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Thomas Mann's Concept of Religion and its Relevance to the Interpretation of Buddenbrooks

by

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Thomas Mann's Concept of Religion and its Relevance to the Interpretation of Buddenbrooks

The theory is advanced that Thomas Mann conceived of religion not as adherence to any orthodox dogma, but as an attitude defined as "religiously-based humanism," the characteristics of which are: scepticism toward both belief and disbelief; modesty; reverence for man despite a profoundly pessimistic view of human history; the belief that life is a process of atonement and purification, and that "higher health" is attainable only through the experience of death and "that which lies below"; and a sense of detachment from the mundane, everyday world. In Chapter I, Thomas Mann's religious ideas and Nietzsche's influence upon them are discussed in terms of Thomas Mann's major fictional works, his lectures, correspondence, and theoretical writings. Chapter II, an examination of religion in Buddenbrooks, attempts to show that the elements of Thomas Mann's conception of religion are already present in this first major work. In Chapter III the conclusion is drawn that Thomas Mann's "religiously-based humanism" had its origins in his early adulthood, and that throughout his life there was no fundamental deviation from this initial conception of religion.
The purpose of this thesis is twofold: first, to show that Thomas Mann conceived of religion not as adherence to any orthodox dogma or even any stated set of principles or ideas, but rather as an attitude, a Haltung, which may be defined as a "religiously-based humanism," and which is characterized by 1) scepticism and "Bescheidenheit" with respect to both belief and disbelief; 2) reverence for man, despite the pessimism resulting from a knowledge of human history; 3) the conviction that life is a process of atonement and purification, achieved by the experience of death and "das Untere"; 4) acute sensitivity to the impulses of the "Weltgeist," a constant striving to ascertain what God's will is for each era; and 5) a detachment from the mundane, everyday world; and second, to show by an examination of religion in Buddenbrooks, Thomas Mann's first major work, that this concept of religion was formed in his early adulthood, and that it underwent no significant change in the course of his life.

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CHAPTER I. THOMAS MANN'S CONCEPTION OF RELIGION

The problem of Thomas Mann's attitude toward religion is fraught with difficulty because of the widespread difference of opinion as to what constitutes religion, to say nothing of the widely divergent views of the essence of Christianity. A further difficulty stems from the fact that Thomas Mann was notoriously sensitive to the comments of his critics; thus those of his statements on religion which are direct replies to comments, inquiries, or criticisms must be approached with considerable caution, more so, perhaps, than the statements he made in private conversations or personal correspondence. Still another aspect of the matter is what Thomas Mann says about religion in his works of fiction.

In spite of the difficulties, the question of what religion meant to Thomas Mann has been examined several times, with widely differing conclusions. Some critics maintain that his interest in religion was entirely secular in nature; another critic who takes this view is

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Hans Egon Holthusen, whose study, *Die Welt ohne Transzendenz*, is widely known. Although the study concerns itself primarily with *Doktor Faustus* (1947), much of it applies to Thomas Mann's thought and work in a more general sense. Holthusen says not only of *Faustus*, but of Thomas Mann's literary production in general, "Das 'metaphysische Bedürfnis' des Menschen wird hier zivilisiert, 'humanistisch' domestiziert und vollkommen säkularisiert." In a discussion of the devil in *Faustus* he says, "Der Teufel, wie alles 'Religiöse' bei Thomas Mann, wird säkularisiert."  

The belief that Thomas Mann's interest in religion was entirely secular is in fact supported by his own letter to Karl Kerényi, dated October 7, 1936, in which he mentions his "Neigung zur 'Saekularisierung' des religiösen Begriffes, zu seiner psychologischen Überführung ins profan Sittliche und Seelische." 

There are others, however, who believe that Thomas Mann belongs within the ranks of Christian poets. Among these is Anna Hellersberg-Wendriner, who shares my conviction that there was a consistency, a lack of significant change in Thomas Mann's attitude toward religion.

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3. Ibid., p. 25.

Her explanation of what Thomas Mann's concept of religion was, however, differs markedly from my own. She seems to regard him as the spiritual descendant and heir of such Christian mystics as Meister Eckehart, Jakob Böhme, and Angelus Silesius, although she does later state that Thomas Mann was rooted in this Western religious tradition without being a confessing Christian.5

The contention that Thomas Mann was a Christian poet is also supported by one of his own statements, namely his defense of himself in the lecture, "Meine Zeit," where admittedly he calls himself Christian only in terms of his own definition of the word: "Wenn es christlich ist, das Leben . . . als eine Schuld . . . zu empfinden, als den Gegenstand religiösen Unbehagens, als etwas, das dringend der Gutmachung, Rettung und Rechtfertigung bedarf,—dann haben jene Theologen mit ihrer Aufstellung, ich sei der Typus des a-christlichen Schriftstellers, nicht so ganz recht. Denn selten wohl ist die

5Anna Hellersberg-Wendriner, Mystik der Gottesferne (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1960), pp. 6, 13. See also Martin Doerne, "Thomas Mann und das protestantische Christentum," Die Sammlung, XI (1956), 407-25; Ernst Steinbach, "Gottes armer Mensch," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, L, 207-42; Austin J. App, "Thomas Mann, Christian Novelist," Magnificat, LXIV (July, 1939), 110-18. Mr. App concludes his discussion of Thomas Mann's works with the amazing assertion that "It is true that Thomas Mann's novels do not inculcate Catholicism or any other denomination specifically. But they do witness God and Christ and declare Christianity and its high moral idealism the only way of life for nation and for individual."
If one considers active participation in the life of a church essential to the definition of a religious man, then Thomas Mann cannot be so designated, for he personally did not adhere to any organized religion, nor did he participate actively in the life of any established religious community. If one's definition is less restrictive, however, one can assert that Thomas Mann was indeed a profoundly religious man.  

It is my contention that he conceived of religion as a deepened and intensified humanism; this is supported by an excerpt from an unpublished letter Thomas Mann wrote on January 23, 1945, to a friend in Oxford: "Ich sehe zwar im Religiösen etwas sehr Menschliches und in der Theologie eine Wissenschaft vom Menschen und nicht—von Gott. Wie sollte man von dem auch wohl Wissenschaft haben. Und doch stehe ich zum Religiösen . . . nicht so, daß ich mich gern entschieden ungläubig

6 Thomas Mann, "Meine Zeit," Gesammelte Werke in zwölfter Bänden (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960), XI, 302. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Thomas Mann's writings are taken from this edition and hereafter are noted by volume and page number only.

7 Thomas Mann, for example, has Serenus Zeitblom, the narrator in Doktor Faustus, define religion quite simply as "Der Sinn für das Unendliche und die ewigen Rätsel"; through Zeitblom, the author also makes a distinction between "Religion" and "Religiosität": "Religiosität, die ich als keineswegs meinem Herzen fremd betrachte, ist . . . etwas anderes als . . . konfessionell gebundene Religion." See Holthusen, Welt ohne Transzendenz, p. 21f.
nennen hörte. Scherz mit dem Heiligen kann eine Form der Bescheidenheit sein und eine behutsame Art, sich ihm zu nähern . . ."\(^8\) This conception of religion, moreover, began to be formed in Thomas Mann's early adulthood, and, in the opinion of this writer, underwent no significant change thereafter.

The conclusions critics have drawn concerning Thomas Mann's attitude toward religion, and, for that matter, my own view of what religion meant to him, are based primarily on statements he and others made during his later life. To what extent they also apply to the young Thomas Mann is a valid question. Very little is known about religion in the life and thought of the early Thomas Mann. His early writings, however, testify to the fact that he was wrestling with spiritual problems in those years and attempting to find a spiritual and moral base from which he could live and work. Moreover, the recent publication of his letters of 1889 to 1936 has made available material which supports the theory that his religion was a deepened and intensified humanism even in his early adulthood.

Thomas Mann read Nietzsche at the age of twenty, and this philosopher becomes our key to Mann's conception of religion. Nietzsche's dominant influence on Mann's thought and work has been generally acknowledged; Thomas Mann himself acknowledged the influence many times.  

\(^8\) Thanks is extended to the Thomas Mann-Archiv der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Berlin for supplying this reference.
In a letter of 1923 to Felix Bertaux he mentions Goethe and Nietzsche, "in denen ich meine höchsten Meister erblicke . . ." Almost immediately after Thomas Mann read Nietzsche, the latter's influence began to reveal itself in the young writer's work. Nietzschean values provide motifs for most of the early tales and novelle (Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Tristan, Tonio Kröger, Der Kleiderschrank, Gladius Dei, etc., 1898-1903); one such motif is the "pathos of distance," the feeling of detachment which separates noble, refined human beings from the vulgar and common Heerdenmenschen, the sense of separation which Nietzsche believed, stemmed from the capacity to suffer, and which was essential to any elevation of man. Another Nietzschean motif is the "heroism from weakness," the ability to achieve heroic stature—despite pain, illness, weakness, and ugliness—through suffering, self-discipline, and the exertion of the will. The heroes of Mann's early


10 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Was ist vornehm?," Jenseits von Gut und Böse in Friedrich Nietzsche Werke, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954), II, 727f. All references to Nietzsche's works are taken from this edition, and hereafter are noted by "Nietzsche," volume and page number only. See also R. A. Nicholls, "Nietzsche in the Early Work of Thomas Mann," University of California Publications in Modern Philology, XLV (1955), 8f.

works are usually Nietzscbean figures: Friedemann, for example, is called an "Epikureer," a term important in Nietzsche's theory of hedonism, or, more correctly, the avoidance of pain. R. A. Nicholls regards Tonio Kröger not only as an autobiographical creation and as "Hanno Buddenbrook grown up," but also as an artistic personification of Nietzsche, who, like Tonio Kröger, was "doomed to isolation, to knowledge, and to solitude." The solitude, the detachment, strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's discussion of "Was ist vornehm?" in Jenseits von Gut und Böse (1886), had a place not only in the artistic realm, but in Thomas Mann's conception of religion as well.

In Fiorenza (1906), with its treatment of the problem of decadence and the conflict of art and morality, a mixture of Christian theology and Nietzscbean philosophy is presented. Nietzsche's "heroism from weakness" is seen in both major characters: Lorenzo de Médici and Savonarola are both men of heroic stature despite illness and physical frailty. Lorenzo's son, in contrast, is strong of body, but by no means to be regarded as a hero. He asks Lorenzo's mistress, "Ist denn, wer

\[12\] VIII, 82.


stark ist, kein Held?" and she replies, "Nein. Sondern wer schwach ist, aber so glühenden Geistes, daß er sich dennoch den Kranz gewinnt,--der ist ein Held."\textsuperscript{15}

The Nietzschean concept of detachment (Degagiertheit) is strongly developed in both Lorenzo and Savonarola. In Lorenzo, the detachment is secular; in the monk, it could be interpreted as both secular and religious: his detachment is on the one hand that of Nietzsche's man of nobility and refinement, who is born to rule, not to be ruled, and on the other, that of a man who seeks separation from the world by fleeing to a religious institution. He says to Lorenzo: "Da floh ich . . . vor dem Greuel solcher Unbefangenheit, die Einsicht und Leiden und Erlösung verlachte. Ich floh ins Kloster, rettete mich in die strenge Dämmerung der Kirche. Hier, dacht' ich, im Weihbezirk des Kreuzes, hier hat das Leiden Macht . . ."\textsuperscript{16} Important here is the association of pain and suffering with "insight" and salvation. Earlier in the conversation the monk also says, "Man muß die Sünde kennen, fühlen, begreifen, um sie zu hassen,"\textsuperscript{17} and this was to become a repeated theme in Thomas Mann's work. Although it is to the established Church that Savonarola flees when he is horrified by the world and the

\textsuperscript{15}VIII, 1018.

\textsuperscript{16}VIII, 1061.

\textsuperscript{17}VIII, 1058.
flesh, he tells Lorenzo that even within the Church he had been bit-
terly disappointed, that in it, too, the cross had been betrayed. The
cross, to Christians the symbol of eternal life through the atonement
and death of Christ, does not entirely lose its character as a Chris-
tian symbol here, but it also reflects strong traces of Nietzsche's
influence: in the dialogue between Lorenzo, the representative of life
and beauty (which the monk equates with life), and Savonarola, the
representative of Geist, the latter preaches redemption from the world,
but only in a pseudo-Christian sense.\(^18\) He is much less an emissary
of the Church than of his own personal will to power, despite his claim
to being in the service of God. This becomes apparent when he attempts
to force Lorenzo to relinquish his hold on Florence. To Lorenzo's
question, "Wozu? Was kannst du wollen?" the monk replies, "Den Triumph
des Geistes," and Lorenzo suddenly realizes that Savonarola wishes to
destroy life and that the Geist he heralds is really death, which will
bring victory over life and release from its stresses.

Lorenzo represents Nietzsche's "aristokratische Werthgleichung
(gut = vornehm = mächtig = schön = glücklich = gottgeliebt)."\(^19\)
Savonarola represents this, too, but he also reflects in almost every
detail what Nietzsche says in his discussion of the priesthood in

\(^{18}\) VIII, 1056-67.

\(^{19}\) Nietzsche, II, 779.
Zur Genealogie der Moral (1887): he speaks of
die ganze sinnenfeindliche Faul- und raffinirt-
machende Metaphysik der Priester, ihre Selbst-
Hypnotisierung . . . und das schließliche . . .
Satthaben mit seiner Radikalkur, dem Nichts (oder
Gott:--das Verlangen nach einer unio mystica mit
Gott ist das Verlangen . . . in's Nichts . . .).
Bei den Priestern wird alles gefährlicher, nicht
nur Kurmittel und Heilkünste, sondern auch Hoch-
muth, Rache, Scharfsinn, Ausschweifung, Liebe,
Herrschaft, Tugend, Krankheit;---mit einiger
Billigkeit ließe sich allerdings hinzufügen,
daß erst auf dem Boden dieser wesentlich gefähr-
lichen Daseinsform des Menschen, der priester-
llichen, der Mensch überhaupt ein interessantes
Thier geworden ist, daß erst hier die menschliche
Seele in einem höheren Sinne Tiefe bekommen hat
und böse geworden ist . . .20

The "Verlangen in's Nichts" of this passage is used by Thomas Mann
in the closing lines of Fiorenza, where Fiore implores the monk,
"Hör auf, zu wollen, statt das Nichts zu wollen!"21

At the drama's conclusion it is Savonarola, with his iron will
and ascetic discipline, who survives, and Lorenzo who collapses, but
the latter, in spite of what he knows of life, affirms it. All his
accomplishments have been in the service of life, and this might
represent Thomas Mann's tentative and still not completely formulated
conception of a moral and spiritual ideal by which he could justify

20 Nietzsche, II, 778. See also "Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?,
Zur Genealogie der Moral, II, 857f.

21 VIII, 1067. See also Nietzsche, "Was bedeuten asketische
Ideale?," II, 839.
his own life and work.22

That Thomas Mann's religiously-based humanism was still not completely formulated at this time is revealed by a study of the Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen (1915-1918); in them he expresses his opinion of what religion is not much more clearly than he explains what he believes religion to be. Nietzsche's influence is just as evident in the Betrachtungen as in the earlier works, especially in the chapters entitled "Vom Glauben," and "Einkehr." In fact a comparison of Jenseits von Gut und Böse and the Betrachtungen reveals some striking parallels. Nietzsche's attack upon the "Heerdenmensch," the bigoted, human being who glorifies his own characteristics as the only real human virtues, and who insists that his morality is the only true and permissible sort of morality, is echoed in Thomas Mann's attack upon the "Zivilisationsliterate." The terminology has changed, but not the basic idea. Thomas Mann's statements concerning orthodox religion are also reminiscent of the charges Nietzsche levels at the Christian Church.24


23 Nietzsche, II, 655-56, 659-61. See also pp. 605-08.

24 Ibid., p. 660. See also Der Antichrist, II, 1161-1235.
The chapter of the *Betrachtungen* entitled "Vom Glauben," like the rest of the work, is the production of a man engaged in an agonizing struggle to define what he believes, and to come to terms with it. A study of this chapter leads to several conclusions:

1) Thomas Mann was just as opposed to *Eindeutigkeit* in spiritual and religious matters as in the realm of art. In heated language he deplores the bigoted and self-righteous smugness of orthodox believers: "Nein, Religion ist nicht die Verpflichtung auf den Geist des Zivilisationsliteraten. Der Glaube an Gott ist ein anderer Glaube, als der an den Fortschritt. Das sachliche Ergebnis dieses 'freireligiösen' Glaubens kennt man . . . sein **persönliches** Ergebnis aber kennt man auch . . . Es ist der pfäffische Dunkel, durch den Glauben was Besseres zu sein, die selbstgerechte Bigotterie des Missionars und Pharisiäers, verbunden mit beständiger Aggressivität gegen die Elenden, welche nicht 'glauben' . . . Das weiß nichts von Toleranz, sondern ist hart, trennend, doktrinär, bis zur Guillotine, humorlos, ohne Liebe . . . ohne Weichheit, zelotisch-schönrednerisch--abscheulich."²⁵

2) True belief, in his view, was not a matter of doctrine or dogma: "Nein, der wahre Glaube ist keine Doktrin und keine verstockte und rednerische Rechthaberei. Es ist nicht der Glaube an irgendwelche ²⁵ XII, 535.
Grundsätze, Worte und Ideen . . . 26 True belief was, on the contrary, a matter of one's attitude, a certain Haltung toward life and the human situation: " . . . wenn es sich um 'Menschlichkeit' handeln soll, so glaube ich nicht nur, daβ der Zweifel menschlicher und gütiger macht, als 'Glaube,' Fanatismus, Wahrheitsbesitzerdünkeln und 'entschlossene Menschenliebe,' sondern ich glaube sogar, daβ Verzweiflung ein besserer, menschlicherer, sittlicherer, -- ich will sagen: religiöserer Zustand ist, als die schönrednerische Glaubigkeit des revolutionären Optimismus . . . " 27 True belief is also a certain Haltung toward death. Memento mori is not a new idea, of course, but for Thomas Mann it involved perpetual awareness of the Psalmist's question, "What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" (Psalms 89:48). As early as 1901 he said in a letter to his brother, Heinrich: "Das Letzte und Beste, was sie [die Literatur] mich zu lehren vermag, ist dies: den Tod als eine Möglichkeit aufzufassen, zu ihrem Gegentheil, zum Leben zu gelangen." 28 On March 29, 1917, Thomas Mann wrote in a letter to

26 XII, 504. The rejection of doctrinaire orthodoxy expressed here was repeated more than twenty years later in "The Coming Humanism," The Nation, CXLVII (December 10, 1938), 617-19.

27 XII, 518. The "Verzweiflung" mentioned here is echoed much later in slightly different terms in Thomas Mann's definition of "christlich" in the lecture, "Meine Zeit" (see footnote 6).

28 Erika Mann (ed.), Thomas Mann Briefe, I, 25.
Lilli Diekmann: "Der Tod und die geistliche Stimmung, die er erzeugt, war mir von jeher auf besondere Art anziehend und vertraut, meine Bücher handeln eigentlich nur von ihm, und wenn ich nicht Schriftsteller geworden wäre, so hätte ich, glaube ich, ganz gut Geistlicher werden können. Dazu ist nicht so sehr irgendwelche Gläubigkeit notwendig, sondern nur, oder doch hauptsächlich, eine bestimmte Grundstimmung, ein Sich daheim fühlen in der ethischen Atmosphäre von 'Kreuz, Tod und Gruft.'[^29] "Kreuz, Tod und Gruft" is, significantly, a phrase borrowed from Nietzsche.[^30] There is a relationship between this Haltung and the "Bedürfnis nach Gutmachung, Reinigung und Rechtfertigung" of which Thomas Mann later spoke (see footnote 6).

3) At this early point in his life, i.e. at the writing of the Betrachtungen, Thomas Mann defines himself as a sceptic, just as he was to do many years later in his "Fragment über das Religiöse" (1931): "Ich darf nicht sagen, daß ich an Gott glaube,—es würde lange dauern, glaube ich, bis ich es sagen würde, auch wenn ich es tätte. Fett hat der Zweifel mich nicht gemacht; sogar bin ich geneigt, zu glauben, daß es der Glaube ist ... welcher fett macht, und tapferer, sittlicherer,

[^29] Erika Mann (ed.), Thomas Mann Briefe, I, 134.

wahrhaftiger möchte es sein, in einer götterlosen Welt gefaßt und würdig zu leben."³¹

4) The foregoing quotations also make clear that Thomas Mann's humanism was characterized not only by caution and scepticism, but by modesty (Bescheidenheit) as well. This, perhaps, is the aspect of his religious Haltung which distinguishes him most sharply from those who assume that they "possess" religion. He once said that the ease with which some people spoke or wrote the word "God" always astonished him, and then he added, "A certain modesty, even embarrassment, in things of religion is clearing more fitting to me and my kind than any posture of bold self-confidence."³²

Thomas Mann's view of religion as an intensified humanism can be clarified further by a discussion of his relation to Goethe.³³ His

³¹ XII, 534. See also p. 230.

³² Thomas Mann, "The Coming Humanism," p. 617. In the letter of 1945 to a friend in Oxford (referred to in footnote 8), Thomas Mann also mentions modesty as a part of his religious thinking; the following lines from the letter of October 7, 1936, to Karl Kerényi confirm the importance of Bescheidenheit in Mann's religious thought: "Religion ... als ein behutsames Verhalten ... und als sorgend achtsame Empfindlichkeit gegenüber den Regungen des Weltgeistes,—was will ich mehr? Auf einmal bin ich legitimiert, mich einen religiösen Menschen zu nennen—eine Selbsteinschätzung, deren ich mich, eben aus 'Vorsicht,' sonst kaum getraute." (Kerényi, Gespräch in Briefen, p. 75.)

³³ For a discussion of Thomas Mann's relation to Goethe see Bernhard Blume, Thomas Mann und Goethe (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1949), and Hans Eichner, Thomas Mann: eine Einführung in sein Werk, 2nd ed. (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1961), p. 60f.
feeling of kinship with Goethe was very deep, as evidenced by many statements, but particularly by the essay, "Goethe und Tolstoi," (1923), which provides insight into the development of Thomas Mann's conception of Humanität. He defines Freiheit as "Geist, Loslösung von der Natur . . . sie ist Humanität, begriffen als Emanzipation vom Natürlichen und seinen Bindungen, diese Emanzipation als das eigent- lich Menschliche und Menschenwürdige verstanden." The question which arises from this, he says, is: "was ist vornehmer und menschenwürdiger, Freiheit oder Gebundenheit, Wille oder Gehorsam, das Sittliche oder das Naive?" The list of opposites contained in the question is reminiscent of Schiller's "naiv" and "sentimentalisch," and could be expanded to include, on the "naiv" side, das Göttliche, das Gesunde, das Heidnische, and on the "sentimentalische" side, das Heilige, das Kranke, das Heldenhafte. It is entirely characteristic of Thomas Mann that he does not answer his own question. In fact he is convinced that the question will never be answered in any final sense. This

\[34\] In a letter written to Ernst Bertram in 1922, Thomas Mann acknowledges his preoccupation with Humanität: "... der mich zur Zeit beherrschende Gedanke ist der einer neuen, persönlichen Erfüllung des Humanitätsgedankens ...." That he affirmed Humanität in spite of an extremely pessimistic view of human history is emphasized by the fact that he adds, "--im Gegensatz allerdings zur humanitären Welt Rousseaus." (Erika Mann, Thomas Mann Briefe, I, 198.)

\[35\] IX, 97.

\[36\] Ibid.
Freiheit, this Humanität, however, does not necessarily imply a rejection of nature: elsewhere in the essay, Thomas Mann says, "Natur und Kultur, das ist kein Widerspruch; das zweite ist nur die Veredlung, nicht die Verleugnung des ersten."\textsuperscript{37}

Although Thomas Mann defines Humanität in somewhat different terms than did Goethe, he shares with Goethe a faith in this classical concept, in man's development to ever higher levels, ultimately (and certainly at some very far-distant point in time) to the level of the "schöne Seele." Whether or not Thomas Mann's (or, for that matter, Goethe's) Humanität may be called religious, is admittedly open to debate. The answer would certainly be "no," if one defined religion in an orthodox sense. If the definition were less narrow, however, it could be argued that this Humanität is religious by virtue of its very nature—this being an attitude of reverence for all life, and especially for man, despite the deep-rooted conviction that he is in desperate need of elevation, of "Gutmachung, Reinigung und Rechtfertigung."

Thomas Mann undertook to deal further with the problem of Humanität in the \textit{Zauberberg} (1924).\textsuperscript{38} Hermann Weigand and many others regard

\textsuperscript{37} IX, 74.

\textsuperscript{38} See XI, 657-58.
the novel as a humanistic Bildungsroman, and Thomas Mann's own references to the work indicate that he conceived of it as such.

In his "Einführung in den 'Zauberberg' für Studenten der Universität Princeton," he says that what Hans Castorp learns to recognize is that "alle höhere Gesundheit durch die tiefen Erfahrungen von Krankheit und Tod hindurchgegangen sein muß, so wie die Kenntnis der Sünde eine Vorbedingung der Erlösung ist." Humanität, like the holy grail, he says, is a mystery, and adds, "Der Mensch selbst ist ein Geheimnis, und alle Humanität beruht auf Ehrfurcht vor dem Geheimnis des Menschen." In 1947 he was to say precisely the same thing of religion (namely that it was first and foremost reverence for the mystery of man), thus equating Humanität and religion.


40 XI, 613. See also the letter to Paul Steegemann (1922), Thomas Mann Briefe, I, 181-82.

41 XI, 617. See also "Die Schule des 'Zauberbergs,'" XI, 599-601, and "Joseph und seine Brüder," XI, 657.

42 "Nietzsche's Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung," IX, 711.
Elsewhere he said of the Zauberberg that he was inclined to call it a religious book, precisely because the human problem, "das Rätsel des Menschen," was the very core of the novel.43

In "Lebensabriß" Thomas Mann tells us that he originally planned the Joseph-cycle (Die Geschichten Jaakobs, 1933; Der junge Joseph, 1934; Joseph in Ägypten, 1936; Joseph der Ernährer, 1943) as a novella "als Flügelstück eines historischen Triptychons, dessen beide andre Bilder spanische und deutsche Gegenstände behandeln sollten, wobei das religionsgeschichtliche Motiv als durchgehend gedacht war."44

It would be impossible to do justice to the religious motifs of the Joseph-novels within the scope of this thesis, but those motifs which relate to Thomas Mann's "religiös fundierter Humanismus" must be mentioned at least briefly. One of them is the God-man relationship. The whole mystery of Humanität is involved here, the whole question of not only what Joseph is, but also what man is, whence he has come, and whither he is going. On March 24, 1934, Thomas Mann

43 "Fragment über das Religiöse," XI, 425. Not relevant to the above discussion of Humanität, but a further indication of Nietzsche's influence is Thomas Mann's acknowledgment that the figure of Leo Naphta bears distinct similarities not only to the later hero, Adrian Leverkühn (Doktor Faustus), but also to Nietzsche. See Karl S. Guthke, "Thomas Mann on his Zauberberg, an Unpublished Letter to Hans M. Wolff," Neophilologus, XLIV, 120-21.

44 XI, 138.
wrote to Karl Kerényi, commenting on the latter's statement, "Einen Gott zu spielen, das bedeutet nach primitiver Denkweise immer ein wenig auch Gott zu sein." Applying this to his hero, Thomas Mann tells Kerényi that Joseph leads people to regard him half as a god, and then as the God. This deceit, he adds, derives its higher justification from Joseph's "weitgehend wirkliche mythische Identität." The theme of death and resurrection should also be mentioned; it, too, is related to Humanität, inextricably bound up in the process of attaining "höhere Gesundheit" through a knowledge of death and "das Untere."

Still another motif is that of "Gottessorge." In the lecture, "Joseph und seine Brüder," Thomas Mann describes this as not only "die Sorge um die Bestimmung und Erkenntnis Gottes, sondern namentlich die um seinen Willen, mit dem der unsere übereinstimmen muß." "Gottessorge" is also the fear that what was once true and right and valid no longer is, but continues to be revered as if it were. It is, in religious terms, sensitivity to what God's will is in each age. The human being who possesses this "Frömmigkeit" (or "Gottesklugheit," as Thomas Mann also calls it) divorces himself from customs and

45 XI, 634.
46 Ibid.
47 XI, 668.
practices that are no longer valid, that no longer reflect God's will.

The motif of "Gottessorge" leads directly to a discussion of Thomas Mann's religious humanism as an anti-Nazi Weltanschauung, for it is in this same lecture, "Joseph und seine Brüder," that he says: "Soll ich hinzufügen, daß wir die Leiden, durch die wir jetzt zu gehen haben, die Katastrophe, in der wir leben, der Tatsache zu danken haben, daß wir der Gottesklugheit in einem Grade, der längst straflich geworden war, ermangelten? ... in dem nährischen Ungehorsam gegen den Geist, oder, religiös ausgedrückt, gegen Gottes Willen, haben wir gewiß die eigentliche Ursache der Wetterentladung zu suchen, die uns betäubt ...." He utters his hope for the return of peace to the world, and then says, "Das Wort 'Friede' hat immer religiösen Klang, und was es meint, ist ein Geschenk der Gottesklugheit."  

The misfortunes of Thomas Mann as an anti-Nazi humanist are reflected in his letter of October 23, 1937 to O. Basler. In it he says: "Sagen wir uns, daß es für den Geist besser und belebender ist, wenn er es auf Erden nicht zu gut hat und es nicht zu sehr nach seinen Wünschen geht. Man kann sich einen saturierten und mit der Welt in

\[48^{\text{XI}, \, 668f.}\] See also the letter of 1932 to Graf Keyserling, \textit{Thomas Mann Briefe}, I, 321.

\[49^{\text{XI}, \, 668f.}\]
Harmonie lebenden Geist ja tatsächlich nicht recht vorstellen -- man ist am Ende zu sehr Christ für diese Vorstellung und zu überzeugt von der Kluft zwischen der 'Welt' und dem 'Reiche Gottes' . . . "50

His use of the impersonal "man" is typical of the caution he customarily exercised in such statements, but it does little to disguise the fact that he is expressing his own view. Moreover, his reference to the great gulf between heaven and the kingdom of God indicates that he could depart from his Nietzschean base on occasion, and make use of a Christian symbol without irony.

In the face of the growing threat which National Socialism posed to mankind, Thomas Mann affirmed his faith in the rise of a new humanism. He did so although he was well aware of the shortcomings of Western democracy.51 He was no fatuous optimist; if he believed in the possibility of human progress and advancement and the individual's development of his faculties to ever higher levels of achievement, it was in spite of his knowledge of human history. As he once said, "Und doch ist es so . . . daß man sich von soviel nur allzu begründeter Skepsis nicht zur Menschenverachtung verleiten lassen--


51 Thomas Mann associated Humanität with democracy as early as 1922. See *Thomas Mann Briefe*, I, 202, and "The Coming Humanism."
The religious humanism which he professed (and which was accompanied by more than a little scepticism) was essentially a state of balance between the dichotomous forces of Leben and Geist, with art the mediating agent.  

In 1946, Thomas Mann reaffirmed his faith in a religiously renewed humanism, when he wrote to Karl Kerényi: "... die Vertiefung des Humanismus ins Religiöse, die ich ohne unglaubwürdigen Dogmatismus noch immer für möglich halte, ist ja wohl das einzige Mittel, ihm die bindende Kraft zu verleihen, die er braucht, um die verlaufene Menschheit um eine neue Autorität zu sammeln."  

Nietzsche was mentioned earlier as the key to Thomas Mann's conception of religion. That Mann's religiously-based humanism did in fact stem from his interpretation of Nietzsche is expressed in the

52 "Vom kommenden Sieg der Demokratie," XI, 918.  

53 It is clear that Thomas Mann did not regard art as a part of Geist. In a letter to Paul Amann (1915) he says: "Ist der Künstler eigentlich ein geistiges Wesen? Ist er nicht in zu hohem Grade zugleich Form- und Willensmensch, um es zu sein? ... Nietzsche meint ..., die Künstler seien immer nur die Kammerdiener irgend einer Moral gewesen und weigert sich entschieden, sie geistig ernst zu nehmen" (Thomas Mann Briefe, I, 121).  

54 Karl Kerényi (ed.), Gespräch in Briefen, p. 129. See also p. 142, and Thomas Mann's "Rede vor Arbeitern in Wien," XI, 890-910.

This "Wissen ums Untere und Dämonische" becomes a major theme in Doktor Faustus and also in Der Erwählte (1951), indeed with greater force than in any of Thomas Mann's previous work. In terms of the plot of Doktor Faustus, Holthusen is justified in saying that Adrian Leverkühn"will von Rettung nichts wissen. Seine letzte Auskunft ist die Bejahung der Höllenfahrt und die Verneinung der Gnade."56 This, however, does not tell the whole story. It is certainly correct to say that ultimate redemption through grace is at least hinted at here. The "hope beyond hopelessness" in Doktor Faustus is grace re-named; perhaps the last hope of Geist is this grace, the source of salvation

55 IX, 711. See also Nietzsche, II, 727-56.

56 Hans Egon Holthusen, Die Welt ohne Transzendenz, p. 47.
"born of utter despair."  

In Der Erwählte Thomas Mann does far more than hint at grace as a possible solution to the problem of redemption. Here grace becomes the actual means by which a man—who has made the descent into hell and acquired knowledge of death and "das Untere"—achieves salvation.

From the foregoing, the ideas which emerge as elements of Thomas Mann's conception of religion are: a strong aversion to "selbstgerechte Bigotterie" and to Eindeutigkeit in the religious as well as in the social and political realms; a cautious scepticism, which in itself could be regarded as a form of religiosity, or as a reflection of the Ehrfurcht which Thomas Mann considered the first essential ingredient of religion (see footnote 55); Bescheidenheit; detachment (Degagiertheit), which is related to the pessimistic conviction of the great, perhaps even irreparable rift between heaven and earth mentioned in the letter of 1937 to O. Basler (see footnote 50); a perpetual awareness of death and "das Untere," knowledge of which is a prerequisite to salvation. Chapter II will attempt to show that these elements are already present in Buddenbrooks, expressed with the unique power of the artistic word.

CHAPTER II. RELIGION IN THE NOVEL, BUDDENBROOKS

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on some relatively unexplored aspects of the novel, Buddenbrooks (1901), through an examination of its religious motifs, among them the ties between the patrician family and the Church, and the gradual dissolution of these ties as the artistic-aesthetic Steigerung within the family occurs; and Thomas Mann's aversion to doctrinaire orthodoxy as it is artistically presented in his ironic treatment of the "possessors" of religion. The meaning and importance of religion to the novel's principal characters, as well as the religious significance of the novel's conclusion, will also be examined.

That Buddenbrooks was of infinite importance to its young author is readily apparent in some of his early letters to his brother, Heinrich. They contain repeated references to the novel, which had just been submitted to the publisher, S. Fischer. There is an unmistakable note of anxiety in these references; they reveal that Thomas Mann believed his future as a writer depended upon the fate of Buddenbrooks, and they give us an inkling of the repugnance and despair with which he contemplated the prospect of not being able to realize his hopes for a literary career. At the same time, Thomas Mann's study of his

1 Alfred Kantorowicz, Heinrich und Thomas Mann (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1956).
family's history evoked in him profound and also painful emotions. "Es ist aus der Seele eines Menschen nicht wegzubewahren, was seine Vorfahren am liebsten und beständigsten gethan haben . . . ," Nietzsche said,\(^2\) and Thomas Mann seems to have suffered a certain sense of guilt at his own inability to continue in the established, time-honored pattern of his patrician, bourgeois family. Such early works as Bajazzo (1898) and Tonio Kröger, and the role of Hanno in Buddenbrooks, all of which show distinct autobiographical elements, justify this conclusion. Like Goethe in his Werther-period, however, the young Thomas Mann was able to objectify his emotional upheaval through the medium of the word, artistically transforming real family members into literary figures, molding personal catharsis into a work of art.

As a work of art, Buddenbrooks is objective, but to deny or ignore its strong autobiographical nature would be foolish, for the link between fact and fiction is especially striking in this early work. Buddenbrooks is not a sociological novel which traces the decline of the Bürgertum;\(^3\) the detested Hagenströms are certainly not declining, but flourishing in a way that arouses envy and frustration in the Buddenbrooks, particularly in the voluble Tony. What the novel traces is,

\(^2\)Nietzsche, II, 738. This idea is not original with Nietzsche, but we know that Thomas Mann had read Nietzsche by this time, and the statement quoted above probably struck a responsive chord.

\(^3\)Cf. Georg Lukacs, Der historische Roman (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1955), pp. 309, 375.
in the words of the sub-title, the "Verfall einer Familie"—a fictitious portrayal of Thomas Mann's own. As he says in one of the early letters to Heinrich, "Es ist so viel persönlich Demonstratives darin . . ."\(^4\)

In writing *Buddenbrooks* Thomas Mann made use of his personal recollections of immediate forebears, studied written accounts and documents which were part of his family's history, and availed himself of material obtained from other members of the family. Obviously it would be a mistake to overemphasize this, however marked the autobiographical elements may be. *Buddenbrooks* is first and foremost a work of art, and wherever historical events and actual character traits were not compatible with the overall scheme of the novel, Thomas Mann did not hesitate to deviate from reality (as is also the case in *Werther*). His letter of June 29, 1939, to Agnes Meyer, for example, contains a description of his mother, and up to a certain point it is almost identical with his characterization of Gerda Arnoldsen: he writes of his mother's "sinnlich präartistische Natur," her "Musikalität," "Neigungen zum 'Süden,' zur Kunst, ja zur Bohème," her beauty "in spanischem Stil," and mentions that she had been "transplanted" to Lübeck at a tender age and that she left the city after her husband's death. The point of deviation occurs when he describes his mother as "stark weiblich begabt--ihre fünf Geburten waren alle leicht

und glücklich, sozusagen talentvoll . . ."5 This robustness, the ability to bear children easily, obviously did not fit into the novel's pattern of decadence and gradual decline, and it was therefore omitted in the characterization of Gerda.

Nietzsche's influence on Buddenbrooks is evident throughout the novel, and specific aspects of this influence will be taken up at appropriate points in the discussion of the various religious motifs; here, however, the general observation may be made that Nietzsche's influence on the novel as Gesamtwerk lies in the values by which judgments and decisions are made throughout the novel, values expressed in terms of illness and health, weakness and strength. In having his characters accept aggressiveness, ruthlessness, selfishness and self-assertion as the fundamental nature of all life, Thomas Mann demonstrates his agreement with Nietzsche's contention that life is essentially the will to power, and that only the strong and egoistic survive.6

In addition, the novel clearly shows Thomas Mann's assimilation of even those aspects of Nietzschean philosophy which he personally did not accept. In "Lebensabriß" he says: "Sollte ich es etwa 'ernst'

Not only Nietzschean-influenced judgments help to give the novel unity; religion does so as well. Artistically it has been said to function as a balance, offsetting the naturalistic trend of the style and the concept of biological decadence. One might argue that the religious motifs themselves are often treated in the same naturalistic style, but in a deeper sense they represent a concern with the supra-real world that is not naturalistic.

One of the first religious motifs introduced in Buddenbrooks is the tie between the family and the Church: Thomas Mann, in the very first pages of the novel, focuses the reader's attention upon the eight-year-old Antonia's recitation of the catechism. The clergyman, Pastor Wunderlich, is also among the first characters to be introduced. Thomas Mann's memory served him very well, for historically and traditionally, as well as in the fictional work, the relationship between

7 XI, 110.

the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the patrician Bürgertum of North Germany was a close, comfortable, and mutually supporting one. This is reflected in Buddenbrooks—through the artistic and often playfully ironic presentation of the motif—in countless ways: Pastor Wunderlich, or later one of his successors, is present at every important event in the life of the family: he is a guest at the housewarming party, he participates in the anniversary celebrations, he presides at the weddings, the christenings, and the funerals. A further example is the assistance Pastor Kölling gives Tony's parents in their efforts to persuade her to marry Bendix Grünlich.9

Still another indication of the strong ties between the patrician family and the Lutheran Church is the wary, suspicious, and openly disapproving attitude toward the Church of Rome. Tony's first letter from Munich to the family contains some sentences typical in this respect: " ... Aber dann ist da der Katholizismus: ich hasse ihn, wie Ihr wisst, ich halte gar nichts davon ... oben auf dem Brunnen, den ich von meinem Fenster aus sehen kann, steht eine Maria, und manchmal ... knien dort Leute aus dem Volke mit Rosenkranzen und beten, was ja recht hübsch aussieht, aber es steht geschrieben: Gehe in dein Kämmerlein ..."10

9 I, 115.

10 I, 308.
What prompts Tony to make these remarks is to some extent religious conviction; her reference to the New Testament admonition to "enter into thy closet . . ." (Matthew 6:6) suggests, moreover, that she is quite familiar with the Scriptures and the doctrines of her Church, although this is not really surprising in view of the fact that she not only has attended church regularly since childhood but also has been exposed to daily Bible-reading at home. The strong words in which her criticism is couched, however, are out of all proportion to her actual attitude toward religion and the Church. Tony is in fact not so pious or devout a person. One could conclude, of course, that the exaggerated choice of words is simply typical of the way she always expresses herself, no matter what the subject is. That is true enough, as far as it goes, but her violent "ich hasse ihn ∫ den Katholizismus∫" is motivated just as strongly by the accumulated social influences of a lifetime as by religious conviction. Tony "hates" Catholicism because it is part of the accepted pattern. Her world, peopled overwhelmingly by Protestants, is one in which the Roman Church is regarded with wary suspicion, if not outright hostility; in that world the only church to which a proud and patrician family of the Bürgertum can conceivably belong is the Evangelical Lutheran Church. That this is so is substantiated by Tony's association of "Leute aus dem Volke" with Catholicism.

There is a kind of tacit agreement between the Church and families such as the Buddenbrooks to support each other and work together for the
preservation of the established order. The decline of the Buddenbrooks is a gradual one, and it is accompanied by a gradual dissolution of this tacit agreement, a loosening of the ties between Church and patrician family, in direct proportion to the artistic-aesthetic Steigerung which occurs from one generation to the next.

The really important question here, however, is not one of historical authenticity, but one of artistic intent: why did Thomas Mann take the actual historical phenomenon of a "verbürgerlichte Kirche" and make it one of the major motifs of Buddenbrooks? Part of the answer is to be sought in Thomas Mann's view of the Buddenbrooks as a decadent and declining family, not so much in terms of class or caste as in terms of cherished traditions, values, and forms. The forms continue to be revered and observed long after they have ceased to be truly meaningful. This is nothing more or less than the lack of "Gottesklugheit," of which Thomas Mann was to speak many years later in the lecture, "Joseph und seine Brüder." It was said above that the gradual dissolution of the ties between Church and patrician family and the artistic-aesthetic Steigerung take place simultaneously and are related to each other; it could be added that this is a preview of the conflict of art and morality treated more specifically in Fiorenza. This conflict is the result of a lack of "Gottesklugheit": the morality of the Bürgertum is losing more of its truth and validity with each passing day, and the younger generation of Buddenbrooks, with the
exception of Clara, finds it increasingly difficult to revere the accepted pattern, let alone adhere to it. How the various members of the family cope with the dilemma this poses will be discussed in detail later.

Another religious motif is the presentation of virtues and character traits often associated with Protestant theology or the Protestant code of ethics—a strong sense of duty, belief in the value of hard work, industriousness, conscientiousness, the wise use of material resources to the best possible advantage, etc.—and the extent to which they affect the success and prosperity of succeeding generations of Buddenbrooks.

The motif is clearly seen in the fact that Tony's sense of duty prevails eventually over her personal feelings, and she consents to enter into a marriage "suitable" but without love, for the sake of the firm; one might also recall that Thomas is filled with disgust and revulsion at Christian's lack of a sense of duty, his careless indifference to the fortunes of the firm, his refusal to work hard, his lack of self-discipline, and his frivolous conduct. Nietzsche's influence on Thomas Mann's characterization of Christian and of Thomas' artistic-aesthetic side is noteworthy: the bourgeois character traits which Christian lacks are precisely those that Nietzsche ridicules in the section of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* entitled "Unsere Tugenden." As for the value of hard work, Nietzsche denies it categorically with


his contention that "... Arbeit schändet—nämlich Seele und Leib gemeinsin macht ... Und daß folglich die ... lärmmende ... dumm-stolze Arbeitsamkeit, mehr als alles Übrige, gerade zum 'Unglauben' erzieht und vorbereitet ..."\textsuperscript{11} Thomas fears Christian's characteristics; he senses that they are present in his own nature, too, but the bourgeois side of his character (a part of which is the "Protestant ethic" in which he has been schooled) has struggled resolutely to stifle them.

Another episode in which this motif is repeated involves Johann Buddenbrook, Jr.'s trip to Hamburg, where he intends to talk with his daughter and then decide whether or not he will save her husband from financial ruin. What is significant about his conversation with Tony is that she rises to the occasion again, and insists that under no circumstances shall the firm of Buddenbrook suffer a financial setback for Grünlich's sake. As before, the concept of "The Firm" and her strong sense of duty to it are the dominant elements in her reaction.\textsuperscript{12}

The "Protestant ethic" of this motif is also reflected in the political and social conservatism of Johann Buddenbrook, Jr. and other members of the family of his generation. In the early pages of the novel he expresses his disagreement with Johann, Sr.'s admiration for Napoleon Bonaparte. Johann, Sr., a very Nietzschean representative of "life," with all its vigor and aggressive self-assertion, consistently

\textsuperscript{11} Nietzsche, II, 618.

\textsuperscript{12} I, 220.
judges people in terms of strength and weakness. He has only con-
tempt for the weak, and what he admires in Napoleon is his strength,
his egoism, and all the other characteristics of "life" he
possessed. Johann, Jr., on the contrary, can see only Napoleon's
tyrrannical, "inhuman" traits.

The Protestant virtues and their resulting conservatism can also
be seen in the reaction of the senators to the workers' disorganized
and for the most part good-natured demonstration. Lebrecht Kröger's
physical collapse and ensuing death can be traced directly to the
threatened collapse of the existing order. A world in which the worker
challenged this order and its figures of authority was simply too much
for him to comprehend, let alone accept. His inability to understand
the impending changes stems not only from his social and political posi-
tion of leadership in the city, but from his "Protestant ethic" as well.

It is of interest to note that Thomas Mann's fictionalized obser-
vations and recollections of these traits and their relation to the
family fortunes are corroborated socio-historically by Max Weber in his
essay, "Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus," first
published in 1904. Weber observes that commerce and industry were

\[^{13}\] Johann, Sr.'s admiration for Napoleon is reminiscent of
Nietzsche's evaluation of him. See Zur Genealogie der Moral, II, 796f.

\[^{14}\] Max Weber, "Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapita-

lismus," in Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (Tübingen:
dominated by Protestants throughout the nineteenth century, and asserts that this cannot be explained solely by economic and social causes. At least part of the explanation, he believes, must be sought in Protestant theology itself, and in those virtues traditionally associated with it. Weber's essay is nevertheless a sociological study, and it seems to support Georg Lukacs' contention that Buddenbrooks is a sociological novel. The sociological interpretation, however, loses sight first of all of the fact that Buddenbrooks is fiction, and secondly of the fact that, even if one emphasizes the novel's autobiographical elements, there is a difference between the biographical and the sociological. Thomas Mann himself later accepted the sociological interpretation (feeling flattered at the thought of having written about an entire social class and its representatives), but his acceptance was by no means unqualified. In a letter to Agnes Meyer written December 25, 1945, he says: "Sie haben nur zu recht, wenn Sie die Betrachtungsweise des Lukacs einseitig und ungenügend finden. Ich fühle selbst, daß man mir mit dem rein soziologischen Gesichtspunkt nicht gerecht wird . . ." Thomas Mann certainly did not conceive of the novel as a sociological one. He discusses the impetus for Buddenbrooks in a letter to Paul Amann dated March 25, 1917, remarking that

15 Georg Lukacs, Der historische Roman (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1955); and Thomas Mann (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1953), pp. 17-18, 22-23, 45, 80.

16 Erika Mann (ed.), Thomas Mann Briefe, II, 468.
he had received letters from readers who told him that, in having written *Buddenbrooks* and other works, he had helped them to live, and then he adds: "Nun, ich bin von dem sozialen Begriff des Helfens nicht ausgegangen, das gestehe ich; ich hatte zu sehr mit mir selbst zu thun . . . ich war nicht sozial, nicht politisch; ich stand nicht da, die Rechte auf dem Herzen und die Linke in der Luft und rezitierte den Contrat social. Und also war ich kein 'Kämpfer,' sondern ein 'Aes-theet.'" The admission that he was too preoccupied with himself to have social and political motives for writing *Buddenbrooks* is further evidence that Thomas Mann's overwhelming concern at that early point in his life was the very personal one of "finding" himself, of determining who and what he was and where he was going. Moreover, although Mann acknowledges in the *Betrachtungen* that he became acquainted with Weber's essay, he stresses that he arrived independently at the conclusions reflected in *Buddenbrooks*, learning only many years after writing the novel that what he had perceived and sensed was corroborated by the sociologist.


The aversion to "selbstgerechte Bigotterie" is also expressed in Thomas Mann's ironic treatment of the novel's clergymen. Except for his characterization of Pastor Wunderlich, Mann's presentation of men of the cloth is far from sympathetic. One senses that Pastor Wunderlich, like Johann Buddenbrook, Sr., belongs to a vanishing breed. Thomas Mann evokes in the reader a liking for Pastor Wunderlich that one certainly
does not feel for his successors. A person of some importance in the
life of the city, he is at the same time a man of far broader horizons
than most of the other residents of the self-isolated and self-
sufficient little world of Lübeck.

As the novel progresses, clergymen are presented in a much less
favorable light. The picture of Pastor Kölling as he officiates at
Johann Buddenbrook, Sr.'s funeral is not an appealing one: "Pastor
Kölling von Sankt Marien, ein robuster Mann mit dickem Kopf und derber
Redeweise . . . pries das maßvolle, gottgefällige Leben des Verstor-
benen . . . im Gegensatz zu dem der 'Wollüstigen, Fresser und Säu-
fer'--dies war sein Ausdruck, obgleich manche Leute, die sich der
Diskretion des jüngst verstorbenen alten Wunderlich erinnerten, die
Köpfe schüttelten . . ."\(^{19}\) This passage and a later one, which also
contains unflattering references to Pastor Kölling's physical appearance
and his coarse speech (see footnote 9), are like a mild first draft
of Mann's harsh caricature of Martin Luther in the much later work,
*Doktor Faustus.*

The traveling clergymen and missionaries, for whom the stately
house in the *Mengstrasse* is a haven of generous hospitality, are
pompous and ridiculous figures. They are frequently the object of
Christian's ridicule and embarrassingly accurate imitations, and the

\(^{19}\) I, 75.
but of Madame Grünlich's practical jokes.\textsuperscript{20}

It is through Tony that Thomas Mann best expresses his aversion to these hypocritical, holier-than-thou men of the Church. They are a source of constant aggravation to Tony, especially after the direction of the household has devolved upon her; there are many incidents, but it is through the account of her experience with the pastor from Berlin, "Tränen-Trieschke," that Thomas Mann most pointedly demonstrates that not all who wear long black frockcoats and say, "Lord, Lord," are spotless and without fault.\textsuperscript{21} We are told with emphatic irony that this "man of God," married and the father of many children, falls in love not with Tony's immortal soul, but with considerably more tangible aspects of her person. The passage not only repeats the motif of ridicule of a "possessor" of religion, but also introduces one of the major characteristics of Pietism: "Tränen-Trieschke's" love letter to Tony, a mixture of "Bibel-extrakten und einer sonderbar anschmiegsamen Zärtlichkeit,"\textsuperscript{22} reminds one of the Pietistic tendency to correlate the emotional and the religious.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20}\textsuperscript{20}I, 242-43. See also pp. 243-44, 282.

\textsuperscript{21}\textsuperscript{21}I, 282.

\textsuperscript{22}\textsuperscript{22}I, 283.

Since the presentation of Pietism and its devotees forms a fairly important part of the novel, one must ask what the presentation reveals with respect to Thomas Mann's attitude toward this religious movement. It is clear that Pietism was not a valid or meaningful form for him personally, and he does not hesitate to mock some aspects of it in *Buddenbrooks*. It must be added, however, that this is gentle mockery, at least most of the time; the novel's Pietists are treated in the main with "loving irony."

Several other aspects of Pietism are brought to the reader's attention in a description of the daily family Andacht, and here the irony is considerably more ruthless.  

The hymn which is sung, containing such phrases as "Wahrer Sündenkrüppel," "so nimm mich Hund beim Ohr," and "Nimm mich Sündenlümmel in deinen Gnadenhimmel," expresses the Pietistic elements of *Einfalt* and *Demut*; even more striking, however, is the hymn's emphasis on the depth, the totality, of human depravity and sinfulness before rebirth in Christ, and the human being's dire need of grace in his "natural" state of sin, all part of Pietistic doctrine. In addition, the passage reveals with unmistakable clarity the disgust these religious observances, particularly their Pietistic tone, evoke in the younger generation of *Buddenbrooks*.

24

I, 278-79.
Like the visiting pastors and missionaries, the ladies (especially the Gerhardt sisters) who participate in the weekly Jerusalemabend also show a definite inclination toward Pietism, although they are not Separatists; officially they remain within the body of the Lutheran Church.

Pastor Kölling's successor, Andreas Pringsheim, reminds one of Pastor Wunderlich, although the similarity is only superficial. At the celebration following Hanno's christening, Pringsheim demonstrates his "worldly" adaptability by carefully altering his words, tone, and gestures to suit the persons with whom he happens to be chatting: in conversation with Thomas and Gerda he is "weltmännisch," with the Consul's widow he is "salbungsvoll," and with Tony, "schalkhaft heiter." Unlike Pastor Wunderlich, however, Pringsheim is a sophisticated clergyman only because he works at it very consciously. In some ways he is a reflection of Thomas Buddenbrook, as Pastor Wunderlich was a reflection of Johann, Sr.

This ridicule of the "possessors" of religion serves indirectly to express Thomas Mann's conviction that the forms the "possessors" revere have become empty. It also underscores his vigorous rejection of a doctrinaire attitude in spiritual or religious matters. The unflattering descriptions of clergymen and the ironic accounts of

25 I, 400.
sermons, family religious observances, etc., should not, however, be regarded as an expression of hostility toward the Lutheran Church alone. It is a matter of autobiographical circumstance that Thomas Mann was in a position to use the Lutheran Church and clergy, rather than any other, as his models. What he ridicules in the presentation of this motif is doctrinaire orthodoxy and self-righteousness per se, and he was certainly aware that these might be found in any organized religion.

The deaths which take place in Buddenbrooks constitute a motif which also has religious implications. In 1941 Thomas Mann mentioned in a letter to Agnes Meyer that Rilke had written one of the first and best reviews of Buddenbrooks, placing special emphasis on the various Todesfälle in the novel. Thomas Mann continues, "... da sehen Sie seinen Rilke's religiösen Zug, den Sinn für 'Kreuz, Tod und Gruft,' in dem wir uns damals begegneten." The preoccupation with death as a religious experience and the recurring treatment of it as a theme in literature were not uncommon to Thomas Mann and Rilke, or indeed to many of their contemporaries, although in the same letter to Agnes Meyer, Mann says, "Aber bei mir, denke ich, ist das alles wohl zugleich männlicher und musikalischer ..." The association of music

26 Bremer Tageblatt, April 16, 1902.


28 Ibid.
and death is best seen in *Buddenbrooks* in little Hanno, who first takes refuge from life in the realm of music. This escape into music is in a sense a symbol and a preview of his later flight from life into death.  

Yet in Thomas Mann's work death is also a part of the affirmation of life, a re-statement of Goethe's "stirb und werde," involving sacrifice (of which the cross is probably the most familiar symbol in the Western world), and purification. Moreover, this was not a late development in Thomas Mann's thought, as the letter of February 13, 1901, to Heinrich Mann proves (see Chapter I, footnote 28). Although this view of death is treated more extensively in the later works, *Der Zauberberg*, the *Joseph* tetralogy, and *Doktor Faustus*, it is touched upon already in *Buddenbrooks* in the passage which tells of Thomas' reaction to Schopenhauer's philosophy and the tremendous change it effects in his view of life and death.

Next to be considered is the question of how, if at all, religion affects the principal characters, and why Thomas Mann made this an important part of the novel. One can say of Johann Buddenbrook, Sr. that his attitude toward religion is non-dogmatic and that it contains an element of healthy scepticism. He is not a self-righteous man. Tony's recitation of the catechism amuses him; he thoroughly enjoys this opportunity to poke fun at it, but there is nothing really

29 See "Zu einem Kapitel aus 'Buddenbrooks,'" XI, 553.
malicious in his laughter. Johann, Sr. is also not the sort of man who talks much about his religion, and one senses that this is a quality Thomas Mann admired and respected. This is borne out by something he said many years later in his "Fragment über das Religiöse," namely that there were some things one should not talk about too much, and that one of those things was religion. It is significant that when Clara is born it is the elder Johann, and not the child's father, who sits with unconcealed happiness at his daughter-in-law's bedside and rocks the baby's cradle. He renders no loud and pious prayers of thanksgiving, a fact which by no means detracts from one's impression of the depth of his joy and thankfulness. This impression is in fact strengthened when it is contrasted to Johann, Jr.'s reaction to Clara's birth.

Yet for all his gentle mockery of the formal aspects of religion, his humorous remarks, and his lack of outward religious display, the old man is perhaps more deeply religious—in Thomas Mann's terms—than Johann, Jr. The elder Buddenbrook observes the accepted forms, it is true, but he reserves the right to treat them on occasion with gentle and "loving" irony. His real religion is, in Nietzschean terms, the affirmation of life, evidenced by his zest for every challenge life offers—in the world of commerce, as in the life of the family (for example, Gotthold's rebellion). Much of Johann, Sr.'s vitality stems

30 XI, 423.
from the fact that he believes in the values associated with an
affirmation of life, and he lives according to these values with
great consistency. There is no discrepancy between his expressed
convictions and his deeds.

Johann Buddenbrook, Jr. bears a certain outward resemblance to
his father, but few, if any, inner similarities exist. His attitude
toward religion is almost diametrically opposed to that of his father;
where religion is concerned he is a totally humorless man, a fact
which becomes obvious in the opening scene of the novel. Unlike his
father, the Consul fails to see anything funny or incongruous in the
eight-year-old Antonia's glib recitation on the creation of clothing
and shoes, food and drink, land and livestock. Like the others, he
dutifully joins in his father's laughter, but his inability to appre¬
ciate the humorous aspects of the situation is made altogether clear
by his reproachful, "Aber Vater, Sie belustigen sich wieder einmal
über das Heiligste!"31

The Consul's Pietistic bent has already been mentioned; the novel
contains descriptions of his long, intimate, and emotional conversa-
tions with God, whom he seems to regard as a silent but very active
partner in the firm of Buddenbrook. While his father derives pleasure
from sitting beside Clara's cradle, the Consul is busy recording the
event of her birth in the family album. This becomes a fervent,

31 I, 12. See also pp. 243-44.
long-drawn-out religious exercise, in which the Consul even apprises the Lord of the sum he has already stipulated for Clara's dowry. When the thought finally does occur to him that he has written enough, he immediately reproaches himself for this sign of contemptible human frailty:

Wurde er es so bald müde, sich mit seinem Schöpfer und Erhalter zu bereden? Welch ein Raub an Ihm, dem Herrn, schon jetzt einzuhalten mit Schreiben... Nein, nein, als Züchtigung gerade für sein unfrommes Gelüste zitierte er noch längere Abschnitte aus den heiligen Schriften, betete für seine Eltern, seine Frau, seine Kinder und sich selbst, betete auch für seinen Bruder Gotthold—und endlich, nach einem letzten, drie-maligen Amen, streute er Goldsand auf die Schrift und lehnte sich aufatmend zurück.3

The foregoing is not intended to impugn the Consul's sincerity. There can be no doubt that religion is a genuine force in his life, no matter how shallow or trite one may consider his practice of it. Indeed it does not seem to occur to him that there is something contradictory about his business activities in the light of his professed religious beliefs, and on the occasions where the contradiction becomes too obvious for even him to ignore, he manages to rationalize the circumstances and actually convince himself that no real conflict exists.

It is true that Johann, Jr. constantly invokes God's blessing on the firm; thus it is something of a paradox that in another sense he seems to regard his business life and his religious life as two entirely

321, 54.
separate realms. In fact he says as much to his half-brother, Gotthold, when Johann, Sr. dies. Gotthold, referring to the financial settlement he never received from his father, asks the Consul: "Und was habe ich von deiner Gerechtigkeit zu gewärtigen?" The Consul replies: "Ich habe dir in diesem schweren und ernsten Augenblick meine Hand als Bruder gereicht; was aber geschäftliche Dinge betrifft, so kann ich dir immer nur als Chef der ehrwürdigen Firma gegenüberstehen, deren alleiniger Inhaber ich heute geworden bin. Du kannst nichts von mir gewärtigen, was den Verpflichtungen widerspricht, die mir diese Eigenschaft auferlegt; meine sonstigen Gefühle müssen schweigen."

Taken at face value, the Consul's words are an admission that his personal feelings are not always in accord with his actions as a businessman. Nevertheless, when a conflict does arise between his personal sense of religion and morality and his sense of business, the latter clearly prevails.

This actually becomes apparent long before the passage quoted above. In the private, nocturnal conversation between Johann, Sr. and his son concerning Gotthold's demand for a financial settlement, Johann, Jr. finds himself in a distressing moral quandary: his conscience is revolted at the prospect of injustice to his half-brother, but his

33 I, 74.

34 Ibid.
business sense is even more repulsed by the thought of doing something that would be financially detrimental to the firm. At this early point in the novel Thomas Mann takes us to the very core of the dilemma: Johann Buddenbrook, Jr. is trapped in the extremely painful position of a man whose "Wille zur Macht" and religious principles are in utter conflict. In him the "Wille zur Macht" is still strong enough that his business sense (threatened only briefly, despite his fervent protestations of belief) maintains the upper hand and he becomes a party to the injustice against Gotthold. Johann, Jr. does not possess "Gottesklugheit"; he does not recognize the conflict of values; what he attempts to do instead is reconcile the one set of values with the other. Johann, Sr.'s remarks may strike one as unfeeling, even ruthless (again, the Nietzschean affirmation of life), but they are certainly devoid of hypocrisy.

Since Johann, Jr.'s business sense does prevail, and since in his own way he also takes his religion very seriously, one has to ask how he manages to live with himself. The answer lies in that part of his reconciliation of conflict which enables him to believe in the rightness of his position. In the affair with Gotthold as well as in other equally distressing situations, the Consul invariably finds something that enables him to reconcile the conflict, with himself emerging as the one who has Right on his side. In another conversation with the Consul immediately after Johann, Sr.'s funeral, Gotthold makes overtures
of friendship, confessing that the dry goods business he operates has not been very successful. This admission only serves to strengthen the Consul's conviction that he is in the right, for the pious thought that flashes through his mind at Gotthold's words is, "Der Trotz gegen den Vater hat ihm also keinen Segen gebracht!"35

One of the "equally distressing situations" is Bendix Grünlich's impending bankruptcy. Johann, Jr. feels an understandably strong sense of guilt and responsibility for the misfortune and embarrassment in which his daughter now finds herself. Once again, however, he manages in his own mind to absolve himself of guilt: in the conference with his son-in-law and the banker, Kesselmeyer, the latter's admission that Grünlich had been on the verge of financial ruin even before his marriage to Tony provides Johann, Jr. with the very thing he needs in order to convince himself that his actions had been morally justifiable and that he had been the honest dupe of evil, unscrupulous men. He says: "Herr, ich verachte Ihre Worte, . . . Ich verachte Ihre wahn-sinnigen Verleumdungen um so mehr, als sie auch mich treffen . . . mich, der ich meine Tochter nicht leichtfertigerweise ins Unglück gebracht habe. Ich habe sichere Erkundigungen über meinen Schwiegersohn einge-zogen . . . das Übrige war Gottes Wille!"36

According to one critic, "Il serait tentant d'interpréter la piété manifestée par Johann Buddenbrook comme une sorte de compensation

35I, 75.
36I, 229. See also pp. 231-32.
de ses activités capitalistes et de sa situation de riche bourgeois."\(^{37}\) Johann Buddenbrook's piety, however, is really not so much a matter of compensation as of reconciliation; it is his almost desperate effort to convince himself (and others) that the forms he continues to observe are still valid.

One finds that in the third generation of Buddenbrooks Clara is the only one who has inherited the parents' devoutness and active interest in the religious life. She does not share their Pietistic tendencies; there is nothing schwärmerisch or emotional in Clara's practice of religion, and she does not show any of the humility which is an important Pietistic quality. On the contrary, the word "herrisch" is used to describe her relationship not only with the servants, but also with her brothers and sister, and even with her mother. The nineteen-year-old Clara is further described as "fromm," "streng," "ernst," and "gottesfürchtig."\(^{38}\) The words may be taken literally; Thomas Mann does not use them here with irony, which indicates that for Clara the religious principles of an earlier time still have meaning and validity, although it could also be argued that her piety is at least partly a matter of compensation for the fact that she is not pretty, gay, or outgoing by nature. Unlike Tony's first match, Clara's marriage


\(^{38}\) I, 285.
is suitable in the true sense of the word; in character, temperament, and interests she is ideally suited to be the wife of a pastor.

Their parents' devoutness and heavy emphasis on religion in the family home certainly have not strengthened Thomas', Christian's, and Tony's interest in religion and made it a significant influence in their lives. In fact the opposite is more nearly true. Religion, at least in the formal, organized sense, is completely meaningless to Christian, and with a characteristic lack of hypocrisy he makes no effort to conceal the fact. He does not observe even the outward forms for the sake of the family's position in the city. Christian's lack of a sense of the religious is quite striking: he often launches into lengthy, indelicate personal anecdotes when religious or semi-religious family observances are in progress, realizing only belatedly and often only when some other member of the family admonishes him, that what he is saying is at the least a breach of good taste. Christian lacks what his brother calls Gleichgewicht; the unfitness for "bürgerliches Leben" which Hanno displays is already present in Christian, and nothing, least of all religion, supplies that which is missing in him. Nevertheless, Christian is, of all the children, the most honest: he knows that the forms of an earlier era are losing their meaning, he recognizes that they are becoming increasingly invalid, and he refuses to honor them. What makes Christian a very pathetic figure is the fact that he exists in a peripheral zone, a sort of limbo between Leben
and Geist, belonging truly to neither. He is too weak, too far removed from bourgeois life to have any real place in it, and yet he is also not a true representative of Geist. In a figurative sense, his preoccupation with pain and illness is his "religion"; his pleasure-seeking is really a caricature of Nietzsche's theory of "Epicureanism," according to which the aim is not happiness, but the avoidance of pain. Nietzsche regards this as a decadent ideal, the weakness and decadence stemming from the fear, the terror of pain, and he sees a relationship between Epicureanism and Christianity, the "religion of the weak." Nietzsche also makes a connection between the Epicurean ideal and Schopenhauer's glorification of art as a means of escaping the domination of the will; in discussing Schopenhauer's theory (in the section, "Was bedeuten asketische Ideale?" of Zur Genealogie der Moral), Nietzsche says, "Das ist der schmerzenslose Zustand, den Epikuros als das höchste Gut und als den Zustand der Götter pries; wir sind, für jenen Augenblick, des schönen Willensdrangs entledigt . . . ."39

Tony is a much more typical product of tradition and environment, both of which she honors and strives to maintain, than either Christian or Thomas. One of the most important words in Tony's vocabulary is "vornehm," and in this distortion, this Verbürgerlichung of Nietzsche's

39Nietzsche, II, 847. See also R. A. Nicholls, "Nietzsche in the Early Work of Thomas Mann," p. 11.
The naive Tony's ever-present concern is that everything, including religion, be "vornehm." She attends the "proper" church; at the weddings, the christenings, and the funerals she derives her greatest satisfaction from the knowledge that these occasions are characterized by dignity, refinement, and a genteel display of wealth and elegance. Although Tony is a more typical representative of the patrician family than either Thomas or Christian, the forms have become decadent and without true meaning for her, too. She does not search for new ones, however; instead, like her father, she renders lip service to the old ones and attempts to preserve them, although her way of doing so is different than the Consul's. Tony's way out of the dilemma is to secularize the forms, making the family and the firm the objects of her "religious" devotion. This enables her to justify her actions, just as her father's "solution" to the conflict of interests enables him to live with himself.

Thomas is the member of the family who shows a strong sympathy for the Roman Catholic Church, and he is admonished for this on more than one occasion by his mother. When she reads to him Tony's letter from Munich, Thomas breaks into hearty laughter at the lines quoted


earlier (see footnote 10), and his mother reproves him:

Ja, Tom, du lachst . . . aber mir gefällt es völlig an ihr, daß sie an dem Glauben ihrer Väter festhält, und die unevangelischen Schnurrpfeifereien verabscheut. Ich weiß, daß du in Frankreich und Italien eine gewisse Sympathie für die päpstliche Kirche gefaßt hast, aber das ist nicht Religiosität bei dir, Tom, sondern etwas anderes, und ich verstehe auch, was; aber obgleich wir dulsam sein sollten, ist Spiellei und Liebhaberei in diesen Dingen in hohem Grade strafbar, und ich muß Gott bitten, daß er dir . . . mit den Jahren den nötigen Ernst darin gibt . . .42

Probably the most surprising revelation here is Madame Buddenbrook's recognition of the fact that her son's sympathy for Catholicism is not actually a matter of religious persuasion, but something different; there is nothing within the novel to support the contention that Thomas is drawn to the tenets or dogma of Roman Catholicism. Joseph Brennan speaks of Thomas Mann's association of Catholicism with the aristocratic, and there is truth in the observation.43 Thomas' inclination toward Catholicism is to a great extent just one more aspect of his aestheticism and aristocratic "different-ness"—somewhat like his fastiduous attention to dress and his marrying a woman who is rather exotic, who never quite "belongs" in the closed-off world of the Lübeck Bürgertum. Yet Madame Buddenbrook,

42 I, 308.

for all her astuteness, is not entirely correct in her appraisal of Thomas' sympathy for the Roman Church. She calls it "Spielerei" and "Liebhaberei," not recognizing that in reality there is a definite seriousness in Thomas' interest in Catholicism. This becomes especially clear when Madame Buddenbrook's long and final illness begins, and when Thomas speaks of his intention to engage the nursing services of Sister Leandra, member of a Catholic order of nuns called the "Grey Sisters." His mother chides him as strenuously as her weakened condition permits: "Thomas, . . . glaube mir, du erregst Anstoß mit deiner beständigen Protektion der Katholischen gegenüber den Protestantischen. Du hast den einen direkte Vorteile verschafft und tust nichts für die anderen. Ich versichere dich, Pastor Pringsheim hat sich neulich mit deutlichen Worten bei mir darüber beklagt."\(^4\)

Ordinarily the soul of discretion and tact, Thomas answers with unusually blunt candor; he tells his mother that Pastor Pringsheim's complaints will avail him nothing, and that he, Thomas, is convinced "daß die Grauen Schwestern treuer, hingebender, aufopferungsfähiger sind als die Schwarzen. Diese Protestantinnen, das ist nicht das Wahre. Das will sich alles bei erster Gelegenheit verheiraten . . . Kurzum, sie sind irdisch, egoistisch, ordinär. Die Grauen sind degagierter, ja, ganz sicher, sie stehen dem Himmel näher."\(^5\) These

\(^4\) I, 559-60.

\(^5\) I, 560. See also "Gesang vom Kindchen," VIII, 1080-81.
words are convincing evidence that Thomas' sympathy for the Roman Catholic Church is not merely something shallow and frivolous.

Further proof of the seriousness of his attitude is his insistence despite his mother's protests: it is in fact Sister Leandra who comes and cares for Madame Buddenbrook through the long and painful weeks of her illness, despite the cold and hostile glances of Pastor Pringsheim and other visitors.

Earlier mention was made of Degagiertheit as an important element of Thomas Mann's conception of religion; his use of the word "degagierter" in the passage just quoted points to his view of Roman Catholicism as an aesthetic phenomenon, i.e. non-prosaic and detached from the bourgeois, everyday world. This element of Catholicism is reflected most strongly in the monastic life, and the Grey Sisters are representatives of that life in the novel. In the secular sphere, a parallel can surely be drawn between Thomas Mann's view of the Catholic nuns as "aufopferungsfähiger" and "degagierter" and his conception of the artist as a person separated from his fellow human beings and detached from life in the bourgeois, mundane sense.46

The passage which tells of Thomas' accidental discovery of Schopenhauer also has unmistakable religious implications—for him, and for the reader as well. The discovery leaves Thomas in a state...

46 See also the reference to the gulf between earth and the kingdom of God, Chapter I, footnote 50.
of profound, if fleeting, exaltation. His understanding of what he has read is neither immediate nor complete; insight comes to him only later, as he lies alone in the darkness, and the experience can best be described as a religious revelation: "... er lag stille und wartete inbrünstig, fühlte sich versucht, zu beten, daß es noch einmal kommen und ihn erhellen möge. Und es kam. Mit gefalteten Händen, ohne eine Regung zu wagen, lag er und durfte schauen..."47

A powerful transformation in Thomas' view of life and death is wrought by the revelation. He sees himself as the possessor of eternal life in the form of all those, "die je und je Ich gesagt haben, sagen und sagen werden: besonders aber in denen, die es voller, kräftiger, fröhlicher sagen..."48 Death is no longer something to be feared and dreaded. His view of it is now a thoroughly Romantic one: Death has become the great Releaser, the Eradicator of limitations, of bonds and boundaries, the marvelous and awesome means by which he will achieve eternal life.

Like Mann's later hero, Hans Castorp, Thomas makes a solemn pledge to himself never to relinquish this newfound Weltanschauung and the happiness and serenity his religious "vision" has brought him; but with the passing of time, with the demands of the day-to-day concerns and responsibilities of bourgeois life which press upon him, he does not

47 I, 656.
48 I, 657.
have the necessary will to remain true to his vow. Like the novelist in Mann's sketch, "Beim Propheten" (1904; VIII, 362-70), Thomas has "ein gewisses Verhältnis zum Leben."

What Thomas reads in the garden house is Schopenhauer, but his reaction to what he has read, in particular the chapter about death and the indestructibility of the human being's true nature, reflects considerably more of Nietzsche than of Schopenhauer. In his essay, "Schopenhauer," Thomas Mann acknowledges the application of his Nietzsche studies to the writing of this passage: he apologizes for quoting extensively from that part of Buddenbrooks which gives Thomas' reaction to Schopenhauer, and then adds, "Das Zitat aber geschieht, um zu zeigen, daß man im Sinn eines Philosophen denken kann, ohne im geringsten nach seinem Sinne zu denken, will sagen: daß man sich seiner Gedanken bedienen—und dabei denken kann, wie er durchaus nicht gedacht haben will. Hier dachte freilich einer, der außer Schopenhauer auch schon Nietzsche gelesen hatte und das eine Erlebnis ins andere hineintrug, die sonderbarste Vermischung mit ihnen anstellte."^9

It was Nietzsche who regarded the will in a positive light, as the primary, creative, and necessary force of life. Indeed, "Wille zur Macht" is made synonymous with life itself in Jenseits von Gut und

Böse:

Leben selbst ist wesentlich Aneignung, Verletzung, Überwältigung des Fremden und Schwächeren, Unterdrückung, . . . und mindestens, mildestens Ausbeutung . . . jener Körper, innerhalb dessen . . . die Einzelnen sich als gleich behandeln, . . . muß selber, falls er ein lebendiger und nicht ein absterbender Körper ist, alles das gegen andre Körper thun, wessen sich die Einzelnen in ihm gegen einander enthalten: er wird der leibhafte Wille zur Macht sein müssen . . . nicht aus irgend einer Moralität oder Immoralität heraus, sondern weil er lebt, und weil Leben eben Wille zur Macht ist.  

Thus when Thomas exults that he will live on in all those who rejoice in life and who are strong enough to survive in it, he is affirming Nietzsche's "Wille zur Macht"; he in fact tells himself that he has never actually hated life, but only himself for his inability to endure it.

Thomas' reaction to Schopenhauer, and especially the exaltation he feels, must not be confused with the Christian belief in or joyous anticipation of life after death.  

51 There is no possibility of interpreting this passage in terms of Christian resurrection and immortality; it leads, however, to the question of how one is to interpret the final passage of Buddenbrooks, which does contain distinct traces of Christian theology. Tony says, "Hanno . . . Tom, Vater, Großvater . . .

50 Nietzsche, II, 729. See also pp. 578, 585, 600-01.

man sieht sie nicht mehr," to which her cousin Friederike replies, "Es gibt ein Wiedersehen." When Tony utters her doubtful, "Ein Wiedersehen . . . wenn es so wäre . . .," it is Sesemi Weichbrodt who supports Friederike with all the emphasis and power of persuasion she can muster: "'Es ist so!' sagte sie mit ihrer ganzen Kraft und blickte alle herausfordernd an. Sie stand da, eine Siegerin in dem guten Streite, den sie während der Zeit ihres Lebens gegen die Anfechtungen von seiten ihrer Lehrerinnenvernunft geführt hatte, bucklig, winzig, und bebend vor Überzeugung, eine kleine, strafende, begeisterte Prophetin." The "Anfechtungen" are the scepticism which is the product of Sesemi's "Lehrerinnenvernunft." Her scepticism gives way here to the belief in a life after death, not in Schopenhauer's or Nietzsche's terms, but in terms of Christian theology. There is also the clear declaration of belief in a reunion with loved ones, also part of Christian doctrine. Thomas Mann ends on a similar note in later works, allowing the possibility of multiple meanings: in the concluding lines of the Zauberberg it is quite clear that Hans Castorp's chances of survival on the battlefield are so slight as to be virtually non-existent, yet the author expresses the ever-so-faint possibility; in Doktor Faustus there is the final note of the composition, "Dr. Fausti Weheklag," which lingers in the air like "a ray of light in the darkness," and in Der Erwählte grace is presented as a possible basis for
hope. In a comparison of Sesemi Weichbrodt's "Lehrerinnenvernunft" and Thomas Mann's own doubt, however, an important difference between the two emerges: Sesemi, in spite of her lifelong attacks of scepticism, renders a vigorous affirmation of faith, and Thomas Mann did not do this in his own life. Why, then, does he allow her this final word in *Buddenbrooks*?

Thomas Mann frankly defines himself as a sceptic in his "Fragment über das Religiöse": "Glaube? Unglaube? Ich weiß kaum, was das eine ist, und was das andere. Ich wüßte tatsächlich nicht zu sagen, ob ich mich für einen gläubigen Menschen halte oder für einen ungläubigen. Tiefste Skepsis in bezug auf beides, auf sogenannten Glauben und sogenannten Unglauben, ist all mein Ausweis, wenn man mich katechisiert."53

Among believers there is often the tendency to sweep the doubter, the sceptic, into the same category as the non-believer. Thomas Mann was surely aware of this, which is perhaps why, not once but several times, in public as well as in private, he expressed his dissatisfaction at being labeled a non-Christian. The scepticism he professes in the "Fragment über das Religiöse" applies in fact not only to Glauben, but also, and to an equal degree, to Unglauben. The closing lines of *Buddenbrooks* are an artistic statement of this, for

53XI, 424.
in them Thomas Mann does not close the door upon the ultimate and perhaps extremely slight possibility that a faith like Sesemi Weichbrodt's is "the ray of light in the darkness," despite his own profoundly pessimistic view of life and the human situation.
CHAPTER III. CONCLUSION

To maintain that Thomas Mann's conception of religion underwent no change or development in the course of his life would be a mistake; the contention here is simply that the development which did take place was the gradual and natural unfolding of a religious Haltung which had its origins in Thomas Mann's early adulthood, and that in the course of this development there was no fundamental deviation from the original ideas, no inconsistency or break with his early religious thought.

The development of Thomas Mann's concept of religion could indeed be regarded merely as the extension of his initial ideas: with the events of the times (for example, the end of the monarchy and the rise of National Socialism in Germany), Thomas Mann's "religiös fundierter Humanismus" came to be more encompassing, i.e. as he gave it increasingly wider application.

It is true that with the years Thomas Mann was able to formulate his concept of religion more clearly than he had done in his early adulthood. Also, he made many more statements on the subject in his later life than in his early adulthood, and the later statements were often in the form of lectures, correspondence, and theoretical
writings; that Thomas Mann should make use of these means, and that
the number of his statements on religion should increase was almost
inevitable as he became more and more deeply involved in public
affairs. Of course the theoretical and the artistic are not of
necessity mutually exclusive; in fact Thomas Mann's artistic state¬
ments on religion have at least one thing in common with his
theoretical statements on this subject: a certain consistency of
attitude toward religion is to be found not only in the theoretical
writings, but also in the works of fiction, indeed from the beginning
to the end of Mann's literary career. In this sense, Sesemi Weich-
brodt's "Es ist so!" in Buddenbrooks and Pope Gregory's salvation
through grace in Der Erwählte constitute the beginning and the end
of one unbroken line.
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