zusammenhang mit der Anstrengung, die er es sich kosten ließ, den Gott Atôn nach seiner Wahrheit und Reinheit hervorzudenken. (V, 1377)

This attempt to conceive Atôn in his truth and purity involves the discovery – many hundreds of years ahead of schedule – of Platonic ideas. Having considered the mystery of the Phoenix-egg which becomes none the heavier for being made to incorporate the body of the phoenix's father, and in his enthusiasm for the paternal-spiritual, as opposed to the maternal-material, Pharaoh goes so far as to envisage not just a Platonic empyrean, but a whole parallel world of ideas.²⁰³

So hieß das, daß es unstoffliche Körper gab, – anders und besser gesagt: unkörperliche Wirklichkeiten, immaterielle wie das Sonnenlicht, – wieder anders und noch besser gesagt: es gab das Geistige; und dieses Geistige war ätherisch verkörpert in dem Bennu-Vater, den das

²⁰³ Throughout *Joseph* Mann associates the pre-Platonism of Pharaoh and the pre-Christianity of Joseph with Bachofen's masculine religious principle as discerned in ancient mythology. 'Das Mutterrecht stammt von unten, ist chthonischer Natur und chthonischen Ursprungs; das Vaterrecht dagegen kommt von oben, ist himmlischer Natur und himmlischen Ursprungs; es ist das Recht der Lichtmächte, wie jenes das Gesetz des dunkeln, mit Finsternis erfüllten Erdschoßes. Es bedeutet also eine höhere Stufe der Religion und der menschlichen Entwicklung als das stoffliche Mutterrecht.' (Bachofen 1975, 130-131)

Myrrhen-Ei aufnahm, indem es dadurch seinen Charakter als Ei in der aufregendsten und bedeutsamsten Weise veränderte. Das Ei überhaupt war ein Ding entschieden weiblicher Spezifität, einzig die Weibchen unter den Vögeln legten Eier, und nichts konnte mütterlich-weiblicher sein als das große Ei, aus dem einst die Welt hervorgegangen. Benu aber, der Sonnenvogel, mutterlos und sein eigener Vater, formte sein Ei selbst, ein Gegen-Weltei, ein männliches Ei, ein Vater-Ei, und legte es als seine Kundgebung vom Vatertum, Geist und Licht auf den Alabaster-Tisch der Sonnengottheit nieder. (V, 1388)

His religious and philosophical quest puts us in mind of the philosopher kings of *Republic*: men who must first be educated to identify and appreciate the source of all goodness and beauty, before being permitted to discharge to the state their moral obligation of good governance.²⁰⁴ Except, of course, that long contemplation of what is most exalted has left Pharaoh wholly unversed in the pragmatism essential if new social and religious programmes – howsoever laudable and disinterested – are to stand a chance of realization. As he himself becomes aware during their interview, he needs someone like Joseph, a Hermes at home in both the celestial and terrestrial realms, if the state is to be led by good practice to good effect.

And this vague reminiscence of *Republic* is brought sharply into focus in the context of more evident references to, or – from the point of view of the novel’s imagined reality – startling premonitions of, Plato’s political masterpiece throughout Pharaoh’s religious disquisition. He is a follower of the solar cult Joseph first became aware of in On, and waxes lyrical about all the wonderful attributes which have earned the sun its place as a perennial focus of religious awe: it brings warmth, life, joy etc. But he begins his eulogy on a different note. The sun is remarkable as a dispenser of enlightenment, a source of *cognition*: it allows the world to be made out and to make itself out. That is, he commends the sun as the principle of intelligibility: ‘Selige Heiligkeit, die sich das Auge schuf, ihr zu begegnen, Blick und Erblicktes. Zu-sich-kommen der Welt, die nur durch dich von sich weiß, Licht, du liebende Unterscheidung!’ (V, 1456)

²⁰⁴ The chapter which introduces Pharaoh is entitled ‘Das Kind der Höhle’. This has been taken – beyond its obvious relevance to both Hermes and Joseph – as a reference to Dionysos by Bernd-Jürgen Fischer. (Fischer 2002, 714) We would suggest that so far as Pharaoh is concerned a more likely allusion is to the cave in *Republic* from which the guardian class must be led by degrees to true enlightenment before returning as philosopher kings to rule over their benighted fellows.

The rather odd notion that the sun begets the eye brings to mind a crucial passage of *Republic* in which Socrates, seeking to explain to Glaucon the relationship of the human intellect to το ἀγαθόν,²⁰⁵ takes the relationship of the eye to the sun for comparison and asks, ‘is not the faculty which the eye possesses dispensed to it from the sun, and held by it as something adventitious?’ And it turns out that Pharaoh’s whole train of thought in this passage parallels that of the sixth book of *Republic* so faithfully that there can be no question of the resemblance being accidental. For just as Socrates persuades Glaucon that the solar deity is no more than a good analogy for the source of all value and intelligibility,²⁰⁶ so Pharaoh too, susceptible like Potiphar before him to Joseph’s guiding presence, comes to see that the sun is not the most proper object of reverence.²⁰⁷ He seizes on the difference between ‘Vater am Himmel’ and ‘Vater im Himmel’ as the key to an essential distinction: ‘Ja, ja, im Himmel und nicht am Himmel, ferner als fern, und näher als nah, das Sein des Seins, das nicht in den Tod blickt, das nicht wird und stirbt sondern ist, das stehende Licht, das nicht aufgeht noch untergeht, die unwandelbare Quelle, aus der all Leben, Licht, Schönheit und Wahrheit quillt – das ist der Vater, so offenbart er sich Pharaoh, Seinem Sohn.’ (V, 1468-9) And a few lines later, in phrases which display his understanding of the sun’s value as analogon, he adds: ‘Goldener Geist ist das Licht, Vatergeist, und zu Ihm ringt die Kraft sich empor aus Muttertiefen, daß sie sich läutere in seiner Flamme und Geist werde im Vater. Unstofflich ist Gott, wie Sein Sonnenschein, Geist ist Er, und der Pharaoh lehrt euch, Ihn im Geiste und in der Wahrheit anzubeten.’

This Platonic quality of Pharaoh’s conversion from a rarefied solar cult to the reverence of a ‘Geist’ which has an intimate but non-spatial relationship with the

²⁰⁵ Strictly speaking this is ‘the good’ rather than το καλόν, ‘the beautiful’, but most commentators accept that the two terms are synonyms. ‘It would seem that the Idea of the Good of the *The Republic* must be regarded as identical with the essential Beauty of *Symposium*. Both are represented as the high-peak of an intellectual ascent, while the comparison of the Idea of the Good with the sun would appear to indicate that it is the source not only of the goodness of things, but also of their beauty.’ (Copleston I, 176)

²⁰⁶ ‘Well then, I continued, believe that I meant the sun when I spoke of the offspring of the chief good, begotten by it in a certain resemblance to itself – that is to say, bearing the same relation in the visible world to sight and its objects, which the chief good bears in the intellectual world to pure reason and its objects.’ (Plato (trans. Davies/Vaughan) 1997, 218-19)

²⁰⁷ Joseph, as Hermes, is ambassador for the very principle with which Pharaoh seeks an accord: ‘Und doch ist zu mir gesagt worden: “Nenne mich nicht den Atôn, denn es ist verbesserungsbedürftig. Nenne mich den Herrn des Atôn.” Siehe jedoch, was tut der Vater seinem geliebten Sohn? Er sendet ihm einen Boten und Traumdeuter[...], daß er in ihm erwecke, was er weiß, und ihm deute was ihm gesagt wurde.’

world of the senses ('ferner als fern, und näher als nah')²⁰⁸ and from which life, light, beauty and truth all emanate, is underlined by the locality in which the interview between Joseph and his new master takes place: the 'Kretische Laube' – for Cretan in the context of the late second millennium BC means Minoan, and Minoan means Paleo-Hellenic. As usual in *Joseph*, we can adopt the naturalistic perspective and write off as the product of blind chance this concordance of the novel's fictional reality with a future not yet realized. Just as the premonitory importance of Joseph's spiritual growth, a spiritual growth which make of him a harbinger of Christianity, seems marked by circumstances (like the angel at the well) which, adjusted slightly, will feature in the Christian story, so the premonitory importance of Pharaoh's spiritual growth, a spiritual growth which makes of him a harbinger of Platonism, seems marked by circumstances (like the Cretan bower) which, adjusted slightly, will witness the birth of Platonic philosophy. But though we may be induced by such coincidences to consider the possibility of a noumenal intention which occasionally advertises its otherwise imperceptible activity by retrospective shadows of things to come – nothing obliges us to do so. That is, nothing beyond our distrust of improbability and our yearning for meaning. But whether we are prepared to see the supernatural at work in such coincidences or not, it should be apparent to all that the Platonism and the Christianity which Mann identified as the two chief vehicles for 'Geist' in the ancient world merge in the meeting between Pharaoh, whose philosophical vision is animated by religious fervour, and Joseph, whose religious conviction is mellowed by philosophical insight.

Mann's Intentions for *Joseph und seine Brüder*

This brings us up to the middle of the final volume of the tetralogy, and it might be well at this point to consider what Mann has so far achieved. What were his ambitions for *Joseph* when he began writing it, and did they change much or at all during the long period of its composition? Was it, for example, conceived in

²⁰⁸ The intimate but non-spatial relationship between the metaphysical and the phenomenal realm was at least partially understood by Abraham, as related in 'Wie Abraham Gott entdeckte'. It is well explained by Copleston: 'The χωρισμός or separation would thus seem to imply, in the case of the Platonic essence, a reality beyond the subjective reality of the abstract concept – a subsistent reality, but not a local separation. It is therefore just as true to say that the essence is immanent, as that it is transcendent: the great point is that it is *real* and independent of particulars, unchanged and abiding.' (Copleston I, 174-175)

accordance with the same Schillerian hypothesis which provides the intellectual foundation for *Betrachtungen*: that there is a perpetual struggle for dominance between ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’, those two irreconcilable principles which despite their enmity yearn towards one another and must be brought into a fruitful balance and cohabitation? As we have seen, they form an important theme in ‘Höllenfahrt’, and certain of Mann’s own declarations from the period when he began work on the novel strongly support the notion that he was first attracted to the story by its hero’s ability to move between the celestial and the terrestrial, the noumenal and the phenomenal. For example he tells Ernst Bertram in a letter dated 28th December 1926 that so far as he is concerned the cornerstone of the biblical account ‘ist der Segen des sterbenden Jakob über Joseph: “Von dem Allmächtigen bist du gesegnet mit Segen oben vom Himmel herab, mit Segen von der Tiefe, die unten liegt.” Damit man sich zu einem Werk entschließe, muß es, als Stoff, irgendwo einen Punkt haben, bei dessen Berührung einem regelmäßig das Herz aufgeht. Dies ist dieser produktive Punkt.’ (Briefe I, 263) However, at this stage there is no sign in his correspondence of any sort of militancy in Mann’s attitude to the newly-begun work: Joseph is to be a ‘mythische[r] Hochstapler’, the contrast between ‘Bedeuten und Sein’²⁰⁹ is presented as equivalent to that between ‘myth and reality’ – an equivalence which, if it were maintained consistently throughout the novel, would render invalid the distinction Joseph himself makes between the ‘geistiger’ religion of his fathers and the multifarious idolatrous beliefs of so many of his contemporaries.²¹⁰

But *Joseph und seine Brüder*, although enlivened by notes of comedy throughout, does not persist in the same essayistic, uncommitted tone which characterizes ‘Höllenfahrt’ and the earlier chapters of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*. At some stage Mann decided to make of the novel a vehicle for the promotion of a certain philosophical perspective, one unduly neglected, as he saw it, in contemporary German society and politics. It was a perspective which during the First World War he had, fearing that it might gain a universal monopoly, inveighed against, on the grounds that its emphasis on the ideal and universal threatened to suppress the historical and particular, that its emphasis on duty to humanity in general threatened to suppress the prerogatives of class and nation. And it was a perspective whose

²⁰⁹ This phrase no doubt inspired Nolte’s contrast between ‘Meaning’ and ‘Being’.

²¹⁰ All this from a letter to Erika Mann dated 23rd December 1926. (Briefe I, 261)

claims, during the first years of peace when far from celebrating an overwhelming triumph it struggled to make headway against the hostility of its eternal opponent, he had tentatively urged, on the grounds that it was indispensable to human dignity. That perspective – we are referring to ‘*Geist*’, of course – was evidently in danger of being altogether routed in the Germany of the early 1930’s and just as Mann had thrown his literary and intellectual weight against it in *Betrachtungen*, so he now decided to throw his literary and intellectual weight behind it in *Joseph und seine Brüder*. We can witness this evolution in his 1931 article ‘Fragment über das Religiöse.’²¹¹ In it Mann declares himself lacking all religious or irreligious conviction, and insists that he could never anyway recognize a God who was merely all-powerful – the maker of the physical universe – as worthy of reverence. The material universe, he points out, is just a machine: ‘einen äußerst komplizierten und in sich ruhenden Mechanismus mit irrationalen Einschlügen.’ (XI, 424) He goes on to say that, despite his current reputation as an idealist, he is by no means unwilling to grant the religious character of ‘zeitgenössischer Strebungen, den Menschen neu ans Natürliche zu binden’, but then makes the following confession:

Wenn ich aber eine Überzeugung, eine religio mein eigen nenne, so ist es die, *daß es nie eine Stufe gegeben hat, auf der der Mensch noch nicht Geist, sondern nur Natur war*. Die modische Tendenz, ihn auf eine solche Stufe “zurückzuführen”, die Ideenverhöhnung der Zeit ist mir in tiefster Seele zuwider. Der Mensch hat nie aufgehört, aus den Antinomien seines geistig-fleischlichen Doppelwesens das Absolute, die Idee zu visieren, – das ist eine Schwäche von ihm, eine Mitgift, ich weiß nicht woher, seht sie ihm nach, sie gehört nun einmal zu seiner Natur und Wahrheit, und er belöge sich selbst, wenn er sie verleugnete, – den Aufblick verleugnete zu “Gott”, den Aufblick zu sich selbst. (XI, 425)

It is this deeply unNietzschean, deeply unSchopenhauerian view of the importance of the ‘Absolute’ and the ‘Idee’, whose denial would entail the denial of both ‘God’ and mankind – it is this view, we believe, which underlies the supernatural and metaphysical perspective which alternates throughout the length of the tetralogy with that other which considers the world to be simply an ‘äusserst komplizierten und in sich ruhenden Mechanismus.’ And if in 1931 Mann was still willing to be conciliatory with regard to ‘Fleischesmystik’ – the idolization of ‘Natur’, the phenomenal realm – his tolerance for such superstition evaporated completely when,

²¹¹ Written after the composition of *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*, but before its publication.

in the form of a National-Socialist tyranny, it became altogether dominant. As he wrote to Karl Kerényi: ‘Ich bin ein Mensch des Gleichgewichts. Ich lehne mich instinktiv nach links, wenn der Kahn rechts zu kentern droht, – und umgekehrt.’ (XI, 632) Considering that the German ship of state continued to list ever further to the right throughout the 1930’s, it is entirely to be expected that Mann himself – at home and in exile – leaned ever further to the left. That is: away from ‘Natur’ and towards ‘Geist’. The presence of this tendency is, of course, indisputable in his essays and journalism, but it is detectable in the tetralogy too, which, as we have noted, becomes more ‘geistig’ from volume to volume.²¹²

Not that the novel at any stage lends credence to idolatry. As we have seen, it goes out of its way to suggest that a divine providence shapes the life of its protagonist. That providence is never unequivocally present in the story: always we can attribute what looks like supernatural intervention to some accident of the phenomenal world. But there is no question which divinity *is to be suspected* of shaping the story’s ends – and it is the God of Joseph and the ‘Gottesfürsten’. Certain putatively supernatural entities in the story, such as the dog-headed Anup (one and the same personage as the ‘Mann auf dem Felde’, as we are given to understand) who appears to Jacob in a dream, or Ea-Oannes who indicates to him the whereabouts of the subterranean well, would have to be accounted agents of God, despite their pagan appearance, and even the ‘Hündin’ (admitting that she has some sort of objective existence and influence) invoked by Mut-em-enet to weaken Joseph’s chastity would actually be doing His work.²¹³ For if Joseph were not tempted to a private encounter with Mut-em-enet, he would never be sent a prisoner to Zawi-Rê, never tell the Royal vintner his fortune, never be called to the Royal presence, never become ‘wie Pharaoh’. As for the other idols of popular piety mentioned in *Joseph*, there is no suggestion that there is

²¹² Harpprecht notes that ‘Aus den Tagebüchern[...] ergibt sich, daß die Religiosität, wenigstens für manche Augenblicke, entschiedener in das Dasein des Autors getreten war: “das Bewußtsein meines Kultur-Christentums,” schrieb er, “das freilich ansteht, ‘gläubig’ zu werden und sich der Offenbarung zu unterwerfen, ist in letzter Zeit sehr erstarkt.”’ (Harpprecht 1995, 821)

²¹³ It is an indication of the degree to which Schopenhauerian thinking has been marginalized in the later volumes of *Joseph* that the ‘Hündin’ – despite boasting all the obvious credentials – is not presented as an ambassador of the ‘Wille’, but rather as the personified *ideal* of sluttishness, although whether this ideal is just an element of human psychology or has its place in the metaphysical realm remains unclear: ‘Solche Gottheiten gibt es und muß es geben, denn die Welt hat Seiten, welche, von Ekel und Blutschmutz starrend und zur Vergöttlichung scheinbar wenig geeignet, dennoch so gut wie die gewinnenderen der ewigen Repräsentation und Vorsteherschaft, der geistigen Verkörperung, sozusagen, oder der persönlichen Vergeistigung bedürfen.’ (V, 1228-9)

anything more to them than the stone, wood, gilt and sawdust out of which they are fabricated.

But Joseph and the narrator (who, as we have seen, seems to adopt in the later parts of the tetralogy the assumptions of his main protagonist) become ever more severe in their devotion to 'Geist' as time passes. The way in which the 'junge' Joseph exploits and manipulates the religious beliefs of his own father and clan is indistinguishable from the way he goes on, in his exile, to exploit and manipulate the religious beliefs of benighted but powerful contemporaries who worship idolatrous mythological figures, so that we might easily gain the impression that the God of the 'Gottesfürsten' is no more to be revered, and enjoys no better a claim to reality, than Baal, Thoth and the rest. Nor does Joseph's decision to identify himself with Osiris – with its blasphemous implications for a son of Israel – cause him any anguish, so far as we can tell. On the contrary, he evidently finds the performance of such a role to be as gratifying to his vanity as it is expedient for his social progress. By contrast, 'Von Josephs Keuschheit' makes clear that Joseph 'in Ägypten' is deeply dismayed by pagan superstition and the worldliness which underlies it. It is on account of the repugnance he feels towards such misguided religiosity that he for so long refuses to yield ground to Mut-em-enet's campaign of sexual aggression. This is a dramatic change in his attitude, so striking that Mann felt the need to include in *Joseph in Ägypten* a chapter intended to explain it: 'Urim und Tummim'.

What does Mann mean by these two terms? Tummim is that Hermetic reconciliation of Godliness and worldliness, the noumenal and the phenomenal which, as we have seen, is Joseph's and, to a lesser extent, Jacob's birthright. By contrast 'Urim' is an exclusive orientation to Godliness and the noumenal: 'Tummim ist das Helle und Finstere, das Oberweltliche und Unterweltliche zugleich und im Austausch – und Urim nur das Fröhliche, in Reinkultur davon abgesondert.' (V, 1508) Urim, then, evidently denotes 'Geist' in its purity, and would be an admirable quality, no doubt, did it not suffer certain deficiencies extensively illustrated in Mann's fiction. For in its negligence of the secular world's limitations, it is either impotent to realize itself (the Pharaoh of the tetralogy, had Joseph not come to his assistance) or driven to realize itself by ignominious tyranny (the Moses of 'Das Gesetz'). Jacob, for example, could never have become a wealthy and successful man in Laban's nether-world if he had

been all Urim, and as for Joseph, his ‘rasche Anpassung an die sonnige Unterwelt Ägyptenlandes [deutet] ebenfalls nicht auf eine bloße Urim-Natur.’ (V, 1509) But Jacob and Joseph are as much Urim as they are Tummim. That is, theirs is a twice-compounded perspective which, we are told, might be translated: ‘yes – yes/no’, and which we, reinstating Mann’s usual terminology, translate: ‘Geist – Geist/Natur’. Mann then adds that, in the light of the fact that ‘yes’ and ‘no’ cancel one another out, there remains only a ‘yes’ in force – and we, in parallel, point out that once the two elements of ‘Geist/Natur’ are allowed to nullify one another, then ‘Geist’ is what remains. That is the purpose of this, for many readers baffling, but all the same crucial passage: to reassure us that though Jacob and Joseph seem equally at home in the phenomenal and noumenal, the terrestrial and celestial worlds, their ultimate loyalty – like the ‘Spieltrieb’, like Hermes himself – is to the latter.²¹⁴

Seen in the light of Mann’s increasing commitment to ‘Geist’ during the 1930s, then, *Joseph und seine Brüder* recounts a multitude of triumphs. The first and most obvious is the ascent to the highest governmental office of a representative of the celestial and noumenal who, however, is so much at home in the terrestrial and phenomenal realm that he knows how to flatter, cajole and deceive it into the paths of righteousness – rather than achieving the ends of ‘Geist’ by violence and terror. The second is the guaranteed survival of the tribe of Israel – for although Pharaoh does indeed anticipate Platonism (and of course Christianity too, to an extent), we know that his is a false start, and many hundreds of years must pass before the philosophical spirit which once inspired him will come to inspire Plato himself. As Joseph confides to his brothers, although Pharaoh is ‘recht wohl auf dem Wege’ he is none the less ‘der Rechte nicht für den Weg.’ (V, 1749) Underlying the usual significance of the oft repeated phrase ‘nachkommen lassen’ – a thought inextricably linked for Joseph since he first recounted his dream of apotheosis to Benjamin with that of the acquisition of supreme power – is that of ‘Nachkommen’ in a genealogical and a spiritual sense. Without Joseph’s political ascendancy the future of Israel would have looked bleak indeed, and without Israel there could be no Christianity. Finally, there is Joseph’s intellectual and spiritual achievement in helping God slough off the last of

²¹⁴ Bernd-Jürgen Fischer notices that the fictional occasion for this disquisition, Joseph’s relocation to Memphis, seems the merest pretext, and adds: ‘Es entsteht der Eindruck, als wollte ThM. hier etwas unterbringen, was ihm zuvor noch nicht so deutlich war: die Beschreibung der Welt als “Ja – ja, nein”.’ (Fischer 2002, 733). He then goes on to explain Urim and Tummim in terms of quantum physics.

his phenomenal attributes and interests so that he might assume the noumenal purity which is rightfully His. The God whom Joseph sees in Potiphar, and of whom Potiphar, with Joseph's encouragement, becomes a living reflection; the God whom Pharaoh, with Joseph's guidance, comes to discern beyond a sun which is but His analogon – this God is not concerned to rule by might, and the influence He exerts is that of a criterion from which all that is valuable in the phenomenal realm proceeds. All that is valuable, all that is intelligible, all that is proper to the free and self-determining subject.

Hegel

But we have not yet reached the end of our reckoning, for present throughout *Joseph* as an uneasy complement to the Platonic view of 'Geist' is another: one strongly resembling that of Hegel. It is a similarity which has gone largely unnoticed, and given the Schopenhauerian perspective adopted by certain influential Mann scholars, and given that Schopenhauer detested Hegel and all he philosophically stood for, this is hardly surprising.²¹⁵ Nor do we wish to imply that Mann devoted to the perusal of Hegel the time and attention he lavished on Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Plato and Schiller – and it is evident that the acquaintance was largely mediated through articles, reviews and, in particular, son Golo's doctoral dissertation.²¹⁶ None the less, that some of Hegel's notions were familiar to Mann is confirmed by references to them in a number of works already cited in this thesis. 'Okkulte Erlebnisse' mentions his 'Geist' (alongside Plato's ideas) in the context of supernatural manifestations.²¹⁷ *Betrachtungen* pointedly refuses to endorse Schopenhauer's derisive reaction to that same 'Geist'.²¹⁸ And when Mann enthuses about his own conception of 'Geist' in 'Versuch über das Religiöse' he refers to it in Hegelian terms as 'das Absolute, die Idee'. At any rate it should be clear from the discussion which follows that certain

²¹⁵ We noted in chapter I that Kristiansen acknowledges a Hegelian element in Joseph. But Hegel is not once mentioned in the almost 900 pages of the *Handbuch zu Thomas Manns 'Josephromanen'*.

²¹⁶ Diary entry for 23rd August 1934: 'Golo gab mir seine Doktor-Arbeit über Hegel zu lesen.' (TB III, 148) Diary entry for 28th August 1934: 'Später in Golo's Hegel-Schrift gelesen.' (TB III, 151)

²¹⁷ 'Es war Hegel, der gesagt hat, daß die Idee, der Geist als letzte Quelle anzusehen sei, aus der alle Erscheinungen fließen.' (See page 54)

²¹⁸ 'Wir sind weit entfernt, sie [Schopenhauer's opinion of 'Geist'] uns zu eigen zu machen'. (See page 82)

aspects of ‘Geist’ as it appears in *Joseph* would not take the form they do without the direct or indirect influence of Hegel.

But before engaging in that discussion, we must first ask the question we posed in chapter III with regard to Nietzsche and Schopenhauer: when we say that certain aspects of Mann’s work are Hegelian, which Hegel are we talking about? It is a question even harder to accost in his case than in theirs, because whereas most commentators accept that both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer are inconsistent in their thinking (the former much more than the latter), there is continuing controversy as to whether Hegel, who is often taken to be a thoroughgoing monist, could ever have been so untrue to his own principles as to really believe that ‘Geist’ could have any existence independent of the phenomenal world. In his works on the philosophy of history – which have and had the widest currency amongst non-specialist readers – he definitely writes *as though* it does have such an independent existence. But Copleston, for instance, believes that such passages should be regarded as ‘pictorial or figurative statements of truth’, (Copleston VII, 196) and not taken literally: ‘For Hegel the infinite exists in and through the finite; the universal lives and has its being, as it were, in and through the particulars. Hence there is no room in his system for an efficient cause which transcends the world in the sense that it exists quite independently of it.’ (Copleston VII, 197) Copleston goes on to moderate this view of the matter somewhat, but other interpreters have no such qualms, and claim that Hegel was, to all intents and purposes, a naturalist.²¹⁹ For example Joseph McCarey says of Hegel’s philosophy of history that ‘the entire scheme has, it appears, an ontological ground in the essence of individual human beings, and that essence is the ultimate source of all teleological energy in history.[...]The teleological energy in question may be understood as an energy that, so to speak, pushes history from behind and from within, rather than pulling it from the front and from outside.’ (McCarney 2000, 132) By contrast commentators such as Charles Taylor take Hegel to be a dualist, and consider ‘Geist’ to be both a metaphysical reality and the phenomenal realization of that reality. In a sense, however, this whole debate – though it cannot be quite ignored – is by-the-by because, irrespective of whether Hegel was actually a

²¹⁹ ‘I do not think that we can exclude metaphysics from Hegelianism or eliminate altogether a certain element of transcendence. The attempt to do this seems to me to make nonsense of Hegel’s doctrine of the infinite Absolute.’ (Copleston VII, 198)

dualist or a monist who occasionally wrote as though he were a dualist, there is little doubt that *Mann* was a dualist, and that he employs Hegel's theory of history in that spirit. We shall proceed on the assumption that Hegel is sincere in his dualism (though it was perhaps meant only metaphorically) because Mann proceeded on exactly the same assumption.

So what characterizes Hegel's conception of 'Geist'? Firstly, he is adamant that 'Geist' (for which he employs a number of synonyms) does not wrong itself by restricting its existence to a metaphysical realm accessible only to certain exalted intellects: 'die Vernunft [ist] nicht so ohnmächtig, um es nur bis zum Ideal, bis zum Sollen zu bringen und nur außerhalb der Wirklichkeit, wer weiß wo, wohl nur als etwas besonderes in den Köpfen einiger Menschen vorhanden zu sein.' (Hegel 1970, 21) However, this realization of itself – the move from 'Geist an sich' to 'Geist für sich' – is not to be regarded as fulfilled by the mere bringing into existence of the material world. That is but a first step on the way to the 'Endzweck': effectively, the emancipation of 'Geist' from all the passion and partiality which a phenomenal career entails and a return, in secular rather than other-worldly terms, to that perfect freedom which it had to forego in order to be realized at all. The concern of historical philosophy is thus to recognize 'den Entwicklungsgang der verwirklichenden Idee[...], und zwar der Idee der Freiheit, welche nur ist als Bewußtsein der Freiheit.' (Hegel 1970, 540) The relevance of this to the tetralogy is evident. In 'Der junge Joseph' Abraham's God is described in the following terms:

Am Ende der Tage würde Gott König sein, König der Könige, König über Menschen und Götter. War er das nicht schon heute? Allerdings, in der Stille und in Abrahams Erkenntnis. Aber nicht anerkannter- und eingesehenermaßen, nicht ganz verwirklichterweise also. (IV, 433)

Abraham, of course, has not the sort of insight into God's once and future character which Joseph has, and is preoccupied instead with the recognition due to His imperial might, but already we see an important distinction between God as a noumenal entity ('in der Stille und in Abrahams Erkenntnis') and God as a phenomenal entity who will one day achieve full realization. As a creature of the world He is at the mercy of its events while as the creator of the world He retains the power to direct them (like the narrator of the novel who is both within and outside of the story he tells). The idea of

a God who allows Himself to be enchained in 'Banden' is further developed in 'Vorspiel in oberen Rängen', in which He becomes guilty of a 'Sündenfall' when Samael infects Him with an ambition similar to that attributed by Hegel to 'Geist': 'denn im Obersten Falle, wo jeder Ehrgeiz nach oben undenkbar ist, bleibt nur ein solcher nach unten übrig.' (V, 1289) What the tempter proposes is that God should forego His 'Jenseitig-Allgültig-Geistige' character and become the God of a rather undistinguished tribe which, however, will be the main vehicle of His apotheosis.

Den Gottesleib dieses eigentümlichen Stammes abzugeben, war einerseits kein sonderliches Vergnügen; unter den anderen Volksgöttern war ihm, wie man zu sagen pflegt, nicht viel Staat zu machen. Man geriet unvermeidlich dabei ins Hintertreffen. Andererseits aber und im Zusammenhang damit hob sich die allgemeine Eigenschaft des Menschengeschöpfes, ein Instrument zur Selbsterkenntnis Gottes zu sein, bei diesem Stamm in besonderer Zuspitzung hervor. (V, 1290)

One of the tetralogy's chief concerns is to focus our attention on the *progressive* in all its aspects. We witness it at work in the novel's great story-defining dynamics: Joseph's worldly career, Pharaoh's philosophical and theological investigations, the transformation of God from a semi-phenomenal worldly deity to a purely noumenal essence. And we witness it at work in the novel's incidental and ancillary elements. For example, in the mutation of an entity which eventually reveals itself to be an angelic messenger but which firstly appears as the jackal running ahead of the fugitive Jacob, which secondly appears as the dog-headed Anup in one of his dreams, and which – despite a still unmistakably doglike profile – finally appears in fully human form when it encounters Joseph 'auf dem Felde'. Progress, however, is always progress towards an end. That end may, of course, be purely phenomenal, the realization of one of the hypothetical imperatives which from the naturalistic perspective are the only ones to be observed. Pharaoh, a naturalist would say, may believe that the intellectual struggle to identify his 'Vater im Himmel' is an absolute obligation, but in truth he is merely yielding to an urge originating in the phenomenal world: social conditioning, psychological predisposition etc. But if such phenomenal ends are not themselves progressive: that is, if they do not help realize some ulterior, in the last instance non-phenomenal, end – then it follows that the progress they evince is illusory. In the absence of an ultimate end capable of lending retrospective value to the deeds which help bring it about (each deed accomplishing a purpose

which contributes in turn to the realization of its superior), there can be, properly speaking, no progress. Only change. It is precisely because Plato's *το καλόν* serves this function that Copleston affirms that 'The Good or Absolute Principle of Value has[...]the nature of a *τέλος*'. To that extent, then, the tetralogy's progressivism – if we relinquish the naturalist point of view, with which it is incompatible – is strongly supported by its Platonism.

Progress in Plato's own writing, however, is generally conceived in terms of the individual's insights, duties and spiritual growth: as a matter of finding one's own way to the 'Absolute Principle of Value'. By contrast, the notion that the whole world is ceaselessly advancing towards the realization of 'Geist', a 'Geist' whose dictates in the present, *and which are valid for the present*, demand to be recognized – such a notion is Hegelian.²²⁰ It is in a Hegelian spirit that Joseph speaks when he says of Laban (who sacrificed his own son in order to propitiate the supernatural powers-that-be) that he 'handelte nach überständigem Brauch und beging schweren Fehler damit. Denn es ekelt den Herrn das Überständige, worüber er mit uns hinaus will und schon hinaus ist, und er verwirft's und verflucht's.'²²¹ It is likewise in a Hegelian spirit that Joseph, even as he disparages the mistaken efforts of Huij and Tuij to anticipate the dictates of a 'Geist' which is always itself progressing, broods on the difficulty of identifying its changing imperatives:

Nicht Jaakob allein sorgte sich in der Welt. Das geschah überall unter den Menschen, und überall gab es den Gram, ob man sich denn auch noch auf den Herrn verstehe und auf die Zeiten, – mochte er auch zu den linkischsten Auskünften führen da und dort, und mochte freilich Jaakobs Erbgedanke des Herrn ihm die feinsten und angreifendsten Prüfungsmittel bieten für die sorgende Frage nach dem Abstand, in den etwa Brauch und Sitte vom Willen und Wachstum ebendieses Herrn geraten sein mochten. (IV, 874)

Jacob too is capable of Hegelian thinking. When he foresees the advent of 'Shiloh' in *Joseph der Ernährer* from a religious perspective he anticipates the coming of a Messiah 'Friedreich geheiß, den Träger und Bringer des Friedens' who will one day

²²⁰ For example, he says of world-historical individuals that: 'Ihre Sache war es, dies Allgemeine, die notwendige, nächste Stufe ihrer Welt zu wissen.' (Hegel 1970, 46)

²²¹ (IV, 474) A few lines later he declares, having heard Jacob's suggestion that the lamb to be consumed at the passover of 'Jahu' is a contemporary substitute for human flesh: 'Brauch und Braten sind wohlschmeckend, und sind sie eine Lösung, so lösen auch wir uns fröhlich damit vom Unflat, indem wir uns auf den Herrn verstehen und auf die Zeiten!'

rule from sea to sea and ‘vom Fluß bis zum Ende der Welt.’ (V, 1557) But when he foresees Shiloh from a less rigorously religious perspective he anticipates, or seems to, the establishment of a universal earthly state which will, after millennia of struggle, reveal itself to be the ‘end of history’ – i.e. the fulfilled *purpose* of history. Such is the implication of the following statement, at first glance no more than an exposition of the name’s derivation, at second glance a hint that the triumph of ‘Geist’ can be achieved in other than conventionally religious terms: ‘Er hieß aber Ruhe- und Rastplatz, denn das meint “Shiloh”; Frieden meint es und frohes Eratmen nach blutiger Fehde und ist ein Segenslaut, tauglich als Eigenname so gut wie als Name des Platzes.’ (V, 1556) Conversely ‘Friedreich’ is an epithet as appropriate to an empire of peace as it is to the son of man who will dispense that peace abundantly.

Does the addition of this Hegelian element greatly alter our interpretation of the novel? It is certainly not in conflict with the notion that *Joseph und seine Brüder* is a work of the fantastic, because Hegel himself, in his writings on the philosophy of history, *apparently* adopts a fantastic perspective. On the one hand he says that history should be studied *as a science*: ‘Die Geschichte aber haben wir zu nehmen, wie sie ist; wir haben historisch, empirisch zu verfahren.’ (Hegel 1970, 22) On the other hand he says that: ‘Die Philosophie[...]lehrt uns, daß alle Eigenschaften des Geistes nur durch die Freiheit erstehen, alle nur Mittel für die Freiheit sind, alle nur diese suchen und hervorbringen; es ist dies eine Erkenntnis der spekulativen Philosophie, daß die Freiheit das einzige Wahrhafte des Geistes sei.’ (Hegel 1970, 30) And these are, surely, incompatible principles. If the historian proceeds in a spirit of empiricism, then he will be quite unable to detect the presence or development of a quintessentially free ‘Geist’, for empiricism is limited to the phenomenal realm with its mandatory association of cause and effect. Conversely, if the philosopher wishes to gain insight into the development of ‘Geist’, or even to take cognizance of it, then he must not look for it in the phenomenal world which leaves no room for its freedom. In order, then, to be a philosopher of history in the Hegelian sense, one has to see the world in two ways at once: as both strictly phenomenal and at the same time as acting at the behest of a ‘Geist’ independent of all phenomena.

What this means in effect is that Hegel, while advancing the principle that ‘die Vernunft die Welt regiere’, and seeing in the ‘providence’ of the religious-minded an

allied concept,²²² does not dispute the usual scientific analysis of historical events whereby every event is but the effect of a phenomenal cause. ‘Geist’ may guide the course of history but it is never caught doing so red-handed. ‘World-historical’ individuals, for example, although they have a sharp sense of what ‘Geist’ in the contemporary stage of its development might allow them to accomplish, are not concerned with its final end, and are frequently driven by quite selfish motives. In compensation, however, their ‘eigene partikuläre Zwecke [enthalten] das Substantielle[...], welches Wille des Weltgeistes ist.’ (Hegel 1970, 45) ‘Geist’, in fact, realizes itself in history not by supernatural manifestations, nor through the abstract contemplation (followed by judicious intervention) of Platonic philosopher-kings, but rather through the struggle of competing interests and passions, which, in a dialogical conflict, bring forth a state of affairs each time a little closer to the *τέλος*, thus furnishing a sound basis for yet another round of progressive struggle: ‘Das ist die *List der Vernunft* zu nennen, daß sie die Leidenschaften für sich wirken läßt, wobei, das, durch was sie sich in Existenz setzt, einbüßt und Schaden leidet.’²²³

Hegel’s understanding of the oblique role played by ‘Geist’ in history is, then, compatible with a divine providence which seems to superintend the accession of Joseph to the highest governmental office but which, although we may believe we have good grounds – in the form of highly improbable coincidences and characters whose knowledge and behaviour is difficult to account for naturalistically – to suspect its agency, can evade the charge of improper interference in the secular world and also the danger of falling prey to that world’s contingency. Taylor interprets Hegel’s reasoning thus:

²²² ‘Das Weitere ist, daß diese Erscheinung des Gedankens, daß die Vernunft die Welt regiere, mit einer weiteren Anwendung zusammenhängt, die uns wohl bekannt ist – in der Form der Religiösen Wahrheit nämlich, daß die Welt nicht dem Zufall und äußerlichen, zufälligen Ursachen preisgegeben sei, sondern eine *Vorsehung* die Welt regiere.’ (Hegel 1970, 25)

²²³ (Hegel 1970, 49) The ‘Geist’ which uses disparate interests and passions – some of them apparently contrary to ‘Geist’ in character – evidently has something in common with God as He occasionally appears in *Joseph*: ‘Ja, dies mochte die List Gottes gewesen sein, der in Abiram sich zu verherrlichen und sich durch ihn einen Namen zu machen gedachte, daß er durch seine Mondliebe ersten Widerspruch und Unruhe in ihm erregt, sie zu eigenen Zwecken benutzt und sie zum heimlichen Ausgangspunkt seiner Laufbahn gemacht hatte.’ (IV, 426) Compare this with Taylor’s gloss of Hegel: ‘But Hegel’s image of the cunning of Reason is also, and especially, related to history. In this sense God’s providence is the absolute cunning because he lets men follow their own passions and interests, but what happens is nevertheless the fulfilment of *his* intentions.’ (Taylor 1975, 326)

Rather than working directly on the object, the higher purpose slips another object between itself and what it wants to transform. If it were to enter directly into the interaction of things, it would be a particular thing itself and would go under like all such things. But it cunningly saves itself from this fate by having its work done for it by the mechanical interaction of things in the world. (Taylor 1975, 398)

If we bear in mind the notion of a ‘Geist’ which is both ‘an sich’ and ‘für sich’ we can make sense of something which has baffled a number of critics with respect to *Joseph und seine Brüder*, and has led some of them to conclude that, despite the presence of duplicitous support for a supernatural explanation of its events, we should interpret the entire work from the naturalistic perspective: the dependence of a supposedly all-powerful God on mere mortals for His own apotheosis. But, like Hegel’s ‘Geist’, Mann’s God (who is a ‘geistiger Gott[...]nach seinem Werdenziel’) (V, 142) is both beyond the world – beyond space, time and nature – and equally, having created the universe and thrown Himself on its mercy, *within* the world and in need of allies. He is both a naturalistically explicable complex of beliefs and customs amongst a modest pastoral tribe – a bundle of phenomena. And He is also the metaphysical end to which that bundle of phenomena will, guided through the vicissitudes of history by the Gottesfürsten, ceaselessly approximate itself.²²⁴

But if the Hegelian ingredient of *Joseph* is not incompatible with its fantastic character, it does cast a new and more probing light on its protagonist.²²⁵ For Hegel’s ‘Geist’ realizes itself through unremitting struggle and suffering, while the Hermetic Joseph, ambassador in the terrestrial realm as he is for a God utterly beyond it, tricks, cajoles and flatters his way to the power he wishes to exercise on his master’s behalf, and never – not when he is lying at the bottom of a well and in danger of death by inanition, not when he is condemned to penal servitude in Zawi-Rê – does he seem to

²²⁴ Copleston explains the matter thus: ‘The world, as we know it in perception, consists of particulars, perishable objects, contingent beings; this is the *outside* of the world, the Idea, or God, *in its otherness*, gone over into particularity. In its inner thought-structure the world is identical with God, but in its outward and contingent aspect it is not identical with God, so that, in religious language, God may be said to be both transcendent and immanent. (Copleston 1946, 11)

²²⁵ Over and above any theoretical considerations, there is a good compositional reason for ending the novel in a minor key, one well explained by Henry Hatfield in his study of Mann’s later fiction: ‘The tale of Joseph is an amazing success story, on an American scale; the danger lay in writing a success story and nothing else. This danger Mann avoided by various stratagems. There are deeply moving scenes, like the recognition between Joseph and his brother, and the section “Of Withholding Love.” We encounter a second element that modifies Joseph’s success: not only is he an exile; he is not to receive the blessing of Israel after all.’ (Hatfield 1979, 86)

suffer in anything more than a physical sense: he is always sure that he is doing right by God and that God will do right by him. In this he is poles apart from Jacob, whose whole life is dominated by movements of avarice, cowardice, romantic love, grief, paternal affection, and doubt – doubt even in providence, when he learns that his best beloved son has been killed.²²⁶ Joseph is not like that, and despite the brilliant way he schemes and improvises for worldly success, his commitment to the promotion of God-in-the-world has none of the passion of his father's, not to mention Abraham's. This latter, whose religious 'Wichtignehmen' allows him 'es vor Gott und Menschen zu[...]Ansehnlichkeit und Bedeutung zu bringen' perfectly matches Hegel's understanding (according to Taylor) of those movers and shakers to be identified as world-historical individuals:

It is not just a question of men's individual ambition being used for a foreign purpose. Rather it is that those men whose individual ambitions coincide with the interests of Spirit are filled with a sense of mission. They instinctively sense the importance of what they are doing, and so do the men around them, who flock to their banner; even though both the great man and his followers would be incapable of articulating it correctly. (Taylor 1975, 392)

It is because of his quite distinct unworldliness, then, that Joseph is capable of *stealing a march on history*, of apprehending the once and future character of God and implementing His will – with the triumphant results that we have already noted. Like Hans Castorp in his snow-induced delirium, Joseph has been granted privileged access to the truth (God in His perfection, 'Geist an sich'), and although he effects far more of that truth than did his fictional forerunner (who simply forgets it, before going on to participate in a dreadful but perhaps spiritually productive world-conflict), his achievement is presented as dubious because founded on a special insight rather than on an experienced struggle. And just as Hegel's 'Geist' cannot be perfected in history through mere intellectual contemplation, so God cannot be perfected in history through mere spiritual apprehension. Joseph's career – which he had reason at first to imagine might have been that of the Messiah – turns out to be an *anticipation*, not the ultimate realization of God's apotheosis. For Jacob's blessing will fall on Juda, a passionate and guilt-stricken slave to Astaroth who conceives the God of his fathers to be a primitive supernatural potentate 'von dessen Nase, wenn er zornig war, Dampf

²²⁶ As Joseph's watchword is 'spielen', so Jacob's is 'ringen'.

ging und verzehrend Feuer von seinem Munde, daß es davon blitzte'. (V, 1547) And though Israel has been saved it must sink very low (how low is made clear by 'Das Gesetz') and engage in a millennium of struggle before it can bring forth Christianity. 'Geist', that is, will emerge in Hegelian, and not in Platonic, fashion. Hence Tamar's reaction as Joseph is introduced to the tribe: 'Hoch und dunkel schritt Thamar vorbei, an jeder Hand einen Sohn, und neigte sich stolz vor dem Schattenspende, denn sie dachte in ihrem Herzen: "Ich bin auf der Bahn, du aber nicht, so sehr du glitzerst."'²²⁷ Hence, too, Jacob's heartbroken explanation as to why Juda and not Joseph will receive the first-born's blessing forfeited by Ruben: 'Siehe, dein teures Leben liegt vor des Sterbenden Blick in seiner Wahrheit. Spiel und Anspiel war es, vertraulich, freundliche Liebingschaft, anklingend ans Heil, doch nicht ganz im Ernste berufen und zugelassen.'

To a certain extent, then, the complex situation which obtained in *Der Tod in Venedig*, whereby Platonic and Schopenhauerian philosophical systems seemed to be competing for possession of the metaphysical realm, is repeated in *Joseph und seine Brüder*, and produces a comparable hesitancy in our final judgment of its protagonist. Comparable in kind – but not in urgency. For the Hegelian and Platonic conceptions of 'Geist' are by no means so incompatible with one another as either of them is with Schopenhauer's 'Wille'. Plato, although he regards το καλόν, and all that is intelligible, as subsisting beyond the phenomenal realm, does not propose that it can have no significance for the lives of human beings who are at least in part creatures of flesh and blood. On the contrary, he considers it their proper business to pursue it by ever closer earthly approximations until the day comes when they can seize it in its essence. And that this can have political consequences, and bring about *historical* change, is the unmistakable implication of *Republic*. Once we admit that the individual's search for the paragon of value can deposit cultural capital accumulating from age to age, then the ultimate phenomenal realisation of the τέλος in human society becomes a possibility at least. And Hegel, for his part, while insisting on the central role played by passion in historical progress, does not suggest that mere dialogical struggle in the absence of the free human intellect can bring about the

²²⁷ (V, 1747-8) *Contra* Frizen, Tamar should be understood in a Hegelian, not a Schopenhauerian, light: 'Thamar hatte über die Welt und ihre Zielstrebigkeit nur belehrt zu werden brauchen, um zu dem unbedingten Entschluß zu gelangen, ihr Weibtum mit dieser Zielstrebigkeit zu verbinden und weltgeschichtlich zu werden.' (V, 1558)

perfection of 'Geist', for if that were the case antagonism between purely natural forces would be sufficient to the task – a proposition which he expressly denies: 'Nur in den Veränderungen, die auf dem geistigen Boden vorgehen, kommt Neues hervor. Diese Erscheinung am Geistigen ließ in dem Menschen eine andere Bestimmung überhaupt sehen als in den bloß natürlichen Dingen – in welchen sich immer ein und derselbe stabile Charakter kundgibt, in den alle Veränderung zurückgeht –, nämlich eine wirkliche Veränderungsfähigkeit, und zwar zum Besseren – ein Trieb zur Perfektibilität.' (Hegel 1970, 74)

If we take the Platonic view, then there is no reason to cast doubt on Joseph's historical contribution, for the fact that this is the consequence of a more direct relationship to the source of value than the vast majority of humankind enjoys strengthens rather than weakens its claim to validity. If we take the Hegelian view we can grant some justification for Thamar's haughtiness and for Jacob's reluctance to bestow the blessing so long reserved for his best-beloved son on another. But, always in accordance with Hegel's own views, it is evident that Joseph's special connection to God has permitted him to make a real contribution to His worldly realization. Thamar can sneer and Jacob wring his hands as much as they please: without Joseph's special intervention and intercession the historical campaign to bring about Christianity, which Mann identified, along with Platonism, as the chief standard-bearer of 'Geist', cannot even be undertaken. Their prospective victories are dependent on his own actual triumph – a triumph to be celebrated in a more thoughtful mood than we might have anticipated, but to be celebrated none the less.

Conclusion: Fantastic ‘Spieltrieb’

What purpose does Schiller’s ‘Spieltrieb’ serve? At a theoretical level, its function is to bridge the gap between the noumenal realm of ‘Geist’ and the phenomenal realm of ‘Natur’. Philosophical systems which incorporate an evaluative metaphysic, such as Plato’s or Kant’s, have this advantage: they underwrite various assumptions human beings are by and large incapable of doing without – for example, that men and women are free subjects susceptible to legitimate moral adjudication and capable of leading authentically meaningful lives. Their disadvantage is that the noumenal and the phenomenal (each by definition what the other is not) are conceived in such a way that is difficult to suppose them in any kind of relationship with one another. Kant’s solution to the problem as explained in *Kritik der Urteilskraft* seems to have something in common with Schiller’s in that both invoke an aesthetic solution to the problem, and what Kant says about the ‘Urteilkraft’ is at least vaguely consistent with what Schiller says about the ‘Spieltrieb’: ‘Allein in der Familie der oberen Erkenntnisvermögen gibt es doch noch ein Mittelglied zwischen dem Verstande und der Vernunft. Dieses ist die Urteilskraft.’ (Kant V 1998, 249) However, Kant includes in the term ‘Urteilkraft’ more than is generally understood by the ‘aesthetic’ (for example: the apprehension of teleology in nature) and his arguments with regard to this area of philosophical investigation are not easy to follow.

That need not concern us, however, because superficial similarities to Kant notwithstanding, Schiller’s ‘Spieltrieb’ is Platonic in character, and (as we have seen) can easily be assimilated to the Eros of Diotima’s myth: like Eros it leads men through an appreciation of beautiful things to the source of value itself. And though the ‘Spieltrieb’ may lack the theoretical substance of Kant’s ‘Urteilkraft’, it appeals with far greater force to the imagination. When we hear of its mission to reconcile the noumenal and the phenomenal, of its capacity to playfully educate individuals and communities to their own advantage and that of ‘Geist’ – the temptation to lend this force a personal identity (for example, that of a supernatural entity like Hermes or a mortal artist like Joseph) is strong indeed.²²⁸

²²⁸ There is little sign that critics have grasped the importance of the ‘Spieltrieb’ for the development of Hermes in Mann’s fiction. Wysling makes no mention of Schiller at all in this regard, contenting himself with the indictment of all of the usual suspects: ‘Die Gegensätze in seinem Denken zu

Which brings us to the second, more personal, purpose of the ‘Spieltrieb’: the justification of art and artists. For Schiller declares that political and social progress cannot be left wholly to those who lack the true artistic temperament. And though he admits as artists all those – including politicians – who practise upon the sensibilities of human beings for the advantage of ‘Geist’, he insists that only those inspired by the ‘Spieltrieb’ will be able to synthesize ‘Geist’ and ‘Natur’ to the right degree and in the right fashion. If this doctrine is accepted, then the activity of those generally regarded as artists (painters, poets, novelists) far from seeming a dispensable social adornment, is revealed as paradigmatic. The artist need no longer regard his ambitions and travails as nobody’s business but his own and his indulgent public’s. Rather, he can see them as a microcosm, sometimes even as an anticipation, of the ambitions and travails of the social and political world around him. Is it any wonder that Thomas Mann, a writer for whom a condition for creative success was the sense of his own importance and the importance of anything he might undertake, was enthused by the idea?²²⁹

This thesis has demonstrated that the ‘Spieltrieb’ as concept or character plays an important role in Mann’s fiction – and indeed, as *Betrachtungen* makes clear, in his non-fiction too. *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph* are dominated by its agents and personifications: the Hermes figures in the novella whose task it is to bring Aschenbach to ‘Geist’ but only through a proper accommodation with ‘Natur’, the Joseph of the tetralogy whose playful, flattering, cajoling efforts on behalf of a God who is all ‘Geist’ are rewarded with political triumph and the salvation of Israel. But if the ‘Spieltrieb’ accords a special dignity to art and artists, it can do so only through the fulfilment of its theoretical purpose. That is to say, the ‘Spieltrieb’ only makes sense in the context of an evaluative dualist philosophy. Without it, the Hermes figures in *Der Tod in Venedig* have no other context but Aschenbach’s imagination:

überbrücken hatte Thomas Mann schon früh angesetzt, und gerade beim Joseph hatte das Grundthema des “doppelten Segens” schon von Anfang an festgestanden, galt es doch, den seit der ersten Nietzsche-Lektüre bewußt durchlittenen Gegensatz von Geist und Leben unter Goethes vorwaltenden Führung in das Zusammenspiel von Geist und Natur zu verwandeln – oder, in Bachofens Bildern geredet, das Solare und das Tellurische im Lunaren aufzuheben.’ (Wysling 1990, 246)

²²⁹ As Reed notes, even in the pre-war period Mann ‘was occupied not only with the human or social problem of the artist, but also with the more specific one of the nature of literary art and its function (as distinct from the writer’s position) in society.’ (Reed 1966, 57) It will be seen that Schiller’s conception of the ‘Spieltrieb’ represents a positive answer to all of these problems (the nature of literary art, the role of art in society *as well as* the human/social problem of the artist) simultaneously.

what looked like Hermes was just a series of coincidences worked up by an old man's passions into a psychodrama. Without it, Joseph is just a narcissistic young man who deludes himself and a lot of other people into thinking that he has a special destiny – to the point where he becomes 'as Pharaoh'.²³⁰ The importance of these figures and the importance of their story *depends* on there being two realms: noumenal and phenomenal, celestial and terrestrial, for them to negotiate between.

But how is this duality, and in particular its noumenal constituent, to be fictionally realized? A writer is at liberty, of course, to introduce it under the guise of the supernatural, and we noted in chapter II that there is a long-standing connection between ghosts, demons, destiny and a metaphysic of some kind, and that this metaphysic has traditionally been evaluative in character. As Le Fanu has Captain Barton, the protagonist of 'The Watcher', exclaim:

Whatever may be my uncertainty as to the authenticity of what we are taught to call revelation, of one fact I am deeply and horribly convinced: that there does exist beyond this a spiritual world – a system whose workings are generally in mercy hidden from us – a system which may be, and which is sometimes partially and terribly revealed. I am sure, I know[...]there is a God – a dreadful God – and that retribution follows guilt. (Le Fanu 1973, 90)

But this notion: that the metaphysical expresses itself as the supernatural, means that the latter is a problematic enterprise. If the supernatural is not to be written off as a not-yet-explained element of the natural world, if it is to retain the awe and terror which derive from the fact that something categorically distinct from the phenomenal realm has somehow intruded into that realm,²³¹ then its existence cannot be baldly affirmed – and it is for this reason that its appearances are kept to a minimum of duration and clarity, or (the fantastic technique) not allowed to appear at all without ambiguity. We have discussed the matter with regard to ghosts etc. before, but in the light of our analysis of *Joseph*, in which 'Geist' is so strongly associated with God, we might profitably revisit the matter now in the context of Mann's religious beliefs.

²³⁰ Felix Krull differs from Joseph, in that the Schopenhauerian metaphysical force of which he (apparently) believes himself an emissary is not a meaningful one, and it is therefore a matter of moral indifference whether he actually *is* a special envoy of the 'Wille' or not. It does a 'Schelmenroman' no harm to allude to an amoral metaphysical substrate – but on the other hand, given that the phenomenal world-view is anyway an amoral one, such a substrate is hardly indispensable.

²³¹ 'Noch einmal möchte ich, gereckten Halses, die Magen-nerven angerührt von Absurdität, das Unmögliche sehen, das dennoch geschieht.' (15.1, 652)

Hermann Kurzke, in a short meditation on the topic, says of Mann that ‘Er war kein Kirchgänger, und er war trotzdem der größte christliche Autor des 20. Jahrhunderts.’ (Kurzke 2009, 4) One does not have to agree with that statement, however, to find what Kurzke writes in this context enlightening. He notes, as we have, that Mann often reduces God to an aspect of human psychology, but also that this is only one side of the ledger:

Es ist kein Zweifel, der Mensch hat Gott gemacht. Gott ist eine Projektionsfigur menschlicher Sehnsüchte, da hat Feuerbach ganz recht. Das ist jedenfalls die Seite des Mondes, die wir kulturell sehen können. Die Existenz einer anderen, der dunklen, nicht von Menschen geschaffenen Seite wird damit nicht bestritten, aber über sie machen wir besser keine Aussagen, sie verehren wir schweigend. (Kurzke 2009, 6)

But of course, as a novelist Mann could not honour God (the God who is ‘Geist’) in silence. If he had, then *Joseph* would be a naturalistic novel, a debunking of religion – and its protagonist’s pretensions all vanity. But nor could he introduce God as an unambiguous presence in the world of the senses and thus compel Him to forfeit his noumenal character. Again, Kurzke gets to the heart of the problem: ‘“Einen Gott, den es gibt, gibt es nicht,” schrieb Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Er meinte damit, dass Gott nicht unter unsere Begriffe fällt. Schon die Wendung “Es gibt” geht zu weit. Unser Reden erreicht ihn nicht.’ (Kurzke 2009, 2)

Fortunately, between honouring God in silence and including Him as a definite presence, there is a third way: a third way which has a long fictional pedigree and which Mann had already explored in *Der Tod in Venedig*. It allows him to steer a course between two alternatives, both of which threaten to annihilate the metaphysical significance of the novel. On the one hand, undiluted naturalism would present us with a concatenation of cause and effect which would allow no purchase for a meaningful interpretation. On the other hand, a straightforwardly supernatural approach: definitely present angels, definitely accomplished miracles etc., would degrade the spiritual to an object of the senses. As with the ghosts and demons of traditional supernatural fiction: the longer and more blatant the exposure of the supernatural, the more banal it becomes. The course between these twin dangers is the fantastic, which ‘manifestiert in flüchtigen Erscheinungen unaufhörlich seine

Existenz, um diese zugleich zu leugnen, indem es sich den Bemühungen der Erkenntnis stets von neuem entzieht.' (Vax 1998, 37-38) Its apparent scepticism with regard to the supernatural ('Was it an Illusion?' 'Was it Reality or Delusion?' etc.) is actually the best way of keeping the supernatural in play, and it is to this effect that it is employed in *Joseph und seine Brüder*. Just as the apparitions in Venice exude a far more alarming supernatural aura for *not* being evidently supernatural entities (for example: Hermes hovering in mid-air with winged sandals) so the presence of the God of the tetralogy and his ministers is disturbing because it is suggested but can never be unambiguously detected.

It is the fantastic, then, which lends to both *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Joseph* their moral stature, their meaning. And it is the fantastic which permits the 'Spieltrieb' to play the crucial role it does in Aschenbach's Venetian adventures and in the realization of Joseph's ambitions. But the fantastic does more than assure the validity of the 'Spieltrieb': in so far as it establishes the just accommodation of the noumenal and phenomenal realms, it is a *manifestation* of the 'Spieltrieb'. The accommodation of the noumenal and phenomenal has proved an intractable problem for philosophers: it is Mann's remarkable achievement that, by an expert employment of the fantastic technique, he manages to solve it aesthetically.

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