

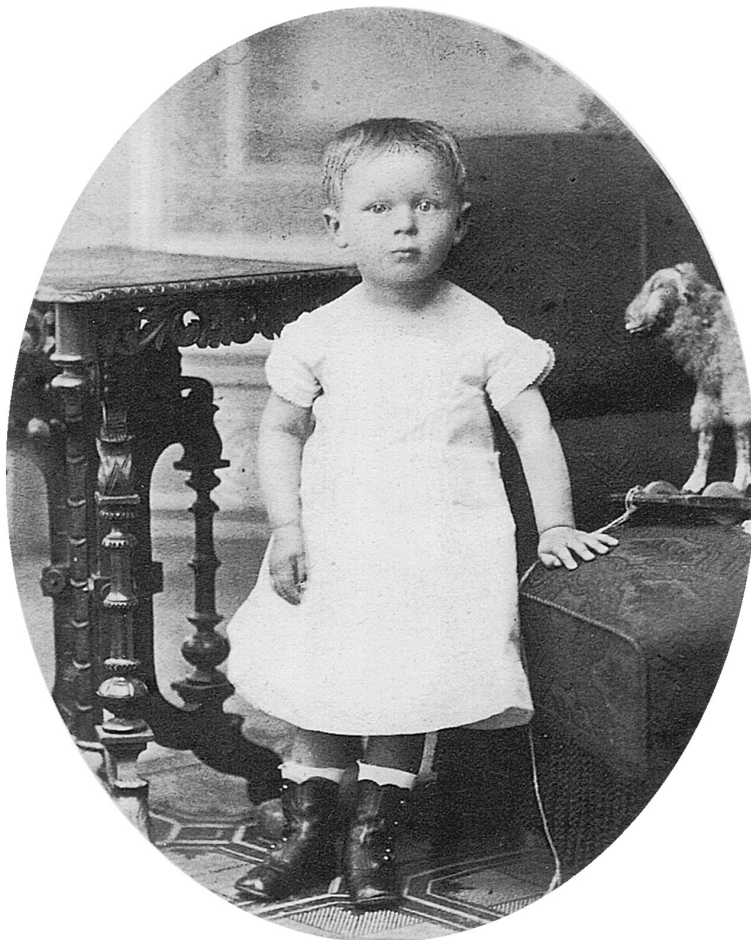
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Hermann Kurzke: Thomas Mann

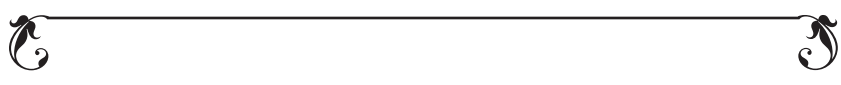
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I. Childhood and School Days



Lübeck, 1877



CHRONICLE 1875–1894

Thomas Mann, or to be precise, Paul Thomas Mann, was born on June 6, 1875, in Lübeck and baptized as a Protestant on June 11 in St. Mary's Church. His parents were very refined people: Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, born in Lübeck in 1840, and Julia Mann, née da Silva-Bruhns, who had seen the light of day for the first time in 1851 in Brazil. His father was the owner of the Johann Siegmund Mann grain firm, further a consul to the Netherlands, and later the senator overseeing taxes for Lübeck, which joined the German Empire as an independent city-state in 1871. His mother came from a wealthy German-Brazilian merchant family. His older brother Heinrich was born in 1871; the siblings born later were Julia, 1877; Carla, 1881; and Viktor, 1890.

As was customary in his circles, instead of entering the public primary school or elementary school, from Easter 1882 on, Thomas Mann attended a private school, the Progymnasium of Dr. Bussenius, in which there were six grades. In addition to the three primary-school classes, there were the first, second, and third years of the secondary school. He was held back for the first time in the third year and had to repeat it. He transferred at Easter 1889 to the famed Katharineum on Lübeck's Königstrasse. Since he was to become a merchant, he did not attend the humanistic branch but rather the mathematical-scientific branch. In March 1894, after the fourth year (twice), the fifth year, and the sixth year (twice) of secondary school, he left at the age of almost nineteen, with the authorization for one year of volunteer military service but without graduating.

The grain firm had just celebrated its hundredth anniversary (in May 1890) when his father died at the age of only fifty-one on October 13, 1891. His will decreed the dissolution of the firm. His mother left Lübeck a few months later and moved to Munich with her younger children, Julia, Carla, and Viktor. Heinrich, who had also left school without finishing, was at the time already at work as a trainee with the young S. Fischer Publishing Company in Berlin. Thomas boarded for a time with various teachers until he followed his mother to Munich at the end of March 1894.

HOROSCOPE

My horoscope was propitious; the sun stood in the sign of Virgo and reached its apex on that day; Jupiter and Venus looked at her with a friendly eye, Mercury not adversely, while Saturn and Mars remained indifferent: the moon alone, just full, exerted the power of her reflection all the more, as she had then reached her planetary hour. She opposed herself, therefore, to my birth, which could not be accomplished until this hour had passed.

Smiling, Goethe flirts at the beginning of *Truth and Poetry* with the state of the stars at the time of his birth. Thomas Mann, for his part, gazes up to Goethe when, regarding his hour of birth, he asserts:

The position of the planets was favorable, as adepts of astrology later often assured me—based on my horoscope they predicted a long and happy life and a gentle death for me.

Of course, like his Jacob, he is not sure whether astronomy was to be counted among the true and useful things or more among the abominations. But he had a horoscope made for himself in 1926. It is correct that the position of the planets is described as favorable, since the most influential stars stand in their own or in friendly signs. But the astrological art of prediction was silent about a long life and a gentle death. Here Thomas Mann helped things along somewhat.

When he conjured up the astronomical report in the novel *Joseph and His Brothers*, he also took only what he could use and left out what was a hindrance. The hour hand at Joseph's birth reflects an idealized version of his own horoscope. "I transferred my own to him."

Accordingly, the sun was at its vertex, which was not quite true in reality, and in the Sign of Gemini, while in the east the Sign of Virgo was rising. With Ninurtu (Saturn) it had a trine, which "points a finger to a share in the events in the realms of earth." That was to come true. But above all, Joseph's, that is, Tommy's, birth is in the Sign of Mercury (the Babylonian Nabu, the Greek Hermes, the Egyptian Thot), the familiar mediator and witty scribe who is a reconciler between things and promotes exchange, but who also, fragile and needing contact, is determined more closely by the society in which he happens to be. In our case it is that of the dangerous Nergal (Mars),

the mischief-maker, who lends toughness to the Hermes child, and that of the seductive Ishtar (Venus), "whose part is moderation and grace, love and mercy." She peaks at that hour and appears amicably with Mercury and the Moon. She also stands in Taurus, "and experience teaches us that, of course, that lends composure and shapes enduring courage and understanding delightfully." Venus, too, receives a trine from Nergal, but that is not bad at all—it makes her taste not sweet and pallid but sharp and spicy.

In the final analysis everything takes place between the Sun and the Moon. The Moon is strong. If Nabu, the smart one, meets it, "then there is a reaching out into the world." Nabu is the mediator between the Sun and the Moon, between the world of the father, who stands in the sign of majestic Jupiter, and the world of the mother, who keeps with Venus. The father world will become that of duty and responsibility and middle-class society, the mother world that of dream and temptation, of love and death. Between the two, Thomas Mann will try to play the role of Hermes.

SUNDAY BELLS

His birth was easy and happy, like those of his siblings. "I was born with Sunday bells." The writer does not recall any reluctance to exchange the dark of his mother's womb for the light of day. It was important for him to have his life appear blessed. "I was born on Sunday, June 6, 1875, at twelve o'clock noon," he writes in 1936.

Thomas Mann was a Sunday's child, that's true. However, it was not twelve o'clock when he took his first breath, as can be seen from the official documentation, but rather a quarter after ten. Goethe was born at noon (if on his part, he did not give himself a literary helping hand): "On August 28, 1749, at noon, with the clock striking twelve, I came into the world in Frankfurt am Main."

The inclination to give his life a "course," a nice and coherent order, was strong in Thomas Mann. In *A Sketch of My Life* he will announce for reasons of symmetry that he would die at seventy—later he interprets a serious lung operation in 1949 as the meager fulfillment of that prophecy. In *My Time*, written in 1950, he reinforces the rhythm of the quarter centuries. Born in 1875, *Buddenbrooks* finished in 1900, *The Magic Mountain* in 1925. All of that is only approximately correct, but it felt good to him to look at it that way. "My time—it was so

changeable, but my life in it is a unity. The order in which my life is related to the times in numbers stirs in me the pleasure I find in all order and coherence." For him it is always a matter of a measure of time. "Childlike pleasure in beginning a new month." All his life he will note down days of commemoration and decisive points of all kinds with special attention. He even sanctified Sunday in his own way—not that he necessarily stopped working, but that he entered the date in red in his diary.

He *wanted* his life to be orderly. It was to be "a well-rounded art work of a life." In truth he conducted a desperate battle against encroaching chaos. Inner chaos threatened through the laziness and dreaminess of his early years, his unrealized homoerotic inclinations, and the desire to let himself go. The chaos of external history brought in 1894 the loss of the world of his origins in Lübeck, and in 1933 that of his chosen home of Munich, followed by change of residence in exile, the renewed homelessness in the United States, and at an advanced age the move to Switzerland. Today Thomas Mann cities interested in tourism carry on the idyllic cultivation of classic writers with traces of his life, but there is not much there. Only late, very late, did the city of Lübeck buy the so-called Buddenbrook House, the house of his grandparents on Mengstrasse. In reality, the architectonic remains of this life exhibit a trace of catastrophe. In May 1942 only the façade of the Buddenbrook House was still standing, and his parents' various other houses in Lübeck have totally disappeared from the face of the earth. Only the foundation of the Munich house on Poschingerstrasse, on which a new postwar construction was erected, remains. The American places of residence are in private hands with no interest in the past. The last place of residence in Kilchberg outside of Zurich was bought by a banker in 1996.

Only in the diaries of his old age did the Sunday's child relax the palliative strictures. "Not *all* of my life was painful. Very likely such a mixture of torment and glory was rare" (September 20, 1953).

Was his birth really so easy and happy?

IN THE SHADOW OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH

The delivery of a baby is something intimate and private; in the case of Thomas Mann, it took place, as was usual at the time, at home, probably Breite Strasse 36. A baptism, on the other hand, is some-

thing public. It signifies not only acceptance into the Church, in this case the Lutheran, but also into middle-class society, with which this church was all-too-intimately connected. To be baptized in St. Mary's: Seen socially, that was the best place. While in the nineteenth century the Lübeckers let their cathedral fall into ruins, stored building rubble in their St. Katharine's Church, and tore down the magnificent Renaissance city gate still situated at the Holsten Gate, they kept faith with St. Mary's Church, located at the market place, and with city hall.

In *The Magic Mountain* old Hans Lorenz Castorp tells his grandson about the baptismal bowl that had for generations received the baptismal water trickling from the heads of the newborn Castorps or, as the case may be, of the Manns, for into this bowl the water from the little head of five-day-old Thomas had flowed. The sexton poured it into the pastor's hollowed hand, "and from there it ran over the crown of your head into the bowl here. But we had warmed it so you would not be startled and not cry, and you didn't either; on the contrary you had been crying before, so that Bugenhagen didn't have it easy with his homily, but when the water came, you fell silent, and showed respect for the holy sacrament, let us hope." It may also have happened like that at the baptism of Thomas—we assume so. Admittedly, the roguish stylization of the scene by the author of *The Magic Mountain* is typical. In the wailing during the sermon he already hints at protest against the bourgeois church and its rhetoric, in the quiet during the flowing application of the baptismal water reverence for an indefinable something more sublime.

St. Mary's Church is not only a place left over from the nineteenth century. Mightier experiences half a millenium older fill its echoing breadth. It belongs among those places "where as you walked, hat in hand, you fell into a certain, reverential, forward-rolling gait, your heels never touching the ground." It conveys two things: the middle-class façade and its opposite, the atmosphere of death. Mann in 1921 calls his hometown a "Dance of Death homeland," with reference to "the humorously macabre thrills that emanated from the Dance of Death frescoes in St. Mary's Church," that late-medieval cycle by Bernt Notke, which burned in the Second World War.

When in California, Thomas Mann heard about the bombing attacks on Lübeck and had to assume that St. Mary's Church could have suffered damage—he did not have much sympathy. "I think of

Coventry," he said in a BBC broadcast, "and have nothing against the idea that everything must be paid for." That takes aim at the guilt of middle-class, National Socialist Lübeck. But after the war, when it is a matter of rescuing and rebuilding St. Mary's Church, he makes a genuine effort to raise the necessary funds. He does not do that for the sake of the citizens of Lübeck but because of the reverential rocking gait. St. Mary's, as middle class as it was mysterious, place of baptism and death, overshadowed besides a childhood dream, the Buddenbrook House in Mengstrasse.

THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

With "Amen, I know something, Grandfather!" eight-year-old Tony Buddenbrook closes her recitation of the catechism she has learned by heart. What does she know?

"If it's a warm flash," Tony said, nodding her head at each word, "then lightning is striking. But if there's a cold flash, then thunder is striking."

When old Herr Buddenbrook demands to know who taught the child such idiocy, it turns out that it was Ida Jungmann, the child's recently engaged nanny from Marienwerder in West Prussia. There were nannies not only in the Buddenbrook home but naturally also in Mann's home. They were very influential. Until Tommy's thirteenth or fourteenth year, it was Ida Springer who obviously served as the model for Ida Jungmann. She, too, will have had that fine sense of class and rank that is characterized ironically in *Buddenbrooks*:

She was a person of aristocratic principles who distinguished exactly between first and second social ranks and between middle class and lower middle class; she was proud as a devoted servant to serve the first social ranks, and she did not like, for instance, to see Toni become friends with a schoolmate who in Mamsell Jungmann's estimation was to be counted only among the upper middle class.

An older brother with three younger siblings experiences his own learning process three more times, that is, when it happens to each of the others. In this way he becomes aware of what the only child or

the last child in the row must remain unaware of because each of them is too close. Only what is known can become a story. Tommy is not Tony; it was not he who believed in striking thunder, but he either observed from a distance how the little story impressed his younger siblings or he took part early on in the good-natured mockery by adults about Ida Springer. Incidents of this sort belong at one time or another to a treasure of family legends whose original kernel of experience disappears more and more behind an anecdotal point that already has something literary about it.

Thomas Mann did not believe in making things up. He is talking about himself when he writes about Shakespeare: "He much preferred to find ready-made things rather than to make things up." So we may assume that this small scene, too, is not made up but is experienced, that it comes from the childhood world of Thomas Mann, and that he had already received it handed on in a half-literary form as a family anecdote, or had even taken part in its composition. His older brother, Heinrich, may also have played a role in it. He had an ear for such funny stories. As the oldest, and also by nature the most aloof, he had the most unconstrained viewpoint. A satirical point of view was Heinrich's talent; this rubbed off on his brother. What was elegiac and idyllic, on the other hand, was Thomas's own and in the long run more fitting for his basic conservative disposition.

Satire, elegy, and idyll, according to Friedrich Schiller's energetic insistence on distinction, are forms that are characterized by the search for something lost and thus by reflective distance. Thomas Mann does not lose that distance for a moment. As a narrator of his childhood, he is never childish. Quite a lot can be found in the literary and essayistic work of our author about his own childhood, but it is as good as always filtered literarily, at the least has passed beyond first drafts, is made worth telling and acceptable to society. It is revised as a rule satirically, elegiacally, or idyllically.

One can get closest to the unfiltered truth in the diaries. But ordinarily children don't keep diaries. It is not clear when Tommy began keeping one, though probably by the age of thirteen or fourteen. He had gotten rid of the records of his youth fairly early on. "These days it has been especially warm for me," he writes on February 17, 1896, to a friend of his youth, Otto Grautoff. "You see, I'm burning my collected journals—" Why? "It was becoming embarrassing and uncomfortable to have such a mass of secret—*very* secret—writings

lying around." These secrets will certainly have concerned only his youthful and adolescent years, not his childhood, for which reason they will not be discussed until later.

OTHELLOS

Small chocolate-covered cream cakes, "Moor's heads" were then eruditely called "Othellos," after Shakespeare's drama about the Moor. Thomas's father must have been a most cultured man. At a very hidden place Thomas Mann tells of a daring pedagogical experiment,

which our father once made with us siblings: He assured us that once in our lives we could eat as many cream puffs, Othellos, and cream rolls at the pastry shop as we wanted. He led us into a sweet-smelling Paradise, let the dream become reality—and we were amazed how quickly we reached the limit of our desire, which we believed to be infinite.

Obviously this father did not want simply to bestow only a few basic principles on his children, but to let them form them from their own experience. Seen superficially, he was successful, at least with his son Thomas, who with all his love for sweets was moderate his whole life in eating as in drinking. In his youth, he says as an old man, "five courses were customary. After the first one I used to go to an adjacent room and lie on a sofa and sleep; the servant had instructions to wake me for the pudding."

But the boy already saw through the great Moor's head feast. "We *had* to be amazed," Thomas Mann writes—amazement was a duty. Apparently the father could not resist prescribing for his children the pedagogically desirable feeling. The boy had noted that. In this middle-class world one could never reveal his *real* feelings. Instead there was always a desirable feeling that should and was allowed to come out. That his children learned to play the expected role was more important to Senator Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann in the final analysis than that they trusted their own experiences and gave them expression. But the personal experience that became evident in the end was not at all amazement, not the aversion to sweets in immoderation (which a bright child knows without such experiments), rather the irony of the comparatively ponderous arrangement of the experiment.

So the father was probably a cultured man, but that culture did not apply to the freedom of the self to learn from its own experience, rather only to the perfection of role playing. The principles of his children should appear as though they came out of their own experience. Their masks should be more believable than the masks of others. They should grow firmly onto their faces. It was not anticipated that ironic skepticism toward the whole educational process would be maintained and that anyone would peer behind the scenery. The masks were supposed to seem natural; that was (and is) the meaning of middle-class education. With Thomas Mann it achieved only partial success in that throughout his life he never escaped this role but instead suffered from it.

LEAD SOLDIERS AND PLAYING GODS

As a child Tommy owned a blue Hussar uniform, regulation down to the least detail, that had been tailored for him personally. But he did not derive any pleasure from the military masquerade, the twenty-nine year old writes later,

and I also did not play with lead soldiers with any real passion, although I called as my own very splendid ones, almost as long as my finger, riders that could dismount, whereby I was bothered only by the thick spike that they had between their bow legs.

When he wrote this, he already had his military service behind him, prematurely finished because he was unfit. It had been repulsive—"yelling, wasting time, and iron laurels tormented me beyond measure." He would thus like to have a reason to trace his scorn for the military back to his childhood and to caricature soldiers' games by thick tenons between bow legs. But his parents and relatives gave him the Hussar uniform and lead soldiers with the intention of upholding the state in any case. The young man was supposed to become a brave man.

But Thomas was a dreamy child. He loved his rocking horse tenderly; it had the rough juvenile coat of a Fuchs pony and "the most trusting glass eyes in the world." The puppet theater, which actually belonged to his brother Heinrich, meant even more to him. Most of all he loved playing roles.

For example, I woke up one morning with the resolve today to be an eighteen-year-old prince named Karl. I dressed with a certain charming sovereignty and walked about with the secret of my dignity. You could have lessons, be taken for a stroll, or have fairy tales read to you without interrupting this game for a second; and that was what was practical about it.

Thomas Mann includes this game later, hardly changed, in the life story of the con man Felix Krull. Also the puppet theater is transferred from life into art, first in the tale the "Bajazzo,"* then in the Christmas chapter of *Buddenbrooks*.

"You come from a rich family," says Settembrini to Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*. They were rich in the Mann home as in the Castorp and Buddenbrook homes. Whatever he asked for, "he always got." But the young man hardly needed the stuff, for he invented what he had need of.

The tone of voice of the idyll changes when the writer comes to speak about the children's games. "Playing gods" especially reveals him as the absolute sovereign of a world of fantasy. Such a role naturally feels good. It still comforts the adult shaken by coarse reality, who from a sentimental distance remembers his erstwhile divinity half comically, half wistfully:

As Hermes I hopped through the rooms with paper wingéd shoes, as Helios I balanced a gleaming gold-foil crown on my ambrosial head, as Achilles I dragged my sister, who whether she liked it or not played Hector, mercilessly three times around the walls of Ilium. But as Zeus I stood on a small, red-laquered table, which served as my divine mountain, and in vain did Titans build up Pelion on Ossa, so horribly did my lightning flash from a red horse-lead, that was, in addition, sewn with little bells.

And they had also given him a train. But all his life Tommy was unable to find any interest in technology. That they "crashed most interestingly" is the only information he handed on about his trains. He thought just as little of playing Indian. Probably, seen from the standpoint of his father, he was lacking in masculine courage. That "the constant influence of women to which the boy was subjected

* Translated as "The Dilettante," with Mann's approval, by Helen Lowe-Porter, 1936; again in 1970 by David Luke as "The Joker." (Trans.)

was not likely to stimulate and develop the characteristics of manliness in him" also distresses Senator Buddenbrook in the case of his son Hanno.

YOUR SAPIENCY AND LÜBECK'S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN

"My childhood was sheltered and happy." Although all the records mentioned to this point bear the stamp of later literary re-formation, we are actually not justified in doubting this statement, for reports about unhappy childhood experiences are not present. Father and mother were loved and respected. The satirical viewpoint, from which the rest of the citizens of Lübeck were inspected, is spared them. To characterize the relationship with his parents, Thomas likes to use the famous verses from Goethe's *Tame Xenias*:

From Father I have the stature
for life's most potent gales,
From Mama the gay nature
and the desire to tell tales.

Again, a good share of this is style at work and a teasing imitation of Goethe, but there is still something true about it. A retrospect from later days recognizes his father as a lifelong example. "How often in my life have I noticed with a smile, have actually *caught* myself being aware, that as a secret model the personality of my deceased father actually determined everything I did." What was exemplary? Not a little: his father's dignity and sensibility, his ambition and his industry, his personal and intellectual elegance, the bonhomie "with which he was able to accept the plain people who clung to him in a really genuine patriarchal way." Thomas Mann also mentions his father's social gifts and his humor. "He was no longer a simple man, not robust, but nervous and with a great capacity for suffering, but a man of self-control and success, who early on achieved admiration and honor in the world." The social stature of his father must have impressed the young man greatly—at least in retrospect. No wonder, for not every child experiences such scenes:

I still see him, raising his tophat, walking between the infantry sentries presenting arms in front of the City Hall when he left a



Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, around 1875

session of the Senate, see him accepting with elegant irony the respect of his fellow citizens, and have never forgotten the sweeping grief with which, when I was fifteen years old, his city, the whole city, took him to his grave.

As senator he was addressed as "Your Sapiency." Perhaps Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann was even the real regent of the city, "for he administered the taxes."



Julia Mann, née da Silva-Bruhns, around 1875

Ludwig Ewers considered her Lübeck's most beautiful woman: Julia Mann, née da Silva-Bruhns. His mother had been "extraordinarily beautiful," Thomas Mann confirms in 1930, "with the ivory complexion of the South, a nobly sculpted nose, and the most attractive mouth I ever encountered." She played the piano, sang like a bell, and often read aloud with a melodious voice. A German-Brazilian, born in the jungle, raised a Catholic, she stood out in fog-cool Lübeck. When she told about how she sat with happy Negroes around a blazing fire and sucked on roast sugarcane, longing expanded the hearts of her children. Faraway places, fairy tales, and

music came from her. She supported the dreamy inclinations of her secondborn, and he thought she loved him especially. "I believe that I, the second one, was closest to her heart." This much from the idyllic perspective.

Thomas Mann confided a chillier aspect to his American friend Agnes E. Meyer. "Papa" was "a fairly rapt, also feared, enormously busy person of authority." Mama had admittedly been more familiar and more intimate but at the same time also curiously cold. Thomas Mann gave her beauty and her coldness to the mother of the successor to the throne in *Royal Highness*. Prince Klaus Heinrich has a crippled hand that, they say, Mama urged him to conceal in a clever way, "urged him especially when on a tender impulse he was about to wrap both arms around her. Her look was cold, when she cautioned him to pay attention to his hand."

As long as her husband was alive, she conformed to the social norms of the city patricians and also imposed them frequently on her children. Only after the senator's death did it appear that she had never quite fitted in in Lübeck. She also had different interests. "Undercurrents of inclinations toward the 'South,' toward art, yes, toward bohemian things" always had obviously also been present and asserted themselves after the death of her husband and the change in circumstances, which explains her prompt move to Munich. There she even participated in Carnival—"which they would hear about in Lübeck with horror."

The senator's trust in the dependability of his wife seems also not to have been 100 percent. From his last will and testament speaks the fear that Julia could be too weak. "In respect to all the children," he states, "my wife should show herself firm and keep all of them dependent. If she should ever falter, then she should read *King Lear*." King Lear, in Shakespeare's drama, signs over his possessions to his daughters in his lifetime, whereupon they treat him like a beggar.

In his literary portraits of mothers, Thomas Mann strengthens their questionable traits considerably. Frau von Rinnlingen, who charmed men; Gerda Arnoldsen-Buddenbrook with her black-eyed lieutenant; the grand-duchess, who thinks of nothing but her beauty; Senator Rodde's wife with her inexhaustible, never adequately satisfied lust for life, her cooing laugh, and the slightly lascivious half-bohemian traits of her salon—vague doubts are always fostered about the decorousness of the way of life of mother figures. They come from the

intolerant sensitivity of grown-up children in regard to any departure of a mother from dignity and purity throughout her life, which Thomas Mann expressed in the late novella *The Black Swan*.

However much Thomas as a child enjoyed what he believed to be preferential treatment by his mother, the feeling of responsibility handed down by his father surfaced with equal effect—to such a degree that he even reproached his mother gently because of her leanings toward the South, toward art, and toward bohemian things. He himself will consciously turn away from the loose artistic life à la Schwabing. The “South” will later, in the story *Tonio Kröger*, be the symbol for artistic genius, licentiousness, and irresponsibility, whereas “North” will stand for fatherhood and a sense of duty.

But we have sufficient grounds to consider that as literature and a later judgment. An aging mother is in a difficult position compared with a father who died before his time, one hallowed in memory. In the real circumstances of his childhood the relationships were more the opposite. His mother was loved, his father feared. The fifteen year old was attached to his father “with fearful tenderness.” There were certainly reasons enough for this fear, especially during his school days, when Tommy’s rebelliousness had become open. In *Buddenbrooks*, traumatizing clashes between father and son are depicted. Hanno is supposed to recite a poem—an emotional catastrophe arises from it:

“Now, son, let’s hear it,” the senator said bluntly. He had settled down in an armchair beside the table and was waiting. He was not smiling at all—today no more than on similar occasions. Earnestly, raising one eyebrow, he measured little Johann’s figure with scrutinizing, even cold, eyes.

Hanno straightened up. He ran his hand over the smoothly polished surface of the grand piano, let his gaze glide shyly over those present, and, encouraged a little by the gentleness gleaming in his grandmother’s and Aunt Tony’s eyes, he said in a low but slightly hard-edged voice: “‘The Shepherd’s Sunday Song’—by Uhland.”

“Oh, my dear boy, that’s not the way,” the senator cried. “You don’t hang on to the piano and fold your hands on your belly. Stand up tall. Speak right out. That’s the first thing. Here, stand

between the portieres. And now hold your head up, and let your arms hang quietly at your sides."

Hanno took a position on the threshold to the sitting room and let his arms hang down. Obediently he raised his head, but he lowered his eyelashes until nothing could be seen of his eyes. More than likely, they were already swimming with tears.

"This is the Lord's own day," he said very softly, and his father's voice, which interrupted him, sounded all the louder. "You begin a recitation with a bow, son. And much louder. Now, start again, please—"The Shepherd's Sunday Song.'"

It was cruel, and the senator knew very well that he was robbing the child of his last remnant of composure and self-control. But the youngster shouldn't let himself be robbed. He shouldn't let himself get confused. He should gain steadfastness and manliness. "'Shepherd's Sunday Song!'" he repeated relentlessly and encouragingly.

But it was all over for Hanno. His head sank down on his chest, and his little right hand, which peered pale and with bluish arteries from the tight-fitting, navy-blue sailor's sleeve embroidered with an anchor, was clutching at the brocade of the portiere. "In meadow broad alone I stand," he said, and then it was finally over. The mood of the poem got the better of him. An overwhelming self-pity caused his voice to fail completely and tears to well irresistibly out from under his eyelids.

Thomas Mann was never quite so weak as the figure in his novel. Of course, he did not die at the age of fifteen either. But even if this scene did not occur in real life exactly like this, it nevertheless indicates what was involved. Thomas was not masculine enough for his father. The Hussar uniform and the lead soldiers may have been an attempt to do something about that.

His later development showed that the boy secretly approved. He distances himself from the world of his mother because, like Tonio Kröger, he feels it a bit dissolute. Probably he did his mother a bitter injustice, for the problem was not in her but in him; it was not she who was dissolute, rather he was afraid of his own inner chaos. So the approval of his paternal society could not remove the conflict from the world. The imitation of his father determines his social ap-

pearance, but nothing more. He plays the role his father lived before him, but he wears it like a mask. His heart is with his mother, while all his life he dresses properly.

To become a “man” like his father was his life’s goal. “Is the artist even a man at all?” asks Tonio Kröger—not without cleverly making demands of what is motherly. What is weak and dreamy, what stands in the way of being a man must be forced into the service of art as a profession. It is subdued with a balled fist and forced into the cellar of the soul. There, chained to the rowing benches, sit the nostalgic slaves where, following the same muffled tempo all their lives, they keep the galley of work under way.

Just as what is motherly (“the desire to tell tales”) corresponds to the literary work, what is fatherly (“the stature for life’s most potent gales”) corresponds to the essayistic work. It was the masculine duty of his life to defy the telling of tales with something conscientious offered by the demands of the day. The aggressive anti-Fascist Thomas Mann, who does not withdraw silent and dreaming into the familiar home of inner emigration, we owe to his father. So one may talk about the suppression of what is motherly, but does anything great ever come into being without suppression?

“My childhood was sheltered and happy.” First of all, this means only that Thomas Mann wanted to see it that way in 1930. It means that he considered the sufferings of his childhood meaningful from a later standpoint. Naturally, like all of us, he suffered—he did not want to abandon the security of the world of wet nurse, nannies, and mother; he opposed paternal pressure to do well and resisted inclusion in the world of men. Luckily, his father had no talent for tyranny. His attempts to be successful were thwarted by secret melancholy and his own weakness. At first he wanted to raise Heinrich, then Thomas, to be the heir of his firm. But then he had insight enough to arrange the dissolution of the firm in his will. He trusted neither Heinrich nor Thomas to lead it. In his will he acknowledges Heinrich had a “dreamy loss of self-control and lack of consideration for others.” He thought more of Thomas: “Tommi will weep for me.” But the one so classified knows that he did not deserve trust at the time. “I was a foolish young man when I lost my father.” The father would never have imagined that one day his second son, even though on a totally different path, would become a senator, even if only an honorary one—but he would have been pleased. Even at the age of eighty

Thomas Mann wants to please him, wishes that "he could have followed my path at least somewhat farther along and have seen that, against all expectations, I was able to prove myself in my own way as his son, his real one." At an advanced age he definitely wanted to return to Lübeck one more time. Why? To breathe the spirit of his father. His daughter Erika advised against the trip at that time. Of course, her father knows what such a fine consummation of life costs, senses the tediousness and the awkwardness of encounters to be expected, but sentimental feelings, namely, "the thought of 'Papa,' and a feeling for biographical closure" are the deciding factors. His life should be a work of art, after all! "Papa" should still have been right more than his "dissolute" Mama!

BED AND SLEEP, ELEGICAL

As a small child Tommy slept in a crib with a green curtain. He was born in a massive mahogany bed, which then for a number of years stood in his bachelor quarters. One of them (Marktstrasse 5, in Schwabing) he immortalizes in fun in the story "The Wardrobe." "This room was mercilessly stripped, with bare, white walls, against which three bright-red lacquered reed chairs stood like strawberries on whipped cream. A wardrobe, a washstand with mirror . . . The bed, an extraordinarily massive piece of mahogany furniture, stood free in the middle of the room."

The wish and the desire to sleep in the bed in which one was born is revealed in the inclination to return to what is childlike that is described covetously in the essay "Sleep, Sweet Sleep!" Thomas Mann liked to sleep. Sleep is the maternal counterforce to the paternal world of duty and business during the day. Bed is the place of dreams and writing. "Le poète travaille" is said to have stood over the bed of the Symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux. Bed is the counter-middle-class place of philosophy, art, and religion. Bed, "that metaphysical piece of furniture in which the mysteries of birth and death occur," is the place of return from desperation into that real and happy state "in which we, warm, unconscious, and with drawn-up knees, as once in the darkness of our mother's womb, again connected at the same time to the umbilical cord of nature, nurture and renew ourselves along mysterious paths."

The aging Thomas Mann slept poorly. He often took sleeping pills. But he claims, as does his Felix Krull, to have been a quiet child as a baby, "not a bawler or troublemaker, but inclined to sleep and doze to a degree most comfortable for my nurses." He had loved sleep and forgetting, even at a time when he had hardly anything to forget. When the duties of the world start to intrude into the splendor of slumber, without hesitation he takes the side of the darkness of the mother. Genuine ardor was to be gained only in sleep, "when the first stage of a life of freedom and inviolability was past and the adversity of life in the form of school began to distort my day."

School is the world of the father, duty, "reality," the first invasion of that horror of expulsion from Paradise that returns again and again in shocks never to be overcome, against which only sleep bestows fleeting respite. "I never sleep deeper, I never enjoy a sweeter homecoming in the womb of night than when I am unhappy, when my work is awry, desperation presses down upon me, human revulsion pursues me into darkness."

STRETCH, CURTAIL, CORRUPT

Hanno Buddenbrook and his friend Kai picture the "pedagogic body" as a creature really present, "a kind of monster of a repulsive and fantastic shape." The tone of the school chapter is satirical. Following all the rules of art, the novelist makes the teachers look ridiculous:

He picked up his notebook and leafed through it silently: but since the order in his classroom left much to be desired, he raised his head, stretched an arm out over the surface of the lectern, and while his face slowly swelled and turned dark red, making his beard look bright yellow, waved his feeble white fist up and down a few times, working his lips convulsively and fruitlessly for half a minute long and finally bringing out nothing more than a forced and moaning "Well . . ." Then he struggled a while longer for further expressions of reprimand, at last turned again to his notebook, and his swelling subsided, and he seemed satisfied. This was typical of senior instructor Ballerstedt's way of doing things.

The tone turns into the elegiac with the retrospective of the games of the four-and-a-half-year-old Hanno:

These games, whose deeper meaning and attraction no adult is able to understand any longer and for which nothing more is needed than three small stones or a piece of wood, perhaps wearing a dandelion bloom as a helmet; but above all the pure, strong, fervent, chaste, still undisturbed and unintimidated fantasy of that happy age when life still hesitates to touch us, when neither duty nor guilt dares lay a hand upon us, when we are allowed to see, hear, laugh, be amazed, and dream without the world's demanding services from us in return . . . when the impatience of those whom we would like to love has not yet begun to torment us for signs and early tokens that we will diligently be able to fulfill these duties— Ah, it will not be long, and with overwhelming, raw power everything will assail us, violate us, drill us, stretch us, cramp us, corrupt us.

The world lays a hand on him in the shape of the school. Thomas Mann, too, experiences it as assaulting and drilling, as stretching, cramping, and corrupting. "School was actually a rule of fear," he still writes as a seventy-one-year-old. The worst thing was gymnastics—"in spite of Willri, just about the most disastrous thing that I ever encountered so far." We see him before us at the horizontal bar and parallel bars practicing the giant upswing or the shoulder stand, suffering from unmitigated ridicule, probably not as self-assured as it later appears to the glorifying view in the memoir of a fellow student: "In the face of this nonsense he practiced sovereignly passive resistance, gripped horizontal bar and parallel bars almost symbolically with his fingertips as it were, and brushed this to him unworthy apparatus with a scornfully vacant glance." His final report card reveals in gymnastics an "unsatisfactory." To the anger of his father, Hanno Buddenbrook also displays a mute, reserved, and almost arrogant resistance to physical training, and Felix Krull admits that, "in dreamer's fashion" he had "always shunned physical exercise completely." In dreamer's fashion: It is his childhood that infused the youth with the potential of resistance that immunized him early on against the training methods of the Wilhelminian educational establishments. The childhood dreams feed the arrogance that permitted a feeling of

vague superiority in spite of bad marks and failing three times. "I despised school, . . . scorned it as a milieu, criticized the manners of its leaders, and early on found myself in a kind of literary opposition to its spirit, its discipline, its methods of obedience training." That is clear. The literary opposition survives from the dream world of childhood that only now, when it is lost, unfolds all its glory. The Prince Karl game and Jupiter's lightning bolts with the horse lead; the fairy-tale hours with his mother; the book of mythology; Andersen; and Fritz Reuter—in his memory they are still much more beautiful than life itself.

His hatred for school torments is reflected in many ways in his works. "I have no sense for facts," writes a disappointed man. School, says Felix Krull, was worse than prison. "The only condition under which I am able to exist is the independence of spirit and imagination, and so it happens that the memory of my long-lasting stay in prison touches me less unpleasantly than that of the bonds of servitude and fear in which the apparently more honorable discipline of the chalk-white, barrackslike house down in the small town struck my sensitive boy's soul." He had never tried in the least to make a secret of his distaste for the despotic stupidity of the institution. "Lazy, obstinate, and full of dissolute scorn about the whole thing" he had sat out the years—again, so says Thomas Mann in person.

The hatred for school is not only fiction—it really existed. The eighteen year old is derisive: "If there is stupidity—then good. That is an indispensably correct principle. That's why I don't like to go to school." The experiences that the pupil was able to have at the venerable Katharineum were scurrilous and ridiculous:

Herr Gottschalk, the great pedagogue, had the nice habit of asking us, before he whipped us, whether we realized that we had earned the punishment. The fearful Yes that was his answer did not usually come from the heart but from a frightened suspicion that, if we said No, we would receive many more blows.

The final report card of Paul Thomas Mann shows only "satisfactory" and "still satisfactory," in drawing an "only partially satisfactory," in singing "finally satisfactory," and in gym, as already reported, an "unsatisfactory." Anyone who expects at least a good grade in German is disappointed; even in this subject the judgment, verbally as

well as written, is "satisfactory." Thomas has the best grade in religion: "very satisfactory." Things were similarly bad for Felix Krull:

Also at the Easter holidays after my poor father's bankruptcy they refused to give me my graduation certificate by presenting me with the choice of being under the thumb of an authoritarian system not appropriate for my age or leaving the school and losing the social privileges connected with finishing it; and with the happy knowledge that my personal characteristics were more than adequate to make up for the loss of this trifling asset, I chose the latter.

The school, "this hostile institution," responded to opposition with Director Wulicke's grim maxim: "I will destroy the careers of every one of you." Thomas Mann, unruly and more than a match for this, was fairly unaffected by that, anyway:

By chance a teacher threatened not me but another pupil with the words: "I'll spoil your career for you!" On the same day I read the maxim by Storm: "To become whatever you can, do not shy from work and long hours, but protect your soul from simply getting ahead." Then I knew that the teachers were not my educators but mid-range bureaucrats, and that I had to look elsewhere for my educators, that is, in the sphere of the intellect and literature.

"As a child I wanted to become a pastry cook or a streetcar conductor," the fifty-seven-year-old insists mockingly. "When I saw that nothing would come of that, I just gave it all up." Becoming a writer means not starting out on a career. It means fooling around, remaining undecided, not being subservient to society. School was the arm of that society. It did not produce free men but servants. Thomas Mann found it all right to train born servants as servants, but he himself did not want to be one. He knew well the torments of a youthful existence that is not yet able to identify itself and with an all-too-vulnerable ego feels derision and contempt everywhere—particularly on the part of the fat cats and the solid people, who cast a broad shadow. Nevertheless he had the strength to respond at school, not suffering like Hanno but with that haughty scorn with which he imbued his "Bajazzo":

One thing's for sure, I was an enormously cheerful lad who was able to get respect and popularity from fellow students because of my favorable background, my masterful imitation of the teachers, my thousand actor's tricks, and my superior way of speaking. But it went bad for me in class, for I was too deeply involved in figuring out the comedy in the movements of the teachers to be able to pay attention to anything else, and at home my head was too full of opera themes, lyrics, and colorful nonsense for me to be in a serious condition to work.

"For shame," my father said, and the creases between his eyebrows deepened when after lunch I had brought my report card to him in the living room and he had read the slip, his hand on his lapel.

FLUNKING

Flunking liberates you. Thomas Mann kept the last two years at school in happiest memory. "The 'institution' expected nothing more of me— I sat through the lessons, but in general lived footloose." What he later thought of as freedom remained marked by that, the good and the bad. Herr Albin, for example, a guest in *The Magic Mountain*, is free: "It's like in high school when it was decided that you would be held back and you weren't asked questions and didn't need to do anything more." Hans Castorp is impressed, "because he himself had been held back in his sophomore year, and he recalled well the somewhat ignominious, but pleasantly untidy state of affairs that he had enjoyed when in the last quarter, he had given up even trying and was able to laugh 'at the whole thing.'" Honor, he ruminates further, has significant advantages, but disgrace has no fewer; indeed, its advantages seem almost boundless.

Herr Albin is tubercular and will die. The freedom of those who are held back reaches its apex when they are claimed by death. No one can demand anything from someone doomed to die. His freedom is honorable but also humiliating, for it avoids society. Thomas Mann, who matured into a republican, denies himself the luxury of death. In *Doctor Faustus* he calls the German enthusiasm for war in 1914 "playing hooky," wild holiday, casting away real duties, and allowing instincts that are not gladly bridled to bolt. The "German revolution" of

1933 appears to him in the same image as a “gigantic impertinence against the will of the world spirit” and a “childish case of playing hooky.” Adrian Leverkühn also damns those who run away from school: Instead of intelligently taking care of what was necessary on earth, mankind played hooky and surrendered its soul in doing so. That is aimed at the Nazi years. But already in 1919 Thomas Mann exhorted the Germans to remain at a distance from the revelries of chaos and to return to work and duty. His praise of flunking and dissoluteness becomes more and more muffled in the course of his life. The attractive philippic against the graduation certificate that Thomas Mann dared to write in 1917 would no longer have been considered appropriate in the republican years. It is guided by highly personal interests, that is clear:

Anyone who passed through the nine classes of the secondary school should be permitted with an acknowledging handshake to go through the door to higher education and not be faced with one more perilous impediment. The age of eighteen, nineteen, is absolutely not an age to “test” persons in a somehow solemn and decisive sense. They do not yet understand life, they do not yet love work, perhaps they are temporarily dreamy idlers.

THE AUTODIDACT

The abundance of education that Mann’s later work strews about extravagantly comes only in a very small way from his schooling. Absolutely nothing from mathematics instruction stayed with him. This student of the branch of high school devoted to science and math worked out even the simplest additions and subtractions on paper all his life. He retained a lot of Latin, as numerous phrases sprinkled in his work demonstrate. He did not learn Greek. Because his son was to become a merchant, Senator Buddenbrook believed he was doing him a favor “by sparing him the unnecessary agony of Greek.” Tommy’s English is said to have been passable. According to his final report card, his French was “satisfactory,” but he never liked that language. “My Negro French”—that’s how he made fun of himself.

He acquired his education in German literature autodidactically and according to need from case to case. At Christmas in 1889 he was

given the works of Schiller. He claims to have spent contented and enthusiastic hours with them "with a plate full of sandwiches." Idealism and sandwiches encroach with irony on one another's territory. Thomas Mann's Schiller is not the man of liberal soapbox speeches. Even the boy treats him in an unusual way. When, disguised as Tonio Kröger, he reads *Don Carlos*, he identifies not with the hero of liberty, Marquis Posa, as would be expected, but in conservative defiance with the king, the lonely and unloved Philip II of Spain, who is deceived by Posa.

And now the news comes from the king's private quarters to the antechamber: The king has wept. "Wept?" — All the courtiers are frightfully disconcerted, and it is completely overwhelming, because the king is so terribly stiff and stern. But you can easily understand that he cried, and I feel sorrier for him than for the prince and the marquis combined. He is always so completely alone and without love, and now he believes he's found someone, and that man betrays him.

The main reason for the selection of reading material in his youth was the almost breathless imitation of his brother, his elder by four years. Like him, Thomas Mann read Heinrich Heine, then Hermann Bahr and Friedrich Nietzsche; a bit later also Paul Bourget. Perhaps even then the remark of the not-yet eighteen year old that he looked upon the words "good" and "bad" as social billboards with no philosophical meaning, is a trace of Nietzsche, going back to *Beyond Good and Evil*. At the latest the fascination with Nietzsche begins in 1894. His knowledge of Heine is even older, influences his adolescent poems, and probably can be traced back to the songs his mother sang. Thomas Mann was enthusiastic about Hermann Bahr from 1893 on. In its first printing, the prose sketch "Vision" carried the dedication: "To the genial artist Hermann Bahr." The Viennese critic counted as the "man of day after tomorrow," as nineteen-year-old Heinrich Mann informs his friend Ludwig Ewers: "This Bahr perhaps has a great future, all the more since he lives and feels completely in the modern, is aware of its smallest twitches and changes and assimilates them." The ardor of Thomas Mann lasts only until 1895. "The most modern thing today is reaction," he writes on March 5, 1895, to Otto Grautoff. "Do you know that Bahr now swears by the classics? And he is l'homme de tête and always has the right instincts for the latest and

coming spirit of the age." Two months later that sounds very different: He had been "stuck on Bahr," but today was a little more mature than at the time "where in the final analysis my diary could just as well have been by the boyishly frivolous and fraudulently sentimental pseudo-Parisian." The French storyteller and cultural philosopher Paul Bourget had been recommended by Bahr and, following him, by Heinrich Mann. The earliest trace of Bourget can be found in the summer of 1894.

Not conveyed by Heinrich, who was by no means as musical as his brother, is the fascination for the musical dramas of Richard Wagner. The introduction to Wagner occurs in 1893, when Emil Gerhäuser was engaged at the Lübeck Municipal Theater. As the precocious reviewer for a student newspaper, "Paul Thomas" reports scornfully that "the mighty Wagner-Gerhäuser evenings of the season" still lay heavy in his stomach and for that reason, as an antidote "Millöcker's carbonic acid music" was of a great help. Nietzsche will speak in a similar way of Bizet's *Carmen*: dry, sunny air after the outbreaks of sweat caused by the siroccos of Wagnerian music. His passion for Wagner will give Thomas Mann numerous fictional figures: Herr Friedemann, Gerda Arnoldsen, Detlev Spinell and Gabriele Klöterjahn, Siegmund and Sieglinde Aarenhold, and others.

FELLOW STUDENTS

No one endures such opposition without being supported. However cruel, bad, and ridiculous school may have been, as in the famous school chapter at the end of *Buddenbrooks*, it became bearable because of a few fellow students of more than average rank. "On the basis of one or another ability difficult to determine"—to which, for example, belonged a stupendous ability to imitate teachers humorously—Thomas Mann was held "in a certain respect" by the outlaws of the class. He was bound to them by "the pathos of distance" (he took the expression from Nietzsche), "an emotion felt by all those who at fifteen secretly read Heine and in the fifth year of secondary school pass judgment on the world and mankind." His opposition did not bind him to the usual boys who flunked terms. His association was much more exclusive, according to social class, so to speak, neither proletarian nor demimonde like that of his brother Heinrich, who had

lived since 1891 as a trainee with the S. Fischer publishing house in Berlin and enjoyed great freedom. His “circle of friends” can be described by “intellect and nobility.” Nobility: Among his closest comrades were Hermann Count Vitzthum von Eckstädt, son of a ceremonial master with Emperor Wilhelm II; Detlef Count Reventlow; and Eberhard Count Schwerin, the model for Kai Count Mölln in *Buddenbrooks*. Von Schwerin was a talented funster. When he had to recite Schiller’s “The Bell,” he included drawing teacher Dräge:

Muffled its mournful tolling
 accompanies Herr Dräge
 On his last way.

And in addition to nobility, also intellect: First of all was his brother Heinrich, but there were also Otto Grautoff, Korfiz Holm, and Ludwig Ewers, who later were active as writers. Otto Grautoff is that nameless person whom Thomas Mann in his *Summary of My Life* mentions as the son of a bankrupt, deceased book dealer, with whom a friendship had bound him “that proved its worth in fantastic and gallows-humoristic scorn and derision about ‘the whole thing,’ especially about ‘the institution’ and its bureaucrats.” The correspondence of many years indicates a profound closeness. “We were really intimate,” Mann writes Grautoff, looking back, on March 28, 1895, from Munich. “We were shameless in front of one another, spiritual, that was so nice and comfortable.” And still Grautoff was for him a dolt. Mann practiced vivisection on him, castigated him for what he hated in himself—for example, a bad style.

We know that Korfiz Holm, who later worked with the August Langen publishing house and smoothed the way for Thomas Mann to *Simplicissimus*, was Mann’s gymnastics coach in school. Ludwig Ewers, a few years older, was more the friend of Heinrich than of Thomas but played an important role as a critically observed writer-competitor even during his school days. He was also familiar with Tommy’s first love. Erich Mühsam, who later became an important anarchistic writer, also strolled back and forth on the schoolyard of the Katharineum, the high school named for St. Katherine. They probably discussed nothing worth mentioning, but they knew one another; the school was not so large that one could escape a striking figure. They did not meet one another again until 1911. Later, Mann rejected Mühsam decisively, but the hostility remained one-sided.

Next to intellect and nobility must be mentioned as a third group the Jewish fellow students whom Thomas Mann recalls in 1921 in the essay "On the Jewish Question," which remained unpublished at the time. These were the son of a rabbi, Simeon Carlebach; the decidedly ugly Franz Fehér, conversant with the circus, gypsy, and merchant milieus; and the intelligent Willi Gosslar, a kosher butcher's son, who was interested in Tommy's gothic ballads and other lyrical attempts of his boyhood.

It was completely with outsiders that the flunking student surrounded himself. But now the talk will be about ordinary people, especially when first love is involved.