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***Ars amandi*: A thematic inquiry into sexual and erotic exceptions
in the early tales of Thomas Mann and the works of Marguerite
Duras**

Schneider, Ursula Wilfriede, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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ARS AMANDI
A THEMATIC INQUIRY INTO SEXUAL AND EROTIC EXCEPTIONS
IN THE EARLY TALES OF THOMAS MANN
AND THE WORKS OF MARGUERITE DURAS

by
URSULA W. SCHNEIDER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Comparative Literatures in partial
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1992

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Ursula W. Schneider

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Abstract

ARS AMANDI:

A THEMATIC INQUIRY INTO SEXUAL AND EROTIC EXCEPTIONS
IN THE EARLY TALES OF THOMAS MANN
AND THE WORKS OF MARGUERITE DURAS

by

Ursula W. Schneider

Adviser: Professor Allen McCormick

Sexuality and creativity derive from the same source: both exist in some unknowable recesses of the mind which may never reveal some of its secrets. The overpowering correlation between aestheticism and eroticism is reflected upon by Thomas Mann in his essay "Die Erotik Michelangelos," which he wrote in 1950. The writer adds a third element to aestheticism and eroticism, namely productivity.

Thomas Mann, while suffering all his life from his ambiguous sexuality, was aware that his erotic preference (homosexuality) was also his main source of inspiration. Without it he would not have become the writer of world-wide renown. Marguerite Duras, at age seventy-seven, spoke for the first time openly - under the disguised form of yet another novel, L'Amant de la Chine du Nord, - about her incestuous relationship with her younger brother. Some of her earlier works make also her interest in narcissism, sadomasochism and lesbianism evident. In neither writer

does sexuality appear in its crude form but is converted into eroticism. Eroticism is a state of mind whose sexual origin has evolved into an often barely visible form in which the aesthetic appeal becomes the dominant factor.

Chapters one through five of this study are a comparison between Thomas Mann's Wälsungenblut and Marguerite Duras's Agatha. Within these two works and across five chapters the underlying currents of narcissism and incest that implicate two pairs of siblings are revealed. In this analysis of narcissism, incest and other forms of "desire", the emphasis is not on ethics; rather, the attempt is made to give an objective evaluation of the psychological damage that occurs when four human beings Siegmund and Sieglind Aarenhold on the one hand, and Agatha and her brother on the other imprison each other voluntarily and are capable of viewing the world only through the enmeshments of their own psyche. Throughout these five chapters the erotic significance inherent in both works is assessed with reference especially to visual, audible, tactile and olfactory stimuli.

Chapters six, seven and eight focus on sadomasochistic and narcissistic aspects in Thomas Mann's tale Der kleine Herr Friedemann and Marguerite Duras's novel Le Vice-consul.

Chapter nine concentrates on homosexuality and lesbianism in Mann's Der Tod in Venedig and several of Duras's novels and film scripts.

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"Grausamkeit ist ein Haupt-Ingrediens der Liebe und ziemlich gleichmäßig auf die Geschlechter verteilt: die Grausamkeit der Wollust, die Grausamkeit des Undanks, der Unempfindlichkeit, des Unterjochens und Maltraitements. Die Lust am Leiden und am Erdulden der Grausamkeit übrigens ebenso. Und noch fünf, sechs andere Verkehrtheiten - wenn es Verkehrtheiten sind - aber das mag ein moralisches Vorurteil sein -, welche in chymischer Verbindung, ohne daß noch was andres hinzukäme, die Liebe machen. Wäre die Liebe aus lauter Perhorrescibilitäten zusammengesetzt, das Lichteste aus lauter uneingeständlichen Dunkelheiten. Nil luce obscurius? Sollte Newton doch recht haben? Nun, laß gut sein, jedenfalls ist der Roman des europäischen Gedankens dabei herausgekommen."

Part of Goethe's monologue imagined by Thomas Mann
(204, Lotte in Weimar)

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Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to explore certain "thematics of desire" (Lucy Stone McNeece) that take effect in the still largely unknown and uncontrollable territories of the psyche, where the "sight or thought of murder can give rise to a desire for sexual enjoyment", (Georges Bataille) and where only music and other non-verbal arts are able to express aberrative erotic longings such as incest, sadomasochism, lesbianism and homosexuality.

Some of the major points and procedures that this study tries to reveal are as follows: 1) A comparison between Thomas Mann's and Marguerite Duras's oeuvre and the writers' vastly different backgrounds; this comparison is made on a thematic and methodological level. 2) At the exclusion of a larger political, social or philosophical frame this inquiry concentrates on the narrow scope of emotional and psychologically hidden cores in the works involved. The symbolic significance of the characters has been taken into account as thoroughly as possible. Some of the works - especially those of Marguerite Duras - are drawn with the pen of a minimalist. They reveal a narrative composition that tends to conceal its meaning under "gaps, fragmented syntax, repetition and slow rhythms,..."¹ At certain

¹*Lucy Stone McNeece, "The Reader in the Field of Rye: Marguerite Duras' L'amour, Modern Language Studies, XXII:1, Winter 1992.

points the rather autobiographical "I" becomes palpable under an artful disguise. Personal recollections of both writers are often recognizable under an objective and formidable artistic coating. (3) While Thomas Mann follows the more classical outlines of the novel, which becomes crucial in the treatment of time, Marguerite Duras adheres mostly to the rules of the Nouveau Roman, even though her writing remains "representational". In her works, which are considerably less broad in vision than Thomas Mann's, the search for the self holds a more distinct position. (4) Both writers are at times involved in explicitly erotic scenes; yet neither one ever loses a subtle and masterful touch. In Marguerite Duras' works sexual longings, particularly lesbian ones, are often transmuted into voyeurism and narcissism.

This study tries to show also that incest in Agatha is instigated by the idealized mother figure of the siblings. While desire is prevalent, narcissism and despair play an equally important role. In Wälsungenblut despair is replaced by revenge and an even greater display of narcissism. Incest is also helped along by an infantile urge to imitate the incestuous scene in Wagner's Die Walküre, which Thomas Mann parodies. In both works the shattering of the incest taboo is an attempt to reach the "I" in the other, to melt into each other's mirror image.

The siblings commit incest because of their absolute incapability to love anyone except themselves in the other. Agatha's husband exists only as the clumsy, amorphous shadow of her brother. Von Beckerath, the fiancé in Wälsungenblut, is deliberately shown as a small insignificant man whose masochistic inclinations are sharply contrasted with the physically attractive and intellectually superior Aarenhold twins.

To compare Thomas Mann with Marguerite Duras might seem at first an absurdity - "ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit". What could two writers of such different dimensions, backgrounds, nationalities, age, sex, preferences in style and life style possibly have in common?

On one side there is Thomas Mann, the foremost writer of twentieth century German literature, a Nobel prize winner (Buddenbrooks) who received worldwide acclaim during his lifetime, who was a neighbor of Einstein in Princeton and who entertained in his home in Pacific Palisades such literary and music giants as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bruno Walter, Franz Werfel, Alfred Döblin, Stephan Zweig and Lion Feuchtwanger.

On the other side there is Marguerite Duras who, while recognized as a representative of the Nouveau Roman and whose novels are taught in French undergraduate classes, has not been a popular success - at least not until late in life. In 1984, when she received the Prix Goncourt for her

novel L'Amant, she was seventy years old. She does not move among the rich and famous of her era. But at age seventy-seven she has written forty-six novels, seventeen plays, two screenplays, and directed seventeen films.²

When Mann fought Hitler with his fifty-five radio broadcasts, sent at regular intervals over several years from California to war-torn Germany, Duras - a former member of the French Communist Party who is still fond of calling herself a Marxist - was in a Resistance group in Paris headed by Francois Mitterand, now France's President. During those years Duras waited for her husband to be released from the Dachau concentration camp, a fact that might explain Duras's anti-German sentiments which have not diminished with old age. She recorded her war years in La Douleur, appropriately translated as The War. If Duras is not fond of the Germans, Thomas Mann, unlike his older brother Heinrich, a confirmed Francophile, did not think highly of the French.

In spite of these many differences, however, there are "inner" similarities between the two authors that should

²*On October 20, 1991 appeared a seven page article in the New York Times Magazine written by Leslie Garis. Together with Monique Gouthier, a bilingual French journalist, Garis went to Paris to take a close look at the seventy-six-year-old Marguerite Duras and her work, of which The Lover exists in twenty-nine foreign editions, "including three in separate Chinese dialects." L'Amant also won the Prix Goncourt.

become more apparent in this study, which focuses mainly on the erotically oriented writings of Mann and Duras.

As Mann turns his magnifying glass on human behavior and on features and mannerisms as mirrors of the inner self, he looks objectively on man in his social environment, as if he were watching a play. Roughly parallel to this, Duras focuses attention on those people near her, in her immediate world, who act in society as though they were giving a performance. In both writers there is always some kind of audience for these people.

My thesis, however, is concerned with a thematic linkage between Mann and Duras that focuses on the desire and obsession by which the characters of both writers are driven. Throughout the nine chapters of this study I explore mostly Mann's early tales, written shortly before and after the turn of the century, and various novels by Duras, with the goal of making a case for the overwhelmingly erotic content of the two writer's works. I compare the techniques used in conveying that erotic content and suggest reasons for selecting particular works for detailed analysis. Finally I discuss also such issues as progression ("development") of erotic attitudes in the two writers.

Thomas Mann has been classified by various scholars as an erotic writer. In Selbstvergessenheit, a substantial critical work published in 1989 that discusses not only Thomas Mann, but also Franz Kafka and Bertholt Brecht, R.

Baumgart concentrates on eroticism in Mann's work from his early tales to his later novels such as Joseph und seine Brüder and Lotte in Weimar. Eroticism, while connected with man's sexual self, is usually manifested on a non-physical level.

"Eroticism, unlike simple sexual activity, is a psychological quest independent of the natural goal: reproduction and the desire for children." (11, Erotism)

In neo-romantic style, Mann often combines eroticism with death. His novellas Der Wille zum Glück, Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Luischen, Tristan, Der Tod in Venedig and Die Betrogene are examples of this. The connection between death or murder and eroticism is also taken up in the works of Marguerite Duras.

If eroticism in Mann or Duras does not lead directly to the death of one of its victims, it is frequently accompanied by either narcissism, voyeurism, and incest, or by fetishism and sado-masochism. Homosexuality and lesbianism are included as well in the so-called darker sides of love, which are sometimes gathered under the more imposing title of "ars amandi".

Marguerite Duras also reveals the less agreeable aspects of love. She recently made it clear that to her love means sexual desire. Her lovers are not concerned with tenderness, which she considers antithetical to desire:

"I don't like tender people. I myself am very harsh. When I love someone, I desire them. But tenderness supposes the exclusion of desire."³

Marguerite Duras converts this desire into eroticism - a state of mind to which bodily functions, including murder, are subordinated.

As captivating as form and style of both writers may be, my interest does not lie in the polished surface of the works I discuss, even though it is sometimes hard to escape the lure of "perfect" form, particularly in Mann's case; but my concern rather is with the question: What is underneath?

Thomas Mann especially plays a masterful game between the correct form - often steeped in brilliant irony that here and there approaches mannerism - and content: his thematically provocative approach.

The first five chapters of this dissertation focus on sibling incest in Wälsungenblut and Agatha as well as various other aspects of "ars amandi" that I discovered in these two works during the course of my research. The next four chapters explore also the darker sides of love, mainly via the themes of narcissism, sadomasochism and homosexuality in such writings as Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Le Vice-consul, Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull, Der Tod in Venedig, Dix heures et demie du soir

³*Duras in an interview with Alan Riding; New York Times, March 26, 1990

en été, Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein, Savanna Bay and other works.

Mann's novella Wälsungenblut exemplifies the writer's treatment of one of society's strongest taboos - incest - as if it were a rather common occurrence. This elliptical technique in which delicacy and a sophisticated style hide a fierce instinct is a self-protective procedure, since his work slowly grew out of the most painstaking and voluminous self-analysis of which innumerable diaries - some of them still unpublished - letters, reflections and essays give ample evidence.

To render the forbidden - in this case incest - is not new. Sophocle's Oedipus Rex and Racine's Phedre have explored the theme of incest in far greater depth than Mann in Wälsungenblut. What makes his novella exceptional is his particular style and the fact that the novella is a masterfully executed parody of Richard Wagner's Die Walküre. Where Sophocles and Racine produced tragedies - the form corresponding to the dramatic content, Mann separated form from content by looking at incest from an ironic angle. He uses elegance and wealth as an aesthetic disguise that enwraps the twins like their heavy fur coats so that their one-time sexual encounter - cleverly placed at the end of the novella - seems rather innocent. By the time the reader realizes what has happened, it is all over.

Phedre is a queen, but her palace seems a poor man's abode, so little did Racine attend to the exterior set of his drama, and so large do the internal agonies of the heroine loom. By contrast, the mansion and its many rooms in which Siegmund and Sieglind Aarenhold live in spoiled splendor become an overpowering focal point in Wälsungenblut, so important that the content - sibling incest - appears to be diminished. Yet it is there. No matter from what angle one approaches the incest, or how many layers of Mann's artful prose one has to peel off, incest and narcissism are the underlying motifs.

To follow in the footsteps of Wagner's Die Walküre, which Mann did by calling his novella Wälsungenblut, an allusion to the incest of Wagner's Siegmund und Sieglinde and the revolt of a daughter against her father, is another ingenious idea. It also gave Mann the chance to demonstrate in artistic form his deep admiration for Richard Wagner and his unusual sensitivity to music. Some of the most skillfully rendered scenes in Wälsungenblut belong to an evening at the opera which show the twins in the full beauty of their youth and wealth. In his novella Mann reincarnates the recognition and seduction scenes of Wagner's Siegmund and Sieglinde. By quoting some of the composer's text, Mann lets the reader hear the music and see a strong, but exhausted Siegmund collapsing in Hunding's hut before he is revived by a full-bosomed, blond, young woman who looks so

much like him that one is not surprised to learn that they are twins. The Aarenhold twins, under the spell of the opera, commit incest as an act of imitation.

In contrast to the illuminated scenes in Wälsungenblut, which pay attention to buildings, rooms, and furniture, Duras's Agatha uses the sparse form of dialogue almost exclusively. Not suprisingly, the work reads more like a screen play than a novel and lacks all luster.

No butler in violet-colored breeches welcomes guests for lunch. Instead one is transported to an abandoned summer cottage with almost no furniture. One simply hears exhausted voices coming from a wall against which a man and a woman are slouching. Only in flashbacks are faces and figures - the beautiful one of an almost fifteen-year-old girl and her nineteen-year-old brother - revealed.

Agatha cannot boast of such witty, intellectual conversations as those between the members of the Aarenhold household and Sieglinde's fiancé, von Beckerath. Duras uses speech sparingly. Each word is weighed; almost every sentence is incomplete. There is no beginning or end, viz: there are holes in the middle, the famous vacant spots of Duras. Instead of using a language that has been employed over and over again - a language invented and practiced by men and only imitated by women - she utilizes her blanks - nothing at all. Through omission her style emphasizes ideas rather than states them. She rejects syntax and sometimes

leaves off personal pronouns by saying, for example: "'Isn't aware of being looked at.(1, Woman to Woman)'" As a result, one has no idea whether she is speaking about a man or a woman. Constantly she seems to grope for a new word - hopefully a feminine one. Particularly in Les Parleuses, translated as Woman to Woman (by Katharine A. Jensen), Duras discusses with Xavière Gauthier the problem of gender writing. With the help of Freud and Lacan,⁴ the two women explore in five long interviews the "new power in woman's difficult and disruptive language" (1987, Woman to Woman).

What is unusual in Agatha's plot, which quite painfully and often rather clumsily emerges word by word, is the mother's conspiracy in the sibling incest. Early on, the mother not only realizes what is happening between her son and daughter, but she actually instigates and encourages the liaison. She even tries to give it permanence when, on her deathbed, she "bequeaths" the brother - "Mon enfant, ne te sépare jamais de lui, ce frère que je te donne (66)," - to the sister.

Duras has stripped the meaning of love, with all its sexual connotations, of its conventional barriers. She wants love to be lived, to be free, especially for young people. The married couple in Détruire, dit-elle does not

⁴*Jacques Lacan praised Duras in an essay called "Hommage fait à Marguerite Duras, du ravissement de Lol V. Stein" and compares her with Marguerite d'Angoulême "celle de l'Heptaméron (136, Editions Albatros)".

know the meaning of "possessiveness" or "fidelity": "What does, 'possessiveness' or 'fidelity' mean to Max Thor, for example, and Alissa? It has no meaning (24, Woman to Woman)." Woman).

For Duras woman is mostly incapable of enjoying love, of experiencing sexual fulfillment, which she calls 'jouissance', because she sees in women "a medieval fear of infidelity (24, Woman to Woman)"

"You see, I believe we're still much closer to the millions of Muslim women who are 'dishonored,' beaten, punished, sometimes killed, because they betrayed their husbands than to the most liberal European husband."
(164, Woman to Woman)

Seen from that perspective, one understands a little better the complicity of the mother in Agatha. Here sibling incest - far from being a sexual frisson - becomes a protest, a political statement in favor of women's sexual liberation. This protest derives from observations that women lived in the recent past (since Duras refers in this instance to parents and grandparents) "in a state of legal rape (26, Woman to Woman)."

Whereas Mann in Wälsungenblut works with eroticism and incest more in a manner often reminiscent of the l'art pour l'art movement, Duras uses these same themes as a political statement.

In the chapters to follow I show in greater detail the treatment of incest themes in the works of Mann and Duras and their different attitudes toward it.

Mann's Der kleine Herr Friedemann and Duras's Le Vice-consul lend themselves redily to an exploration of sado-masochism.

The emphasis in both works is on the male masochist, a less frequent occurrence in the strata of ars amandi. Usually - one thinks of de Sade of course - the role of the sadist is played by the man whereas the woman is the masochist. According to Georges Bataille this division goes back to ancient practices of religious eroticism where the act of love was combined with sacrifice that ended in the death of the victim - which was always the woman: "I must emphasize that the female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the male as the sacrificer,...(18, Erotism)."

I mostly depart from this classical concept of Sade's sado-masochistic image and apply Sacher-Masoch's theory of male masochism, which he explores in Venus in Furs.

Just as Wanda von Dunajew, the female protagonist in Venus in Furs, plays the role of the sadist, so do Gerda von Rinnlingen and Anne-Marie Stretter respectively. These two women are young, married, seductive and interested in music. They are surrounded by admirers and lovers - particularly Anne-Marie Stretter - in whom they mirror themselves - as the narcissistically inclined person is compelled to do.

There is something in the subtle cruelty of Gerda von Rinnlingen and Anne-Marie Stretter that works better when seen from a psychological angle than when viewed from a more

simplistic sado-masochistic level. Duras wrote an entire novella on sado-masochism entitled L'Homme assis dans le couloir in which a man slowly and voluptuously beats a woman until she is at the point of death. Duras approaches the subject from the point of view of a male fantasy: the woman who deliberately exposes herself in seductive movements seems to enjoy her torture. Duras is here close to de Sade, who demonstrates in Justine, Juliette and Cent Vingt Journées that violence, the breaking of laws and taboos, are closely connected with our sexual instincts.

In the Vice-Consul there is a scene in which Charles Rossett, one of the young diplomats who surround Anne-Marie Stretter, daydreams of slapping her face repeatedly and painfully in order to subdue her - in reality she is still unapproachable - to his will. While such scenes have a surrealistic quality to them, they clearly show that erotic conduct stands in sharp contrast with normal behavior and that there is an interaction, as Georges Bataille points out, between eroticism, violence and death. Seen from a sociological angle, the face-slapping scene draws attention to the past in Western history when women were economically and politically dependent upon men; and how those men, who were mostly loving fathers, brothers, and husbands could suddenly misuse their power.

Mann first approaches sado-masochism in his early tales by being rather serious, even pathetic - Tobias Mindernickel

comes to mind. But later, in old age, when he tried to finish Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull, his irony, mingled with a great sense of humor, reached perfection. Tobias Mindernickel is as much an outcast as Johannes Friedemann but without the latter's financial independence. He is a disturbing example of man's love for a young dog which, in a fit of uncontrollable rage, he beats to death. Mann and Duras afford insights into the human abyss that are difficult to acknowledge and almost impossible to deal with. For Georges Batailles the idea of possessing a beloved object is connected with the idea of death, or rather:

"...the idea of death is linked with the urge to possess. If the lover cannot possess the beloved he will sometimes think of killing her; often he would rather kill her than lose her. Or else he may wish to die himself." (20, Erotism)

The urge to love and to be loved is so inescapable because:

"...only the beloved can in this world bring about what our human limitations deny, a total blending of two beings, a continuity between two discontinuous creatures." (20, Erotism)

The only escape from the narcissistic circle that spins by itself through space seems to be love. Johannes Friedemann and Jean-Marc de H. know this but they chose the wrong love object.

In Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull Mann looks at sado-masochism with tongue-in-cheek when he portrays a night of love between Diane Houpflé, a forty-year-old successful provincial writer of romances, with a penchant

for adolescent boys, and Armand, an elevator boy in one of the large, luxurious Parisian hotels. Similar to de Sade, who occasionally went to a prostitute to have himself beaten, Diane Houplé asks Armand to spank her with his suspenders. Armand, who is too young and inexperienced to understand the implications of this masochistic demand, does not comply.

The last large category of ars amandi I explore in this thesis is homosexuality and lesbianism, which exist overtly and covertly in several texts of Mann and Duras.

Gerhard Härle uses the colorful expression "Männerweiblichkeit" for homoeroticism, which in turn reminds one of Paul Verlaine's work Femmes Hombres, which comprises not only his poems and sonnets but also the ones (or at least one "Sonnet du trou du cul") which Verlaine composed together with his lover, Arthur Rimbaud.

When the collection Femmes Hombres first appeared in 1920 in its German translation, Mann - Haerle points out - made a revealing remark in a letter to his publisher, Paul Steegemann, saying that:

"'...die Unzucht der Gedichte mich erschüttert hat. Dies nämlich ist die Wirkung, die Unzucht und Wollust, wenn ihre Tiefen sich auftun, auf mich auszuüben pflegen.'" (111, Männerweiblichkeit)

Yet it is precisely those depths of incontinence and voluptuousness to which Mann and Duras frequently descend.

In Der Tod in Venedig - usually considered Mann's best novella - beauty (Tadzio) is juxtaposed with duty and "Geist" (Gustav von Aschenbach). In his late novel Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull, Mann puts his axiom that all beauty is stupid because beauty is simply a state of being - an object of exaltation for the intellect - into the mouth of Diane Houpflé:

"Alle Schönheit ist dumm, weil sie ganz einfach ein Sein ist, Gegenstand der Verherrlichung durch den Geist." (138, Bekenntnisse)

Diane Houpflé plays here the role of Aschenbach and Armand that of Tadzio.

In highly stylized prose Mann struggles with the clash between the Dionysian and Apollonian elements. Aschenbach, who has relentlessly driven himself all his life to become a famous writer, collapses under the sudden impact of his emotions - unleashed by a boy's beauty, wrapped in silence, and by male desire.

Duras pursues the theme of lesbianism in such novels as Dix heures et demie du soir en été, Détruire, dit-elle, as in Savannah Bay and in her film India Song, as well as in other works. Where she uses dialogue form in which narrative time no longer exists, Mann uses the traditional Erzählzeit in Der Tod in Venedig. The novella describes homoerotic love from its early stage where it possesses the form of a hardly recognizable heartbeat, to its fullest expression of passion that unexpectedly ends in death. All

of it takes place in the mind of one person, who hides his feelings shyly and shamefully from the world. Death appears in the person of the beloved: Tadzio, who has become Psychogogos, "leader of souls".⁵

The connection of love and death agrees here with Georges Bataille's dictum, "...eroticism, it may be said, is assenting to life up to the point of death (11, Erotism)."
Love pursued to its ultimate conclusion leads to death.

Mann was careful to emphasize from early on that Der Tod in Venedig has less to do with homoeroticism - at least not with what is normally considered a homosexual affair - than with passion and degradation. He even cites the aged Goethe's love for Ulrike von Levetzow as having been an inspiration for his novella. This is an indication that the "'Öffnung der Seele für das Schöne'" (Haerle, p. 108) was far more important to him than physical, homosexual longings. While it is true that the beautiful appearance of Tadzio, still half-child, half boy - "vormännlich hold und herb (478, Der Tod in Venedig)" - aroused in Aschenbach erotic feelings that are normally classified as homosexual, it is also true that he sublimated his desire and created art. Instead of making love to Tadzio, he immortalized his form in writing. Tadzio was the idealized mirror reflection of Aschenbach's soul. To see love as a "narcissistic

⁵*The Greek definition Psychogogos refers to Hermes, who leads souls into Hades.

monologue" (Janet Lungstrum) as Aschenbach does, is to revert to works of Romantic Irony such as F. W. Schlegel's Lucinde or Heinrich von Kleist

"with his notion of a passive female audience, preferably a mirror-like sister, with whom he can dialogize basically to himself in order for the birth of a (seemingly) transferential thought to occur."⁶

Late in life Aschenbach experiences the full force of eros. His state of mind goes beyond homosexual desires and allows a glimpse into his inner worlds where religious veneration - "hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war (490, T.i.V.)" mixes with narcissism and eroticism - "Standbild und Spiegel (490)."

I am aware that I am seeing Aschenbach's feelings for Tadzio more in an aesthetic light and less in a strictly erotic one. Tadzio remains, on account of his author's will, an unknowable quantity. George Bridges⁷, who compares Tadzio with Mario, contends that Aschenbach deliberately refused to get to know the boy because he feared that familiarity would reveal Tadzio as the spoiled, 14-year-old brat he most probably was. This knowledge would have destroyed Aschenbach's narcissistic dream of beauty.

⁶*Janet Lungstrum, "Conceiving the Text: Nietzschean Inspiration in Musil's Tonka", The German Quarterly 64.4 (1991)

⁷*"Thomas Mann's Mario und der Zauberer: 'Aber zum Donnerwetter! Deshalb bringt man doch niemand um!'", The German Quarterly 64.4, Fall, 1991.

For the true impact of lesbianism a writer like Alberto Moravia offers far more graphic examples (in novellas such as The Thing) than either Duras or Mann. Duras is more inclined to describe overtly seductive scenes between heterosexual lovers than Mann, who eroticizes the body to such an extent that even the most ardent desire - the unfortunate Mut-em-enet, who longs with such passion for Joseph is an example - is sublimated by yearnings that are confined to the mind of the lover. Most of Mann's lovers are destined not to meet on a physical level. The anguish and delights that the other sex - or the same - provoke remain on an abstract level.⁸ In his work there is no such thing as the traditional love scene where a passionate dialogue between two lovers takes place. Mann's creations use mainly monologues in which endless solitary erotic speculations fluctuate between hope and despair. Mut-em-enet, driven by an uncontrollable, physical longing, is able partly to undress Joseph, but to her horror he slips through her fingers and vanishes forever from her life as if he had suddenly become invisible.⁹ This evaporation of the

⁸*Mann shares this tendency toward platonic and eroticized love with Goethe, who was one of Mann's idols and with whom he identified.

⁹*A lover swiftly escaping haunted Mann most of his life. In Doktor Faustus, the work of his old age, he relives Mut-em-enet's sufferings but softens them with irony by turning Rudi Schwerdtfeger into a modern Joseph who causes a large amount of pain to Ines Institoris. Rudi Schwerdtfeger confesses his liaison with Ines to Adrian Leverkühn: "Ich kann nichts dafür, Adrian,

physical being is a typical fate that befalls many of Mann's lovers. When it concerns an open homoerotic inclination, such as Gustav von Aschenbach's, Mann is even more careful not to betray the slightest bodily token of love. It is all in the mind where it grows its narcissistic flowers, leans heavily toward self-condemnation and spins itself toward the dionysian abyss. Perhaps this tendency to conceal, to metamorphose and to supplant the physical is partly responsible for the curiosity of a seemingly endless row of Mann scholars and admirers: Georg Lukacs, Inge Diersen, Erich Kahler, Henry Hatfield, Robert Faesi, Karl Kerényi, Hermann Weigand and many others.

Duras also exercises an elusive touch, when she describes lesbian relationships - especially when compared with her sometimes rather concrete images of heterosexual lovers. The touch of a woman's hand on the shoulder of a female friend who is desired by her - a look in the mirror that encloses both lesbians and projects their image in perfect doubles - is enough to let the reader arrive at his own conclusions. Lesbianism in the Durassian novels and films is confined to the eye and - similar to Mann, but without his extensive elaborations of a multilayered world -

glaube - glauben Sie mir! Ich habe sie nicht verführt, sondern sie mich, und die Hörner des kleinen Institoris, um diesen dummen Ausdruck zu gebrauchen, sind ausschließlich ihr Werk, nicht meines. Was wollen Sie machen, wenn eine Frau sich wie eine Ertrinkende an Sie klammert und Sie durchaus zum Geliebten will? Wollen Sie ihr Ihr Obergewand in den Händen lassen und fliehen?" (350)

to the mind. Eroticism in her case is closer to voyeurism and a vivid imagination than the more complex erotic approach of Mann. When Maria in Dix heures et demie du soir tells Claire, the mistress of her husband, that she will always love her - "je t'aimerais toujours, Claire (154-155)" - she wishes to see and possess Claire in her nudity. "Jamais encore Claire ne s'est montrée nue à Maria (154-155)." When Gustav Aschenbach whispers "ich liebe dich" after Tadzio has passed him and is no longer within earshot, there is no trace of physical desire. In its stead one witnesses the collapse of Aschenbach's world. The admission of love is the end of Aschenbach's life as it existed up to this point - a life dedicated to duty, work and ethics. Love opens the door to self-abandonment - to disorder, despair, fear and unimagined delights - to the Dionysian element that destroys Aschenbach since he is unable to regain his rationality, the equilibrium he needs to survive. Where homoerotic desire renders Aschenbach totally intoxicated - "das war der Rausch (490, T.i.V.)" - to the point where, without hesitation, he sacrifices his life to his emotion, Duras' Maria remains lucid. A lucidity bought at the price of quiet despair and loneliness. Maria's husband will possess Claire, whom Maria also desires - while Maria at best looks upon their love-play or imagines it as she lies awake in the dark by herself.

To sum up: an attempt to approach the works of two writers from an erotic angle means that invariably one is tempted to go beyond the work itself in order to consider the writing in a larger context: the life and the psychological make-up of the writers themselves. I have done this by examining some of Mann's published and unpublished diaries, by reading in his large collection of letters and essays and by choosing such autobiographical works as Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (interviews with Michelle Porte); Les Parleuses, (1974), translated as Woman to Woman, (1987) with Xavière Gauthier; La vie matérielle, translated as Practicalities, in which Duras discusses with Jérôme Beaujour her own work, experiences and philosophy; Duras by Duras and La Douleur, an autobiographical account of World War II.

If by selecting particular works and focussing on their erotic content, I have limited my observations to a psychological context and to the use of a psychosexual language I felt appropriate in discussing ars amandi, I have done so by choice - and at the expense of a larger picture. I have lifted out the erotic form from its richly embellished background of social criticism and shown only a fraction of some of the things Mann is best known for: his irony and his being a "Diagnostiker der Gesellschaft" and by paying less attention to Duras' innovative handling of time. But I hope that despite my concentration on the particular -

ars amandi - in both writers, I am nonetheless able to convey a sense of the overall idea and insights Mann and Duras offer.

Chapter I

Narcissism and Sibling incest:

Wälsungenblut and Agatha

(1)

Wälsungenblut was written during the spring and summer of 1905, between the publication of Fiorenza and the conception of Königliche Hoheit.

Thomas Mann was thirty years old and in his first year of marriage with Katia Pringsheim, daughter of the well-known, wealthy Munich mathematician and Wagnerian, Professor Alfred Pringsheim. Wälsungenblut is the accidental by-product of a trip to Berlin with his wife, Katia. The novella was squeezed in between spaces already reserved for the novel Königliche Hoheit and Fiorenza¹⁰, a one-time dramatic attempt that gave him innumerable headaches and scant literary recognition.

¹⁰*Even today, Fiorenza does not seem to find sufficient recognition. Reinhard Baumgart in Selbstvergessenheit, published 1989 by Carl Hanser in Munich calls it: "...ein Essay mit verteilten Rollen, ein hilflos eleganter Seitensprung in die ihm lebenslang verschlossene Gattung des Dramas." (16)

While finishing Fiorenza, Thomas Mann did not know that Wälsungenblut would rather unexpectedly interrupt his work on Königliche Hoheit, the novel in which the "otherness" of the artist, the writer, is symbolized by a physical handicap and a princely attitude - both leading to a life in isolation that is endured with dignity. The novel, which ends in marriage (and is therefore considered a comedy), is viewed as one of his most charming but also his weakest. In the Spring of 1990, a congress of leading Thomas Mann scholars convened at the town-hall of Lubeck to discuss his work. Among them was Hans Wysling, author and director of the Mann-Archiv in Zurich. Even though some of Mann's early tales, such as Luischen, were discussed, Wälsungenblut was apparently not on the agenda.¹¹

Written in 1905 but not published until 1921, Wälsungenblut was first called "Tiergarten-Novelle." According to Peter de Mendelssohn, Thomas Mann started to write this rather brief composition before he and Katia Pringsheim left for Zoppot on the Baltic. On the way to Zoppot, the Manns stopped in Berlin and stayed with the

¹¹*Königliche Hoheit was discussed and criticized instead by Hermann Kurzke: "...Hermann Kurzke, einer der besten Thomas-Mann-Kenner, hatte dankenswerter-weise nicht damit hinter dem Berg gehalten, daß er die "Hoheit" für Manns schlechtesten Roman halte. (86, Die Zeit, May 10, 1990, Nr.108)" When first conceived, Thomas Mann thought of Königliche Hoheit as merely a longer tale, a tribute to his courtship of Katia Mann. Yet, as happened rather often in Mann's life, a work in progress seemed to possess a life of its own. Several times a tale or novella grew into a full-fledged novel.

Rosenbergs, relatives and owners of a luxurious villa - the "Tiergarten-villa". A second visit to Berlin, on the way back from Zoppot, reinforced the favorable impression of the first one. Thomas Mann enjoyed the advantages of great wealth which, he felt, were a compensation for the asceticism he was obliged to exercise as a writer. He also thought that the dichotomy between self-denial on the one hand and indulgence in luxury on the other is characteristic of the modern soul, and he offers Wagner as an example:

"Ach, Reichthum ist doch eine gute Sache, man sage, was man wolle. Ich bin Künstler genug, um mich davon bezaubern zu lassen. Und übrigens muß die widersprechende Neigung zur Askese einerseits, und zur Üppigkeit andererseits wohl der modernen Seele überhaupt zugehörig sein. Man sehe sie in großem Style bei Richard Wagner. (655, Der Zauberer)"

The wealthy surroundings of Siegmund and Sieglinde play a major role in Wälsungenblut. They form a stark contrast to the stage setting in Wagner's opera Die Walküre, which Wälsungenblut parodies. Also the luxury and great wealth of the Tiergarten-villa in which the twins Siegmund and Sieglinde grow up as two precocious, subtle and refined creatures, set them apart from the rest of Berlin's inhabitants. Their resultant sense of superiority promotes the sibling incest with which the novella ends. Siegmund and Sieglinde, inspired by Wagner's demi-gods and goddesses, see themselves as exceptions to the norm and obey different rules than others. To some extent they resemble Shaw's sixteen-year-old Cleopatra and her younger, detested

brother-husband. However, whereas Cleopatra, who belonged to the Ptolemaic dynasty and was, according to James Twitchell's (Forbidden Partners, The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 11), the eleventh generation of descendants to practice incest, Siegmund and Sieglinde Aarenhold do not come from a royal blood line. On the contrary, Thomas Mann goes to great lengths to describe their family as nouveau-riche. Herr Aarenhold has been able through marriage and lucky transactions to amass a large fortune. Yet he still remembers vividly when he was far too poor to afford a silk counterpane. Frau Aarenhold is treated even more cruelly:

"Seine Frau war unmöglich. Sie war klein, häßlich, früh gealtert und wie unter einer fremden, heißeren Sonne verdorrt. Eine Kette von Brillanten lag auf ihrer eingefallenen Brust. Sie trug ihr graues Haar in vielen Schnörkeln und Ausladungen zu einer umständlichen und hochgebauten Coiffure angeordnet, in welcher, irgendwo seitwärts, eine große, farbig funkelnde und ihrerseits mit einem weißen Federbüschel gezierte Brillant-Agraffe befestigt war." (10-13)

Being small, prematurely aged, and dried up, she anticipates the image of Dinah, Jaacob's unfortunate daughter in the Joseph novels, who quickly grew old and withered away, after her brothers murdered her new-born child. Frau Aarenhold brings to mind Mathilde Spiegel, one of the caricatures in Doktor Faustus.¹² That Frau

¹²*Mathilde Spiegel has put her hair in a "Fladus", derived, as Mann points out, from the French flute douce designating "eine sonderbare Lockenfrisur nebst Kopfputz." (41)

Aarenhold wears in her elaborate coiffure a large, multicolored, sparkling diamond clasp decorated with a cluster of white feathers makes her resemble a wrinkled and prematurely aged Marie-Antoinette. This unfavorable portrait of Frau Aarenhold, a composite of a Jewish mother, is cleverly drawn but one of the ugliest images Thomas Mann ever painted of a woman. Is Frau Aarenhold an indirect attempt by Mann to criticize the mother of incestuous offspring, to brand her rather than her attractive children? If so, then the image of the mother figure in Der Erwählte, who herself commits incest, stands at the opposite pole from Frau Aarenhold: the mother of the "holy sinner" is beautiful, whereas Frau Aarenhold, the mother of the incestuous Siegmund and Sieglinde is ugly. Also Frau Aarenhold's image stands diametrically opposed to the enchanting, twelve-year-old Rahel, Laban's daughter in the first part of the Joseph tetralogy¹³, who eventually marries her first cousin, Jaacob. Rahel stands on the periphery of incest since marriage between first cousins is usually not encouraged and often outright forbidden.

Except for his feelings of inferiority toward his children, who have benefitted by his wealth and are wittier and far better educated than he, no mention is made of how

¹³*The small-shouldered Rahel with her short, black, entangled hair, is one of the most delightful women in Thomas Mann's large repertoire of feminine characters.

Herr Aarenhold, the patriarchal head of his household, relates to his daughters. Wälsungenblut raises only the question of narcissism and sibling incest, not any other psychological disorder.¹⁴

Herr Aarenhold is unable to dominate his daughters. Märit is a twenty-eight-year-old bluestocking whose verbal aggressiveness her father could not challenge. In the description of Märit's facial features one encounters a somewhat anti-semitic remark: "ein strenges Mädchen von achtundzwanzig mit Hakennase, grauen Raubvogelaugen und einem bittern Munde." (13)

Wälsungenblut did not appear in Thomas Mann's collected works until 1958, three years after his death. The novella caused a scandal in Munich. Von Beckerath was seen as a personification of the young Thomas Mann - as fiancé of Katia Pringsheim -, who supposedly had an affair with her twin brother. Instead of being published as planned in 1906, Wälsungenblut was not made available until 1921, and then in just 530 deluxe copies by the Phantasmus publishing house in Munich. When a French translation appeared in 1931 under the title Sang réservé, it caused renewed talk about anti-semitism.

¹⁴*It takes forty more years before Thomas Mann also investigates - in his novel Der Erwählte - the most commonly occurring incest in society: a sexual relationship between father and daughter. Even then Mann treats it only as a sort of prelude to the mother-son incest that is the focal point of the novel. Mother-son incest is the least frequent form of incest in reality.

It was not the incest motif that shocked the reader, but the last sentence of the novella, which contains the "goy" remark. More of that later.

Sieglinde cannot be reached by her father's authority. She is literally "untouchable" since she is rarely seen without her masculine double, Siegmund, with whom she almost never loses "touch". It is not the father but the brother whom Sieglinde obeys blindly "...dem sie untertan war...."(43) She agrees to marry von Beckerath mainly because Siegmund is not opposed to it. This tacit assent by Siegmund to allow his adored sister to be taken away, distinguishes him sharply from Wagner's Siegmund, who loves his sister beyond death and refuses to enter Valhalla without her. Thomas Mann's Siegmund is deliberately shown as a weak incarnation of Wagner's protagonist.

The twins always hold hands, either openly when taking walks together, or secretly while sitting at the dinner table. The moist, fine-boned, still almost childlike hands that cling to each other are the visible signs of the narcissistic circle that holds them captive. Sieglind loves herself in the perfect image of her brother. Siegmund is thrilled that his sister looks and smells like him: "Du bist ganz wie ich," (88) Siegmund says with a dry throat toward the end of the novella when he realizes how much he is in love with his twin sister, as his feminine half.

Since his daughters are escaping his fatherly dominance, Sieglinde's fiance becomes the scapegoat of Herr Aarenhold.

Von Beckerath is one of Mann's least flattering alter egos. Even Peter de Mendelssohn, who treats Mann's creation with admiring respect, calls von Beckerath "[einen] trockenen, d unkelhaften und uninspirierten Menschen,...(659)". The moment Beckerath appears on the scene - "klein, kanariengelb, spitzb artig (16)" - he is quickly attacked by his bride-to-be and her older brother Kunz. They find fault with him for being late. Von Beckerath humbly apologizes. When he sits down at the dinner table, he immediately falls prey to his future father-in-law, since he is the one least able to defend himself. Von Beckerath is by no means stupid, but he is far too slow for the Aarenholds, whose wit is continually sharpened by a realistic, passionless intellect. The entire family, with the exception of Frau Aarenhold, who answers a question with a question, loves to argue and to destroy its opponent with one pre-emptive word. Von Beckerath, who leans toward a vague enthusiasm that leaves his feelings unprotected, is no match for them and is quickly defeated.

Mann's brief, physical description of von Beckerath - it is composed of three adjectives - shows great skill in the use of suggestive imagery - especially "kanariengelb". But what is "yellow as a canary"? Von Beckerath's facial

expression, his outfit, his character or his physiognomy? Some Mann scholars say it is his hair, in contrast to the dark Aarenhold family; but one cannot say with certainty.

Yellow has a special significance for Mann, who shows particular fondness for that color in several of his early tales. The straw color marks his blond Aryans as a breed apart. It also echoes Nietzsche's "blonde Bestie" even though Mann modifies its meaning. For Mann the blond Hans Hansen in Tonio Kröger represents the normal, healthy, intelligent and often rather boring bourgeois - the other half of Mann himself, who identified with his blond father, a respected senator, immortalized as Thomas Buddenbrooks. But Mann sees himself even more in his dark-haired mother, who represents his artistic side. Siegmund Aarenhold with his black, curly hair is a symbol of Mann's aesthetic endeavors. The split between bourgeois and artist resulted in the well-known struggle in Mann between "Kunst und Leben". As a young writer, he saw himself as an outsider, as a Bajazzo figure, who revolted against society. One manifestation of this protest was the use of incest as a literary theme.

Yellow also plays an important role in the early novella Der kleine Herr Friedemann¹⁵ which made Mann a

¹⁵*On Friday, March 29, 1991 German television showed a film version of Der kleine Herr Friedemann, whose production had started in East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The former DDR had turned several novels of Heinrich Mann into films at an earlier point but this was the first time any work of Mann had been used

literary celebrity. When Johannes Friedemann catches his first, fateful glimpse of Gerda von Rinnlingen, he sees her in a yellow gig. The fact that the open carriage in which she rides, whip in hand, is yellow, is mentioned twice in two consecutive sentences interrupted by a paragraph: "Da haben wir den gelben Wagen." And: "In der Tat war es der gelbe Jagdwagen..." (85)

After dinner at Gerda von Rinnlingen's, a meal attended by thirty guests that turns out to be Johannes Friedemann's last supper, he, deadly ill from unrequited love, watches the lady of the house as she reclines on silk pillows which are yellow like her gig. Without being seen, Johannes Friedemann observes his idol for quite a while. Yet there is no passion, not even the faintest trace of sexual excitement in his voyeurism. At this point he is but a step away from suicide, as mesmerized by his lady's deadly charms as a canary before the bite of a snake. Unable to act on his own, he moves only when spoken to by Gerda von Rinnlingen. Entranced, he accompanies her into her garden, and into death.

Yellow is also symbolic of a sado-masochistic relationship between a lover and his beloved in the works of Thomas Mann. In the novella Luischen, Amra Jacoby

for a film production in the DDR. ("Mannheimer Morgen", March 28, 1991)

represents the most sadistically inclined character in Mann's fiction. The color yellow is attributed to her:

"... obgleich die Dunkelheit ihres starken, weichen Haares... nur die Bräune des Kastanienkerns war, so zeigte ihre Haut doch ein vollkommen südliches mattes und dunkles Gelb, und diese Haut umspannte Formen, die ebenfalls von einer südlichen Sonne gereift schienen..." (45)

The emphasis on a perfectly beautiful yellow skin whose color could only have been produced in a southern climate recalls Julia Bruhns, the mother of Thomas Mann whom his father "einstmal von ganz unten auf der Landkarte heraufgeholt hatte." (Tonio Kröger, 275)

The whip Gerda von Rinnlingen holds while riding her yellow gig appears again in the hands of Cipolla, the magician of Mario und der Zauberer, another sadistically inclined character in Mann's early works.

There is also Tobias Mindernickel (in the tale of the same name) and his unhealthy love for his young dog, probably the best example of a social outcast and sadism in Mann's short novels. Predictably, the dog's fur is yellow.

In the relationship between Beckerath, "klein, kanariengelb, spitzbärtig (16)," and Sieglind, the fiancé plays the masochistic role. For Sieglinde's sake, Beckerath is willing to be treated rather sadistically by her father, her brothers and herself.

Unwittingly, Beckerath becomes the catalyst in the incestuous relationship of the Aarenhold twins. Even though Siegmund and Sieglind have loved each other from childhood

and, as adults, love each other for the joys they had experienced together as children, they had not exhibited this love in physical terms except for the expression of an innocent intimacy in the form of holding hands and exchanging a few affectionate kisses. The arrival of Beckerath changes that. He plays the unpopular role of the devil in Paradise who, metamorphosing into the phallic symbol of a snake, tries to seduce Eve. Unfortunately, he is quite successful. Beckerath arouses Sieglinde's curiosity about her sexual self and tempts her to descend

"...in ein tiefes Reich, wohin sie noch nie gelangt, zu dessen Grenzen aber, seit sie verlobt war, zuweilen erwartungsvolle Träume sie getragen." (88)

Simultaneous with Sieglinde's sensual awakening, von Beckerath incurs the wrath of Siegmund, who sees him as his rival - worse than other rivals because he is of a different race.

"Dann fügte er, sich nach ihr umwendend, hinzu und verzerrte dabei sein Gesicht wie jemand, den die Sonne blendet: 'Übrigens möchte ich dich bitten, dieses Germanen im Laufe des heutigen Abends nicht mehr Erwähnung zu tun.'" (47)

Siegmund is in severe danger of losing his sister, the person whom he loves more than anyone except himself. This threat comes from a man whom Siegmund does not respect. Yet he accepts his sister's betrothed, who is sixteen years older than Sieglinde, on two accounts: he is a civil servant and he comes from a good family. "...weil von Beckerath im Ministerium tätig und von Familie war...."(42)

Siegmund, intelligent and introspective, understands the compromise he makes and despises himself for it. Pressured by his hatred for Beckerath, Siegmund chooses incest as a weapon to fight back.

Sibling incest in Wälsungenblut - seen almost solely from a male perspective, that of Siegmund Aarenhold, the elegant, slightly effeminate twin brother - is committed for several reasons. One of them is a sense of superiority that Siegmund indulges in. His arrogance is based on the great wealth of his family that elevates him in highly visible forms - a palatial villa, servants, luxurious vacations at secluded spots, exquisite food and clothes - from the rest of the world. Another reason for incest is an almost total lack of identity. Siegmund is still in his teens. He knows who he is only because of his sister, his other half, his mirror image. Without Sieglinde he is lost. When Beckerath, the outsider, the despised Aryan, marries Sieglinde, he will destroy half of Siegmund's world. Therefore, the most important reason for incest is self-defense and revenge. Incest is a planned, premeditated act, flung like a stone, at Beckerath. It is a vicious challenge between rivals for a woman. Had Siegmund been more virile, he might have opposed the union directly and openly. As it is, an act of love becomes more deadly than a sword. In choosing this mode to state his otherness and his exclusivity, Siegmund reminds one of Detlev Spinell in

Tristan, who writes Gabriele Klöterjahn's husband a letter instead of confronting his rival in person.

Sieglinde's role in the love triangle is ambiguous and problematic. She loves her brother but has no objection to marrying von Beckerath. As a product of a patriarchal society where women found it "natural" to be married off, Sieglinde is totally obedient to her brother's wishes. During "la belle Epoque", it did not matter if the newly-wed couple did not love each other. At the turn of this century, love was still subordinate to the laws of the family, headed by its male members.

The incestuous encounter between brother and sister in Wälsungenblut is seen through the brother's eyes. One knows what goes on in Siegmund's mind but Sieglinde's soul is a mystery. The reader only sees her externally as a lovely, spoiled, nineteen-year-old girl. One does not know what goes on in her heart because Sieglinde's psyche is nothing but an echo of her brother's. The twins are man-woman incarnate, like Kafka's bug, in the physical world. The "act" merely puts them back together - but in what a satirical, ironic context!

Mann focuses with such expertise on his male protagonist that at first one does not object to Sieglind's muteness, which is the mirror of her soul. But her internal silence is in stark contrast with the soul of another young woman who is also in love with her brother - that of

Marguerite Duras's Agatha¹⁶, whose incestuous relationship will be explored next. Where in Wälsungenblut Thomas Mann analyzes sibling incest from a male point of view, Marguerite Duras and Anais Nin do so from a female one.

(2)

In 1971 Alfred Cismaru wrote a short study (171 pages, published by Twayne Publishers, New York) that covers Duras's work up to that year. At that time he called her "one of the most noteworthy contemporary French novelists, playwrights, and film writers (1)." This was thirteen years before the publication of L'Amant (1984) which made her famous and brought her the Prix Goncourt. From 1943, the the publication year of Les impudents, to 1970 when L'amour was published by Gallimard, she wrote twenty-two novels, plays and screen plays. Between 1966 and 1976, she made eight films; and during 1977 and 1984 she turned out another ten. Even though among her screen plays was Hiroshima, mon amour (1960, Gallimard), for which she had written the scenario, and Moderato cantabile, (1958, Ed. Minuit) a novel turned into a movie with Jeanne Moreau in the leading role, none of her work was known to a broad public. Only scholars

¹⁶*Agatha shares some traits with Jeanne, the heroine of Anais Nin's prose poem, House of Incest. See beginning of Chapter 2 below.

and French students, who were more intrigued by her style than her themes, read her.

The time span between 1970 and 1987 was filled with an additional large number of writings. Her total output as of 1991 comes to about eighty-two works (46 novels, 17 plays, 2 screenplays, and 17 films). Duras is getting close to George Sand's prolific output; the 19th century writer produced one hundred novels during her life.

Born in 1914, it took Duras thirty-six years before she gained recognition with Un barrage contre le Pacifique (1950) and Le Marin de Gibraltar (1952).¹⁷ Both novels were influenced by the then popular style of Hemingway. They are classified as being:

"...combinations of adventure, brutality, drunkenness, sexual aggressiveness hiding deep frustrations, and artificial gaiety obscuring poorly the most desolate sadness, loneliness, and boredom." (18, Cismaru)

It is only however with her novels Le Square (1955), Moderato cantabile (1958), Dix heures et demie du soir en été (1960), and L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas (1964) that Duras attained the level of established Nouveau Roman writers such as Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Samuel Beckett. Their works no longer adhere to a plot, or motivation; they are filled with nameless heros and seemingly banal objects which are most carefully

¹⁷*By comparison Mann was in his early twenties when a collection of his short stories entitled Der kleine Herr Friedemann was published, shortly followed by his first novel Buddenbrooks.

represented, as well as "obsessive and contradictory fragments of thoughts and recollections (18)". Contrary to some Nouveau Roman writers, Duras takes these fragmented thoughts and somehow weaves them together to create a psychological world with which the reader can identify. In her novels despair does not reign supreme, as in Beckett's Endgame, for example, but in the midst of loneliness and alcoholism (especially apparent in some of her earlier works) there is often a redeeming last-minute human touch, an embrace, the sound of a voice, a dream. But not always. In La vie tranquille, considered an "unknown" masterpiece, Francou, the young heroine, watches a man drown at the beach without moving her foot. No cry issues from her even though the man's friends are quite close. Only after the man's head is no longer visible on the surface of the ocean, is the spell of Francou's inner landscape broken. Ruthlessly honest, Duras is not afraid to explore the strange and the repulsive.

Two dark images haunt Marguerite Duras's fiction: that of the mother - Duras's feminine double, and the brother - her masculine projection. They form the palimpsest of her psyche and her work.

All other characters, male or female, are but reflections of these two domineering love objects. Mother and brother form a circle within which the Durassian creations are prisoners of their narcissistic mirages, their

auto-sensual and incestuous longings and their sado-masochistic day dreams.

In almost all of Duras's work the mother is highly visible as a masterful, half-mad woman who sometimes, as in Un barrage contre le Pacifique and L'Amant, sadistically beats her daughter because she follows her passions instead of marrying. In Des Journées entières dans les arbres the mother is less abusive toward the mistress of her ill-bred son, who would like to be her daughter but is rebuked by the mother. In Agatha, she becomes an accomplice to sibling incest. In Savannah Bay and Détruire, dit-elle, the mother appears in disguised forms; she is shown as the beautiful, idealized mother with whom her daughter falls in love. Then there are masked self-portraits of Duras as the daughter who became a mother herself, as in Moderato cantabile, Le Vice-Consul, Les petits chevaux de Tarquinia, Dix heures et demie du soir en été and Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein. In L'Eté 80 she portrays a young girl whose motherly instincts toward a lonely boy are interspersed with subtle eroticism.

By contrast, there is only one fully developed father figure: it occurs in L'Après-midi de Monsieur Andesmas. He is a lonely and impotent old man who watches his teenage daughter, Valérie. He lies in wait for her, half hidden on a tree-studded hill above Saint Tropez, even though he knows that she will never return to him - who waits for death, who lives a kind of death.

In life Duras did not know her father, a school teacher who left France and went with his wife to Saigon. He died when Duras was only four years old, leaving his widow and three small children in utter poverty.

In Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras, the writer tells us that her older brother was sent to France because her mother was unable to bring up three little children on her own. Her older brother appears only in L'Amant and Des Journées entières dans les arbres. In both novels he is shown as an unpleasant character: in L'Amant he plays a bully, loved by no one except his mother, and in Des Journées entières dans les arbres he is a gigolo, and the mother is again shown as being infatuated with her son. By contrast, the image of Duras's younger brother is pursued with insistence and eroticism. The love and despair that the writer felt toward him is already present in her two earliest novels, Les Impudents (never liked by critics) and La Vie tranquille; but the finest portrait occurs in Un barrage contre le Pacifique, which might be seen as an abbreviated counterpart to Thomas Mann's Buddenbrooks. In that novel the near-biographical traits of her smaller brother are preserved in the figure of Joseph. Further portraits of him occur in Agatha and L'Amant. Her older brother, even though feared by Duras, apparently had also an erotic appeal.

"I never dance with my older brother, I have never danced with him. Always prevented by the disturbing apprehension of a danger, that of the evil attraction

that he exerts over all of us, that of the closeness of our bodies.

We look strikingly alike, particularly our faces..."
(59, L'Amant)

Incestuous desire toward the younger brother has nothing frightening; it comes naturally. Not so with the older brother, who is violent and enjoys hurting his younger brother and sister. Duras's older brother shares sadistical traits with L'homme assis dans le couloir, a man who beats his lover to death.

Marguerite Duras's younger brother, who was raised with her in Indochina, became mentally ill while she was still a child. Before he died - also at a young age like her father - Duras had left Asia to study law in Paris. Her brother's death brought out strong suicidal impulses in her, which at first she could not explain. She eventually came to the conclusion that her brother's death disturbed her in an unusual way because she had loved him in an extraordinary manner.

The younger brother is often represented as the rival of the men the heroine is sexually attracted to, or he is the competitor of those who are in love with her. Whether it is Francou's brother, Nicolas, in La vie tranquille, Joseph in Un barrage contre le Pacifique, or the nameless brothers in Agatha and L'Amant, the brother is the rival because the sister not only loves him, but loves him more passionately - as she does Joseph, for example, and the

nameless brother in Agatha. Or she loves him more protectively, as she does with Nicolas and the younger brother in L'Amant, than the men with whom she has a physical relation. In L'Amant, the brother's image breaks into two uneven parts: an older, evil one who cruelly dominates the younger, good brother. In Un barrage contre le Pacifique, the incestuous desire which haunts Suzanne does not take bodily forms; it remains a "sort of unconscious incest," as Peter L. Thorslev calls it¹⁶. In Agatha, however, incest, underlined by narcissism, is carried out in its full psychological and physical impact.

In Agatha there are only two actors in an uninhabited house, a summer villa called Agatha, that looks dreary in the winter light. Leaning against the wall of a living room are a man and a woman in their thirties. They look exhausted and resemble each other.

Although the reader learns rather quickly that the plot concerns a brother and sister, the dialogue is kept mostly in the formal address of "vous" with only occasional slips into the familiar "tu". Brother and sister have decided to use the "vouvoient" after they have slept with each other on a July afternoon - the hour of Pan when the air sizzled with heat and their parents had taken a siesta. The siblings were at that time - the technique of the screen

¹⁶Peter L. Thorslev, "Incest as Romantic Symbol" Comparative Literature Studies, 2, #1 (1965): 352-361.

script Agatha is based on flashbacks - eighteen and twenty-two years old. The sleep of the parents, the moral watch-guards, reminds one of Faust, who is only able to seduce Gretchen because her mother is unconscious from a sleeping potion.

By using the official "vous", brother and sister create an aesthetic distance between an act condemned by society and their conscience, which reflects the social taboo they had violated. When they recall the fateful day in detail, they revert to the third person. Agatha also refers to herself as "she"; a device her brother uses as well. "Vous, vous disiez qu'elle, Agatha, ne pouvait pas mourir, qu'elle affrontait la mort sans danger de mourir." (65)

The brother's name is never mentioned. The sister has two names: Agatha, the name of her parents's summer villa in France, purchased in the year she was born. It is the name used by her brother, but not by her husband, who does not know her as Agatha, the symbol for her incestuous relationship with her brother, but as Diotima. When she makes love to her husband, she calls out to her herself, "...le nom que je crie est le mien." (62), using Agatha. She evokes her brother's and her own image, being forever caught in the narcissistic circle of incest, even as she lies in her husband's bed.¹⁹ Her incestuous desire for her

¹⁹*She had asked her husband with whom she lives in the Azores, a man not without culture, but someone who has not read Plato, to call her Diotima.

brother, which did not stop after her marriage even though the siblings no longer meet - except once, for the last time - splits her into two halves.

Why this deliberate reference to the teacher of love in Plato's Symposium or to Hölderin's Hyperion? If Agatha wanted to be Diotima, the embodiment of love for her husband, what did she want to be for her brother? Nothing less than a goddess! When the brother sees the nude body of his sister during a hot afternoon while she rests in her room, he cries: "L'indécence de son corps a la magnificence de Dieu." (49) He also sees her as the embodiment of love that the night brought forth: "Je ne vois plus rien que ceci, que vous êtes là, faite, que la nuit de laquelle vous êtes extraite est celle de l'amour..." (49) There is no doubt that Duras defends sibling incest. She does so by evoking Western culture's loftiest ideals: the Greeks, the god of the old and the new testament, spelled with a capital "G", and through mythical allusions "...the night from which you were extracted is the one of love..." If "night" were replaced with "sea", the image of Aphrodite's birth would be even clearer. To have Agatha emerge from the night instead of the sea, makes night synonymous with the unconscious desires of dreams. With Agatha and her brother these desires, felt early in their lives and intricately mixed with narcissism, develop into incest.

Why such beautiful images for incest? Does Duras want to juxtapose this taboo with death? The motif of death rings throughout the narrative script insistently. It starts with the first flashback, when Agatha was twelve years old. Sitting at the beach, she watches her brother swimming way out in a tossing sea and is terrified that he might drown. When he returns to the shore and lies down next to her with closed eyes, her recently experienced fear of his death and her joy of seeing him alive merge into the first unconscious pangs of incestuous love.

"Je vous regarde seulement, je regarde les yeux sous les paupières fermées, je ne sais pas encore nommer ce désir que j'ai de les toucher avec mes mains. Je chasse l'image de votre corps perdu dans les ténèbres de la mer, flottant dans les fonds de la mer. Je ne vois plus que vos yeux." (15)

In seeing nothing but the eyes of her brother it is as if his body had vanished for Agatha, as if it had returned to the sea where he had almost drowned.

During their last encounter at the abandoned villa, the brother repeatedly begs his sister to come back to him, to delay her impending departure. But the sister refuses rather cruelly. She recalls how - for a split second - she saw her brother dead and herself alive next to him. The brother does not want to believe that she escapes to death without him. Then Agatha explains that her image of his death is the only means to try and forget him, to love him no longer. The brother is heart-broken, but understands that leaving him now means that she still loves him. Agatha

is going back to her husband, who presumably knows nothing of her feelings for her brother. "Vous savez, il ne sait rien de ma vie, il ne sait que mon mariage." (62-63)

The blending of love and death evokes the credo of Romanticism. Yet Agatha is not considered a romantic work. At the most there are touches, fleeting impressions, of neo-romanticism.

Several motifs, such as music, hands, a keen sense of odor, and the meaning of color and mirrors are shared by Agatha and Wälsungenblut.

(3)

There are a number of differences in structure, time, plot, mood and character between the siblings in Agatha and the Aarenhold twins in Wälsungenblut.

Siegmund and Sieglind are nineteen years old when the reader meets them. In the first scene, Agatha and her brother are in their mid-thirties. As their story unfolds, they become progressively younger until Agatha is a child of five, then seven, and her brother about four years older. In Wälsungenblut time fastens on one particular moment: it is eight days before Sieglinde's and von Beckerath's wedding. (Beckerath has no first name.) The action takes place in twelve hours, from noon to about midnight, an economy typical of Greek drama.

Contrary to the dramatic quality of Wälsungenblut, the lyric aspect is stressed in Agatha. In this Durassian work, actual time does not exceed more than about an hour. Yet in this hour two young lives pass before the viewers' eyes. In Agatha, written like a film script²⁰, Duras uses the dialogue form again, a genre she had already applied successfully to Le Square and Hiroshima, mon amour. Even while reading Agatha instead of seeing the script projected on a screen, one finds it appeals more to the eye and to an innate voyeuristic trait (shared by all humans) than as a novel that charms the ear.

In Wälsungenblut the reader is led slowly toward the incestuous scene that eventually takes place in Siegmund's white bedroom. Incest is therefore an event in the future. In Agatha, on the contrary, the action had occurred many years before. It is an event in the past which is relived, superimposed upon the present. At the opening of the narrative, brother and sister meet for the last time in an abandoned summer cottage at the coast of France. There, in utter solitude (it is winter time) they revive their childhood and adolescence. Together with their family, they had spent many summer days at the Villa Agatha until the

²⁰*In 1981, the same year when Agatha was published in Paris by Minuit, Duras also produced her film, Agatha ou les lectures illimitées.

fateful day in Agatha's eighteenth year when incest was committed.

Siegling is engaged to be married to von Beckerath. Whereas there is never the slightest physical contact between these two, Agatha's brother has a fiancée from Charentes whom he has known intimately; and Agatha, too, had made love to a friend of her brother's. Also, prior to being engaged Agatha's brother had been seduced by a friend of their mother's, a much older woman. In Un passage contre le Pacifique, Duras had already explored love between a mature woman and a young man. Suzanne's brother, Joseph, falls madly in love with the seductive wife of an alcoholic with whose help he hopes to escape the stifling, narcissistic circle of mother and sister. The theme "young man versus older woman", a mother fixation, has of course famous predecessors.²¹

In Agatha the brother compares his sister's body favorably with those of other women: "Je ne savais pas la différence qu'il avait entre le corps de ma soeur et celui d'une autre femme." (48) In Wälsungenblut, brother and sister hold hands secretly; like children they hide their closeness under the dinner table.

²¹*Mainly Flaubert's Education sentimentale, Balzac's Le Lys dans la Vallée and, a little earlier, Rousseau's Mme de Warens of the Confessions, and Elléonore in Constant's Adolphe.

There are further differences between Agatha and Wälsungenblut with regard to incest.

In Wälsungenblut, incest is committed while the twins are still under the hypnotic effect of Wagner's Walküre.

It is also committed out of curiosity. The Aarenhold twins want to explore the regions they have come from: "...zogen sie hinab, dorthin, woher sie kamen, in ein tiefes Reich, wohin sie noch nie gelangt,..." (88)

Incest occurs out of revenge. Siegmund does not want to lose his sister, whom he loves, to a man of a different race. Just as Wagner's Siegmund could not bear the thought of his sister being married to Hunding, "...bauchig und x-beinig wie eine Kuh...(60)" so different, so inferior, to them.

Another reason for incest - possibly the most important one - is a narcissistic, exclusive infatuation with each other for which Thomas Mann created a specific word: "Ebenbürtigkeitswonne" (delight in equality - of birth!). The twins not only delight in their mutual resemblance, but also in each other's refined tastes, in their being spoiled by utter luxury and in the delicious way each of them smells. The sense of odor is particularly important for Siegmund, who suffers from compulsive cleaning or, as Freud would put it, from anal retention.

"Ein außerordentliches und fortwährendes Bedürfnis nach Reinigung war ihm eigen, dergestalt, daß er einen beträchtlichen Teil des Tages vorm Lavoir verbrachte."
(34)

In Agatha incest is committed through the complicity of the mother who, when Agatha reaches her eighteenth birthday, writes her brother, away at college, how beautiful his sister has become and that he has to come and see her: "Notre mère me l'annonce, elle m'écrit: "Tu devrais venir la voir, elle est belle tout à coup â ne pas en croire ses yeux..." (45) The mother is a sort of benign procuress, a "tertio incommodo" who shapes the life of her daughter and son. Before she dies, she "bequeaths" her son to her daughter: "Mon enfant, ne te sépare jamais de lui, ce frère que je te donne." (66) The brother too, is not supposed ever to leave his sister: "...qu'il ne faut pas qu'il se sépare d'Agatha." (66)

Incest also occurs out of a curious sense of preordination, of fatality. On invisible pages of their personal history "it has been written"²² that brother and sister should love each other. They have loved each other not only in their current life but in previous generations that predate their mother's and the lives before her. Incest has been in their genes, so to speak, for many decades:

"Depuis que nous sommes advenus vous et moi dans cette famille-là, de cette femme-là... inconnaissable... inconnue... Notre amour... Notre amour...Depuis avant

²²*Quote from Diderot's Jacques le fataliste. The brief quote is constantly repeated throughout the novel to underline the concept of fate expressed in the work and its title.

elle et encore avant et encore et encore avant..."
(44)

The curiosity and tenderness that drew Siegmund and Sieglinde together for a single incestuous encounter - the novella dramatically ends with it - is replaced in Agatha with a considerable amount of suffering and a deadly longing that seems never to end. Incest has occurred several years before the opening of the narrative. In pitiful retrospect, the siblings constantly recall the event; their remembrance is mixed with despair, with the knowledge that they meet for the last time. Agatha is nothing more than a brief encounter between a brother and sister who once loved each other physically and who now relive the incestuous relationship in their minds. While they speak with each other, a sense of loss hangs over their meeting and casts its shadow upon the two characters. Agatha's brother calls these an "épaisseur obscure" (42). The siblings are, as it were, wrapped up in this "dark thickness", a "quasi uterine space" as Julia Kristeva calls it²³. Only here and there a few glimpses of the exterior world, a world brother and sister are unable to reach, becomes visible: a sun-bathed beach in France that recalls a beach in the tropics, and an empty hotel with a black piano that overlooks the Loire. The river is seen as a treacherous water that drowns children.

²³*Julia Kristeva. Soleil Noir. Depression et Melancolie. Paris: Gallimard, 1987.

In between the black shadows are clear views in blue and white: Agatha, who drops her mother's blue dress to reveal her white body to her brother. By wearing her mother's dress, Agatha becomes a little like her and descends into the generation preceding her. Here, one has what Freud calls a "Wiederholungszwang", the compulsion to "import the old into the new, the past into the future..." (Dorrit Cohn, 465)

The light scattered from the dots of colors renders the rest of the scenes even darker and more stark. Duras uses the contrasting colors of black and white with an occasional spot of blue to create a melancholy mood, whereas Mann applies the color yellow to describe a character like von Beckerath, who is "klein, kanariengelb, spitzbaertig (16)" or the sadistic inclinations of Gerda von Rinnlingen, who drives a yellow hunting gig and reclines voluptuously on yellow pillows. (See part 1 above, pp 7-9)

Siegmund and Sieglinde, slowly, half playfully like puppies - "Schließlich spielten sie wie kleine Hunde, die sich mit den Lippen beißen (48)," - slide off a slippery edge and while caressing and consoling each other, tumble helter-skelter into incest. Agatha and her brother are far more haunted by a sense of guilt, of fear, and of pride, the hubris of the Greek hero or the Nietzschean "Übermut" here used in the sense of overbearing rather than lightness of mind, which is its other meaning: "Voici revenue,

l'épaisseur obscur autour de nous, le calme de cette interdiction qui est notre loi." (42) Brother and sister live according to their own laws as Antigone and Wagner's Siegmund and Sieglinde have done.

The differences in Wälsungenblut and Agatha shown above are balanced by many similarities.

One of the distinctions between Wälsungenblut and Agatha is found in the effect of the past, Time is approached quite differently by the two writers. Duras operates in her characters' past, depending on their memory (manipulated of course) to piece together a narrative, and uses the present as a second canvas, as it were, to re-paint a visual narrative, sometimes in opposition to the former one. (For example Agatha's innocence as a child versus her incestuous desire for her brother later on.) The traditional point of view (Mann occasionally infuriates his reader when he claims ignorance) is gone in Duras.

By utilizing the technique of a "palimpsest" (my emphasis) in Agatha, Duras evokes in the middle of the present not only a fairly recent past of about fifteen years ago but a far more distant one: the past of many generations that preceded Agatha and her brother's lifetime. The use of two pasts, superimposed upon the present creates an eerie effect. Duras is not a religiously inclined writer; neither does she try to explain the incestuous

longing between brother and sister from a scientific angle. She vacillates instead between the two and deliberately makes no choice between an art/religion versus science approach. Yet somehow she catches an atmosphere that denies and affirms at the same time a recent past and an unknowable one. It is as if the love between the siblings were some kind of light or air that hovers above the abyss of time. In contrast to this haziness, not unlike the cloudiness that envelops Claude Monet's haystacks and waterlilies giving it its special mood, Mann's approach to incest in Wälsungenblut is solid, like a multi-faceted stone or a building. Perhaps there is good reason why Wälsungenblut was first called Tiergartenvilla. One can enter Wälsungenblut through many different doors - there is always solidity, a concreteness and elegance of form and a concept of time that is now. Similar to Greek drama, the present dominates in all scenes of Wälsungenblut. While Mann still gives the illusion of reconstructing a chronological time sequence, Duras proves that such an attempt is no longer possible. Agatha is a set of images loosely put together so that one becomes conscious of what is not there, or rather one "sees" through the holes of the present the past of her two protagonists and senses the distant past of unknown generations that preceded them.

If yellow is the color that one remembers from a reading of Wälsungenblut, blue - frequently juxtaposed with

white such as the blue sea with white, foamy crests - is the color of Agatha.

Traditionally, blue is a celestial color: the blue sky, the blue dress of madonnas whose heavenly beauty has enhanced the Middle Ages for a thousand years. Blue is also associated with loyalty and fidelity. Duras uses blue as a symbol for narcissism, "Ebenbürtigkeitswonne" and sibling incest:

"Lui (temps).-Mon amour. Agatha... ma soeur Agatha... mon enfant... mon corps. Agatha. -- Ils pleurent. Elle. -Comment étaient ses yeux? Lui.- Bleus. Elle.-Comme les siens à lui..." (36)

Into the brother's words is etched the intense passion he has for his sister. She is not just his lover, the woman he desires more than any other woman, but he makes her into his child, his body. She is blood from his blood. The brother wants that which can never be.

Then Agatha asks: "What color were her eyes?" He: "Blue". She: As were his (eyes)..." Here is Agatha's curious referral to herself again in the third person. Once more it is used as a device to impose distance between the actual act of incest that happened long ago and the present when brother and sister talk of their love but are careful not to elicit any physical desire. They avoid sitting down together or even looking at each other since the eye is a seductive instrument - even when covered by an eyelid or when looking away from its love object.

Even more intensely than Siegmund in Wälsungenblut, the brother in Agatha identifies himself with his sister to the point where she becomes his body and even his child. Whereas in Wälsungenblut Siegmund indulges in a narcissistic, still almost childlike joy in identifying himself with his sister, and by loving himself in her, in Agatha narcissism tries to reach the androgynous ideal. Man and woman are joined in one body with the man having strong paternal longings - almost maternal ones - that make him wish for his lover to become also his child. In his mind this wish is instantly fulfilled so that his sister, who is so close, so important to him, turns into his child.

Agatha's brother is a good example of the longing of a man for a child. In his mind this wish turns his sister into his child: "...Agatha...ma soeur...Agatha...mon enfant...mon corps....(36)"

"Mon corps" - my body - underlines the androgynous perception that exists between brother and sister in Agatha. But the price for this androgynous ideal is incest and a narrow narcissistic circle with no escape except through destruction. "Lui.- Ecoutez-moi, écoutez...il arrive aussi bien qu'un amour ne meure pas et qu'il faille l'anéantir." (56-57) "...it happens that love does not die and one has to destroy it." Duras speaks in general terms about love. Yet one cannot help but assume, in view of the above context, that she refers here also specifically to love in

the form of this sibling incest: "It happens that - (such a love as ours) - does not die and has to be destroyed." Of course, to destroy their love is like demolishing an invisible but vital organ without which they cannot breathe or live.

Here again the idea of love and death are linked. It is an important motif in the works of Duras, in fact she calls one of her novels, in which she thought intensely about love and destruction, Détruire, dit-elle. In her film script Hiroshima mon amour the Japanese lover almost literally grows out of the death of the German lover of Nevers. The living lover and the dead one are embraced as one entity.

In Dix heures et demie du soir en été, there is also the love/death motif: Maria and Pierre, the married, sleepless couple in a Spanish hotel, recall a night of love in Verona while a few feet away from them, Rodrigo Paestra, the fugitive murderer hides on a roof top and waits to be shot at dawn.

"L'odeur de la boue et du blé arrive par effluves dans le couloir. L'hôtel baigne dans cette odeur, la ville, Rodrigo Paestra et ses morts, et le souvenir inépuisable mais parfaitement vain d'une nuit d'amour à Vérone." (59)

In Agatha, the exterior world is so tightly shut out in the blind, psychic closeness of the siblings that the sister has for an instant even forgotten the color of her brothers eyes and must be reassured by him that they are blue.

"Elle-Comment étaient ses yeux? Lui.-Bleus..." (36) The delight in each other, the "Ebenbürtigkeitswonne" brother and sister experience, is balanced and deepened by a sense of inescapable sadness and despair: they cry.

They cry and become silent. In that silence they remember with haunting vividness their first physical encounter. It is the brother who breaks the silence and refers to the blue dress, a bathrobe that Agatha wore at the beach. It is her mother's old robe. It now paints a blue spot on the ground where Agatha dropped it. She lies on her bed nude. The white of her body contrasts with the discarded dress on the floor. The blue and white of Agatha is echoed by the blue sea with its white-crested breakers outside the summer villa. Then there is a pronounced silence - a silence that lasts for ten pages before Duras actually describes the incestuous scene in detail. The long interruption is filled with flashbacks about one of Agatha's lovers, her brother's jealousy, they seem to hear a waltz by Brahms, they reflect on their incestuous relationship, they remember their mother's interference, their childhood at the beach, the brother's fiancée - and only then do the two lovers return to the blue robe and Agatha's white body on the bed, exposed to the noon sun and her brother's eyes. Time in Agatha constantly shifts between "temps propre" and "temps disloqué", the latter signifying the world lived in memory.

The next time the color blue is mentioned, brother and sister describe the eyes of Agatha's husband: "Elle. - Bleus, très bleus. Très clairs. J'embrasse le bleu sous les yeux fermés." (60)

"...I kiss the blue under the closed eyes..." Agatha speaks here of the blue eyes of her husband which are of the same color as those of her brother's, those she cannot touch: "Les yeux de mon frère n'ont jamais été touchés par moi." (60) She kisses the blue skin under the eyes, which is safe. To caress the eyes is not.

Brother and husband have no face, they are identified only by the color blue that refers to their eyes. Duras is not interested in what a character looks like. The exterior image is unimportant; it exists only in a single adjective which she repeats and emphasizes: "Bleus, très bleus. (60)" The color blue evokes strong feelings in Agatha. Since husband and brother/lover both have blue eyes, they are hard to disengage from each other. They appear to be intertwined. Yet there is never a moments doubt whom Agatha loves more: it is her brother, not her husband.

The final reference to the color blue is made on the last page of the narrative:

"Elle.-Oui, c'était un été admirable. Le souvenir en est plus fort que vous et moi ensemble devant lui... c'était un été plus fort que nous, plus fort que notre force, que nous, plus bleu que toi, plus avant que notre beauté, que mon corps, plus doux que cette peau sur la mienne sous le soleil, que cette bouche que je ne connais pas." (67)

This last passage spoken by Agatha serves several purposes: it is a hymn to summer and an apology for human frailty expressed in incest. It also underlines again a sense of predestination, of the Freudian "Wiederholungszwang": brother and sister were to become lovers during that summer. It was a summer that preceded them and will be there long after they are gone. Agatha measures their love, their life span and their fate against this summertime upon whose vastness the siblings are nothing but passing shadows, silhouettes that caught the sunlight for a moment and then fell back into the abyss of time whence they have come and where they are now momentarily sustained by fleeting glimpses of beauty. "...plus doux que cette peau sur la mienne sous le soleil,..." (67)

The cult of the exclusively "human" aspect in literature as it prevailed until mid-nineteenth century has made place for a world without a hero and for a conscience that is more aware of its surroundings and its past.

The essence of summer is symbolized by the color blue: "more blue than you" (whom I love). Its beauty is even greater than that of her brother: "more blue than you".

"...plus avant que notre beauté..." emphasizes once more the "Wiederholungszwang", the irresistible urge to reflect upon the past and to integrate it not only into the present but also into the future. It is an effort to overcome time, to live no longer within a definite time span

but to eliminate the length of an individual life so that a succession of generations becomes visible.

In their constant recall of the past, in the recollections of Agatha and her brother, one gathers the materials with which to construct the narrative reality of Duras. It is a reality that tries to escape the literary past where - as Robbe-Grillet points out - the writer enclosed the universe in words in order to hand it over to society like a valuable object. "Le mot fonctionnait ainsi comme un piège ou l'écrivain enfermait l'univers pour le livrer à la société." (26, Pour un nouveau roman)

As the reader has seen in Kafka's work, whose protagonist in Das Schloß uses no name but only the initial K., Duras too largely dispenses with proper names in her novels. The brother of Agatha has no name, nor has the mother. Or she goes in the opposite direction and changes the name of the heroine in the same narrative, as Beckett has done. Before the middle of the 19th century it was inconceivable for a character not to have a name or at least an initial and for a novel not to center around a family, a hero, or a heroine whose destiny was described in a linear, slow, detailed movement that is inconceivable in the modern novel. One example would be the lengthy dinner filled with sexual innuendos Tom Jones has with his lover, who turns out to be his mother, or the opening chapters of Jean Paul's novel Die Flegeljahre in which the author, a friend of

Goethe and Herder, devotes sixteen pages to the reading of a will. Mann's Buddenbrooks comes to mind in this respect since it still contains epic dimensions in which details and sub-plots are often more important than plot and character. But as Robbe Grillet points out, our world has become less sure of itself and perhaps more modest since it renounced the all-powerful dominance of the character:

"Le culte exclusif de 'l'humain' a fait place à une prise de conscience plus vaste, moins anthropocentriste." (33, Pour un nouveau roman)

And the novel, Robbe-Grillet continues, seemed to stumble, having lost its foremost support, the hero.

More important than character, who has become nameless and faceless, possessing at best only eyes, is the element of time in Duras' novels and film scripts. As Robbe-Grillet points out, time in the "Nouveau Roman" no longer has anything to do with clocks or calendars. The action takes place mostly in a perpetual presence - "le présent de l'indicatif (164, Pour un nouveau roman)". Chronological ruptures are the basis for the structure of a novel. This becomes even more evident in a modern film which is a reflection on human memory, its uncertainty, its obstinacy, its dramas:

"...toute oeuvre cinématographique moderne serait une réflexion sur la mémoire humaine, ses incertitudes, son entêtement, ses drames, etc." (164, Pour un nouveau roman)

Commenting on his own work, Robbe-Grillet mentions that the world in L'Année dernière à Marienbad has no past. It

is a world that is created from moment to moment and eliminates itself progressively as the action proceeds. A man and a woman come into existence only when they appear on the screen for the first time; a moment before they do not exist and once the film has ended, they cease to exist as well. They are alive only during the duration of the film. Characters cannot have any reality outside the image one sees, the words one hears. All action in L'Année dernière à Marienbad takes place within an hour and a half. That is roughly the same time which elapses in Agatha as well. The scenes one has just observed, the successions of plans, the frequent changing of costumes are incompatible with this short time frame unless one sees them as a subjective, mental and personal "déroulement". Robbe-Grillet and Duras in most of her later works, starting as early as 1954 when she published Les journées entières dans les arbres and Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein (1964), show that those things can exist only in someone's head. But whose? The hero-narrator or the hypnotized heroine? Once more Robbe-Grillet and Duras claim that just as there is only one time that counts, namely the time of the length of the film,²⁴ so there is only one character who is important and that character is the spectator. It is in his head - "dans sa tête (166, Pour un nouveau roman)" where all action takes

²⁴*The distinction is between "Erzählzeit" and "erzählte Zeit," narrative time and narrated time.

place, an action that is imagined by him. This is of course the well-known credo of the modern novel, often summed-up in one expression: - "reader-participation."²⁵

Robbe-Grillet and Duras insist that a work of art is not witness to an exterior reality but that the work itself has its own reality - a reality in which any attempt to reconstruct a chronological time sequence will sooner or later end in failure.

Whereas Mann gives the reader no such task as "reader-participation" -- he directs, ironizes, manipulates, remains totally in control -- Duras, Robbe-Grillet and other representatives of the *nouveau roman* -- push us in manifold ways to 'figure things out', to make a narrative reality out of the bits and pieces collected in a dialogue narration such as the one used in Agatha and several other works of Duras. This, for instance, is why yellow is so fixed and definable in Mann, while blue demands that the reader do the fixing.

Discussion of Duras's work in subsequent chapters shows in greater detail how she follows and, in doing so, modifies some of the *nouveau roman's* new "discoveries".

Wälsungenblut has not one ending but two. Mann had considerable difficulty in finishing his carefully

²⁵*"Reader-participation" can also be seen as a shift in critical emphasis from the author to the reader. Not all twentieth century novels call for it.

constructed novella, which is incredibly rich in its overall aesthetic appeal, not to mention that it possesses intriguing psychological insights and tactfully handles its incest theme. The ending comes suddenly, right after Sieglind and Siegmund have committed incest. The original version of the last sentence -

"Nun", sagte er, und einen Augenblick traten die Merkzeichen seiner Art sehr scharf auf seinem Gesicht hervor, "was wird mit ihm sein? Beganft haben wir ihn, - den Goy (659)!"

bears too strong an antisemitic message and had to be changed. The modified version, as it stands now, reads as follows:

"Nun," sagte er, und einen Augenblick traten die Merkzeichen seiner Art sehr scharf auf seinem Gesicht hervor "dankbar soll er uns sein. Er wird ein minder trivales Dasein führen, von nun an (92)."

The last sentence in its original form had caused Thomas Mann considerable friction with several members of the Pringsheim family, especially his father-in-law. Even Heinrich Mann, Thomas's older brother, who, according to Peter de Mendelssohn, had used far stronger antisemitic innuendos in his novella Schauspielerin, had been asked by Thomas to help with the last difficult sentence of Wälsungenblut.

Peter de Mendelssohn devotes twenty-nine pages in Der Zauberer to the background of the novella's genesis. He points out that Wälsungenblut was rather hastily withdrawn before being printed in the January 1906 issue of the "Neue

Rundschau" - whose editor, Oscar Bie, - had from the beginning felt uncomfortable about the Yiddish expression in the last sentence of the first ending, whose barely disguised crudeness stood in sharp contrast to the artful subtlety and discreteness with which Mann had treated the theme of incest throughout the novella. Yet even those precautionary steps, de Mendelssohn continues, did not prevent the novella from becoming a cause célèbre in Munich.

It is possible that Wälsungenblut is an extended anecdote, with the subject matter so serious that either ending will fall flat. The goy ending is more in keeping with the overall attitude of the siblings and Mann's malicious depiction of some of the story's figures; the compromise ending does not make much sense, for Beckerath won't notice the difference, and his life can hardly be less trivial.

Siegling and Siegmund, in spite of their narcissistic involvement with each other, behave throughout the novella rather like two "altridge Kinder" who fight to stay in the golden country of their childhood which they have tried to preserve with patience, skill and cunning. Now they are threatened with the loss of their paradise by Beckerath, the outsider and intruder.

Or are they not that innocent? Have they been aware of their attraction to each other, using Beckerath as an excuse

to commit the forbidden act, which has been in their minds all along? Innocence and guilt are intricately mixed where Sieglinde and Siegmund are concerned - so much so that in the end a moral judgment depends perhaps on the reader's own point of view. With Mann ethics nearly always loom large in the background. In the case of Aschenbach and Tadzio, Mann clearly pleads for a "not guilty" as far as homosexuality is concerned. His judgment of Sieglind's and Siegmund's incestuous longings is more ambiguous.

Wälsungenblut ends with a fall, quite literally with the twins making love on the floor instead of Siegmund's bed and in a moral sense, of course, by breaking one of the foremost social taboos. Agatha closes with a last look at summer and a lost youth before brother and sister collapse. "Silence. Les yeux sont fermés. Ils sont dans une raideur effrayante." (67) The closed eyes and terrifying stiffness of their bodies are symptoms of death. Thomas Mann's Siegmund and Sieglinde will go on living, but one is not sure about Agatha and her brother's fate. The open ending of Agatha is in line with Duras's intentions. She deliberately leaves one suspended to activate "reader participation" in the fate of Agatha and her brother.

To recapitulate: Chapter 1 offers a comparison between sibling incest in Wälsungenblut and Agatha, starting with the social scandal that surrounded the first printing attempts of Wälsungenblut. Mann was accused of having

implied an incestuous relationship between his wife, Katia, and her twin brother.

I then discussed the color yellow and its sadistical implications which play a subtle but important role in Mann's early tales. A little later, I juxtaposed Mann's "yellow" with "blue" in Duras's Agatha where it becomes analogous with narcissism. I also pointed out that in Agatha narcissism at times tries to reach an androgynous ideal. The incestuous desire between brother and sister goes beyond physical expressions. An idealistic approach is brought about through intense pain and fear. On a psychological level there is a desperate clinging to each other that grows out of despair rather than desire.

Some of the romantic residue, mainly the love/death motif, is still visible not only in several of Duras's writings but also in Mann's. One has but to recall Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Luischen, Tristan, Tobias Mindernickel and even his late short novel Die Betrogene.

I also emphasized the masochistic behavior of von Beckerath toward his future father-in-law, Herr Aarenhold, his fiancée Sieglind and her inseparable twin brother Siegmund.

I concentrated mostly on one of the major themes in Wälsungenblut: the sibling incest that is committed at the end of the novella. There are several reasons for incest to have developed. Among them is an act of imitation. The

Aarenhold twins intensely enjoy and identify with the incestuous stage meeting of Siegmund and Sieglinde in Wagner's Walküre. Another cause for the incest is revenge. Siegmund feels threatened by von Beckerath who, by becoming engaged to his twin sister, takes away Siegmund's most priceless possession. Yet an even more important incentive for engaging in incest than revenge is narcissism and a lack of identity. Siegmund, who has artistic ambitions, mirrors himself in his sister in whose large eyes, dark curls, slender hands and pleasantly scented skin, he recognizes himself. Instinctive recognition and a naive delight in his own beauty, which he sees reflected in his sister, lead to incest. Incest exists here as "Ebenbürtigkeitswonne", an expression invented by Mann, whose meaning consists in a kind of "narcissism à deux" (my emphasis), the self-centered joy of the siblings in each other at the expense of any outsider.

If Siegmund has trouble in identifying himself, Sieglind is completely lost without her twin. Mann has stripped her of any identity except a woman's biological instinct of protection. (Sieglind shows concern when her brother does not eat or feigns illness.) Her psyche, enclosed in delicate features, is but an echo of her brother's.

In Duras's Agatha, the mother and brother fixations become eminent. The mother often stands for sadism; if not

in Agatha, then in some of her other novels such as Un barrage contre le Pacifique, Les journées entières dans les arbres and L'Amant. The brother is a symbol of incest. Sibling incest, which is foreshadowed in La vie tranquille and Un barrage contre le Pacifique, becomes fully developed in Agatha. An incestuous brother-sister relationship is also explored in Duras's latest novel, L'Amant de la Chine du Nord.

In Agatha, Duras uses grammatical skills such as the "vouvoisement" between brother and sister to keep incest at bay. To reinforce an aesthetic distance between the social taboo and sibling incest even further, the siblings sometimes apply the third person singular when they talk to each other.

The name "Agatha" is a metaphor for incest. It is only used among brother, sister and mother, who encourages the incestuous relationship of her children. Agatha's husband knows her under a different name. She has him call her Diotima. Where Siegmund and Sieglind, partly because of their youth, lack an identity, Agatha, far more than her brother, knows who she is. When Agatha decides to give up her incestuous desire for her brother by leaving him forever and returning to her husband, she makes a conscious effort to break out of the narcissistic circle that held her and her brother enclosed for many years. However, at the end of the novel it is not clear if Agatha is in control of her

infantile impulses or whether she remains a prisoner of incest. Duras, in accordance with one of the dicta of the Nouveau Roman, leaves the end open deliberately to invite reader-participation.

The most obvious difference when comparing Wälsungenblut with Agatha is the treatment of time. Whereas Mann follows the traditional, linear movement of time, having incest occur as the dramatic ending of his novella, Duras's incestuous encounter between her siblings has happened a long time ago when the novel begins. Duras adheres again to one of the concepts of the Nouveau Roman which claims that one can no longer tell a story within a sequential time frame. She distinguishes between "temps propre" and "temps disloqué", the latter representing the world lived in one's mind. Action takes place in a continued presence - the presence of the reader's mind. Chronological time is ruptured all the time. Most attempts to overcome time, ends in the Freudian "Wiederholungszwang". Time appears as a circular movement. It is an endless repetition of the same in various forms.

Chapter 2

The Mirror:

Wälsungenblut and Agatha

The most common metaphor for narcissism is the mirror that receives and reflects the self. Self-contemplation usually concentrates on the face, upon which man's vulnerability to time and destruction is carved.

With the help of narcissism an attempt will be made to unlock certain aspects of an inner, hidden world in Agatha and Wälsungenblut. The emphasis is more on positive than negative observations. Narcissism will not be dismissed simply as a symptom of vanity, of superficiality or of egocentricity - in short, those characteristics often attributed to a person called narcissistic.

Freud's paper "Zur Einführung des Narzissmus" (1914), now recognized as one of his most important writings, distinguishes three versions of narcissism:

I - primary narcissism where a person:

"...treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated - who looks at it, that is to say, strokes it and fondles it till he obtains complete satisfaction through these activities." (73)

II - a narcissistic attitude which:

"is found in many people who suffer from other disorders - for instance, as Sadger has pointed out, in homosexuals - ..." (73)

III - the so called "normal narcissism" that:

"might claim a place in the regular course of human sexual development." (73)

Freud considers only the first category - "primary narcissism" a perversion. Even the second one, the narcissistic attitude, is categorized rather as a "disorder" than a severe illness.

Prior to the incest scene in Wagner's Die Walküre, Sieglinde looks longingly at the face of her long lost twin brother and sings:

"Im Bach erblickt ich
mein eigen Bild -
und jetzt gewahr ich es wieder:
wie einst dem Teich es enttaucht,
bietest mein Bild mir nun du!" (600)

"In the brook I saw
my own image -
and now again I become aware of it:
the way it once emerged from the pond
so now you reflect my image!"

Sieglinde is here a feminine rendition of Ovid's Narcissus; her twin brother's face becomes a mirror in which Sieglinde recognizes herself. In loving her brother, she loves herself. It is hard to tell whether Sieglinde suffers here simply from a narcissistic attitude or whether she experiences a so called "normal narcissism" that is part of the "human sexual development". But it is clear that she loves herself in her own reflection in which she also recognizes her love for her brother.

Incestuous love in Wagner's Die Walküre (the model for Thomas Mann's Wälsungenblut), exposes a "truth" hard to

bear: No matter whom one falls in love with, it is always oneself that one loves.

Anais Nin in her novel House of Incest expresses narcissism less poetically than Wagner but she adds a new image; she pictures narcissism as the room of a house, the house of incest, when she cries:

"If only we could all escape from this house of incest where we only love ourselves in the other,..."
(70)²⁶

When love is viewed from this angle, one is better able to sympathize with sibling incest, since brothers and sisters are more like each other and therefore recognize themselves more easily in the other than they would in strangers. They also transfer their narcissism with greater readiness from one to the other - with narcissism sometimes developing into sibling incest.

In Wälsungenblut Siegmund studies intensely his features in a mirror, which he later - during the incest scene - also recognizes in his sister, who then becomes his mirror as well:

"Plötzlich erhob er sich, warf die Zigarette fort und trat vor den weißen Schrank, in dessen drei Teile enorme Spiegel eingelassen waren. Er stand vor dem Mittelstück, ganz dicht, Aug in Aug mit sich selbst, und betrachtete sein Gesicht. Sorgfältig und neugierig prüfte er jeden Zug, öffnete die beiden Flügel des

²⁶*Narcissism is here no longer seen in the classical sense as a reflection in the water but as a house. Narcissism has solidified. It is no longer just part of nature - the way Ovid sees Narcissus in the Metamorphoses - but it has become domesticated, more refined and far more complex.

Schrankes und sah sich, zwischen drei Spiegeln stehend, auch im Profil. Lange stand er und prüfte die Abzeichen seines Blutes, die ein wenig niedergedrückte Nase, die voll und weich aufeinander ruhenden Lippen, die hervorspringenden Wangenknochen, sein dichtes, schwarz gelocktes, gewaltsam auf der Seite gescheiteltes Haar, das ihm weit in die Schläfen wuchs, und seine Augen selbst unter den starken, zusammengewachsenen Brauen, diese großen, schwarzen und feuchtblanken Augen, die er klagevoll blicken ließ und in müdem Leide." (85)

The lake over which Narcissus had bent changes its horizontal surface into a vertical one in Wälsungenblut. A flat, fluid substance becomes a hardened one and divides, like a triptych: the mirror becomes almost "ein dreiteiliges Altarbild" without its religious connotations. An aberration of religious imagery into self-adoration takes place here. There is more than one mirror in this portrait. Siegfried's extraordinary beautiful eyes - "...er stand Aug in Aug mit sich selbst..." are mirrors as well. He adjusts his eyes so that they look plaintively and with tired suffering. Wagner's blond, blue-eyed Siegmund is still on his mind and invisibly lurks somewhere in the depth of the mirror. Even though this modern Narcissus has exchanged his Greek features for Hebraic ones - "...lange stand er und prüfte die Abzeichen seines Blutes...", it is once more Narcissus who contemplates his own beauty that he is in love with. The beauty Siegmund sees - his own - exists in the space between his large, black eyes and the mirror. Narcissistic love is - according to Marcel Kunz's Narziss -

confined to that "Zwischenraum", the space between mirror and eyes.²⁷

Siegmond, who is waiting for his sister to bid him good night, has momentarily forgotten about her. As soon as he enters his bedroom, he becomes primarily interested in himself, in his own Liebesausbruch (ecstasy of love) which he hopes will resemble that of Wagner's Siegmund. For a moment, Sieglinde seems to have receded into the background or even changed into the hapless nymph whom Narcissus flees. Like Narcissus, Siegmund longs only for himself. Or rather he sees himself as Wagner's powerful protagonist whom he has just watched on the stage. Siegmund would like to be like Wagner's hero but he is not. The serio-romantic approach to incest in Die Walküre changes in Wälsungenblut to an intentionally burlesque sex act in which infatuation and self-infatuation remain clearly distinguishable.

²⁷*Marcel Kunz in his inquiry Narziss - Untersuchungen zum Werk Rainer Maria Rilkes, which he introduces to the reader through Ovid's Metamorphosis, claims that Narcissus even before he recognizes his mirror image, his counterpart, realizes that it is unreachable. Not because the beloved "person", the self reflected in the water, is too distant but while the "illusive other" exists, "he" cannot be touched. Narcissus and his mirror image can only approach each other up to a certain point. If the minimal distance that exists between self and mirror is eliminated, there is danger that the mirror image will become obliterated. Total closeness means the destruction of the "other" and of the self. In order for Narcissus to love and recognize his mirror image (love in this particular instance precedes recognition since the process occurs on an unconscious level), he needs distance, a space in between. The love affair between Narcissus and his "illusive other" is only possible so long as this "Zwischenraum" is adhered to. It is within this space that Narcissus exists.

The mirror image of Siegmund Aarenhold is modelled after Wagner's hero. He sees himself not as he is but as he would like to be. So strong is this longing that he splits his ego in two: one half is himself, the other his mirror reflection, who is the romanticized hero. This type of love is unbound by outer limits; like a ball it bounces back and forth between reality and reflection. It gives itself and instantly receives itself again. The love object is the split self.

Many times before, Siegmund had observed himself in the huge, divided mirrors of his white bedroom. But tonight is different. This evening after his visit to the opera, he studies himself thoroughly, wanting to recognize himself as he really is. He no longer indulges in an act of pure vanity as before, but longs to know himself. He not only sees himself as he has done a thousand times, but recognizes himself and his own beauty - his face that is duplicated in the mirror. If Descartes said "I think, therefore I am," Narcissus said "I see, therefore I am." Self-recognition, since it occurs here on a rational level, precedes self-admiration. To recognize oneself often means to loathe oneself before one loves oneself.

Yet simultaneous with this gain of self-knowledge and of self-love comes the realization that his double, the other who is himself, cannot be approached. If Narcissus tries to unite with the lake, if he bends his face too

closely over the water, he dies. There is a drowning Narcissus in Thomas Mann's fiction: When Johannes Friedemann commits suicide, he puts only his head and upper torso under water. His body, that small, childlike and hunchbacked form of his, despised by the woman he loves, remains on shore.

There can be no fulfillment in self-love, only longing and curiosity. Narcissism is an eternal yearning for an ideal that exists only in the mind of the beholder. It is impossible of fulfillment, it would mean destruction. If Siegmund approaches the mirror, his image will recede and disappear. In order to contemplate himself, he needs to keep the *Zwischenraum* referred to above, the space between his living, breathing face, the eyes that dominate it and their reflection in the mirror, where love takes place.

Agatha, too, knows about that space: The last sentence of the book shows this:

"Oui, c'était un été admirable. Le souvenir en est plus fort que vous et moi ensemble devant lui..." (67)
(my emphasis)

"Yes, it was a beautiful summer. The remembrance of it is stronger than you and I together before it..."

Summer is represented here as if it were a prop, a painted scene, standing upright on a stage (Agatha is also a film script) before which Agatha and her brother long for each other and long for themselves in the other. They do not love each other within the space of summer - man cannot re-enter nature, cannot become one with nature except in

death - but only in the small, narrow space in front of it - the human space between the self in the other and the space between the face and the mirror.

After Siegmund has contemplated himself in the mirror, he walks over to a white bear rug stretched out in front of his bed and lies down on it. The floor is of course the space where Siegmund Aarenhold just saw his blond namesake lie down in Die Walküre. His position on the bearskin rug points to identification with and projection into the Wagnerian scene - as preparation for the mirroring of incest. That is where Sieglinde finds him. Thinking he does not feel well, she becomes instantly solicitous. "Gigi..was tust du?..Bist du krank?" (86) Sieglinde's words are precisely what Siegmund wanted to hear in order to "become" Wagner's hero, who, utterly exhausted, had found comfort while stretched out on the floor of Hunding's hut where his twin sister had taken care of him. Not only Wagner's pair of incestuous twins comes to mind but also Chateaubriand's René and his slightly older sister Amélie, who was the only woman René could love. Trying to define his incestuous longings which he is unable to put into words, René is only capable of using the noun "mother" and the adjective "tender" - "...c'était presque une mère, c'était quelque chose de plus tendre, hélas..." In the space between being almost a mother and something more (my emphasis) tender - in that space hovers the shadow of

incestuous sibling love, confirmed by a "hélas" in which accumulates all hopeless, bittersweet longing of brother for sister.

Sieglinde identifies herself so completely with her brother that she no longer possesses a will of her own; she has become a reflection, her brother's female double. Her question about the fate of her fiancé: "Beckerath, Gigi...was ist nun mit ihm?..." (91) after she has physically loved her brother, is purely rhetorical. Beckerath represents reality, the world outside, the one that surrounds her own world like the shell of a conch. Yet that real world no longer exists. Only she and her brother, her male reflection in the mirror, do.

When Sieglinde goes to her brother's room, she is already half undressed for the night. Her hair which has been pinned firmly to her head during the day, now falls in long cascades over her white peignoir. Sieglinde's white "Frisiermantel" contrasts with Marie-Anne Stretter's black peignoir that she wears in India Song. Like Sieglinde's, it is also left half open and shows "le blanc du corps nu." (31)

On her feet Sieglinde Aarenhold wears dainty slippers. As she bends over her brother with anxious concern since she is afraid he might be ill, her small breasts, "...deren Hautfarbe wie angerauchter Meerschaum war,..." (86) are revealed. Thomas Mann repeats here - in a mutated form -

his own rendition of Wagner's Sieglinde who leans over her brother so that "...ihre Brust aus dem wilden Fell ihm entgegenblühte." (59) When he compares the color of Sieglinde Aarenhold's bosom with "angerauchter Meerscham", he alludes to Aphrodite who was born from the froth of the sea. Mann reveals himself here as a master of eroticism; in this aspect he is superior to Duras, whose erotic descriptions are less detailed. When she speaks of the breasts of Agatha seen by her brother in her sunlit bedroom, she simply says: "Les seins sont blancs..." (49) and leaves the rest to the reader's imagination. Her strength lies elsewhere. Her style is different. Duras is more self-conscious than Mann when she describes incestuous scenes. She does not say: "Her breasts are white..." which one would expect, but "The breasts are white..." By not giving Agatha's breasts a possessive pronoun but a definite article instead, Duras again removes herself one step from the object of desire. Duras has learned well one of the important lessons in aesthetics which teaches that understatement is the mother of excitation. Understatement and evasiveness sometimes go to the extent of leaving out entire sentences: the well-known blanks of Duras - are part of the style that creates her unique art. Robbe-Grillet points out that if one changed only slightly the tenses of the verbs in l'Etranger, replaced the first person passé composé (whose rather unusual usage extends throughout the

entire story) into the familiar third person passé simple, Camus's universe would disappear; and nothing would be left of Flaubert if one changed the order of words in Madame Bovary.

To the image of the solicitous sister the erotic shapes of the lover are added. And as Siegmund looks intensely at his sister, his sexual longings are mixed with a strong dose of narcissism. He looks into his sister's face as if it were a mirror and once more recognizes himself in his sister's features:

"Er hielt, halb aufgerichtet, einen Arm um ihren Nacken geschlungen und sah sie an, betrachtete sie, wie er vorhin sich selbst betrachtet, ihre Augen und Schläfen, Stirn und Wangen...Du bist ganz wie ich," sagte er mit lahmen Lippen und schluckte hinunter, weil seine Kehle verdorrt war..." Alles ist... wie mit mir..." (87-88)

This multiple vision of narcissism is so strong that all reason becomes confused and consciousness is lost. The siblings move and speak as if they were caught in a bizarre dream world. "Es trachtete, sich in Logik zu kleiden, was er sagte, und kam doch gewagt und wunderlich, wie aus wirrem Traum." (88) The inevitable happens: self loves self.

Schlegel once said "Im Grunde sind wir Dichter alle Narzisse (Marcel Kunz, Narziss, 8)." This confessional statement, Kunz explains, applies to writers and poets who do not create the world in their works - as some writers do - but who search for themselves in their creations: art appears as a reflection. Novalis, one of the foremost proponents of Romanticism, belongs to the second category of

poets, those who search for themselves in their work, as opposed to the first category, those who recreate the world on a more objective level without being as concerned about the self as is the more narcissistically inclined writer. The French symbolists, especially Valéry, for whom Narcissus has become a favorite metaphor, are also part of the second category of writers - those with a narcissistic penchant. There is also Rilke, a contemporary of Mann, who uses one of Mann's motifs, that of the open hand. At the end of the Seventh Duineser Elegie, Rilke describes this hand:

"...Wie ein gestreckter
Arm ist mein Rufen. Und seine zum Greifen
oben offene Hand bleibt vor dir
offen, wie Abwehr und Warnung,
Unfaßlicher, weitauf." (DE VII 89-93) (101)

Similar to Thomas Mann's Siegmund and Sieglinde, where incest is precipitated by self-recognition in the mirror, Agatha recognizes herself and her brother in a mirror just before the siblings become conscious of their mutual desire. When Agatha was fifteen and her brother nineteen, they stumbled upon an empty mansion whose doors were all left open with no one there.

In a large salon facing the Loire Agatha discovers a black piano and a mirror. The river, also a mirror, is huge and does not move. The Loire is close to the sea and filled with islands that seem to float on the tranquil, mirrorlike

surface of the water. Looking in the mirror, Agatha sees herself and her brother, who plays the piano for her while she listens and watches both of their reflections in the mirror. They are alone. They have almost never been by themselves before. "Nous avions jusque-là rarement été seuls, c'était une des première fois (27)." Her brother plays only for his sister.

"J'étais dans un grand salon face au fleuve et j'ai entendu vos doigts faire cette musique...Je me voyais dans une glace en train d'écouter mon frère jouer pour moi seule au monde et je lui ai donné toute la musique à jamais et je me suis vue emportée dans le bonheur de lui ressembler tant qu'il en était de nos vies comme coulait ce fleuve ensemble, là, dans la glace, oui, c'était ca... et puis ensuite une brûlure du corps s'est montrée à moi. (temps) J'ai perdu la connaissance de vivre pendant quelques secondes." (temps) (30)

For what seems to be a long time Agatha intently observes her brother in the mirror. She finds him very handsome. "Vous étiez très beau..." (27) His playing the piano only for her stirs in her the wish to give him the most beautiful thing in the world: music. Wishes spoken into a mirror become instantly fulfilled. "...je lui ai donné toute la musique à jamais... (30)" Music represents here the gift of herself - who has just discovered her identity in that of her brother. The realization that she and her brother are the same, are united in the fluid sounds of music with which the mirror is filled, - as if music and mirror were trying to link with the river outside - makes Agatha intensely happy. "...et je me suis vu emportée dans

le bonheur de lui ressembler tant..." (30) Her happiness is so great that she loses herself in it. Music, her brother at the piano and her own reflection in the mirror - as she watches her brother - melt into one flowing substance in which any conscious thought, any distinction between self and an exterior surrounding becomes lost - as it had between Siegmund and Sieglinde Aarenhold. Yet where Siegmund still tries to express his loss in a dream world, in the unconscious, with words that no longer make sense but are instantly understood by Sieglinde -

"Ihr klang es nicht fremd, nicht sonderbar. Sie schämte sich nicht, ihn so Ungefeiltes, so Trübe-Verworrenes reden zu hören." (88) -

Agatha is mute. Her muteness, however, is filled with a waltz by Brahms and a visual metamorphosis that changes her brother and herself into the river outside - which seems now to flow magically through the mirror.

"...qu'il en était de nos vies comme coulait ce fleuve ensemble, là, dans la glace,..." (30)

A river is not self-contained since it flows away into the sea. Its movement toward the sea emphasizes the ephemeral state of a human being. But the Loire in front of the building does not flow. Large and lake-like it lies there immobile, a perfect symbol of mirror and music.

When Agatha discovers with the help of the mirror that she is like her brother and that she loves herself in him, she is so overwhelmed by her emotion - which seems to set her body on fire - that she faints.

"...une brûlure du corps s'est montrée à moi. (temps)
J'ai perdu la connaissance de vivre pendant quelques
secondes." (30)

Duras's most complete and most tragic image of narcissism does not occur in Agatha, but in Le Vice-consul and India Song. The vice-consul's self-imprisonment is so terrible that he goes out at night and shoots at lepers and at himself in the mirrors of his home.

"Il tirait la nuit sur les jardins de Shalimar...Vous le savez...? Mais aussi bien des balles ont été trouvées dans les glaces de sa résidence à Lahore..." (63)

The source of self-love - the mirror which reflects the flow of his own lightness, of his beauty - is shattered by him. Being a virgin, he constantly searches and at the same time flees Anne-Marie Stretter, the French abassador's wife, who gives herself to anyone who wants her. "Elle est à qui veut d'elle (46, India Song)." Yet, strangely, Anne-Marie's erotic generosity does not include the vice-consul. Cruelly, sadistically, she drives him away. Alone, far from water, the feminine element, and mirror, the symbol of self-love, he becomes mad.

To conclude: The writer, the artist, is by definition of his calling a mirror which he holds up to society. He is Narcissus reincarnate. The sum total of a people.

In the work of a major writer a society is often mirrored. This could certianly be said of Thomas Mann's work, in which the dark fate of Germany during sixty years of her

most turbulent history is mirrored. Even during his long exile in the United States Mann never lost track of Germany's destiny. Even though he hated Hitler and the Nazis, he remained loyal to the German people.

With Marguerite Duras the mirror image she traces becomes more complex since she was born and raised in Indochina as the daughter of French parents and at one point in her life spoke Vietnamese better than French. Mann was not tempted to portray the United States in his work. There is but one American character in work, in the late novella Die Betrogene. It is the twenty-four-year-old Ken Keaton, the likeable, well-built, naive lover of the aging Roaslie von Tümmeler, who mistakes symptoms of cancer for a symbol of rejuvenation. But Duras mirrors the country of her youth - Indochina - in her novels and films. One thinks particularly of Un passage contre le Pacifique, Le vice-consul, India Song and La femme du Gange. Nor does she forget France of which La Douleur mirrors the brutalities of the Second World War in images that are unmistakably hers.

Chapter 3

Music, Passion and Murder:

Doktor Faustus, Wälsungenblut, Agatha and Nathalie Granger

Music plays a dominant role in Mann's work. The only way I was able to approach it was by isolating its importance and by looking at it from a rather general level at first without referring right away to detailed erotic occurrences. This holds true also for comparisons with the works of Duras, in which music is often crucial as well.

In Doktor Faustus and Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus - Roman eines Romans in which Mann uses and explains Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone-technique. Other works show the even more important, life-long influence that Richard Wagner had on Mann's thoughts and writings. Wälsungenblut and Tristan come to mind first when one thinks of Wagner. But the influence of music with or without reference to a specific composer can also be seen in Der kleine Herr Friedemann (1897) and Tonio Kröger (1903) - e.g. the ball given at the small, white hotel at the Danish sea-shore near Kopenhagen where Tonio Kröger spots Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm once more. Tonio is again attracted by the young couple, both of whom embody life and love for the lonely writer, who longs for it in vain. As Tonio stands at the entrance of the ballroom and watches the festively attired crowd without being able to mingle with it, he reminds one

of another social outcast, the Vice-consul of Calcutta, who attends a diplomatic soirée at the French Embassy. Both men are viewed with unfriendly curiosity, "... aus hübschen, erhitzten Gesichtern trafen ihn fremde und forschende Blicke; aber er behauptete trotzdem seinen Platz." (332) Both men, of whom Tonio Kröger is the slyer, are unable to obtain the woman they desire - Ingeborg Holm and Anne-Marie Stretter -, and both men turn their backs on other women, who are willing enough to be in their company.

In Der Tod in Venedig (1912), Gustav von Aschenbach is given the facial traits of Gustav Mahler. Richard Wagner is referred to in another early novella, Die Hungernden (1903), in which Detlev attends a fashionable event during which Wagner's Tristan music is parodied:

"Vier oder fünf Personen in Bauernkostüm parodierten auf Klarinetten und näselnden Streichinstrumenten das chromatische Ringen der Tristanmusik..." (264)

Music is the background for Ein Glück (1904) in which Baroness Anna witnesses during a ball the betrayal of her husband and the unexpected brief tenderness of her rival.

In Luischen (1900) Amra Jacoby's lover, Alfred Lätner, is the charming, mediocre composer whose music Amra's oversized husband, Christian, attempts to sing while dressed as a chanteuse - and dies instead.

Music in Mann's work is a superior force. Almost everything that he wrote is somehow connected with it, and this apart from his essays on Richard Wagner or the music,

themes and motifs that more or less powerfully underscore his entire oeuvre. Buddenbrooks and the early stories abound with 'performing' characters: Hanno Buddenbrook and Gerda von Rinnlingen at the piano, Tonio Kröger, Johannes Friedemann and Herr von Throta, Gerda Buddenbrook's admirer, all of whom play the violin. Von Throta also plays the piano, flute, violoncello and the viola. His musical talents seduce Gerda Buddenbrook and drive her husband, Thomas, who works in his office directly below the music room, from where he listens to the passionate storm of music performed above his head, half mad with jealousy. More than the music, the nervous Thomas Buddenbrook hates the silences that follow when the music stops.

Music is a constant presence, even when it is virtually "silent". Similar to an underground river - invisible but almost always audible - it runs through Mann's writing until it crystallizes in the figure of Adrian Leverkühn, a modern Faust whom Mann could not create without conceiving of him as a character of specific musical proportions. Mann had to overcome a considerable number of technical problems connected with theories of music in Doktor Faustus, not to mention the professional jealousy of Arnold Schoenberg, who accused Mann of having appropriated his twelve-tone-technique without giving him credit for it. In order to pacify Schoenberg, Thomas Mann added an apology at the end of Doktor Faustus in which he gives the composer

full credit as the inventor of the twelve-tone-technique whose theory Mann used in his Faust novel.²⁸

Adrian Leverkühn explains at the wedding²⁹ of his sister, Ursula, - while taking a walk with Serenus Zeiblom - the twelve-tone-technique:

"...Man müßte von hier aus weitergehen und aus den zwölf Stufen des temperierten Halbton-Alphabets größere Wörter bilden, Wörter von zwölf Buchstaben, bestimmte Kombinationen und Interrelationen der zwölf Halbtöne, Reihenbildungen, aus denen das Stück, der einzelne Satz oder ein ganzes mehrsätziges Werk strikt abgeleitet werden müßte. Jeder Ton der gesamten Komposition, melodisch und harmonisch, müßte sich über seine Beziehung zu dieser vorbestimmten Grundreihe auszuweisen haben. Keiner dürfte wiederkehren, ehe alle anderen erschienen sind...." (192)

By transposing music, as far as this is possible, into the art of writing, Thomas Mann did make use of Schoenberg's technique; but in the writer's hands, Schoenberg's invention takes on a quite different coloring and character. For example, Schoenberg's twelve-tone-technique has little to do

²⁸*"Es scheint nicht überflüssig, den Leser zu verständigen, daß die im 22. Kapitel dargestellte Kompositionsart, Zwölfton- oder Reihentechnik genannt, in Wahrheit das geistige Eigentum eines zeitgenössischen Komponisten und Theoretikers, Arnold Schoenbergs, ist und von mir in bestimmtem ideellem Zusammenhang auf eine frei erfundene Musikerpersönlichkeit, den tragischen Helden meines Romans, übertragen wurde. Überhaupt sind die musiktheoretischen Teile des Buches in manchen Einzelheiten der Schoenberg'schen Harmonielehre verpflichtet." Thomas Mann, (511)

²⁹*Zeitblom calls this wedding "Opfer der Magdschaft (187)" and speaks of Ursula's wedding gown as "das weiße Sterbekleid der Jungfräulichkeit" and "die atlasnen Totenschuhe (187)". This is another example of Mann's use of the combination of love/death, a theme he works with also in Tristan, Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Der Tod in Venedig, Tobias Mindernickel, Luischen, Die vertauschten Köpfe, Die Betrogene and others.

with the conception of Mann's devil's pact and black magic - in spite of the composer's objections, fed by vanity, after the publication of Doktor Faustus.

The presentation of the twelve-tone technique in Doktor Faustus, which takes the form of a critical dialogue, is not based on Schoenberg but on the analytical work of Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno, a well recognized philosopher and composer, who in 1941 was a neighbor of the Manns in Los Angeles:

"Die Darstellung der Reihen-Musik und ihre in Dialog aufgelöste Kritik, wie das XXII. Faustus-Kapitel sie bietet, gründet sich ganz und gar auf Adorno'sche Analysen,..." (45, Die Entstehung)

Adorno had shown a manuscript to Mann that dealt with Schoenberg's school and the twelve-tone-technique. While Adorno's writing left no doubt about Schoenberg's importance, it also criticized with perspicacity and deep penetration Schoenberg's system:

"...indem sie in einem äußerst konzisen, ja überschärften, an Nietzsche und mehr noch an Karl Kraus geschulften Stil das Verhängnis erörtert, das die objektiv notwendige konstruktive Erhellung der Musik aus ebenso objektiven Gründen, gleichsam über den Kopf des Künstlers hinweg, in ein Finsteres, Mythologisches zurückschlagen läßt." (45, Die Entstehung).

Schoenberg, as Mann mentions later in Die Entstehung, did not take Adorno's criticism lightly and kept him at a respectful distance.

Mann speaks several times of his difficulties concerning the technical parts of music in his Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus-Roman eines Romans, which is

not only about music and Adrian Leverkühn - whose complex life resembles that of Nietzsche³⁰ - but about World War II as well. Perhaps the novel is primarily an "Epoche-Roman;". Thomas Mann himself calls it a "Seelen- und Epochengemälde" (45, Die Entstehung)

Adrian Leverkühn is a metaphor of the lure that music left early on the writer's psyche. It was of course Wagner, not Schoenberg, who influenced Mann's musical sense the most. Wagner und unsere Zeit, a collection of essays, reflections and letters, makes Mann's lifelong enthusiasm for Wagner quite clear. He was particularly fond of Lohengrin. On November 15, 1927, when Mann was fifty-two-years old, he writes:

"Den 'Lohengrin' lernte ich am ehesten kennen, habe ihn unzählige Male gehört und weiß ihn nach Wort und Musik noch heute fast auswendig." (53, Wagner und unsere Zeit)

In his essay "Erinnerungen an das Stadt-Theater", written in 1930, he repeats himself by saying: "...und noch heute weiß ich aus jener Zeit den 'Lohengrin' so gut wie auswendig. (59, Wagner)". In another brief essay "Wagner und unsere Zeit", written in 1931, that gave the collection of contemplations its title, Mann not only lists Wagner as a

³⁰*Like Nietzsche, Adrian Leverkuehn's life ends in madness caused by syphilis during a one-time visit to a brothel. Leverkuehn, like Nietzsche, led a life of abstinence.

European phenomenon³¹ but places him next to Bismarck, both of whom he sees as a high point of the romantic hegemony that symbolizes the German mind:

"Wagner ist, als künstlerische Potenz genommen, etwas nahezu Beispielloses, wahrscheinlich das größte Talent aller Kunstgeschichte. Wo ist zum zweitenmal eine solche Vereinigung von Größe und Raffinement, von Sinnigkeit und sublimer Verderbtheit, von Popularität und Teufelsartistik? Er bleibt das Paradigma welterobernden Künstlertums, und Europa erlag seinem Können, genau wie es der Staatskunst Bismarcks erlag. Sie wußten nicht viel voneinander, aber zusammen bilden sie den Höhepunkt einer romantischen Hegemonie des deutschen Geistes." (60, Wagner und unsere Zeit)

At the age of seventy-four, Mann reconfirms his undiminished but now selective love for Wagner that started when he was an adolescent. On December 6, 1949, he writes to Emil Preetorius:

"...den ganzen 'Tristan' könnte ich nicht mehr aushalten. Wohl aber den 'Lohengrin', dessen Vorspiel vielleicht das Wunderbarste ist, was er überhaupt geschrieben hat, und den ich in seiner blau-silbernen Schönheit wohl immer noch am innigsten liebe - es ist eine echte, bleibende, bei jedem Kontakt sich erneuernde Jugendliebe." (168-169, Wagner und unsere Zeit)

³¹*In his perhaps best known, long essay on Wagner "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner" published by Alfred Knopf in 1937, Mann again pays tribute to the meaning of Wagner: "Richard Wagner stands before my eyes suffering and great as that nineteenth century whose complete expression he is. His face scored through and through with all the century's impulsive force: so I see that face. And I can scarcely distinguish which I love the best: his work, so magnificently equivocal, and compelling - as much so as any work of art; or his century, during most of which he lived his restless, harassed, tormented, possessed, miscomprehended life, which closed in a glamour of world fame." (101, "The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner")

Mann was already in his seventies when he created his "Tonsetzer", his hard-earned symbol of music in Doktor Faustus that goes beyond man as a historic figure into the still largely unexplored and primitive states of man - man before culture and civilization, man still closer to arboreal anthropoids than more advanced primates..

"Die Musik ist in jedem Augenblicke 'imstande, von vorn zu beginnen, aus dem Nichts, bar jeder Kenntnis ihrer schon durchlaufenen Kulturgeschichte, des durch die Jahrhunderte Errungenen.' Daher ihre dauernde Beziehung zum Urfrühen, ihre beständige Bereitschaft zur Primitivität." (Peter Altenberg, Die Romane Thomas Manns, 235)

This readiness for the primitive origin of man in conjunction with music is sometimes expressed in the exceptional erotic longings that certain characters of Mann and Duras display.

In Ein Glück, a brief short story (Mann called it a "study") written between Fiorenza, Wälsungenblut and Königliche Hoheit, Anna, a young, sensitive woman is married to Baron Harry, an officer and womanizer. During a festive evening at the officer's club, amidst laughter and dancing, Emmy, a pretty gypsy singer suddenly displays an open affection for Anna. Anna, who had suffered all night pangs of jealousy while her husband danced and flirted outrageously with the little singer, discovers that she too longs for Emmy, feels a desire that is deeper than that of her husband's: "Und plötzlich fühlte sie, daß ihre eigene Sehnsucht nach der kleinen "Schwalbe" heißer und tiefer war

als Harry's." (359) Anna is intrigued by the singer's sensual, if somewhat common, beauty. And when the singer demonstrates publicly a tender attention for Anna by kissing her hand, Anna experiences a brief happiness - ein Glück - that her husband's blunt, phallic sexuality has withheld from her.

Here is a parallel to Duras's Maria and Claire in Dix heures et demie du soir en été (1960). Maria, mother and wife of Pierre, becomes enticed by Claire, their travel companion on a vacation trip through Spain, and while Pierre attempts to start an affair with Claire, Maria secretly longs for Claire's beauty and feminine grace as well. Just as with Baroness Anna, however, this hidden longing is never fulfilled. Mann ends his short story quite abruptly rather than have Anna go on day-dreaming about the singer. Sexual dreams of any lesbian nature remain in Anna's case almost completely unconscious while Maria transforms her homosexual drive for Claire into eroticism that is expressed in a highly voyeuristic imagination.

That music also plays a major role in the work of Duras, is shown in the early appearance of a black piano with its successive, ghostly recurrences in most of her writings - starting with Un barrage contre le Pacifique

(1950), where the mad mother of Suzanne and Joseph had earned their living by playing the piano for ten years at Eden Cinema. Moreover, three of her works have a musical title: the novel, Moderato Cantabile (1958), the film, India Song (1973), and the play La Musica (1965). In 1985, she also wrote a short novel called La Musica deuxième.

India Song is the film version of Le Vice-consul in which Anne-Marie Stretter possesses the same strange power of life and death over one man as does Gerda von Rinnlingen, who mortally entices Johannes Friedemann. Both Anne-Marie Stretter and Gerda von Rinnlingen, are sensitive toward music and play the piano with expertise. In Anne-Marie Stretter's case, music is played with professional proficiency since she was a concert pianist, trained in Venice, before she married the French Ambassador of Calcutta.

Moderato Cantabile begins with a small boy who - under the stern eyes of his teacher, simply called "la dame" - takes a music lesson during which he practices a sonata by Diabelli. The lesson, attended by the boy's attractive, mysterious mother, Anne Desbaresdes, is interrupted by a murder. The cry of the victim - a young woman - penetrates through the open window. Music, sexual violence and murder are strangely connected.

The theme of music, death and love rather than sexual violence between a man and a woman is also present in

Tristan (1903).³² Detlev Spinell, the writer who lives in a sanatorium for its aesthetic appeal, belongs to a totally different class from Chauvin's, the laborer, and his desire is not expressed on a physical but an artistic level. The two women, however, Gabriele Klöterjahn and Anne Desbaresdes, share the same social background, the same disinterest in their husbands, the same ambiguous feelings about their sons and both women live life at its edge. Surrounded by an enigma that in Gabriele manifests itself in tuberculosis, they observe life rather than participate in it. Music and passion play vital roles in their inner landscapes and lead them to their deaths - in Gabriele's case to a physical, in Anne's to a simulated one. Anne desires to be murdered by Chauvin in the same way that the unknown woman died at the beginning of the novel. Inadvertently, Anne had watched a woman being killed and caressed by her lover. This act of sadism carried to its extreme conclusion takes place at sunset in front of a house near the sea where Anne's ten-year-old son tries to learn his sonatina under the admiring eyes of his mother and the impatient ones of his piano teacher. The image of the murder drives Anne half-insane throughout the better part of

³²*Something of the daemonic power inherent in music and explored in consistent intervals in Doktor Faustus, where the creation of music has the seal of the devil's pact which Adrian Leverkühn signed, can be felt in Tristan as well. The devil's pact takes the form of a rental contract for eighteen years between Frau Schweigestill and Adrian.

the novel and involves her in an erotic love affair with Chauvin. Desire remains within the physical limits of a light kiss.

Gabriele embodies that which is non-physical, is mysteriously veiled, the substance that slips away between one's fingers. She symbolizes the denial of empirical experience and embodies inaccessibility; she also incorporates that which does not want to know anything. She is the female counterpart of Chopin, in Adrian Leverkühn's description of him:

"...Ich liebe das Engelhafte seiner Gestalt, das an Shelley erinnert, das eigentümlich und sehr geheimnisvoll Verschleierte, Unzulassende, Sichentziehende, Abenteuerlose seines Daseins, das Nichts-wissen-Wollen, das Ablehnen stofflicher Erfahrung, die sublimale Inzucht seiner phantastisch delikaten und verführerischen Kunst." (143-144, Doktor Faustus.)

Burdened with her boisterous husband's unfitting name Klötterjahn, Gabriele dies because she gives in to Detlev Spinell's ardent begging that she play the piano, an activity her physician had strongly forbidden because of her advanced consumption. Detlev Spinell "murders" Gabriele as surely as the unknown killer in Moderato cantabile assassinates the woman he loves. Detlev desires Gabriele, who is the wife of another man. His desire is not physical, however, even though Gabriele is beautiful. But her beauty belongs to the realm of the aesthetic, synonymous with death, where Detlev lives too. He bitterly resents the fact that against her father's wishes, Gabriele became the wife

of the coarse industrialist Klöterjahn, who waylays chambermaids in the dark hallways of the sanatorium. Klöterjahn resembles Permaneder, Tony Buddenbrook's second husband. Both men with their bursting health and insensitivity represent life, the antagonist of art. Detlev sees Gabriele's soul desecrated by her marriage and by giving birth to a healthy baby, the spitting image of its father. He wants Gabriele - "...diese Todesschönheit" (253) - dead rather than living a life that in his eyes is shameful and humiliating: "...Sie erniedrigen die müde, scheue und in erhabener Unbrauchbarkeit blühende Schönheit des Todes in den Dienst des allgemeinen Alltags..." (254)³³, Detlev writes to Klöterjahn, admitting his hatred of the husband and his deferential love for his wife that finds its physical expression only once, when he falls on his knees after Gabriele has finished playing Wagner's "Liebestod". The genuflection evokes among other things the image of a medieval knight taking leave of his lady to whom he has devoted his life.

Like Anne-Marie Stretter in Le vice-consul and India Song, Gabriele Klöterjahn is an accomplished pianist. Mann

³³*The influence of August von Platen's (1796-1835) sonnet "Tristan" that starts with "Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen, ist dem Tode schon anheimgegeben..." is strongly felt here in Mann's writing. See Erich Heller's Thomas Mann. Der ironische Deutsche, page 113, 1970. (There is also a shorter English version of Heller's work, published in London in 1958 under the title The Ironic German. A study of Thomas Mann).

in Tristan and Duras in Le Vice-consul are using the Eros/Thanatos motif (Liebestod) that is influential in Romanticism.

There is no refinement in Chauvin's ardent pursuit of Anne Desbaresdes, the wife of his superior. He desires her strictly on a physical level; he has watched her house for many months before they meet accidentally after the street murder of the unknown woman. Even though he is an uneducated laborer, he is less coarse than Klöterjahn and understands immediately what Anne wants from him: to die by his hands. The symbolic murder takes place in the same bistro where they first met. The ritual of the murder is carried out while sitting at a table where the lovers touch hands and exchange a kiss:

"Leurs lèvres restèrent l'une sur l'autre, posées, afin que ce fût fait et suivant le même rite mortuaire que leurs mains, un instant avant, froides et tremblantes. Ce fut fait." (113)

More important than the murderous kiss they exchange in public under the curious gaze of a gathering of small town people, who perceive Anne as an adulteress, are the words which are exchanged between the would-be murderer and his willing victim: "Je voudrais que vous soyez morte, dit Chauvin. C'est fait, dit Anne Desbaresdes". (114) With those words the novel quickly comes to its end as if a real murder had been committed. Both murders, the real one in the beginning and the simulated one at the end, occur at sunset and give the novel its circular shape.

As Anne leaves the pub, its owner turns up the radio. One is not told whether it is music that is played so loudly that: "...quelques hommes se plainquirent qu'elle fût trop forte à leur gré". (115)

Music, sexual violence and murder also play a major role in Dix heures et demie du soir en été a novel in which Rodrigo Paestra murders his young wife from Madrid and her lover. Maria, a hotel guest on vacation, tries to save the murderer who is hiding during a rainstorm at night on the rooftop of a house in a small Spanish village. At 1:00 am in the morning Maria stands on a balcony of her overcrowded hotel, eleven meters from the rooftop across the street on which the dark, motionless shadow of Rodrigo Paestra merges with the chimney. Maria, whose husband Pierre is in love with Claire, their pretty travel companion whom Maria desires too, is unable to sleep.

As pointed out above, Maria's desire for Claire remains, like that of Baroness Anna, on an aesthetic level. In Maria's case strong voyeuristic impulses are balanced by an unrequited longing for tenderness. In Anna's instance physical demonstrations of lesbianism find their expression in a hand-kiss, the momentary imprint of a warm, female face and mouth upon another female hand. This brief encounter between the psyche and the physical produces a fleeting impression of intoxication and happiness in Anna, whose mind Mann explores rather than Emmy's.

The importance of a kiss, as opposed to a hand-kiss, exchanged on a heterosexual level - versus a homoerotic one - is considered by Thomas Mann in his novel Lotte in Weimar. There Goethe looks upon a kiss as the best thing that love has to offer. The kiss, Mann reflects, is a poem to love and sensually Platonic. It stands mid-way between a mental beginning and a sexual ending. It occurs in a higher sphere than the one of intercourse because it is executed with the more refined organs of breath and speech. A kiss is intellectual because it is highly individual and distinguishing. It tells the lover that only he is loved, whereas intercourse is anonymous, animal-like, gives no choice, and is covered by night. A kiss is happiness, intercourse voluptuousness. It is the difference between life and art: to beget children is not art, the kiss is:

"Ist die Liebe das Beste im Leben, so in der Lieb das Beste der Kuß, - Poesie der Liebe, Siegel der Inbrunst, sinnlich platonisch, Mitte des Sakraments zwischen geistlichem Anfang und fleischlichem End, süße Handlung, vollzogen in höherer Sphäre als das da, und mit reinern Organen des Hauchs und der Rede, - geistig, weil noch individuell und doch unterscheidend,... sagt ihm dein Kuß: Dich lieb und mein ich, dich, holde Gotteinzelnheit, ausdrücklich in aller Schöpfung dich, - da das Zeugen anonym-creatürlich im Grund ohne Wahl, und Nacht bedeckts. Kuß ist Glück, Zeugung Wollust,... Auch ists der Unterschied von Kunst und Leben,...das Kindermachen ist nicht Sache der Poesie, des geistigen Kusses auf die Himbeerlippen der Welt..., ist..." (212, Lotte in Weimar)

In Dix heures et demie du soir en été Maria is not only intrigued by Claire but also by Rodrigo, a murderer whom she pursues during a sleepless night. Wide awake, and with the

strong urge of an alcoholic to have a drink, Maria calls out to Rodrigo, who clings to a chimney above her head. Knowing that at sunrise the murderer will be captured and killed, Maria tries hard to speak with Rodrigo. But he gives no sign of life. Maria's pleading, interrupted by the patrolling police, becomes more frantic. Her heart starts to beat violently and she perspires. After the police pass without noticing anything, she calls Rodrigo again in a subdued voice. Still the dark figure on the roof does not move. Then Maria starts to sing. Softly, she sings a melody popular that summer and familiar to the murderer, who must have danced with his wife to it:

"Maria, le corps hors du balcon, se met à chanter.
Très bas. Un air de cet été-là, qu'il doit connaître,
qu'il a dû danser avec sa femme les soirs de bal."
(72-73, Dix heures et demie)

There is little doubt that Rodrigo has an erotic attraction for Maria because he is a murderer. Georges Bataille, who is strongly influenced by de Sade, offers a perfect example of this strange connection:

"...and there is not a libertine some little way gone in vice, who does not know what a hold murder has on the senses..." (11, Erotism)

Bataille not only agrees with de Sade but makes the linkage between death and sexual excitement even clearer:

"The sight or thought of murder can give rise to a desire for sexual enjoyment, to the neurotic at any rate. We cannot [however] just pretend that a state of neurosis is the cause of this connection. I personally believe that there is a truth revealed in de Sade's paradox. This truth extends far beyond the confines of vice; I believe that it may even be the basis of our

images of life and death. I believe, in fact, that we cannot reflect on existence without reference to this truth. As often as not, it seems to be assumed that man has his being independently of his passions. I affirm, on the other hand, that we must never imagine existence except in terms of these passions." (11-12, Erotism, translated by Mary Dalwood)

The connection between violence and sexual enjoyment is also made by Shusaku Endo. In his novel Scandal he makes the point that the pleasure of love-making between Toshio, an intellectual and his wife, called Madame Naruse, is heightened by images of atrocities that Japanese soldiers, including Toshio, committed while fighting in China during the forties. The gentleness and cruelty that live side by side in Toshio's soul, his hidden, secret crimes, increase sexual fulfillment between himself and his wife and makes her a potential alley in violence:

"The duality, the complexity that resided within him, strengthened my attachment to him. No, I never once had the slightest urge to criticize or scorn him. I never thought of him as repulsive. If I had been a man and been sent off to war as he was, I'm sure I would have done the same thing." (131-132, Scandal)

When Maria in Dix heures et demie en été is singing to the murderer on the roof-top, she becomes the mermaid who lures the man she desires into her airless domain. In this sense, music, eroticism and murder transcend any cultural and moral confines and seem to remember their link with the origin of man and with primordial ferocity.

In 1973 Le Vice-consul (1966) was made into a film by Duras, who called it India Song. In it music takes the form of a ball at the French Embassy during which the fate of its

male protagonist is decided. Music also plays a strong, if only symbolic, role in the strange songs of a bald, mad beggar woman from Cambodia who haunts the streets of Calcutta and daily lingers outside the garden of the French Embassy, where she and other beggars wait to be fed.

In Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras, the author associates music with the forest and the feelings of fear that she experiences with both of them. Fears are evoked by losing a sense, a dimension of time that man is as yet unable to conceive. Music thrusts her forward into an unknowable future. In its ultimate meaning the future signifies death - one's own and that of loved ones. Hence her fear.

"C'est lié, la forêt et la musique, quelque part. Quand j'ai peur de la forêt, j'ai peur de moi, bien sûr, voyez-vous, j'ai peur de moi depuis la puberté, n'est-ce pas. Dans la forêt avant la puberté, je n'avais pas peur. Et la musique m'épouvante aussi. Je pense qu'il y a dans la musique un accomplissement, un temps que nous ne pouvons pas actuellement recevoir. Il y a une sorte d'annonciation dans la musique d'un temps à venir ou on pourra l'entendre. La musique, ça me... enfin, ça me bouleverse et je ne peux pas l'écouter, alors que je pouvais quand j'étais jeune, quand j'étais ignorante, encore, et naïve, je pouvais écouter de la musique. Maintenant, ça m'est très difficile d'en entendre sans être...enfin bouleversée... Bien sûr, on ne peut pas parler de la musique, je ne peux pas vous parler de la musique. Elle ne fera plus peur à un moment donné. Pour le moment elle fait peur, comme le futur fait peur..."
(28-29)

When Duras was young and ignorant she enjoyed listening to music. As a mature adult, however, music disturbs her. It frightens her the same way the future can become threatening. Or an unknowable past.

In Agatha, as will be shown directly, music and fear of abandonment - brother and sister are left without supervision by the mother - are major instruments of seduction in the sibling incest, which is the focal point of this novel.

Mann and Duras both played musical instruments, Mann the violin and Duras the piano. In her long interview with Michelle Porte, Duras talks with modesty and in her typically understated manner about her own piano-playing, as well as her son's and her husband's:

"Je ne joue pas, moi, très peu, mais mon fils joue un peu, son père joue beaucoup ..." (39)

She also speaks about the profound and controversial effect music has on her state of mind - its double function of causing pain, delight, bewilderment and despair.

"...c'est toujours une douleur d'entendre bien jouer, pour moi; quand les gens jouent très bien, je suis à la fois enchantée, éblouie et au désespoir." (39, Les Lieux)

It appears as if in the midst of the beauty she conceives there is a subterranean growl, rumbling sounds that come from nowhere, or rather from all around her. She has no control over these impressions which apparently surround her when she writes.

As has been indicated, Mann's Wälsungenblut is a skillfully executed parody of Wagner's Die Walküre. Even the sibling incest that Sieglinde and Siegmund commit takes place in the shadow of the opera. It is inspired,

influenced and encouraged by it. Or seen from a slightly different angle: incest is expressed in music and is experienced on account of it. Everything that cannot be put into words about such an act is told with music. This "incestuous" music is visualized as a river. Not the Loire that becomes one of the symbols of narcissistic incest in Agatha, but a river without a name, encompassing all rivers.

"Eine Minute verging, ausgefüllt von dem singenden, sagenden, kündenden Fluß der Musik, die zu den Füßen der Ereignisse ihre Flut dahinwälzte..." (59)

During the long minute that passes, Wagner's Siegmund has collapsed from fatigue and Sieglinde enters the scene. Not a word is "said" or sung about their fateful encounter, yet the music tells all.

When Wagner's Sieglinde quenches her brother's thirst with a drink and the sight of her alabaster-colored bosom, it is the music that speaks pathetically of refreshment and kindness. "Rührend sprach die Musik von Labsal und kühler Wohltat." (59) As brother and sister look at each other with that first delight, that first recognition of what their emotion signifies, they are mute, as mute as Agatha is when she experiences her desire for her brother while first playing and then listening to a waltz by Brahms.

In Die Walküre the significant moment of incestuous awakening is caught by a melody below Siegmund and Sieglinde. And even though one knows that "below" here

simply means the orchestra pit, it also evokes the below, the beyond of a dark forgotten past that existed before culture and civilization but whose primitive habits are now recapitulated by music.

"Dann betrachteten sie einander mit einem ersten Entzücken, einem ersten, dunklen Erkennen, schweigend dem Augenblick hingegeben, der unten als tiefer, ziehender Sang ertönte." (59)

Siegmund, having drunk the mead Sieglinde offered him, tries to leave but she prevents it by confessing her own misfortune. Once more it is not Sieglinde who tells her brother of her suffering, but the music that speaks darkly below them on her behalf.

"Sie rief ihn und da er nicht hörte, ließ sie sich... das Geständnis ihres eigenen Unheils entfahren. Er stand. Sie senkte die Augen. Zu ihren Füßen sprach es dunkel erzählend von Leid, das beide verband. Er blieb." (60)

Wagner's stage becomes a mirror with which the nineteen-year-old Aarenhold siblings identify themselves to such a degree that they seem to fall into deep, hollow spaces - those empty spaces that exist within their young selves. Especially Siegmund becomes aware that his life has little meaning. It is soft, witty, spoiled and filled with negations, with luxury and contradictions, but his life lacks experience and feelings. He becomes intensely aware of a vague longing which he cannot place nor understand, but he clearly sees that love and distress, peril and danger are necessary not only for a full life, but also for art.

"...sah ihre Liebe und Not und fühlte, daß so das Leben sein

müße, um schöpferisch zu sein." (74) The disparity between life and art and the Nietzschean solution that affirms life, a philosophical perspective adopted by Mann in his early works, - most noticeably perhaps in Tonio Kröger's famous dispute with Lisaweta Iwanowna - does not exist here. Siegmund Aarenhold is convinced that art simply follows a life filled with peril and love.

When Agatha and her brother discover an abandoned hotel that was once a castle and then became a "maison de rendez-vous" (25), their instinctive impulse is to restore life to the building by playing on an open piano they found in an empty room. A closer look however reveals that performing music in the forsaken mansion is most of all a metaphor for the incestuous emotion they experience for the first time in all its intensity. It is a feeling so overpowering that they can express it only through music. The abandoned castle can be seen as a symbol for what Anais Nin's calls the "House of Incest".

The piano is placed between two parallel doors facing the Loire. The French stream recalls a river in Indochina where Duras and her younger brother roamed as children. In her semi-autobiographical work, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras (1977), written in collaboration with Michelle Porte, Duras talks about some experiences of her early childhood during which she and her brother were left mostly to themselves. Their mother, mad from grief, despair and utter

poverty, could at one point no longer take care of them. For days on end the little girl and her brother did not return home but lived in the forest and rivers of Indochina, speaking far more Vietnamese than French. They hunted for their food.

"...je n'ai jamais vu des enfants aussi libres que nous, que nous sur les terres...on restait partis des journées entières,...dans la forêt et sur les rivières, ...On chassait." (60)

Duras first fully reincarnates this childhood in Un barrage contre le Pacifique (1950) and later in some of her other works, of which Agatha (1981) is one.

Completely alone in the empty, long, grey "maison de rendez-vous", without a protecting mother, "loin d'elle qui nous avait appris à nous tenir dans cette merveilleuse négligence de nous-mêmes (27)", Agatha realizes how beautiful her brother is.

"Vous étiez très beau sans jamais vouloir le paraître, jamais, et cela donnait à votre beauté la grâce insaisissable de l'enfance." (27)

His beauty and the emotion of love aroused by it, force Agatha to leave her brother. Yet even away from him, she continues to look at him from a distance, and then observes the river's bend. Her brother and the surface of the river, a mirror symbol, reinforce her narcissistic inclinations that imperceptibly take the form of incest. When Agatha returns to her brother, having walked by herself through the empty rooms, he stares at her the same way as she had looked

at him before. In his gaze, Agatha instantly realizes that her brother shares the same incestuous longings.

"...et j'ai vu que vous pensiez la même chose à me voir que moi de vous avoir vu de la sorte dans cette solitude..." (27)

Her brother's eyes function here as a mirror again in which Agatha recognizes herself and her male double. The curious thing about her brother's eyes is that they can be looked into but they cannot be touched. "Les yeux de mon frère n'ont jamais été touchés par moi." (60) Touching his eyes would blind them, would cause ripples on the surface of the water in which the face would drown; touching the eyes would break the mirror. Eyes in the vernacular have always stood for windows of the soul. The soul, symbol of man's most elusive substance, cannot be touched; it is not concrete.

Their desire aroused, the siblings separate again and once more wander through the forsaken mansion that recalls the castle in Cocteau's film La belle et la bête. Film and novel share in this scene the same surrealistic atmosphere for which Cocteau's films are well known and which sometimes rather unexpectedly permeates Duras's writing. Also the relationship between father and youngest daughter in La belle et la bête, while not openly incestuous, certainly has a tendency toward it. Cocteau analyzes extensively sibling incest in his novel Les enfants terribles.

After their exploration of the abandoned building, Agatha, unable to contain her feelings any longer but incapable of expressing them in words, returns to the piano to play a waltz by Brahms into which she puts her incestuous longings for her brother. As in Die Walküre, the passionate and forbidden love that brother and sister experience cannot be voiced except through music.

Agatha has never been able to perform a certain passage of the waltz. Now, suddenly feeling enclosed and held by shadows, the sensations of incestuous love, she believes she can play it. "Tout à coup j'ai cru pouvoir la jouer...(28)" But she quickly realizes that she still has the same technical difficulties to overcome. "...et puis non, cela n'a pas été possible. Je me suis arrêté à la reprise, vous savez, celle que je n'ai jamais pu passer correctement...(28)"

Her brother then plays the difficult passage of the waltz with expertise. He plays it several times while Agatha listens, watching him and herself in a mirror. Her brother, able to play the hard part of the waltz that she cannot, is here an ideal extension of Agatha: her brother, her male half is capable of overcoming difficulties her own physical female nature is unable to do. This comes close to androgyny.

What Wagner's Die Walküre brings about in Wälsungenblut, namely Siegmund's and Sieglinde's incestuous

act, a Brahms waltz does in Agatha. During her brother's play, which she observes not directly but through a mirror, looking at him while she looks at her own face, Agatha suddenly becomes aware of her desire for her brother as a lover. This realization has such a strong effect upon her that for a few moments she loses consciousness. "J'ai perdu la connaissance de vivre...(30)" Her fainting spell is almost like an illumination, this sudden spiritual light that threw Pascal to the ground - and before him Saul as he rode to Damascus. That instant inspiration changed their lives. So did Agatha's.

Her brother stops playing and calls out to her, calls her three times before she decides to go to him. She sits down at the piano, next to him and they look at their hands. They measure them to find out how much smaller Agatha's hands are than her brother's.

"Nous avons regardé nos mains, nous les avons mesurées pour savoir de combien les miennes étaient plus petites." (31)

During the measuring contest Agatha is fifteen, her brother nineteen years old. Brother and sister study their hands, not daring to look at their faces on which their love for each other now shows all too clearly.

In Nathalie Granger, Duras's film script about an eight-year-old girl whose violent destructiveness her mother, Isabelle Granger, tries to cure with music - the only thing the little girl responds to - Duras makes perhaps

her strongest statement about music. Music, badly played by children, stands for violence and murder. In addition to Nathalie's violence, but independent from hers, there is the crime of Christian M. and Pierre G., two minors who shot and killed four people in "les Yvelines", not far from Paris, before they were encircled by the police in a wooded area. Then there is Isabelle Granger, as well as the washing machine salesman and a cat - all "killers", all prisoners of the same house whose history started three hundred years ago in April 1672 with a young farmer's wife and her sleeping child under a tree. Everybody has his separate history of violence that is transformed into music. "La violence, ici, c'est la musique qui la dit, plus que les paroles, les actes (95)." It is music that reigns everywhere in the film, powerfully, like a monster.

"Mais la musique est là, à travers les fausses notes, puissante, monstre qui regne sur le film. Elle est partout, à tout instant, silencieuse ou bruyante. Elle régle la circulation et l'enchaînement des thèmes."
(95)

The film is extremely violent - but almost nothing is visible except for a child's gesture, a look from Isabelle Granger, and her friend, a languid yawn by the cat. The music, always the same for each separate act of violence, nourishes all of these and gathers the whole into one single fact.

"Le film baigne dans la violence. Mais rien, ou presque, ne se voit de celle-ci: un geste d'enfant, un regard d'Isabelle Granger, de l'Amie, un bâillement avide de chat. La musique - la même pour toutes ces

différentes violences abordées par le film - nourrit chacune d'entre elles, et rassemble le tout en un seul fait." (95)

As in Wälsungenblut, and of course far more so in Doktor Faustus, where music is the all-powerful instrument that dominates events and imprisons the various themes, music controls the crucial moment in Agatha - just as it plays an important role in other works by Duras.

If in Mann's work music could be given an adjective, it might be "demonic"; in Duras's writings, the adjective changes to "violent". Both terms are symptomatic of the primitive, unremembered part of man - man the monster, for whom singing must originally have been nothing but a howling across several pitches until an attempt was made to pin it down to one pitch:

"...den Gesang, der ursprünglich ein Heulen über mehrere Tonstufen hinweg gewesen sein muß, auf einer einzigen festzuhalten und dem Chaos das Tonsystem abzugewinnen." (24, Karlheinz Hasselbach, Thomas Mann - Doktor Faustus)

It is that dark side of man's nature - the "antihumane Dämonie (24, Karlheinz Hasselbach)" - which Duras associates with the forest, the ancestral home of primates, and with music.

In Doktor Faustus music expresses the "Situation des Geistes selbst in unserer durch und durch kritischen Epoche. (24, Karlheinz Hasselbach)"

Chapter 4Hands, narcissistic mother figures, eyes, and Romantic residues:Agatha and Wälsungenblut

Hands: next to feet, they are the most complex bone structure of man.

In 1979, Marguerite Duras made a film called Les mains négatives, which exists also as a short novel, published the same year under the same title.

In 1948, Jean Paul Sartre published his play Les Mains sales, the confrontation of two intellectuals that ends in murder. Hugo, a young Marxist who wants to preserve his ideal, versus Hoederer, head of a clandestine communist party who is mainly interested in efficiently run politics even if one has to dirty ones hands - se salir les mains - in order to do so.

If in Les Mains sales hands are symbolic of doing the dirty work of politics, in Agatha the use of hands is connected with music and a mother-figure who wants her children to learn to play the piano. Hands become also a metaphor for sibling incest. The movement from large, external and historic events in Sartre's play turns inward to an intimate family triangle circle that consists of mother, daughter and son.

The mother's will imposes itself successfully upon the son, but not the daughter. As a small girl, Agatha, though fearful of punishment, protests against her mother's wishes. She does not want to take piano lessons. She does not want to use her hands - with their elongated fingers made to play music. Her hands resemble so closely her brother's: "Les mains d'Agatha...tellement ressemblantes...-Si longues (60)," that one is reminded of Mann's twins Siegmund and Sieglind. (See below)

Agatha rejects her mother as a role model, but the little girl's revolt does not manifest itself as a paroxysm. There are no screams or stamping of feet; her revolt is introverted and passive. No external signs betray her strong passion; there is only silence. She shows her passive resistance simply as laziness. "...elle était paresseuse..." (62) Behind this barrier of laziness lies a tumultuous sea of emotions, feelings and tensions. Invisibly. Rather all one "sees" or "hears" is: "...elle était paresseuse.." (62)

This daughter-mother rebellion in which love and hate are intricately interwoven, forever inseparable from each other, is one of Duras's major themes. It finds dramatic expression, punctuated with latent sado-masochism, in Un barrage contre le Pacifique and L'Amant where the mother pursues and in blind rage beats the daughter. Almost every portrait of the "bad" mother, however, is balanced by the

creative reminiscence of a "good" one, such as Madeleine, "la splendeur de l'âge du monde,..." (1) in Savannah Bay or Anne-Marie Stretter in Le Vice-consul and India Song.

Anne-Marie Stretter, the enigmatic woman in black who steals Lol V. Stein's fiancé in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, is perhaps the writer's best drawn female figure: she appears throughout her fiction as a thin, secretive Anne-Marie or under such other masks as Elisabeth Alione and her fourteen-year-old daughter, Anita, in Détruire-dit-elle. Anne-Marie Stretter becomes the most thoroughly idealized mother figure, a poetic visualization of Duras's own mad mother. This complex mother image emerges also in her semi-biographical work, Les Lieux de Marguerite Duras.

"Si le modèle parental ca n'a pas été elle, la mère de ces deux petites filles, Anne-Marie Stretter, non pas ma mère, voyez, que je trouvais trop folle, trop exubérante, et qui l'était d'ailleurs. C'était ce pouvoir secret... Anne-Marie Stretter, le modèle parental pour moi, le modèle maternelle, ou plutôt le modèle féminin; elle ne m'apparaissait pas comme maternelle, elle était avant tout une femme adultère, voyez, non pas la mère des petites filles. (65, Les Lieux)"

This role model of a mother of whom Duras is enamored is first of all a mysterious woman, an adultress, and only then, almost as an afterthought, a mother.

"...elle avait quelque chose d'invisible, c'était le contraire d'une femme qui se remarque, elle était très silencieuse, on ne lui connaissait pas d'amis et elle se promenait toujours seule ou bien avec ses deux petites filles... (65, Les Lieux)"

Anne-Marie Stretter is wealthy, whereas Duras's own mother was very poor. "...je la voyais passer le soir dans

son automobile avec son chauffeur (64, Les Lieux). " Most of all, Anne-Marie possesses a double power, an everyday power and a power over death.

"...elle a incarné pour moi longtemps une sorte de double pouvoir, un pouvoir de mort et un pouvoir quotidien. Elle élevait des enfants, elle était la femme de l'administrateur général, elle jouait au tennis, elle recevait, elle se promenait, etc. Et puis elle recelait en elle ce pouvoir de mort, de prodiguer la mort, de la provoquer. (65, Les Lieux)"

Her power over death has been demonstrated by a young man who, shortly after her arrival in town, commits suicide out of love for her.

"C'est peu après son arrivée qu'on a appris qu'un jeune homme s'était suicidé, par amour pour elle, par amour d'elle. (64, Les Lieux)"

The parallel between Anne-Marie Stretter and Gerda von Rinnlingen is striking. Johannes Friedemann too drowns himself shortly after the arrival of Gerda von Rinnlingen in the town he has lived in all his life. He too commits suicide out of love.

The ideal mother-figure in Duras's fiction is a woman who is almost accidentally a mother. Being a mother is not her important asset, possessing a double power is: "...elle ne m'apparaissait pas comme maternelle, elle était avant tout une femme adultère...(65, Les Lieux,)".

This pattern of passionate woman first, and mother second, persists throughout the oeuvre of Duras. Her multiple portraits of women are the antithesis of Nietzsche's conjecture that

"...everything about woman has one solution: that is pregnancy. Man is for woman a means: the end is always the child. (178, Thus Spoke Zarathustra)"

Nietzsche reserves dangerous passion for men. "A real man wants two things: danger and play (178, Thus Spoke Zarathustra)." Yet the Durassian female figures are as much concerned with passion, danger and play as are men. Pregnancy is not foremost on their minds when women engage in dangerous play.

In Moderato cantabile the scream of a woman murdered out of love reverberates throughout the novel. The horrid cries of the dying stranger, whose lover caresses her body with murderous hands, bring to light inner, unknown tensions and wishes in Anne Desbaresdes. It is not her small son around whom Anne's thoughts ceaselessly turn - expressing themselves in ambiguous, broken, constantly repetitive outlines - but Chauvin, one of her husband's former laborers whom she entices to kill her. He does. But only on an emotional level. "'I wish you were dead,' Chauvin said. 'I am,' Anne Desbaresdes said (79)." Danger and an obsessive erotic desire grip her soul, not her child whom she loves but abandons when absolute passion enters her life.

If occasionally the child is focused upon, as happens in L'Eté 80, the maternal instincts change into something else: they too become involved in passion. La jeune fille in L'Eté 80, who takes pity on a small, homesick boy away in summer camp, falls in love with her little charge. It is a

love whose consummation is postponed until the boy grows up, but meantime the young woman's desire is reciprocated in all its pain and sadness.³⁴

Keeping the mother-image of Anne-Marie Stretter in mind, one understands why Agatha suppresses her recalcitrant impulses and even at fifteen does not dare to ask her mother, who represents constituted authority, to release her from the tedious task of playing the piano, an art her brother is better at with his larger hands. Afraid to approach her mother directly, she appeals to her brother for help, and he intervenes on her behalf. "Je t'ai demandé de lui dire à elle, notre mère, que je voulais abandonner le piano. Tu as accepté (31-32)."

When one first meets the siblings in Agatha, one does not "see" them. They exist only as two voices, male and female that float bodiless through space - a living room in an uninhabited summer cottage at the French seashore. Then out of the somber light emerge two travelling bags and a few nondescript pieces of furniture. Among these objects, still half hidden in the greyish, misty light of winter, are two figures. About to leave, they lean silently against a wall.

³⁴*Several of Duras's mother and child creations have a certain resemblance to the devastating passion of Racine, a passion so inescapable that it humiliates and breaks its proud victim. His Andromaque loves her son Astyanax. But not for his own sake. She loves him because he is the son of Hector. She, like the Durassian woman, is first a lover, then a mother. Anne Desbaresdes adores her small son, but when Chauvin enters her life her son recedes into the background and is hardly mentioned again.

They are exhausted. The most revealing fact the author tells us about her two protagonists is their age. "Ils ont trente ans (77)." Yet even this specific number is misleading because one soon learns that the woman is four years younger than the man. Almost as a postscript one is told that the two strangers resemble each other.

From these vague facts the dramatic event unfolds.

Duras' novels are mostly categorized under Nouveau Roman, a genre which is still accused of dehumanizing modern fiction. The figures of Agatha and her brother, however, are a far cry from dehumanization as they slowly step forward from silent silhouettes projected in a dreamlike manner against the walls of a half-empty summer cottage and become beings of flesh and blood. Brother and sister quickly involve one in intense feelings that have little to do with the general criticisms that the Nouveau Roman tends to cast man from the world, or that its goal is to reach perfect objectivity, and that, hard to read, it addresses itself only to specialists. Duras' novels, plays and films evoke an entire scale of emotions from pain and sorrow - which are perhaps her most frequent manifestations of human frailties - to humility and a pathetic display of tenderness and joy. In her work, man and his emotions are portrayed with intensity even if her plots seem fragmented and she does not undertake lengthy studies of character and milieu the way Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert wrote their novels.

Mann's oeuvre, especially his long novels, are much closer to these 19th-century writers than the work of Duras.

By focusing on brief, decisive moments in the lives of her characters and by concentrating on a narrow scope, the writer constantly attempts to eliminate distracting details. She aims, so to speak, at a troubled spot and penetrates the surface to the unseen. Fearlessly, sometimes even daringly, she shows the often ugly, twisted, and distorted mechanisms that operate the human mind. She does this by using something approaching the chiaroscuro: she highlights center points, moves back and forth and in and out of her scenes by accelerating or decreasing speed, depending upon whether she applies real time or "temps disloqué", the rope on which she descends into the past. She redoubles her steps in landscapes where colors, even those of the sea, are subordinated to the overall dominant effect of light and dark.

Her preferred speech is the dialogue, which she uses almost exclusively in Agatha and other works. With words, sparse gestures and sometimes prolonged silences, she investigates inner spaces, using the eye as an important tool. The exterior counts for little. It is mainly there to create a certain mood - a yacht in the ocean, a small Spanish town, a sun-drenched beach - or to evoke a specific image.

To the siblings, the mother's appearance in Agatha is sudden and silent. Caught so strongly in their own images and games that the external world has ceased to exist, they have at first been unaware that their mother was watching them. In Agatha, this obsessively inquisitive, voyeuristic woman plays the role of the "good" mother. She smiles - "...elle a souri,...(32)." But her power does not lie in her smile, which is an involuntary gesture; nor is it hidden in her hands. Agatha's mother does not beat her children as does the mother in Un barrage contre le Pacifique and in The Lover. Rather, her power is in her eyes and her silence. Her eyes, like her brother's, have an importance of their own. They reflect inner worlds - those of solipsism and self-absorbed suffering. As Agatha's mother comes forward in the scene played in an empty building on the Loire, the brother is about to finish the Brahms waltz. Under the "suspiciously irresponsible" influence of music (as Thomas Mann refers to it when he compares music with literature),³⁵ the siblings have just

³⁵*On pages 42-43 of Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988, Thomas Mann compares literature with music and declares the former morally more responsible than music and poetry. According to him civilisation is identical with literature but not with music, which tends to be far less ethically inclined: "Im Gegenteil das Verhältnis der Musik zur Humanität ist so bei weitem lockerer, als das der Literatur, daß die musikalische Einstellung dem literarischen Tugendsinn mindestens als unzuverlässig, mindestens als verdächtig erscheint. Auch nicht mit Dichtung: es steht damit allzu ähnlich, wie mit der Musik; das Wort und der Geist spielen darin eine allzu indirekte, verschlagene, unverantwortliche und darum ebenfalls unzuverlässige Rolle. Sondern ausdrücklich mit Literatur, mit sprachlich

become conscious of their incestuous desire. And of their mother.

"On l'a découverte ainsi nous regardant tous les deux dans la lumière du fleuve. (temps) Je sais moins ce qui est arrivé après ce regard de notre mère. (temps)"
(32)

In this paradise of the self the mother suddenly appears like an archangel, casting the sexually awakened Adam and Eve into the world. The mother plays a double role. While she is mostly benign, there is also a threatening aspect to her. The siblings perceive her as a powerful, larger-than-life figure whose control over her children is felt to be as absolute.

Startled by their mother's unexpected appearance and driven by their guilty conscience, the siblings must have felt as if their incestuous longings were reflected in their mother's eyes. Together they confront her. "Nous avons tenu tête à ce regard (32)." The three of them wrestle silently. It is a contest fought with their eyes, with their egos.

The mother, however, far from having punitive thoughts or trying to exercise any parental power, becomes an accomplice to the sibling's offense. She not only releases Agatha from her piano lessons but in her next and last scene - she is dying - she puts her son into the hands of her

artikuliertem Geist, - Zivilisation und Literatur sind ein und dasselbe."

daughter: "Mon enfant, ne te sépare jamais de lui, ce frère que je te donne (66)." This mother who spies on her children - "Notre mère écoutait (65)," has some of the ambiguous traits of the mysterious, adulterous Anne-Marie Stretter.

In her ambivalent act of "bequeathing" her son to her daughter before she dies, the mother reveals "the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego,..." (91, Freud, On Narcissism). Driven by the terrible fear of death, the mother tries to find refuge in her two children. Her own narcissism, having been repressed under parental disguise, having been hidden under wishful dreams of a better world for her offspring, better, younger parts of herself, now breaks fully forth, desperate to survive in her son and daughter. Dying, she sees her son as a hero, her daughter as the bride of a prince. By joining them, they become a double cathexis for their mother's unfulfilled desires, her ego-instinct and wish for immortality.

A similar instance of this kind of sibling incest may be found in Ibsen's Ghosts, where it is not the mother, Mrs. Alving, who dies, but her son, Oswald. Yet she too, as Peter Thorslev argues, is willing to "give" her son - "ce frère que je te donne (66)" - in an anticipated incestuous

marriage to his half-sister, Regina³⁶. Both mothers defend sibling incest in the name of love and idealism. Both mothers know that the sister is to the brother "As my own shadow.../A second self, far dearer and more fair (Shelley's Laon and Cythna, Canto II 208-209, 274, p. 54, quoted by Peter L. Thorslev)."

The motif of hands, the piano-playing hands of brother and sister that resemble each other closely, elongated hands so fragile they seem to be fractured

"Les mains d'Agatha... tellement ressemblantes...Si longues. Comme brisées de même...Oui...Comme cassées... (60)"

appears only toward the middle and again at the end of the scene. Those hands stand for their broken lives -

"...mannigfach/Gebrochen,... (Novalis, 389, quoted by Wilson)" - for the incestuous taboo they shattered in order to reach themselves in each other, to melt in their mirror images. It is an attempt condemned from the beginning by society, the external world they have fled.

How differently and yet in how many ways the same does Thomas Mann approach the incest theme in Wälsungenblut. In his novella nothing but the external dominates his prose style. One meets his twins in all colors from Bordeaux-red,

³⁶*Otto Rank (before Thorslev) discussed Ibsen's Ghosts briefly in his large work The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend. Rank sees more than just sibling incest in Ibsen's Ghosts. He argues that the sister is a substitute for the mother. "Suggestions of deeper erotic affection between mother and son, such as that underlying the sibling incest complex, are not lacking either." (544, Ghosts, the "family drama")

to grey, to pink silk, in all the slim splendor of their nineteen years.

The sparsely lit stage in the opening scene of Agatha is replaced in the Tiergartenvilla by a rich display of shapes and forms, movement and rhythm, all brought to life by the sound of the gong that announces lunch. When the Aarenhold twins are introduced, the light focuses first upon their hands. Before one knows anything about them - their figure, age, the way they dress, their faces, feelings and thoughts - one learns that they hold hands. "Siegmond und Sieglind kamen zuletzt, Hand in Hand, aus dem zweiten Stock (13-14)." After one has made their acquaintance, has been given an elaborate description of their stylish dress:

"Sie trug ein bordeauxrotes Samtkleid...im Schnitt der florentinischen Mode von Fünfzehnhundert sich nähernd... Er trug einen grauen Jackett-Anzug mit einer Kravatte aus himbeerfarbener Rohseide..." (14)

and their physiognomy, our attention is returned to the hands: "Aber am meisten glichen sich ihre langen und schmalen Hände, - (15)." In that way the introductory scene opens and closes in a circle.

The long elegant hands of Agatha and her brother are similar to those of Siegmund and Sieglind. The circular movement of the light that focuses first and last on the hands of the Aarenhold twins becomes one of the symbols of their incestuous desire. When reduced to a formula, incest is shown in the geometric shape of a circle, symbol of an inescapable enclosure. The physical expression of Siegmund

and Sieglinde's incestuous closeness is their hands, which become rather moist - a trait they share but are not bothered by.

"Und sie hielten einander beständig daran, worin sie nicht störte, daß ihrer beider Hände zum Feuchtwerden neigten..." (15)

This warm, humid connection is like an umbilical cord one has forgotten to cut. Their narcissistic impulses are nourished by the touch of their hands - which initiate a sexual arousal that ends, more or less inevitably, in incest. Incapable of loving anyone except themselves (in the other), intercourse with an outsider such as von Beckerath is, in their case, the "unnatural" course to take. Sieglind and Siegmund can only be happy in each other's company.

Nevertheless, Sieglind is going to marry von Beckerath who, in her eyes, shares some of Hunding's characteristics expressed in derogatory anatomical idiosyncracies such as "...bauchig und x-beinig wie eine Kuh (60)." Madame Bovary's husband also shows similarities with the bovine family. But where Flaubert allows Bovary to keep his sexual identity, even if somewhat reduced, Hunding and von Beckerath are stripped of theirs when Hunding is compared with a cow. With the forthcoming marriage of Sieglind and von Beckerath Mann pokes fun, not only at the utterly predictable and archly conventional customs of society, but also at the spectacle of the Jewish princess and the Aryan

ass. If one pays heed to the social scandal that surrounded the first attempts of the publication of Wälsungenblut - in which Munich's society saw Mann playing the role of von Beckerath and Sieglind the one of Katia Pringsheim -, then Mann's mockery is directed also at himself. Irony becomes self-mockery.

Agatha's husband too exists only as the clumsy, amorphous shadow of her brother. Only the outline of his body, where the resemblance with her brother is explicit, is attractive.

"Le corps pourrait être beau, je ne sais pas très bien. Comme le vôtre il me semble, [mais] encore maladroit, comme non encore délié, vous voyez, comme encore faible on dirait, et devoir encore grandir, encore devenir. (temps)" (59)

The impenetrable circle within which the Aarenhold twins are held captive is also symbolized by a heavy gold chain that Siegmund wears around his wrist and by a large pearl which adorns Sieglinde's forehead, each a gift from the other.

By giving each other expensive presents they separate themselves further from the outside world, the ugliness and poverty of a large city that only once, for a brief moment (when they arrive in front of the opera) tries to pull them into its midst. It is wintertime - the same season as in Agatha. There is snow on the ground as Siegmund and Sieglind step daintily from their heated Coupé. Their carriage, where they had sat upon brown silk upholstery,

behind drawn curtains, as usual holding hands, was pulled by two beautiful horses who - like their owners - resemble each other perfectly. "Die beiden Pferde, hoch, vornehm und einander vollkommen gleich,...(78)."

As the twins walk from the carriage to the entrance of the opera, followed by their butler, Wendelin, whose violet-colored breeches are now hidden under a long, yellow overcoat that makes him look like a giant, they must pass a gauntlet of the city's poor. Inadequately dressed, shivering with cold, these lost souls stare at the vision of Siegmund and Sieglind with hatred:

"In der Helligkeit der Bogenlampen sahen graue, frierende Leute ihrer Ankunft zu. Sie gingen zwischen ihren forschenden und gehäßigen Blicken hindurch, gefolgt von dem Diener,..." (55)

The eyes that symbolize the gauntlet are here as important as the eyes of Agatha's mother when she spies on her children in the piano scene. Both scenes are mute - but in that muteness worlds confront each other and create an ironic contrast.

Wrapped in furs and in their own narcissistic worlds, the twins are totally unaware of the misery that surrounds them.

A similar scene - in his youth, Thomas Mann was an avid opera buff - is found in his short novella, Die Hungernden. But here the protagonist, as he leaves a festive soirée, feels almost physically assaulted by the disdainful, greedy look of a starving man. He becomes not only intensely

conscious of the outcast's wretched lot, but totally identifies with him. He calls him brother. "Wir sind ja Brüder (269)!" Detlef, the artist, condemned to create instead of living life, "...du darfst nicht leben, du sollst schaffen;...(267)", is just as much an exile from normal human activities, as the clochard. They are both starving.

In the contrast between the wealthy Aarenhold twins, beautifully clothed, perfumed and wearing golden bracelets on their wrists that emphasize their hands and shield them against life's bitter threats, and the city's starving, shivering poor, there emerges a brief dramatic moment. The twins' incongruous contact with social morality is not so much the incest they commit - which causes, after all, no harm to anyone except possibly to each other - but their wilful enclosure in a solipsistic world that prevents them from recognizing the most obvious misery around them.

The costly gifts the Aarenhold twins exchange are signs of their narcissistic enmeshment, tokens of spoiled wealth, as well as protection against their pending separation³⁷.

When one looks closely at Siegmund Aarenhold and Agatha's brother, one finds that both appear to be men for

³⁷*According to Freud those presents represent some type of apotropaic magic where something of value is given in order to prevent the loss of something far more precious - or to ward off an unconsciously apprehended calamity. The best example of Freud's apotropaic magic is perhaps the modern film version of Phaedre played by the Greek actress Melinda Mercouri, who throws a valuable diamond ring into the Thames, hoping to prevent the loss of her stepson's love.

whom an incestuous love is not only "logical" but the only possibility of love altogether. Both men are prototypes of protagonists in whom Romantic residues were reawakened or had never died.

With Romantic residues I refer to a trend in literature that began with the Gothic novels and dramas in England and particularly the "Schauerromane" in Germany. These works reintroduced the theme of incest in literature - which goes back at least as far as Sophocle's Oedipus Rex. During the Romantic movement the themes of narcissism and incest were most popular. While Horace Walpole, author of a Gothic drama, (The Mysterious Mother) in which the hero marries his sister, who is also his daughter, confesses that he had simply been "desirous of striking a little out of the common road, and of introducing some novelty on our [English] stage (43, Peter Thorslev)," the Romantic poets were more serious.

In his article "The Romantic Love Object: The Woman as Narcicissistic Projection",³⁸ James D. Wilson illustrates how woman was the concrete form of a chaste ideal. "Chaste" is used in the sense that the male protagonist;

"finds in the beloved a reflection or objectification of his own hidden perfection, a means of defining his own loveliness to himself, a kind of sexually attractive Doppelgänger. (388, James D. Wilson)"

³⁸*Comparative Literatures Studies, vol. 15, No. 4, December 1978.

Little wonder then that the female shape created by the Romantic poet is supremely beautiful: the enticing woman, often endowed with the power of death, as Keats's "La Belle Dame sans merci", reflects her creator's anima. This power of death Duras also attributes to one of her most important and enigmatic female protagonists: Anne-Marie Stretter, who appears in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein, Le Vice-Consul and India Song.

In his narcissistic reflection the Romantic poet sees a feminine projection that wants to unite with itself. The Romantic writer too wants, as Chateaubriand's René had wanted: "...une Eve tirée de moi-même...Beauté Celeste (388, Wilson)." Incest derives here directly from narcissism. Siegmund Aarenhold did not need to experience René's intense longing, brought about by years of total loneliness, since the feminine rendition of himself in the form of his twin sister had been born together with him. Yet René and Siegmund have identical desires . Wälsungenblut clearly has its rhizome in the Romantic movement. Its roots may no longer be buried in the same soil; yet its "flowers" still share the same origin.

The lovely feminine creation of the Romantic poet has a major flaw: since she is the narcissistic reflection of his soul, she is either ice-cold, or surrounded by cold like Keats's "la belle dame", who appears on "the cold hillside" or she exists as a figure wrapped in veils, as in Shelley's

Alastor. In Mann's Wälsungenblut and Duras's Agatha, cold hills and transparent cloaks are transformed into mirrors as the most conspicuous symbol of narcissism.

Yet the coldness of Keats's "belle dame" is still inherent in certain female characters of Mann's early novellas, such as Gerda von Rinnlingen and Amra Jacoby (Luischen). If Sieglinde Aarenhold is less cold, her older sister Märit is characterized as lacking human warmth, not to mention the feminine grace that Sieglind possesses in such abundance.

Duras's Anne-Marie Stretter shows no pity toward Jean de H. in his desperate pleas for help, and Agatha remains perfectly unmoved even when her brother tells her that a final separation from her means his death. These women still share some of Keat's "belle dame" characteristics. Some of the Romantic discoveries are carried over into Mann's and Duras's work, where they continue to intrigue readers with illusive eye-and-hand signals that have far reaching consequences. And where the mother-figure plays an ambiguous role that evokes a schizophrenic state of mind in the daughter or son who wants to love the mother as a person but is horrified by her personality.

Chapter 5Olfactory stimuli, Homosexuality and the Durassian woman:Agatha, Wälsungenblut and L'Amant

In Civilization and its Discontents, Sigmund Freud offers the hypothesis that while man was still in his ape-like developmental state his sexuality was largely influenced by olfactory stimulations. Their function was to produce "sexual excitement in the mind of the male (45)" provoked by the female menstrual cycle. As man continued his slow evolution and became bi-pedal, olfactory stimuli were replaced by visual ones. This loss and replacement, Freud goes on to say, was the result of man having started to walk upright. His upright position caused several biological changes, the most important of which was possibly that he became aware of his genitals. They were now visible and vulnerable. On a psychological level this exposure brought the emotion of shame. Bi-pedalism is analogous to the "Fall of Man", the myth immortalized by the Old Testament in the figures of Adam and Eve. On an anthropological and psychological level the biblical legend becomes the mutation from animal innocence to consciousness.

Simultaneously with bipedalism and visual stimulations whose aim was sexuality and eroticism came (Freud explains once more) sublimation and displacement of libido. As a result, sexual life is now rejected by some men and women

because of the connection between the olfactory sense and the genitals.

"All neurotics, and many others too, take exception to the fact that 'inter urinas et faeces nascimur'. The genitals, too, excite the olfactory sense strongly in a way that many people cannot tolerate and which spoils sexual intercourse for them. Thus we should find, as the deepest root of sexual repression that marches with culture, the organic defence of the new form of life that began with the erect posture against the earliest type of animal existence - " (54)

The change in civilized man from the olfactory to the visual sense is quite obvious in Agatha, where the eyes play a far more important role in the seduction scenes than the sense of odor, which is mentioned only once. When Duras does use it, however, it is accompanied by something mysterious and vague that cannot be adequately described: "Ton odeur Agatha, ce vide (38)." It is "ce vide", this vacuum that surrounds Agatha which excites the curiosity of the reader. What is it? Is it an invisible substance that contains Agatha's essence - those parts of a human being which are hidden to the eye but cause one to decide instantly between sympathy or dislike? Is it her skin that exudes a pleasant aroma which her brother cannot resist? Are we encouraged to fill "ce vide", that empty gap, with figures and shapes that belong to a forgotten past but linger in our subconscious and are called forth, like obedient dogs, in times of erotic excitement? Dogs, who are of course unashamed of their sexuality and still rely exclusively on their olfactory sense. According to Freud they

have provoked man's contempt since their sole, concentrated dependency on the olfactory sense does not cause them any loathing of excrements. From which man, at least the adult, suffers.

"Siegmond machte Toilette für die Oper und zwar seit einer Stunde. Ein außerordentliches und fortwährendes Bedürfnis nach Reinigung war ihm eigen, dergestalt, daß er einen beträchtlichen Teil des Tages vorm Lavoir verbrachte. Er stand jetzt vor einem großen, weißgerahmten Empire-Spiegel, tauchte den Puderquast in die getriebene Büchse und puderte sich Kinn und Wangen, die frisch rasiert waren;...Er stand dort ein wenig bunt: in rosaseidenen Unterbein-kleidern und Socken, roten Saffian-Pantoffeln und einer dunkel gemusterten wattierten Hausjacke mit hellgrauen Pelzaufschlägen."
(34-35)

To Freud, Siegmund Aarenhold would be the confirmation of a compulsive neurotic who is characterized by a constant urge to clean himself³⁹.

Siegmond's narcissistic traits are reinforced by his "court[ing] an amorous looking glass"⁴⁰

Driven by his compulsive cleaning efforts and his narcissistic inclinations, Siegmund appears to go beyond the conventional confines of masculinity. By using a powder-puff, he enters the sphere mostly restricted to women. When he powders his chin and cheeks in order to

³⁹*According to Freud's theory expounded in The Interpretation of Dreams, Siegmund suffers from a "reaction formation", a defense against the suppressed wish to be dirty. The strange behavior comes about through traumatic toilet training.

⁴⁰*In Shakespeare's, Richard III Gloucester envies the man who can court the mirror because Richard, Duke of Gloucester, is so misshapen - like Friedemann rather than Siegmund Aarenhold. The quote is from the opening soliloquy.

erase any trace of a beard, he masks his masculinity, or rather he emphasizes his hidden feminine traits. One could argue of course that men with extremely dark and heavy facial hair did indeed use powder in the attempt to 'lighten up' a bit and this was not considered feminine. It is not only the powder-puff, however, but also Siegmund's all too colorful clothes that stridently underline the anima in him. If one thinks of figures like Oscar Wilde or Paul Scott, who, while still quite young, loved dressing up, the image of the dandy is readily connected with homosexuality. "...between 17 & 20 I was a bit of a peacock," wrote Paul Scott in 1960 to the novelist Muriel Spark. (60, Hilary Spurling)

The "peacock" tendency of Siegmund Aarenhold is reinforced by his choice of a pair of pink silk drawers and socks, and red slippers made from morocco leather. Even his dark patterned, padded house-jacket with its fur-embroidered lapels would have been a becoming accessory for a lady.

Apart from the psychological underpinnings of Mann's descriptions of Siegmund as he dresses for the opera, there is, of course, also artistic intent involved. Not only does Mann pay attention to Siegmund Aarenhold embellishing himself, he treats Gustav von Aschenbach in a comparable way (even though the reason for beautification differs): Siegmund is vain and narcissistic, in love with his sister more for his own sake than hers. Aschenbach tries

desperately to make himself younger, to get closer to the boy he is fatally attracted to. Each day that Tadzio stays in Venice after it has become infested with cholera - "das ekle Sterben - (518)" Gustav von Aschenbach falls more deeply in love with the beautiful, fourteen-year-old Polish boy. Von Aschenbach at fifty is consumed by disgust, shame and a sense of hopelessness because of his aging body, his grey hair and his sharp facial features - all of which he sees as a formidable barrier between him and the boy he loves so desperately. In order to make himself more attractive to Tadzio, he adds to his clothes "jugendlich aufheiternde Einzelheiten (518)", uses jewelry and perfumes and, like Siegmund Aarenhold, spends considerable time in getting dressed for different occasions during the day. Still not satisfied, he decides one day to have his hair dyed black, his eyebrows plucked, his eyes made up and his cheeks and lips rouged. Then, like a happy sleepwalker, von Aschenbach leaves the hairdresser's salon. He wears a red tie and a broad-brimmed straw hat. It is the same outfit that the intoxicated old homosexual, one of the figures of death in the novella, wore when Gustav von Aschenbach first saw him as he boarded the ship for Venice.

Siegmund Aarenhold's androgynous image is reflected not only in "den wasserklaren Spiegeltiefen des Schrankes (35)" but also broken into a thousand diminutive shapes that are

mirrored in the small perfume bottles⁴¹ decorating his washstand.

One of the most positive approaches to the taboo theme of homosexuality and creativity is summed up in Gerhard Härle's Männerweiblichkeit, where he refers to a statement made by Herbert Lewandosky in the 1920s.

"Geprägt von der Aufbruchsstimmung des "Wandervogels" und ganz der Diskussion um 1920 verpflichtet, sucht Herbert Lewandowsky schon ziemlich früh, die Spezifika homosexuellen Schreibens zu erforschen. Er kommt zu dem Ergebnis, daß man sich den homosexuellen Mann als Angehörigen des 'dritten Geschlechts', das heißt als 'Mann mit der Seele einer Frau' vorzustellen habe."
(38)

In the Joseph tetralogy, Thomas Mann achieves this ideal of a "Mann mit der Seele einer Frau" with his extraordinary creation of Mut-em-enet, the wife of an Egyptian aristocrat who desires so feverishly, so hopelessly the chaste Joseph. Mut-em-enet, as Reinhard Baumgart points out, is one of several feminine renditions - Tonio Kröger is another - of Thomas Mann's complex psyche. According to Gerhard Härle, the character of Mut-em-enet carries so much emotional depth because of Thomas Mann's unhappy love affair with Paul Ehrenberg. Mann, who liked to quote himself, called it the "'Passion der Mut-em-enet'", a passion which grew out of the "Liebesleid um Paul Ehrenberg...(204)"

⁴¹*Perfume bottles arranged in an immaculate order according to their size betray also the neurotic state of mind of Ines Institoris, the mistress of Rudi Schwerdtfeger in Doktor Faustus. Ines is the modern incarnation of Mut-em-enet: "...und auf dessen Damen-Toilettentisch sich die blitzenden Flacons, die silbernen Utensilien genau der Groesse nach reihten, - ..." (328)

In the figures of Tonio Kröger and Mut-em-enet he realizes in almost totally disguised forms his homoerotic phantasies, hidden carefully, subtly, even a little anxiously under seven veils and among a thousand pages of his diaries. In a style that lacks the luster of his works he registers in his journals daily events from a tooth-ache to his thoughts on Richard Wagner. They are, as Baumgart discovered,

"...bar aller Erotik und Ironie. Alles findet faktisch und monoton statt auf einer einzigen gleichmäßig erleuchteten Oberfläche. (61, "Thomas Mann als erotischer Schriftsteller", Die Zeit, #15, 8. April 1988)"

Baumgart further comments that only here and there are stealthy glances ventured at boys and young men whom Mann encountered at the beach, the movies or in hotel lobbies. Their smiling faces and exposed torsos were for him at once torture and delight. This too he confides to his diaries. It is those erotic feelings that give his journals depths and heights one otherwise sorely misses. Sexually sublimated inclinations find their artistic expressions in the creation of handsome young men such as Siegmund Aarenhold, who are composites of Mann's own complex psyche. Siegmund's art courses at college mirrors Mann's own ambitions.

"An einigen Wintertagen hatte er sich vor kurzem noch zur Hochschule fahren lassen, um ein zu bequemer Stunde stattfindendes Kolleg über Kunstgeschichte zu hören; er besuchte es nicht mehr, da die Herren, die außer ihm daran teilnahmen, dem Urteil seiner Geruchsnerve nach

bei weitem nicht genug badeten..." (40-41, elisions Mann's)

It is perhaps not as easy to detect in Siegmund's meticulous preening echoes of the handsome Thomas Mann, sporting a luxuriant mustache. The sporadic academic endeavors of the young writer are however quite apparent in the above quotation.

In his biography, Peter de Mendelssohn mentions that Thomas Mann started volunteer work at the Süddeutsche Feuer-Versicherungsbank A.G., Salvatorstraße 18, in the center of Munich on April 1, 1894, two months before his 19th birthday - the same age as Siegmund Aarenhold. At that time, Thomas Mann lived not far from Schwabing with his mother, his two sisters, thirteen-year-old Carla and seventeen-year-old Julia, his older brother Heinrich and his four-year-old brother Viktor. During this period Mann attended the university, taking courses in economy, Shakespeare, art history and German literature.

Neither Mann nor Siegmund Aarenhold attended the university for long. Each had a different reason for leaving: Siegmund Aarenhold could not stand the odor of his classmates - all of whom it seems were male.

"...er besuchte es nicht mehr, da die Herren, die außer ihm daran teilnahmen, dem Urteil seiner Geruchsnerve nach bei weitem nicht genug badeten..." (41, elisions Mann's).

How little fond of school Thomas Mann was is evident in Buddenbrooks (Chapt 2, Part 2), where the author puts his

anti-academic feelings into the figure of Hanno Buddenbrook and describes a single day in the life of the boy, a day spent mostly in school. He is a sensitive fifteen-year-old boy with a weak constitution, who lives for music. Had it had not been for Kai Mölln, the slender, slovenly boy with aristocratic features and beautiful hands, who loves Hanno, Hanno would have survived less long the senseless structure of a school system, which under the hands of "Direktor Wulicke" was no longer devoted to a classical education pursued leisurely and with idealism. Instead the system took pride in the ideas of authority, duty, power, service and promotion - all of which thrived under the banner of Kant's categorical imperative:

"Wo ehemals die klassische Bildung als ein heiterer Selbstzweck gegolten hatte, den man mit Ruhe, Muße und fröhlichem Idealismus verfolgte, da waren nun die Begriffe Autorität, Pflicht, Macht, Dienst, Karriere zu höchster Würde gelangt, und der 'kategorische Imperative unseres Philosophen Kant' war das Banner, das Direktor Wulicke in jeder Festrede bedrohlich entfaltete." (492)

Hanno Buddenbrook and Tonio Kröger - alter egos of Mann (there are letters written by Mann which he signed with Tonio Kröger) - show with great vividness Mann's distaste for school and most of its teachers, who preferred with an almost deferential attitude the "Primus" of their classes, like the industrious Adolf Todtenhaupt -

"...es hätte sie schmerzlich berührt und beschämt, es hätte sie in ihrem Glauben an menschliche Vollkommenheit erschüttert, ein Verstummen Adolf Todtenhaupts zu erleben..." (485) -

or the practical-minded and handsome Hans Hansen, who understood horses but was mystified by Don Carlos.

The same teachers - "...die um nichts als ihr Avancement und darum besorgt waren, bei den Machthabern gut angeschrieben zu stehen..." (492) - were mystified by Hanno Buddenbrook. They treated with indifference, if not sadistical pleasure, introverted and highly gifted children such as Hanno Buddenbrook or Tonio Kröger, who did not adapt to scholastic discipline. The gymnasium, and to a large extent also the university, could not teach what Thomas Mann needed to know.

If the German school system was rough on boys, it treated girls and young women even more harshly. At the turn of the century, when the United States had opened its university doors to women, Germany still kept theirs shut to them. If women did succeed in gaining admittance - Märit, the older sister of Siegmund apparently studied law - they were often stigmatized as ugly, flat-bosomed, embittered bluestockings who spend their days in mysterious ways - a mystery deprived of any sexual connotations and therefore of no interest to the male observer. Märit's brief appearance in Wälsungenblut is a good example of this trend:

"Märit erschien in niederlosem Gewande. Sie war aschblond, ein strenges Mädchen von achtundzwanzig mit Hakennase, grauen Raubvogelaugen und einem bitterm Munde. Sie studierte die Rechte und ging mit einem Ausdruck von Verachtung durchaus ihre eigenen Wege."
(13)

This portrait of a young girl, which describes Märit with a mixture of "undeutlichem Schrecken und verdecktem Hohn gemischte Kälte..."(53, R. Baumgart, Selbstvergessenheit), underlines Mann's fear of certain women. His dismay, however, is balanced by an uncanny understanding of a woman's psyche. Rachel and Mut-em-enet in the Joseph trilogy come to mind once more. Often it is not his women, however, who are erotically the most enticing and physically more beautiful, but his men. Joseph in his youthful beauty and simplicity is far more appealing than the sophisticated Egyptian aristocrat Mut-em-enet. Tazio is infinitely more attractive than his plain sisters. When Thomas Mann renders his women more beautiful than his men, as he does with Gabriele Klöterjahn, Gerda von Rinnlingen and Amra Jacoby, it is at the expense of the men with whom he confronts the women. The obese Christian Jacoby is so repulsive in his physical appearance and his masochistic devotion to his young, sensuous, unfaithful wife that he mainly exists as a contrast to beauty and as an excuse for Thomas Mann's expert exercise in irony. The opening paragraph of Luischen makes this clear:

Es gibt Ehen, deren Entstehung die belletristisch geübteste Phantasie sich nicht vorzustellen vermag. Man muß sie hinnehmen, wie man im Theater die abenteuerlichen Verbindungen von Gegensätzen wie Alt und Stupide mit Schön und Lebhaft hinnimmt, die als Voraussetzung gegeben sind und die Grundlage für den mathematischen Aufbau einer Posse bilden." (168, Luischen)

It seems as though Mann's beautiful women have been created with a detached passion, perfectly observed by an eye that does not miss the slightest detail - like the blue shadows in the corners of Gerda Buddenbrook's "nahe beianderliegenden braunen Augen (234)". But his heart belongs to his male creations like Hanno Buddenbrook, Hans Castorp, Tonio Kröger, Tazio, Jaakob, Joseph and Adrian Leverkühn. These characters are modeled after himself - they immortalize him as a great artist.

Mann's art is in this respect similar to Michelangelo's, whose masculine creations from David and Adam to Moses are infinitely superior to most of his female sculptures and paintings. Feeling undoubtedly an affinity with the Renaissance genius, Mann wrote in 1950 - he was then seventy-five - his essay "Die Erotik Michelangelos" in which he thinks about the

"Zusammengehörigkeit von Verfallenheit an das Schöne, Verliebtheit und Produktivität,... (59-60, R. Baumgart, Thomas Mann als erotischer Schriftsteller)"

Gerhard Härle starts his chapter "Subkultur" in Männerweiblichkeit with a quote from Hans Mayer's Außenseiter that makes the connection between homosexuality and incest rather clear.

"Der Fluch über die Paiderasteia gehört zum Fluchbereich, unter dem Oedipus stand. König Laios von Theben, Gatte der Jokaste und Vater des Oedipus, entführte den schönen Knaben Chrysispos. Darüber zürnte Hera, die Hüterin der Ehe, sandte den Thebanern die Sphinx zur Strafe dafür, daß die frevelhafte Liebe zu Chrysispos vom Volk nicht geahndet wurde. [...] Es

ist merkwürdig, daß Siegmund Freud, auch in seinen späteren Arbeiten über den 'Untergang des Ödipuskomplex' niemals offenbar die Einschmelzung des Päderastiethemas beachtet hat." (105, Männerweiblichkeit)

If one takes the Greek myth seriously, homoerotic love precedes incest. Incest is seen here as the result of punishment for King Laius's love for the beautiful boy Chrysippus.

In Männerweiblichkeit Härle explores the homosexual identity of some of Mann's work in a scientific rather than a literary way. He defends the theory (and underlines it with many quotations from other professionals) that one is able to find quite a number of intellectually and artistically talented men among homosexuals. On account of their extreme identification with the mother, homosexuals have internalized those traits which the mother holds against the father, who represents the idea of practical reality:

"Unter den Homosexuellen dürften recht viele geistig Begabte sich finden; psychogenetisch wohl darum, weil sie kraft der extremen Identifikation mit der Mutter auch jene Züge verinnerlichten, welche die Mutter dem Vater, dem Vertreter praktischen Realitätssinn, entgegengesetzte." (123, Gerhard Härle quoting Theodor W. Adorno)

In his mind, in his internalization of the maternal principle, Härle continues, the homosexual does not keep the memory of a person alive, but a dogma, that of the anti-patriarchal idea. It is the memory of the concealed rivalry between mother and father which, even though it has

been put into the conventional channels of marriage, continues to exist. This rivalry stems from the experience of the actual social castration of the woman by man.

Härle then reverts to Freud, who thought it was possible that in some instances the oedipal father-son conflict is resolved in favor of a more tender inclination, the "homosexuelle Objektwahl (125)." This results when an identification with the mother takes place. In that case the aggressive impulse of the son is repressed. Freud speaks here of an oedipal decision: the early infant object - which was the mother - can, when the boy reaches the oedipal stage, either be replaced by an identification with the mother, or the reinforcement of a father identification occurs. The latter process is considered the "normal" one.

Thomas Mann uses the theme of homosexuality in Tonio Kröger (1909), Der Tod in Venedig (1912), and Buddenbrooks (1901). In Der Zauberberg (1924) Pribislav Hippe, the 'forunner' of Clawdia Chauchat is homosexual. Clawdia Chauchat stands for the male desire for women, a desire which is satisfied within the wishful homosexual instinct: "...ein sexuelles Begehren,...das in sich wesentlich durch den homosexuellen Triebwunsch ausgefüllt ist. (160)"

In Wälsungenblut sibling incest is dealt with for the first time. Rather late in his life, Mann picks up the theme again in Der Erwählte (1951), where a mother-son incestuous affair is explored as well.

Thomas Mann is of course not the only writer whose homosexuality is connected with incestuous feelings. Hilary Spurling, whose biography of Paul Scott, a married homosexual like Thomas Mann, was published in 1990, mentions that

"early manuscript drafts [of A Male Child] leave no doubt that Mrs. Hurst's maternal feelings are incestuous: 'what a man would call unnatural physical passion'" (203)

Mrs. Hurst is "a grim but not unforgiving portrait of his mother..." (202). Paul Scott's mother, Frances Hurst, in her obsessive possessiveness, could have been based on D. H. Lawrence's portrayal of his mother in Sons and Lovers.

An even more detailed incestuous mother-son relationship occurs in Arthur Schnitzler's Frau Beate und ihr Son. This short novel focuses on Beate Heinold, a Viennese widow, still desirable, and her seventeen-year-old son Hugo. In a mountain village mother and son experience - independently from each other - strong physical emotions. Beate has an affair with Fritz Weber, her son's nineteen-year-old friend and Hugo falls in love with an older woman, a former actress of doubtful reputation. Their amorous enmeshments are not acceptable to the turn-of-the-century society they live in. Mother and son commit suicide. Clinging to each other in a last incestuous embrace, they drown together.

Schnitzler handles his mother-son incest in a subtle and more modern approach than Mann, whose use of the mother-

son incestuous theme in Der Erwählte is cleverly disguised as a medieval romance. Even though the incest is atoned for by an inhuman punishment (a seventeen-year long exposure on a solitary, unsheltered rock reachable only by boat), in the end, mother and son do not die as in Schnitzler's novella, but are rewarded.

If in Wälsungenblut, Mann emphasizes feminine traits in Siegfried Aarenhold, he gives masculine ones to his older sister Märit - an undeveloped, frigid mother-figure. Mann uses here the often encountered distancing from autobiographical elements by applying a reversal of traditional feminine and masculine roles.

Märit's roots go back to the suffragettes. She is also a representative of the militant women's liberation movement who 'burn their bras', do not remove hair from their legs or put on make-up, "...women who refuse to wear badges of desirability (211, Trista Selous, The Other Woman)". They are often women who, when expounding their non-sexual interests through political actions, are severely attacked by men for their unattractiveness. They are punished for their refusal to be confined within the limits of either a) a narcissistic sexuality such as the teenage lover in L'Amant who boasts that she can make herself as beautiful and as desirable as any man, or as her family would wish her to be, or b) - to be the object of desire to someone else - as Anne-Marie Stretter in India Song. In almost all of

Duras's works women are allowed only three desires: ...1) to be a sexual object to themselves, the narcissistic choice; 2) to be desirable to others, mostly men, and 3) to bear children. Her women do not reach beyond those confines of women's traditional domains. Although herself a trained lawyer, Duras does not create professional women. Even in La Douleur where the Durassian female protagonist shows her greatest independence, for example Thérèse, the sadistical interrogator of the Résistance in Paris of World War II, the heroine still performs her nauseating job as the lover of a superior, thus working either directly for a man, or in the name of a man. Woman does not achieve a position of authority. Why? Is Duras concerned not to offend a male, chauvinistically-inclined publisher or public who prefer portraits of non-professional women as they occurred in the past? Or is her task of furnishing new insights into feminine landscapes and language so difficult that even rendering women in their conservative roles which deny them intellectual achievements becomes too difficult? Trista Selous has a curious explanation for the restricted emancipation of Duras's female protagonists. Looking at her characters from a Freudian and Lacanian point of view, she writes of Duras's

"...ability to be the object of a man's desire which she describes as allowing her to separate from the emotional disaster of her family and it is that which gives her the independent existence which allows her to write." (194, Trista Selous, The Other Woman)

Although this quote pertains specifically to the Chinese lover from Cholon in L'Amant, for whom the fifteen-year-old white girl is nothing but an object of desire, it applies to most of her other works as well. Duras's choice to have her feminine renditions remain solely objects of desire (rather than evolve on an intellectual and professional level as well) has at least two reasons: Her women, as objects of desire are able to separate themselves from the affective cataclysm of their families, and only then are they able to create - in Duras's case, to write. Of course when writing she reopens her memory banks where the calamity of her family is stored and she relives herself as an object of desire. There is no escape from this circle. Moreover, as a writer she reflects her time, the women she portrays belong within the years she lived, starting with 1914, when Duras was born.

It is a narrow, stifling circle in which brother and sister are caught in an incestuous embrace that can only be expressed in vague words like: "Ton odeur, Agatha, ce vide (38)." Those words seem to wrap the scene in gauzy veils rather than shed light on feelings that are difficult to express verbally. It appears that sometimes those things for which no words exist take refuge in the sense of smell. Music and painting, the non-verbal arts, appear to be more closely connected with olfactory stimuli than literature, which is too intellectual to allow more freedom for the

senses. Poetry - one thinks of Baudelaire in particular - sides here with music rather than literature. Mann considers literature a morally responsible art form, whereas music and poetry are less ethically inclined and far more subject to the senses and the influence of eroticism.

In Agatha as well as in Wälsungenblut the major purpose of the sense of smell is isolation from the environment. "Ton odeur Agatha, ce vide (38)" is all that Agatha's brother wants. No other woman he has known smells like his sister. No other woman offers him "ce vide", that empty space which is his world - an inner world invisible to anyone else, who is kept at bay. The sense of smell becomes here a Proustian device, releasing the sense of letting go, as a kind of counterpart to Proust's past. It takes a talent like Proust's or Baudelaire's to give olfactory stimuli meaning.

Where in Agatha one gets only a brief but positive hint of the sense of smell, in Wälsungenblut the olfactory sense is treated more extensively in all its positive and negative connotations. The offensive associations of smell are explored rather thoroughly by Siegmund Aarenhold, who stops attending the university because his classmates offend his sensitive olfactory senses.

In addition to his wealth and sharp wit, Siegmund further distances himself from the world outside through his sense of smell. Since his butler always provides him with

plenty of hot water and clean towels, he looks down upon - an attitude that we express in the concrete form of the olfactory sense, to turn up one's nose at his less fortunate classmates. At the turn of the century and indeed even later, a bath was for most Europeans a weekly matter, not a daily one. Deodorants did not yet exist. Only wealthy homes such as the villa of Siegmund and Sieglinde's parents could afford to spray exotic and costly perfumes throughout their dwellings. "...das ganze Haus, dessen gleichmäßig erwärmte Atmosphäre durchaus mit einem süßen und exotischen Parfum geschwängert war (9)."

The opening paragraph of Wälsungenblut is dominated by three senses: sight, sound and odor.

"Breitbeinig, in seinen veilchenfarbenen Kniehosen, stand er auf einem altersblassen Gebetsteppich...(9)"

"Der erzene Lärm wild, kannibalisch und übertrieben für seinen Zweck,...(9)"

"...das ganze Haus,...mit einem süßen und exotischen Parfum geschwängert war (9)."

All three senses are used as barriers against a world that is so much uglier, poorer and less pleasant-smelling than Siegmund and Sieglinde's palatial if not always tasteful surroundings. The Aarenhold twins use their olfactory senses to excite each other in their "Ebenbürtigkeitswonne" and to further isolate themselves from their environment.

"Statt dessen ging er mit Sieglinde spazieren. Sie war an seiner Seite gewesen seit fernstem Anbeginn, sie hing ihm an, seit beide die ersten Laute gelallt, die ersten Schritte getan, und er hatte keinen Freund, nie einen gehabt, als sie, die mit ihm geboren, sein

kostbar geschmücktes, dunkel liebliches Ebenbild, dessen schmale und feuchte Hand er hielt, während die reich behangenen Tage mit leeren Augen an ihnen vorüberglitten. Sie nahmen frische Blumen auf ihre Spaziergänge mit, ein Veilchen-, ein Maiglöckchen-Sträußchen, daran sie abwechselnd rochen, zuweilen auch beide zugleich. Sie atmeten im Gehen den holden Duft mit wollüstiger und fahrlässiger Hingabe, pflegten sich damit wie egoistische Kranke, berauschten sich wie Hoffnungslose, wiesen mit einer inneren Gebärde die übelriechende Welt von sich weg und liebten einander um ihrer erlesenen Nutzlosigkeit willen." (41)

Siegmund and Sieglind Aarenhold take flowers on their walks. The nosegays are similar to the drawn curtains of the brown coupé that takes them to the opera: to shut the world out, to close themselves in, to lock all doors leading to an exit.

Juxtaposed to the pleasant smelling flowers at which the twins on their walks sniff every so often, taking turns or both bending over one nosegay at the same time, is the image of "egoistische Kranke (41)." Mann treats narcissism here as an illness in which the suffering person can think only of his pain. Nothing else exists: Here is no life, no hope outside themselves ("...berauschten sich wie Hoffnungslose... (41)").

In their hopeless infatuation with each other the twins reject everyone who does not look, sound or smell like themselves.

"...liebten einander um ihrer erlesenen Nutzlosigkeit willen (41)." In their youth, beauty and unproductive lives, they resemble rare butterflies, fluttering around each other like those slender-bodied diurnal insects.

Noiselessly one follows the other. They are beautiful to behold but useless to all except to each other.

The sense of smell referred to briefly in Agatha - due perhaps to the dialogue form of the film script, which leaves less space for broader descriptions than does a novella - is more thoroughly explored in L'Amant. This novel, "a series of meditations on writing, memory, and the relationship between political and private life"⁴², centers on a fifteen-year-old Caucasian girl - the same age as Hanno Buddenbrook - and her wealthy Chinese lover from Cholon, who is almost twice her age. Yet where Hanno Buddenbrook barely dares to mention masturbation to his friend Kai - the small French girl has learned to enjoy everything about love there is to know. She has trained herself to be no longer inhibited by the thinness of her body⁴³, whose normal growth "has been stunted by the excessive heat (98)" of Indochina. Having been able to overcome some of her complexes, the little girl began to enjoy her sexual relationship.

For a rather long time the small French girl is picked up every day after school in a black limousine and carried to a villa in Mekong where her lover bathes her - "...he'll

⁴²*110, Barbara Wiedemann, "The Search for an Authentic Voice: Hélène Cixous and Marguerite Duras." Journal of Durassian Studies, 1. Fairfax, Virginia: The Duras Society. (1989): 99-114

⁴³* With the acceptance of her body, her sexuality, Duras guides French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and most of all Hélène Cixous. The latter in particular "links female creativity to an acceptance of the body (102, Barbara Wiedemann)"

wash her under the shower, slowly,...(91)" The school girl is educated early to accept her body.

The Chinese lover is a father-figure to the small white girl "So I became his child (100)", the girl says. He is not an ordinary father-figure, however, because in him she also recognizes the body of her younger brother, with whom she first experienced incest when she played as a child in the untamed landscapes of Indochina:

"...and I'd tell the lover from Cholon, talk to him of the other's body and member, of his indescribable sweetness, of his courage in the forest and on the rivers whose estuaries hold the black panther." (100)

The relationship between the Chinese and the white girl has not only aspects of an incestuous father-daughter relationship but there are also indications of sibling incest. In breaking the incest taboo, Duras challenges the current pallocentric society which "represents language, culture and authority (102 Barbara Wiedemann)". Duras wants language to become "the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures (Ibid, 103)"

In The Lover Duras repeats again and again in different variations the love-making scene between the white girl, who wears high-heeled lamé shoes⁴⁴ and a man's fedora, an out-

⁴⁴Socially, the Durassian woman differs substantially from the women Thomas Mann portrays. Even when Duras creates wealthy women such as Anne Desbaresdes in Moderato cantabile and the elusive female protagonist in Le marin de Gibraltar or when she puts them on a high social level such as Anne-Marie Stretter, there remains the residue, the aura of a poor past. By contrast Thomas Mann's women, like those of Henry James, belong to the upper class and behave like the ladies they were brought up to be.

fit that is at once innocent and provocative, and her Chinese lover. "There is an almost compulsive return to the image throughout the novel" (B. W., 112). But each repetition adds a perspective that deepens and dramatizes what at first seems to have been just a fleeting impression. At one point the relationship between the two lovers becomes so intense that

"he inhales her face, breathes it in. He breathes her in, the child, his eyes shut he breathes her breath, the warm air coming out of her." (99)

It is as if at the height of emotions the sense of smell rules supreme. The sense of sight is no longer important. The man from Cholon has memorized the girl's face and body in minutest detail so that he sees everything with his eyes closed. "He looks at her. Goes on looking at her, his eyes shut. (99)" Blind, the lover explores his "child" with his olfactory sense alone.

It is the sense of smell that causes total oblivion of reality - it appears to cross borders into areas and dimensions normally closed to human consciousness:

"Less and less clearly can he make out the limits of this body, it's not like other bodies, it's not finished, in the room it keeps growing⁴⁵, it's still without set form, continually coming into being, not only there where it's visible but elsewhere too, stretching beyond sight, toward risk, toward death,..."(99)

⁴⁵*The body that keeps growing has elements of Eugene Ionesco's "theatre de l'absurd" or Antonin Artaud's "theatre de la cruauté".

In this passage Duras makes the transition from the concrete body of the young girl to the "body" of writing. It is her own psyche, growing and "still without set form, continually coming into being,...(99)" that she analyzes in the girl's body. Here Duras approaches Cixous's argument that women must "write as closely as possible to the unconscious, to the area of repressions (102, B. W.)" - even at the risk of being accused for having a structure that "seems painfully fragile (Vivian Cormick, B.W., 112)" or for having too little regard for hierarchy, organization and order, and for using blanks and silences instead of the more conventional explanations and descriptions one is used to in novels. The last point is frequently the most common criticism of Duras's writing.

Benoit Jaquot in his 1974 essay "How she works" gives the following explanation of her blanks:

"For M. D., the invariant consists of a blank, something unsaid, an absence-word, a hole-word, whose center would have been hollowed into a hole, a kind of hole into which all other words would have been buried..." (151, Duras by Duras)

Duras shares with the New Novelists like Alain Robbe Grillet, Michel Butor, Natalie Sarraute, Samuel Beckett and others, the sparse writing, the minimalist approach, the surface presentation of things and the

"almost clinical style, but unlike them her novels contain an emotional intensity and vitality that results from her reliance on personal experience. Transferred and transformed into her fiction are the milestones of her life. In fact, her writing

challenges the boundaries between fiction and autobiography." (104, Barbara Wiedemann)

On a larger scale Robbe-Grillet makes it clear that a work of art does not lean on any truth that existed before it. It does not express anything except itself. It creates its own balance and it has a sense of its own. "Il crée lui-même son propre équilibre et pour lui-même son propre sens." (51, Pour un nouveau roman). Whatever one might hold against or in favor of Duras, her work does have a sense of its own.

Chapter 6Narcissism and Sodomasochism:Der kleine Herr FriedemannandLe Vice-consul

(1)

Physical deformity had an attraction for Thomas Mann. There is Sesemi Weichbrot, the diminutive teacher in Buddenbrooks who feverishly defends immortality. She is convinced that one meets deceased family members again after death. Sesemi is not only tiny and possesses the spirit of a prophet but also, like Johannes Friedemann, she is hunchbacked. In the Joseph tetralogy are two dwarfs, Gottliebchen, who took an instant liking to the young Joseph, and Dûdu, who hated him.

The bodily disfigurement of these hunchbacks and dwarfs visibly marks them as outsiders. They search for happiness and meaning in life without much success. But life casts them cruelly aside. They are, according to Darwin's biological evolutionism, weak species whom the strong ones, favored by natural selection, feed upon. Mann calls someone like Sesemi Weichbrot or Johannes Friedemann "...ein von der Natur stiefmütterlich behandelte Mensch (135, On Myself)."

In Oscar Wilde's tale The Birthday of the Infanta, a dwarf is subjected to a fate similar to Johannes Friedemann's. The dwarf, in love with the little princess, perceives himself one day in a mirror. He suddenly understands that he is a monster whom no one can love, who can only be laughed at on account of his crooked limbs and his ugliness. The story takes an eerie turn when the reflection of the dwarf in the mirror becomes a crawling monster that watches every movement of the dwarf, whose face is torn by pain. The dwarf can only protect himself against the horrible image that is himself by covering his face with his hands. Moaning like a wounded animal, he crawls in despair and self-loathing into a dark place where he no longer moves.

In his autobiographical writing On Myself, Mann gives the following synopsis of the fifteen chapters that comprise Der kleine Herr Friedemann:

"Diese melancholische Geschichte des kleinen Buckligen stellt auch insofern einen Markstein in meiner persönlichen Geschichte dar, als sie zum erstenmal ein Grundmotiv anschlägt, das im Gesamtwerk die gleiche Rolle spielt wie die Leit motive im Einzelwerk. Die Hauptgestalt ist ein von der Natur stiefmütterlich behandelter Mensch, der sich auf eine klug-sanfte, friedlich-philosophische Art mit seinem Schicksal abzufinden weiß und sein Leben ganz auf Ruhe, Kontemplation und Frieden abgestimmt hat. Die Erscheinung einer merkwürdig schönen und dabei kalten und grausamen Frau bedeutet den Einbruch der Leidenschaft in dieses behütete Leben, die den ganzen

Bau umstürzt und den stillen Helden selbst vernichtet."
 (135, On Myself - Gesammelte Werke)⁴⁶

Wilde's dwarf and Mann's hunchbacked "man of peace" [Friedemann] suffer from a narcissistic infatuation. Their illusionary worlds come to a sudden stop when each realizes that the woman he loves not only does not love him in return but mocks him cruelly. The combination of narcissism and sado-masochism is here equated with mockery and cruelty proves to be deadly.

In his Die Libidotheorie und der Narzissmus, Freud explains the basic functions of narcissism by using the zoological example of an amoeba whose form, consisting of a mass of protoplasm, constantly changes its shape by protuding portions of its body. The process of protuding and retraction is called pseudopodium. The protuding process of the amoeba is for Freud synonymous with the sending forth of the libido to a love object while the main mass of protoplasm or of the libido remains in the self.

"Denken Sie an jene einfachsten Lebewesen, die aus einem wenig differenzierten Klümpchen protoplasmatischer Substanz bestehen. Sie strecken Fortsätze aus, Pseudopodien genannt, in welche sie ihre Leibessubstanz hinüberfließen lassen. Sie können diese Fortsätze aber auch wieder einziehen und sich zum Klumpen ballen. Das Ausstrecken der Fortsätze vergleichen wir nun der Aussendung der Libido auf die Objekte, während die Hauptmenge der Libido im Ich

⁴⁶*On Myself, Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden, Frankfurt 1974 - see Herbert Anton and his work Die Romankunst Thomas Manns, page 77. The English title "On Myself" was given by Thomas Mann and was apparently never translated into German.

verbleiben kann,..." (466, Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse)

In case of an organic illness, Freud further explains, a painful irritation, or an inflammation of the organs, the libido retracts to the self where it nurses its damaged parts. Not only during illness, Freud continues, but also in sleep and while in love, the libido retracts. During an amorous infatuation, the sexual object draws part of the narcissistic self toward itself. Or seen from the opposite angle: part of the self - usually the most idealistic part - is transferred to the sexual object which then becomes overrated. Narcissistically inclined persons tend to deify, or at least to overestimate, their sexual object. The love object then suffers from a so-called "Sexualüberschätzung". Aschenbach sees Tadzio as nothing less than a young god whose beauty the writer equates with the dawn. The love object becomes erotically overrated and untouchable. The resulting inaccessibility of the love object immensely heightens its value.

When Johannes Friedemann falls in love with Gerda von Rinnlingen, he suffers from this "Sexualüberschätzung" - his narcissism reflects upon his love object and overevaluates it. Or seen from a different perspective: if Johannes Friedemann had not been inclined toward hypochondria, waiting for a partner and a release, he would not have responded as strongly, as fatally to Gerda von Rinnlingen's

psyche, steeped in her own nervousness and narcissistic difficulties.

"'Auch ich bin viel krank', fuhr sie fort, ohne die Augen von ihm abzuwenden; 'aber niemand merkt es. Ich bin nervös und kenne die merkwürdigsten Zustände.'" (95)

It was fatal for Johannes Friedemann to have fallen in love with the type of woman Gerda von Rinnlingen represents - a woman who possesses little personal charm but a large amount of erotic power. Since she also happens to have a strong penchant toward narcissism, she fits perfectly Freud's narcissistic "Frauentypus". In his Introduction to Narcissism Freud considers this type of woman rather important for the "Liebesleben der Menschen"; he paints in his a fascinating portrait of the Gerda von Rinnlingen type of woman, or, as we will see later, of an Anne-Marie Stretter in Le Vice-consul and in the film script India Song.

"Solche Frauen lieben, streng genommen, nur sich selbst mit ähnlicher Intensität, wie der Mann sie liebt. Ihr Bedürfnis geht auch nicht dahin zu lieben, sondern geliebt zu werden, und sie lassen sich den Mann gefallen, welcher diese Bedingung erfüllt. Die Bedeutung dieses Frauentypus für das Liebesleben der Menschen ist sehr hoch einzuschätzen. Solche Frauen üben den größten Reiz auf die Männer aus, nicht nur aus ästhetischen Gründen, weil sie gewöhnlich die schönsten sind, sondern auch infolge interessanter psychologischer Konstellationen. Es erscheint nämlich deutlich erkennbar, daß der Narzißmus einer Person eine große Anziehung auf diejenigen entfaltet, welche sich des vollen Ausmaßes ihres eigenen Narzißmus begeben haben und sich in der Werbung um die Objektliebe befinden; der Reiz des Kindes beruht zum guten Teil auf dessen Narzißmus, seiner Selbstgenügsamkeit und Unzugänglichkeit, ebenso der Reiz gewisser Tiere, die sich um uns nicht zu kümmern scheinen, wie [der] der

Katzen und großen Raubtiere, ja selbst der große Verbrecher und der Humorist zwingen in der poetischen Darstellung unser Interesse durch die narzißtische Konsequenz mit welcher sie alles ihr Ich Verhindernde von ihm fernzuhalten wissen. Es ist so, als beneideten wir sie um die Erhaltung eines seligen psychischen Zustandes, einer unangreifbaren Libido-position, die wir selbst seither aufgegeben haben. Dem großen Reiz des narzißtischen Weibes fehlt aber die Kehrseite nicht; ein guter Teil der Unbefriedigung des verliebten Mannes, der Zweifel an der Liebe des Weibes, der Klagen über die Rätsel im Wesen desselben hat in dieser Inkongruenz der Objektwahltypen seine Wurzel." (55)

Johannes Friedemann, as well as Jean Marc de H., the Vice-Consul, become the victims of the enticement such narcissistically inclined women radiate. These women have enriched literature under various forms from "la belle dame sans merci" and Geraldine to Lulu, the prototype of the modern femme fatale.

Keat's "la belle dame sans merci", who appears mysteriously on a cold hill to the love stricken knight, functions as the embodiment of the male psyche involved in narcissistic dreams. If C. G. Jung had been looking for a concrete form of his "anima" theory, "la belle dame" could have also been one of the examples of the anima's illusiveness and her transcendental sensuality (Übersinnlichkeit) which is connected with death. Coleridge's poem "Christabel," in which Geraldine plays the double role of woman/male lover/seducer, gives an even more concrete shape to a narcissistic infatuation. Frank

Wedekind's "Lulu"⁴⁷, a flower girl who uses her sensuality to seduce men in her bizarre and destructive ascendancy, is a more up-to-date version of "la belle dame" and Geraldine. All three women behave in a mysterious and ruinous way, which is an expression of their narcissism that ruthlessly pushes aside all things that obstruct their ego. Ruthlessness is mixed with a feline grace whose seductiveness is heightened by its inaccessibility. These women have maintained the untouchable libido-position that Freud mentions; it is normally reserved for children, certain animals and large cats but lost to us.

Like Oscar Wilde's dwarf, Johannes Friedemann recognizes himself in the mirror image of a cold beauty and recoils in "Erkenntnisekel": ruthless introspection and self-dissection bring him to the brink of suicide. Quickly left without a trace of hope, and cruelly rejected by the woman he loves, Johannes Friedemann drowns himself. The scene of suicide is executed with skill and offers a good example of the narrator's moment of abdication of authority:

"Er lag da, das Gesicht im Grase, betäubt, außer sich, und ein Zucken lief jeden Augbenblick durch seinen Körper. Er raffte sich auf, tat zwei Schritte und stürzte wieder zu Boden. Er lag am Wasser. - Was ging eigentlich in ihm vor, bei dem, was nun geschah? Vielleicht war es dieser wollüstige Haß, den er empfunden hatte, wenn sie ihn mit Blicken demütigte, der jetzt, wo er, behandelt von ihr wie ein Hund, am

⁴⁷*Alban Berg (1885-1935), a student of A. Schoenberg, based his unfinished opera "Lulu" on Wedekind's flower girl. There is also a film version of "Lulu", G. W. Pabst's "Pandora's Box".

Boden lag, in eine irrsinnige Wut ausartete, die er betätigen mußte, sei es auch gegen sich selbst...ein Ekel vielleicht vor sich selbst, der ihn mit einem Durst erfüllte, sich zu vernichten, sich in Stücke zu zerreißen, sich auszulöschen...Auf dem Bauche schob er sich noch weiter vorwärts, erhob den Oberkörper und ließ ihn ins Wasser fallen. Er hob den Kopf nicht wieder⁴⁶; nicht einmal die Beine, die am Ufer lagen, bewegte er mehr. Bei dem Aufklatschen des Wassers waren die Grillen einen Augenblick verstummt. Nun setzte ihr Zirpen wieder ein, der Park rauschte leise auf, und durch die lange Allee herunter klang gedämpftes Lachen." (105)

Apart from its stylistic effectiveness, this closing paragraph gives ample evidence of Johannes Friedemann's latent masochism.

The last paragraph maybe divided into four sections, starting with the physical description of the protagonist. "Er lag da, das Gesicht im Gras,...(105)" From the exterior event that takes place in the first section, the eye quickly gains a revealing view of the psychological motives that are displayed in the second section, beginning with the question "Was ging eigentlich in ihm vor,...?(105)" In the third section the writer goes back to an exterior image of Johannes Friedemann that highlights the death of the unhappy hero. "Auf dem Bauche schob er sich...(105)"

The forth and last part of the paragraph evokes nature, superbly serene and indifferent to the human drama that just

⁴⁶The almost oversimplified version of Friedemann's suicide: "Er hob den Kopf nicht wieder;" - is an ironic parallel to Goethe's poem "Der Fischer" whose protagonist is lured to drown himself by a mermaid: "...und ward nicht mehr gesehen." Mann uses six words to announce death, Goethe five.

occurred. "Beim Aufklatschen des Wassers waren die Grillen einen Augenblick verstummt (105)." The momentary muteness of the crickets is perfectly timed with the drowning of Johannes Friedemann and is juxtaposed with the muted laughter that rings through the long passage way of the park. In reality, the insects had been simply frightened by the unusual interruption and had become silent. But the narrator uses here a highly effective dramatic device to create another dimension. The "gedämpftes Lachen" in its disharmony with the death that has just occurred is the perfect ironic touch to a dramatic ending. Even though one assumes that the laughter pertains to Gerda von Rinnlingen or one of her guests who frolic in the garden after dinner, the laughter also seems to agree with the indifferent beauty of nature. Suffering and death of an individual have no meaning when measured against life in general.

The psychic revelations of Johannes Friedemann's interior are announced by uncontrollable quivers that move his small body convulsively. So strong are his emotions that they throw him helplessly to the ground. As if he were already drowning, past pictures of his encounters with Gerda von Rinnlingen rapidly run across his mind. It is now clear to him that from the moment he tried to approach his idol, he was quickly put in his place by nothing but humiliating looks. No harsh or insulting words were ever exchanged.

Johannes Friedemann and Gerda von Rinnlingen meet four times, each meeting longer than the previous one. There are the first two incidental encounters on the street and at the opera where Friedemann happens to sit next to Gerda and from where he leaves prematurely, emotionally too shaken by Gerda's erotic aura and her domineering attitude to remain seated. Then there is Johannes's first official visit to Gerda's home, and finally Johannes is a guest at the dinner party which Gerda gives at her house, the festivity that has such disastrous consequences for him. Except for the last scene the words exchanged between them are incidental, a mere reflection of the gentle upbringing and social class to which both protagonists. Strong feelings run underground. One almost hears one of Wagner's "Sehnsuchtsmotive". The action takes place only in their eyes - the mortifying looks of Gerda von Rinnlingen and the open, helpless gaze of Herr Friedemann, who receives her looks with apparent humility while they cause turmoil in his soul. Johannes Friedemann's emotional outbursts are a delayed reaction - usually after he has left Gerda and relives their meeting in his mind. Only then do her poisonous looks come to full force, stirring up the voluptuous hate and irrational anger that Johannes turns against himself.

This curiously delayed reaction is also part of the Vice-Consul's infatuation with Anne-Marie Stretter. During a soirée at the French Embassy in Calcutta to which the

Vice-Consul was invited, he is for a long time unable to dance with Anne-Marie Stretter, who as the wife of the Ambassador is in constant demand by other diplomats and their spouses. When Jean-Marc de H. finally manages his bow in front of Anne-Marie Stretter and she dances with him, he tries to tell her how much he is in love with her. Yet he is unable to do so.

"'Because I have the feeling that if I tried to say what I really want to say to you, everything would crumble into dust - 'he is trembling - 'for what I want to say... to you... from me to you...there are no words. I should fumble... I should say something different from what I intended... one thing leads to another.'" (98, ellipses Duras's)

His words are at once mysterious and clumsy - and ill-suited for seduction. They express the aura that surrounds Jean-Marc de H. and arouse the curiosity of the white circles in Calcutta. When he pushes too hard: "'Yes. I want you to hear what I have to say. You. Tonight (98),'"

Anne-Marie Stretter quickly puts him in his place. Quite similar to Gerda von Rinnlingen's tactics, Anne-Marie Stretter does not use words to express what is on her mind. Instead, she too applies looks that leave Jean-Marc H. bewildered and disappointed.

"She darts a glance at him, so swift that he is only aware of it afterwards. He begins talking in a very low voice." (98)

The first indifferent gaze that Gerda von Rinnlingen fixes on Johannes Friedemann occurs in the main street of

town⁴⁹ where he walks, "wichtig und winzig (85)" together with Herr Stephens, a "Großkaufmann".

That first fatal look is accompanied by a whip that Gerda von Rinnlingen tips when she salutes Johannes Friedemann and Herr Stephens. The whip is, of course, a symbol of the sado-masochistic relationship that develops between Gerda von Rinnlingen and her admirer. In addition to this concrete image, there is also an abstract one: Friedemann's earlier resolution to renounce "normal" life (sexuality), which is his whip.

The image of Isis and her masochistically disposed priest to whom Count Sacher-Masoch pays tribute in Venus in Furs is evoked here.

"To me woman represented a personification of nature, Isis, and the man was her priest, her slave. In contrast to him, she was cruel like nature herself who tosses aside whatever has served her purposes as soon as she no longer has need for it. To him her cruelties, even death itself, still were sensual raptures." (50, Venus in Furs)

Even though the last sentence of this quote might be somewhat hard to conceive when applied to a normal love relationship, in the case of Johannes Friedemann's infatuation with Gerda von Rinnlingen, Sacher-Masoch's image is quite apt. Johannes does experience sensual rapture even

⁴⁹*The town where Johannes Friedemann lives is modeled after Lübeck, and the house that Johannes occupies with his three sisters, Henriette, Pfiffi and Friedericke, is a replica of the houses in Buddenbrooks and Tonio Kröger, including the elegant "Landschaftszimmer" where guests are received.

when Gerda physically pushes him away from her as if he were a too exuberant dog whose paws had soiled her skirt.

Shortly after Gerda had shoved Johannes Friedmann off her lap where he had buried his face - "...und sein Gesicht in ihren Schoß drückte,..." - leaving him in utter despair, he commits suicide by drowning himself. There is a correlation between Friedemann's sudden fall headfirst into the lake and Tazio's walk into the water. Friedemann-Gerda is a mirror reversal, a reversed image of Aschenbach-Tadio, with respect to death.

The second confrontation between Johannes Friedemann and Gerda von Rinnlingen takes place at the opera where Lohengrin is being performed. (According to Peter de Mendelssohn, the overture to Lohengrin was considered by Mann the most beautiful piece of music). Next to his box, number 13, Johannes Friedemann spots Frau von Rinnlingen. He is immediately perturbed and is unable to return Gerda von Rinnlingen's look. She watches him attentively as he sits down, while he is capable only of throwing an oblique glance at her. She is even more seductive to him than when he saw her first: she now wears a light-colored evening gown - the only one of the attending ladies whose dress has a small décolleté. He cannot help watching her left arm from which she removed her white glove. It is an arm and a hand without jewels but adorned with pale blue veins. During the first act arm and hand rest on the red velvet of

the balastrade under the eyes of Johannes Friedemann. To focus on a particular part of the body - sometimes nothing more than a vein or wrinkle on the forehead of a pretty woman, a shadow in the corner of her eyes - is a literary device frequently used by Mann. One thinks of Gerda Buddenbrook, the mother of Hanno:

"Das schwere, dunkelrote Haar umrahmte das weiße Gesicht, und in den Winkeln der nahe beieinanderliegenden Augen lagerten bläuliche Schatten." (209)

Or of Baroness Anna in the short story Ein Glück:

"Sie hatte blasse Hände und aschblondes Haar, das viel zu schwer war im Verhältnis zu ihrem schmalen, zartknochigen Gesichtchen. Zwischen ihren hellen Brauen stand eine senkrechte Falte, die ihrem Lächeln etwas Bedrängtes und Wundes gab." (356)

And in Doktor Faustus there is Ines Institoris, "eine hübsche Frau, wenn auch auf etwas fatale und leidende Weise. (350)" Married to Helmut, a small, not too intelligent but wealthy professor who overrates aesthetics, Ines lives in constant fear of losing her lover:

"...und zu ihrer höchsten Angst die prekaere Lieblichkeit ihrer Erscheinung bedrohte, - zum Beispiel, indem es die beiden Falten an der Nasenwurzel, zwischen ihren blonden Brauen, auf eine gewissen marikalische Weise vertiefte." (350)

In discussing Mann as an erotic writer, Reinhard Baumgart points out that someone ensnared in eroticism can only dream of fulfillment in love but never achieve it. Foreplay is the playground for eroticism, Baumgart finds, because the erotically disposed person needs distance from his/her love object. Distance facilitates approach and

withdrawal. There has to be space for that which is not permissible or not yet allowed; space is also essential to undertake a siege. Gerda von Rinnlingen's arm - only one part of her body - signifies her entire being.

"Segmentierung des Körpers, der isolierte Teil als Signal fürs Ganze - schon daran erkennt man einen erotischen Tick, eine erotische Strategie." (R. Baumgart, Die Zeit, #15, April 8, 1988.)

Johannes Friedemann delights in eroticism. Eroticism seems to occupy a similar space in the complex human psyche as narcissism - that "Zwischenraum" between mirror and self Marcel Kunz speaks of in connection with Rilke's narcissism.

Similar to the dismemberment of the body is the fetishism which occurs in Le Vice-consul. In her psychoanalytical study Feminizing the Fetish, Emily Apter considers fetishism a subgenre of Realistic French fiction. Apter argues that French authors of the turn-of-the-century who inherited the Naturalistic and Realist movement - writers such as Guy de Maupassant, the Goncourt brothers, Octave Mirbeau, Octave Uzanne, Gide and Zola, are intrigued by fetishism and use it to represent sexual obsession. The most familiar objects that stand for fetishism are gloves, shoes, umbrellas and cigars. In the Vice-consul the metaphor for fetishism is a bicycle. It is not only a symbolic device for the unreachable Anne-Marie Stretter, to whom it belongs, but the unanimated object suddenly possesses a life of its own.

"The bicycle, propped up against the wire netting, is coated with fine greyish dust, from the drive. It is abandoned, unwanted, frightening." (35)

The three adjectives describe precisely Jean-Marc de H.'s state of mind after his transfer from Lahore to Calcutta. Only one thing can save him from going mad: the love of Anne-Marie Stretter. The bicycle⁵⁰ is mentioned about ten times. Each time it is recalled, the Vice-consul remembers when he first saw Anne-Marie Stretter walking toward the tennis courts on the French Embassy grounds.

"I might find a way of approaching her through something she had touched...the bush...or the bicycle, perhaps." (61, ellipses Duras's)

Longing to make advances to the woman he loves, but unable to find a proper way, he ponders about his predicament aloud while drinking with the Embassy's secretary. Anne-Marie has become deeply ingrained in his memory, from where she rises ghostlike as soon as her bicycle, the fetishistic symbol, is mentioned or seen.

Gerda von Rinnlingen's arm and hand, with their flawless white skin displaying pale-blue veins - that symbol of her desirable but unobtainable beauty - finds a parallel in the sadistically disposed Wanda von Dunajew, the heroine of Count Sacher-Masoch's Venus in Furs:

⁵⁰*A bicycle plays also a major role in The Jewel of the Crown, the first novel of Paul Scott's monumental message to the modern world about India in The Raj Quartet

"Her skin is so infinitely delicate, that the blue veins show through everywhere; even through the muslim covering her arms and bosom." (29-30)

As the second act is about to begin and Frau von Rinnlingen returns to her box, Johannes Friedemann senses her eyes on him. Without wanting to, he raises his head and their eyes meet. Silently Gerda challenges, Johannes cringes. Aware of Johannes' anguish, Gerda continues to investigate Johannes's face, on which his feelings are openly displayed. Whereas Gerda looks at Johannes with sadistical pleasure, he feels overpowered and chastened. Yet in his agony he also experiences some strange, voluptuous rage.

"Als ihre Blicke sich traf, sah sie durchaus nicht beiseite, sondern fuhr fort, ihn ohne eine Spur von Verlegenheit aufmerksam zu betrachten. Er war noch bleicher dabei, und ein seltsamer, süßlich reizender Zorn stieg in ihm auf..." 89, ellipses Mann's)

After their first sado-masochistic match which leaves Johannes with that "ohnmächtigen, wollüstigen Haß (91)" he experiences whenever he thinks about Gerda von Rinnlingen, Johannes begins to hate her because she does not act as a well-bred, young lady is supposed to behave: to look modestly down the moment a man's glance crosses her own. Disobeying this social code, Friedemann feels that Gerda has humiliated him since he, as the man, had to look away first. "War sie nicht eine Frau und er ein Mann (90)?" Not only did Gerda behave immodestly, according to Johannes's moral convictions, but she obviously enjoyed his embarrassment.

"Und hatten ihre seltsamen, braunen Augen nicht förmlich dabei vor Freude gezittert (90)?"

Herr Friedemann's anger and hate are modified by an undefinable voluptuousness that overpowers him. Since Gerda is a highly desirable woman, desire mingles with shame and produces a masochistic state of mind. Toward the end of the first act, Gerda has dropped her fan near Johannes Friedemann's seat. While they both reach for it, Johannes breathed in the warm scent of her bosom. It was more than he could take. Breathless, with his heart pounding heavily, he leaves the opera.

"Ihr Köpfe waren ganz dicht beieinander gewesen, und er hatte einen Augenblick den warmen Duft ihrer Brust atmen müssen. Sein Gesicht war verzerrt, sein ganzer Körper zog sich zusammen, und sein Herz klopfte so gräßlich schwer und wuchtig, daß ihm der Atem verging. Er saß noch eine halbe Minute, dann schob er den Sessel zurück, stand leise auf und ging leise hinaus."
(89-90)

The love match between the two players favors from early on the stronger opponent. It is Gerda who represents life in full bloom - she is twenty-four years old - and not the pitiful, sensitive Johannes Friedemann, who clearly possesses some characteristics of the artist. His love for music and literature compensates him for the way life has mistreated him. Yet with the arrival of Gerda von Rinnlingen his hard-won peaceful edifice collapses and buries him under its debris. The theme of unevenly matched lovers runs throughout Mann's work. One has but to think of

von Aschenbach and Tadizo, Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat, Mut-em-enet and Joseph, Ines Institoris and Rudi Schwerdtfeger.

(2)

This section deals with the critical and fatal encounter of love-stricken men and their women in Le Vice-consul and Der kleine Herr Friedemann.

The cat-and-mouse game played by Johannes Friedemann and Gerda von Rinnlingen is echoed by Anne-Marie Stretter, the wife of the French Ambassador in Calcutta and Jean-Marc de H., the former Vice-Consul of France in Lahore.

There is one major difference in the otherwise similar sado-masochistical relationship between Anne-Marie Stretter and Jean-Marc de H.: this time it is the woman who commits suicide - also by drowning -, not the man. Anne-Marie Stretter's suicide occurs in India Song, the film script of Le Vice-consul. The content of the novel, Le Vice-consul and the film script India Song is more or less identical but the form changes considerably. India Song is told by four unidentified voices - two female and two male. Voice #1 and Voice #2 are the feminine projections. Voice #2 is in love with Voice #1, who in turn loves Anne-Marie Stretter. The voices, like a Greek chorus, advance the action but play no role in it. They reflect upon the characters' external

behavior and their hidden motives. Anne-Marie Stretter does not know that Voice #1 exists. She therefore has no idea that this bodiless woman concealed under Voice #1 is in love with her. If one were forced to identify Voice #1, a good choice would be that it belongs to Duras, for whom Anne-Marie Stretter represents an idealized self- and mother image.

Jean-Marc de H. and Anne-Marie Stretter meet in Calcutta, where the Vice-Consul was transferred from Lahore. Prior to his arrival, he had served for a year and a half in the French Diplomatic Service of Lahore "from where he was recalled, following incidents distressing to his superiors...(23)." Quickly a lot of rumors spread through the "white" section of the capital of India about the reason for the Vice-Consul's sudden transferral. But no one except the French Ambassador and his wife knows details. Duras cleverly exploits the mysterious past of Jean-Marc de H., a past filled with emotionally disturbing secrets only hinted at but not fully revealed.

In Calcutta, the Vice-Consul, who lives on the Embassy grounds, daily observes Anne-Marie Stretter at a distance while she walks in white shorts to the tennis courts, flanked by her two half-grown daughters: "Undoubtedly, the elder will be a beauty, like her mother, she has all her charm already (72)." For five weeks, in spite of Jean-Marc H. being on the look-out for Anne-Marie Stretter, "their

acquaintance has not progressed beyond a nod and a bow (25)."

Notwithstanding his invitation to a welcoming reception at the Embassy about three weeks after his arrival in Calcutta, the Vice-Consul is unable to go beyond the stage of a nodding acquaintanceship with Anne-Marie Stretter.

At their second meeting she has exchanged her white tennis shorts for a white dress. In it she sits - once more surrounded by her two daughters - "on a couch upholstered in rose-colored cretonne (82)," and she astonishes Jean-Marc de H. with her beauty. "He was startled by her expression, and her statuesque grace, as she sat on the couch (82)."

If their first encounter on the Embassy grounds as Anne-Marie Stretter was walking to the tennis courts had aroused the Vice-Consul's curiosity - an encounter that quickly became a daily ritual mutely performed, only real in the spying eyes of Jean-Marc de H. - their second meeting is responsible for the Vice-Consul's falling in love. He is a man who so far has always preferred his own company, a man steeped in narcissism, unable to love anyone except himself - not unlike Johannes Friedemann.

The first repetitive skirmish between Anne-Marie Stretter and the Vice-Consul in the Embassy gardens corresponds to the first glances exchanged between Johannes Friedemann and Gerda von Rinnlingen as she drove her yellow hunting gig through town.

The second encounter between Jean-Marc de H. and Anne-Marie Stretter occurs in a small sitting-room belonging to one of the Embassy's private apartments. This scene, in which the Vice-Consul sees Anne-Marie Stretter reposing straight-backed between her two daughters, has its parallel in the after-dinner portrait at the von Rinnlingen's red villa where Johannes Friedemann watches Gerda, who reclines leisurely on the yellow silk cushion of an ottoman.

"Im Hintergrunde des Zimmers aber, auf der Ottomane, neben der die niedrige, rotverhüllte Lampe stand, saß im Gespräch mit dem jungen Fräulein Stephens Gerda von Rinnlingen. Sie saß ein wenig in das gelbseidene Kissen zurückgelehnt, einen Fuß über den anderen gestellt, und rauchte langsam eine Zigarette, wobei sie den Rauch durch die Nase ausatmete und die Unterlippe vorschob." (101)

Neither Johannes Friedemann nor Jean-Marc de H. talks. Silently they watch their idol in whose power they have put themselves, apparently voluntarily, and from which they can no longer escape.

"Niemand beachtete den kleinen Herrn Friedemann, und niemand bemerkte, daß seine großen Augen ohne Unterlaß auf Frau von Rinnlingen gerichtet waren. In einer schlaffen Haltung saß er und sah sie an." (101-102)

There is no action in this scene; not a word is spoken, the drama develops internally. It is as though watching rare fish or plants.⁵¹

⁵¹*Nature, laughing at words, at human language, so useless in critical moments, is in full control here. Man is reduced to bare essentials.

Both men are drawn irresistibly by their own narcissistic inclinations toward a woman who is not interested in them but fulfills their secret wishes. Both men become victims of their own "Sexualüberschätzung".

The reception at the French Embassy in Calcutta corresponds to the dinner for thirty at Gerda von Rinnlingen's home. The fate of the two masochistically disposed, ill-fated lovers is decided during these social gatherings.

Johannes Friedemann has just celebrated his thirtieth birthday when he meets Gerda von Rinnlingen. The Vice-Consul is a few years older but he looks younger than his age.

"How well he has kept his figure, the Vice-Consul. You would take him for a much younger man, but for his face." (75)

Being hunch-backed, Johannes Friedmann only reaches as far as Gerda von Rinnlingen's bosom "...er reichte ihr nur bis zur Brust, (94)..." whereas Jean-Marc de H. is rather tall. "Have you noticed how tall he is? She only comes up to his ear (96)." What the two men share is the color of their faces: both are terribly pale. "Sein Gesicht war bleich und über den geröteten Augen klebte das Haar an der Stirn (94);"

"'Sie sehen auch jetzt noch nicht gesund aus', sagte sie ganz ruhig und blickte ihn unverwandt an. 'Sie sind bleich, und Ihre Augen sind entzündet.'" (95)

And the Vice-Consul, who is often described through the eyes of Charles Rossett, the thirty-two-year-old First Secretary of the French Embassy:

"How pale he is, as though he were in the grip of some intense emotion, holding it in check, endlessly deferring the moment when he will have to give expression to it." (76)

"The Vice-Consul, with a grunt of fury, flings away his glass, which shatters. He is deathly pale (109)."

The pale faces of both men are the outer signs of their fear and terror. It is literally a terror of death. Both men have staked their fortunes and lives on one card, on one woman. If they lose, life becomes meaningless for them. That unbearable tension is reflected in the ghastly paleness of their faces and in their eyes, where death is already taking hold.

"Es war nichts Leidenschaftliches in seinem Blick und kaum ein Schmerz; etwas Stumpfes und Todes lag darin, eine dumpfe, kraft- und willenlose Hingabe." (102)

Johannes Friedemann's strange and terrible behavior, as if he were a puppet on a string pulled by the seemingly frail hand of a woman, can also be observed in Jean-Marc de H. But whereas Johannes Friedmann's suffering is hidden in the shade, among the folds of the starched table cloth, with only Gerda von Rinnlingen aware of his tortures, Jean-Marc de H. is fully exposed to the public eye. His two dances with Anne-Marie Stretter make it all too clear to everyone assembled how much he desires the Ambassador's wife and how little she is interested in him.

So intense are the Vice-Consul's sufferings at certain times that even Anne-Marie Stretter's husband feels it his duty to console this man who is a potential rival.

"Once again, the Ambassador seems on the point of moving away, and once again he thinks better of it. He must stay and talk to this man tonight, this man who is looking at him with death in his eyes." (92)

Mr. Stretter, considerably older than his thirty-nine-year-old wife, and a kindly man, who, as gossip will have it, knows and tolerates Anne-Marie's lovers, is more concerned with Jean-Marc's awful state of mind than with his wife. Again and again she rebuffs her all too ardent admirer. Not physically as Gerda von Rinnlingen does, who actually throws Johannes Friedmann to the ground,

"...hatte ihn am Arm gepackt, ihn seitwärts vollends zu Boden geschleudert,..." (104)

but with looks and words.

During the evening Anne-Marie has been occupied with Charles Rossett, the "...fair young man with the sad blue eyes (95),..." who, it is said, will soon be taken to the Ambassador's villa in the Delta of the Ganges, where Anne-Marie only invites her lovers. When the Vice-Consul is finally able to dance with Anne-Marie he is happy. Some of the strain he has been under leaves him as soon as he touches his idol. This is not so with Anne-Marie, who did not want to dance with Jean-Marc de H. and perspires slightly - an outward sign of the stress she is under. It is she who initiates a conversation if only to have the Vice-Consul

relax his grip on her. He dances too closely - something that is not customary in India.

"He must know that he is dancing as they do in Paris, and that is not done here. He must realize, as he leads her, that she moves a little more heavily than she should, as though resisting the movement of the dance." (95)

In a conventional manner, Anne-Marie speaks first about the weather. It is the beginning of the monsoon season and she has lived in the tropics far longer than the Vice-Consul. She knows almost as much about the weather in India as she knows about herself. "She has a way of talking about the climate of Calcutta that endows the subject with a kind of intimacy (95)." She would rather speak about her summer house on the "island in the mouth of the Ganges (95)" but does not - perhaps because she has already made up her mind "that he will never see (95)" it.

The dampness of the weather, the heavy air that sometimes becomes almost unbreathable, reminds Anne-Marie of her piano that gets out of tune after one storm-ridden, utterly humid night.

At seventeen, Anne-Marie - whose mother was Italian - has been a gifted student at the Venice Conservatoire where she was "the white hope of western music (149)." Spoiled as the "beloved child of Venice (149)", she had gained the attention of wealthy patrons of the arts.

Now she still plays nightly in Calcutta. "I play the piano, yes, I always have. Perhaps you do, too (95)?"

Anne-Marie asks Jean-Marc de H.. He no longer does, as he admits with embarrassment. But he had been taught to play the piano as a child.

Music is rather one-sided in the Vice-Consul: it is dominated by Anne-Marie Stretter, who plays every night as if she were a mermaid singing at the seashore to lure passers-by into her net. Michael Richard⁵², one of her young English lovers, has been seduced this way. One night, while strolling through Calcutta, he heard piano-playing. For several evenings he returned to the same spot where he had listened to the music. Then, intrigued by the lovely sounds and a little afraid of his own daring, "...I was shaking, I remember (149)," he followed the playing into the embassy grounds where he encountered Anne-Marie Stretter. He never left her again. Neither did he ever return to England but stayed in India.

In Der kleine Herr Friedemann music is controlled by Gerda von Rinnlingen, who asks her timid guest at his first official visit to her home - shortly after they had met at the opera - if he plays the piano. When Friedemann tells her that he plays the violin, Gerda invites him to play together one day. Her request has put him into a dreamlike state. "'Ich stehe der gnädigen Frau mit Vergnügen zur

⁵²*In Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein Michael Richard is the fiance of Lol. Seduced by Anne-Marie Stretter, he abandons Lol. As a result of her loss, her ravissement, the young girl becomes mad.

Verfügung', sagte er, immer wie im Traum (96)," from which he is, however, rather rudely awakened as he suddenly becomes aware that Gerda watches him again with the malice of a large-eyed cat ready to pounce upon her victim.

"Da änderte sich plötzlich der Ausdruck ihres Gesichtes. Er sah, wie es sich in einem kaum merklichen grausamen Spott verzerrte, wie ihre Augen sich wieder mit jenem unheimlichen Zittern fest und forschend auf ihn richteten wie schon zweimal vorher." (96)

The object of desire grows here out of proportion and becomes in Johannes Friedemann's eyes a sort of archaic, whip-carrying mother-figure who punishes at will and with mocking cruelty.

Gerda does not wield her power only through sexuality, the conventional form man is used to when he confronts a woman, but in Johannes Friedemann's overly excited mind she becomes a kind of phallic mother. She turns into far too fearsome a figure for the imagination of a patriarchal society in which women are viewed as being either sexually attractive, as Marilyn Monroe, or as powerful, as Margaret Thatcher - but not as a combination of the two, which would be intimidating.

Little wonder that Johannes Friedemann becomes embarrassed like a schoolboy under Gerda's glances, in whose trembling there dwells something sinister. Here Mann goes beyond the confines attributed to normal woman and reaches into the unconscious world of instincts, the realm of archetypes, the "country under waves," as Yeats calls it.

Here woman can take the form of water snakes and mermaids, beautiful but cruel and dangerous.

In the midst of the shame and humiliation that Johannes Friedemann experiences when Gerda von Rinnlingen looks at him there is a helpless but strangely sweet and tormenting rage that runs up and down his spine. "Wie ein kurzer Schauer aber durchrieselte ihn wieder jene ohnmächtige, süßlich peinigende Wut (96)." It is the rage of a little boy who fears and loves Mother all at once. He fears punishment but above all he fears to lose her love. This mixture of love and fear can produce masochism in the adult man (as well as in the woman). Johannes Friedemann hates and desires Gerda von Rinnlingen because - like his mother when he was a small boy - she has control over him. He wants to be in her power but despises himself for a longing that is so unmanly. In the end, Johannes Friedemann does not commit suicide because Gerda treats him like a dog, "...behandelt von ihr wie ein Hund (105),..."but because she runs away from him. "...war aufgesprungen und in der Allee verschwunden (104)." Similar to the hero in Venus in Furs, Johannes Friedemann would have been able to take a physical beating by Gerda von Rinnlingen - not because he would have enjoyed the abuse and the pain - but because of the consoling attention he was hoping to get afterwards. The idea of this type of unconscious thinking is: Mother has to be cruel in order to be kind. Contrary to popular

assumption, masochism is not based on suffering pain - no human being or animal enjoys pain for its own sake - but on what follows afterwards: kindness, tears, demands for forgiveness, possibly love, but at least permission to be with the person one loves. Or the so-called masochistic person endures pain in order to avoid even greater pain.

Masochism is mainly aggression turned inward. It is usually attributed to women, but as Mann and Duras show, there are also masochistically inclined men. If aggression is suppressed, either early through education or later by society, destructiveness turns inward and is called masochism. Freud applies masochism mainly to women and asserts that "females constitutionally suppress their aggression (75, The Myth of Women's Masochism)."⁵³

Johannes Friedemann was not born a hunchback. He was dropped by his alcoholic wet nurse when he was about a month old while his mother and his three teenage sisters had gone for a walk. It is quite possible that Johannes, when he grew a little older and started to understand what had

⁵³*Freud connects female aggression with the Oedipus complex and penis envy - which might explain the sexual connotation associated with masochism - and the little girl blaming mother for not having provided her with that vital organ. It is supposedly this mishap that subsequently instills an inferiority complex in the female's psyche. Because of it little girls must learn early to tolerate unpleasantness and pain. They are, as if they were puppies, systematically trained to become masochists. Even if one accepts this hypothesis, there is a large difference between tolerating pain and enjoying it. Physical pain is sometimes endured for a higher goal - as in sports to win a game or earn a medal - but not for its own sake.

happened, reacted first with anger at his mother because she apparently did not care enough about him not to leave him in the hands of an irresponsible woman. Yet since he was dependent on his mother, he could not show her his frustration or his pain. He turned rage onto himself. He became a masochist.

Toward the end of Johannes Friedemann's visit at the red villa of the von Rinnlingen's, just when he feels he can no longer stand his emotional turmoil and, like a drowning man raises his head desperately, he notices that Gerda von Rinnlingen has lost all interest in him:

"Als er mit einem verzweifelten Entschluß den Blick wieder erhob, sah sie ihn nicht mehr an, sondern blickte ruhig über seinen Kopf hinweg auf die Tür. Er brachte mühsam ein paar Worte hervor." (96)

If a moment before he felt as if a train were approaching him full force, he must now feel that the train has passed, apparently without hurting him. All he still senses is a rush of air that had accompanied the fast-moving train.

With Johannes Friedemann's question: "Und sind gnädige Frau bis jetzt leidlich zufrieden mit Ihrem Aufenthalt in unserer Stadt (96)?", scene and dialogue continue in conventional terms. They now remain on an elegant and descriptive surface and are soon ended by the arrival of Gerda von Rinnlingen's husband, who repeats the dinner invitation his wife had already made. There is no longer any hint of the sado-masochistical confrontation that has

just taken place. Everything is smoothed over by normal appearances.

Chapter 7

Sadomasochism and Narcissism:

Der kleine Herr Friedemann and Le Vice-consul

On one of the last pages of the Vice-consul, Anne-Marie Stretter is called "the queen of Calcutta (161)." Like a monarch she is surrounded by men, minus the Vice-Consul who is not allowed to come with her to her villa on one of the islands in the Delta of the Ganges. There are no other women except her "clown", the bald-headed, mad beggar woman from Cambodia (who in Jungian terms would be considered her shadow). She follows Anne-Marie Stretter everywhere, including the islands; yet no one knows how she gets there. Her daughters, who at first are seen together with her - functioning as younger doubles of herself - disappear from the scene. There can be no other woman next to a queen.

It is her queenly status, her power and beauty that fascinate and subdue the Vice-Consul. From the beginning "he was startled by her expression, and her statuesque grace, as she sat on the couch (82)." Anne-Marie is almost too perfect an object of desire; she fulfills the stereotype of female beauty men dream about and from which they build their fetishistic images while indulging in narcissistic phantasies. As Trista Selous points out, Anne-Marie Stretter "stands as a powerful incarnation of Woman, the object of desire (192)." The men who are close to her,

delight in her thinness, her low-cut, tight-fitting evening gowns (those she wears mainly in Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein), the bone structure of her body and face. To underline further the dramatic aspect of her appearance, Duras dresses her either in white or black. Black, the absence of color, is the most becoming for Anne-Marie Stretter. It symbolizes her silence, her sadness and the mysterious seductiveness that encircles her.

In Le Vice-Consul, Anne-Marie Stretter is shown only from an exterior, two-dimensional angle. Contrary to Jean-Marc de H., of whose thoughts one catches glimpses here and there, mostly filtered through the mind of Charles Rossett, one does not know anything about Anne-Marie except that she is a wife and mother - an elegant, white woman, who, while still young, came to India where she married a high-ranking French official, considerably older than she. Her sophistication is acquired. She was not born into a wealthy family as most of Mann's protagonists were.

Living on the embassy grounds, guarded by sentries, Anne-Marie Stretter and a handful of whites exist in a sea of hundreds of thousands of Indians. Starving India is seen through the eyes of a few traditional Europeans. Duras perpetuates the myth of an incomprehensible India in which the whites like to see themselves as having some order, some imperialistic structure to their lives in contrast to the Indians, who are ruled by chaos, sickness and hunger. Duras

refers to the bizarre, exotic side of India as if it were a woman in distress: "Once more, Calcutta sends up a faint cry (126)." And: "Once more, distant Calcutta groans in its sleep (126)." She describes Indian people as having no faces; their bodies having turned into something subhuman. They are walking skeletons dying from starvation, who seem to be reduced to an animal level and even less than that - things that crawl along, half-dead from lack of food and exhaustion.

"People everywhere, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, crowded like grains of millet, walking along the causeways, an endless procession, continually on the move, each one with his tools of naked flesh hanging down on either side." (141)

This image is so horrible that one thinks of extermination camps on Beckett's Endgame, with its dying people huddled together in a cramped space. Lepers and starving dogs, whose intestines are eaten by worms, are everywhere. The outcasts are especially evident right outside the gates of the French Embassy in Calcutta, where Anne-Marie makes sure they get fresh water and left-overs daily, often straight out of garbage cans. These unfortunates are mirrored in only one face: that of the mad beggar woman. Bald-headed, like a Buddhist nun, she is the only one who possesses a face and seems to be immune to leprosy. Living among the sick, she waits for food to be distributed and then feeds herself with incredible speed;

ravenous, she ignores the cuffs and blows of the other beggars who scramble for the waste cans together with her.

The secret that encloses Jean-Marc de H. is connected with these lepers. In the Shalimar gardens of Lahore, before his forced transferal to Calcutta, he used to shoot lepers at night, then return home and shoot at himself in the mirrors of his rooms. There is no explanation why the Vice-Consul acts this way, except that of the general notion of madness. Attempts to interpret Jean-Marc de H.'s insane acts have been made by several critics. One of them, Ninette Bailey, explains the Vice-Consul's nightly shooting this way:

"...the sound of gunshots, the smashing of broken mirrors and cries, that is, another form of language, language returned to a primitive state and thus meeting the primitive needs of the Indian masses: hunger."
(243, quoted by Trista Selous)

Whether shooting people is actually a kind of violent language the Vice-Consul uses, or whether it is something not explicable from a positive angle but a mystery that is understood only as the desperate act of an utterly lonely man, who as he approaches middle age is still chaste, is left open to reader interpretation. But the effect the Vice-Consul's shooting has on the white community of Calcutta (one never gets to know how the Indians feel about these murders) has devastating consequences for Jean-Marc de H.: he is shunned by almost everyone as if with his act he had contracted leprosy himself - an illness which people

whose diet produces sufficient antibodies do not easily catch. On a metaphorical level it is as if the Vice-Consul had unsettled a huge wasp's nest with a stick - without realizing that the stick would prove insufficient protection against the stings of the insects. Jean-Marc de H. is ostracized not on account of the killing of other human beings - Indian lepers are not considered part of the human race - but because he disturbed the peace of mind and the prestige of the white inner circle of Calcutta. According to European society, he misbehaved as if he were still in boarding school where he had already broken things and ignored house rules. That is why he is punished - not for murder, his real crime. By trying to show how callous, selfish and brutal the whites act toward starving and sick Indians - "'Lepers and dogs! Can you call it killing, when it's merely a question of lepers and dogs (72, The Vice-Consul)?'" - "merely" is a slap in the face - Duras deliberately shocks the reader and forces him to reflect how he would behave in a similar situation. Duras is best known as a writer of family histories. Her images of a family are a microcosm, a mythical entity for society, state and politics. In the Vice-Consul, however, she goes beyond the limits of domestic unhappiness to point out the insensitivity, selfishness and racism that exist among all people. Only once before, in her early novel Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, did her language approach this

universal level, this finely tuned psychological understanding that reveals the absurdity and cruelty of man's behavior.

Thomas Mann, who is a direct descendant of the Romantic idea of illness and decadence as being connected with "Vergeistigung", might have found the character of Jean-Marc de H. interesting, even though in his Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen he takes a decisively condemnatory position toward French literature. In order to reinforce his convictions, Mann uses a quote by Leo Tolstoi, who apparently loathed Paris. The Russian writer visited that city in 1857, when he was only twenty-nine.

"'Die Stadt', erklärte er, 'hat mich angewidert, daß ich fast den Verstand verloren hätte. Was habe ich nicht alles gesehen.... Zunächst waren in dem hôtel garni, in dem ich wohnte, sechsunddreißig Haushaltungen und davon neunzehn wilde Ehen! Dann wollte ich mich einmal auf die Probe stellen und ging zu einer Hinrichtung, bei der ein Verbrecher guillotiniert wurde. Danach konnte ich nicht mehr schlafen und wußte nicht wohin...'" (431, Betrachtungen)

Mann uses Tolstoy's remark to vent his own anti-French feelings.

The Vice-Consul's shooting of lepers, his insane cries that follow the murders, reverberate through the night streets of Lahore and turning him into an outcast. As a result of his mad behavior he is punished with expulsion. In the midst of the inner white circle of Calcutta, he lives like an exile. Locked out from society, he is almost completely alone, nervous and suffering. There is no doubt

that the Vice-Consul is ill, and for Mann illness combined with intelligence often adds up to talent. Most of the protagonists in Mann's early tales are either artists or dilettantes like Johannes Friedemann and Siegmund Aarenhold, who suffer from some kind of mental disorder. Jean-Marc de H.'s ailments, joined by an above average intelligence, might qualify him in Mann's eyes as a man with artistic inclinations⁵⁴ - a man not unlike Johannes Friedemann - who also suffers from life. The advantage of such an ailment that often puts the afflicted person in isolation from other people is a gain in dignity and humaneness.

"Im Geist...in der Krankheit beruht die Würde des Menschen, und der Genius der Krankheit ist menschlicher als der Gesundheit." (179, Adel des Geistes, quoted by C.A.M. Nobel, p. 51).

The risk of illness leads on the one hand to deeper insight, and on the other to disintegration and dissolution. Fleeing reality, Jean-Marc de H. and Johannes Friedemann tend to withdraw into their unconscious, which is hidden from reason and creates a constant conflict with consciousness. In

⁵⁴"Artistic inclinations" is here used in the Wagnerian sense. In his voluminous treatise The Incest Theme in Literature and Legend Otto Rank mentions a letter Richard Wagner wrote to his friend Uhlig while he was staying in Zurich. In it Wagner laments the fact that "...art begins precisely where life ends. When we have nothing, we cry out through art, 'I wish.' I cannot imagine how it could occur to a truly happy man to produce 'art'...Is our art thus nothing more than an admission of our impotence? Surely! Our art is, at least, and so is all art we can imagine, given the perspective of our current dissatisfaction with life! All art is a wish expressed as clearly as possible." (540)

both protagonists these emulations lead to their destruction.

Both men are plagued with inferiority complexes, a fact they have only been dimly aware of until they meet the woman who becomes their destiny.

Both men are chaste when they fall in love. In their youth they have made a conscious decision that woman was an unattainable object. This is particularly true of Johannes Friedemann, who, when seeing a friend of his kiss a girl, says:

"'Gut,' sagt er zu sich ohne weiteres, 'das ist zu Ende. Ich will mich niemals wieder um dies alles kümmern. Den anderen gewährt es Glück und Freude, mir aber vermag es immer nur Gram und Leid zu bringen. Ich bin fertig damit. Es ist für mich abgetan. Nie wieder. - '" (80, Der kleine Herr Friedemann)

Johannes Friedemann suppresses his sexual instincts and sublimates them with art. In spite of his contorted torso - "...seiner spitzen und hohen Brust, seinem weit ausladenden Rücken (78, Der kleine Herr Friedemann)", he learns to play the violin. He is well-read, appreciates the rhythmic beauty of a poem and knows how to enjoy the intimate mood of a novella.

With the Vice-Consul, whose distortions are more internal and less obvious than those of the little hunchback, matters are more complex. He did make some half-hearted efforts to discover love but became too quickly discouraged:

"I have made several attempts to fall in love, but I have never been able to see it through to the end. You might say that my life has been one long effort to experience love,..." (58, The Vice-Consul)

Unable to find a love object, Jean-Marc de H. reverts to narcissism.

He reveals not only his failures in love and self-love but also the mutilating aspect of narcissism: "'The years I have devoted to the pursuit of self-love have crippled me' (59, The Vice-Consul).

In Friedemann's, as well as in Jean-Marc de H.'s, case maternal influence was very strong. The father played either an inferior role, as with Jean-Marc de H., who makes no secret that he did not like his father,

"'My father died six months after my expulsion from Montford. Dry-eyed, with arms folded, I watch him being lowered into his grave.'" (66, The Vice-Consul),

or none at all, as with Johannes Friedemann whose father died before he was born. Jean-Marc de H.'s refusal to show any emotion at his father's funeral reminds one of Camus's L'Etranger, whose protagonist was condemned to death not for shooting an Arab, the official reason, but for failing to comply with social conventions when his mother died.

All that people know about the Vice-Consul's prolonged sojourn in Lahore is that he shot lepers and dogs, broke mirrors, and that his mother had been with him in India for a certain amount of time. She used to play the piano for him,

"...playing classical pieces, like the heroine of a novel, playing the melodies of her youth, with him listening, listening altogether too much, or so it would seem.'" (74, The Vice-Consul)

But then for some totally unknown reason the mother suddenly abandons her son: "One day his mother just walked out and left him. Everyone in Calcutta knows." (75, The Vice-Consul)

It is typical of Duras's style and poetical moods just to hint at the possibility of a mother-son infatuation - "...with him listening, listening altogether too much,...(74)" and then to drop the subject, leaving any conclusion to the reader. When Jean-Marc de H. confesses to the Club Secretary, a tattle-tale and alcoholic, some of his boyhood episodes in which the destruction of furniture had been dominant, "the fun at Montfort, the Vice-Consul explains, consisted in breaking up the place (63, The Vice-Consul)," he also refers to his mother as a fornicator. "'My mother is an adulteress (66, The Vice-Consul).'" Such a remark is more readily made by a jealous lover than a son.

The Vice-Consul's accusation reminds one here of Nero, who objected that his mother, Agrippina the younger, received her state counselor, who was also her lover, in her bedroom. Nero had an incestuous relationship with his mother before he murdered her. The jealous remark the

Vice-Consul makes about his mother reveals incestuous feelings as well.⁵⁵

Destruction and love, or the lack of love, run parallel in the Vice-Consul's life. The romantic theme of destruction and love, or love/death, echoes through a vast part of Duras's work and even forms the title of one of her novels: Détruire dit-elle.

Then Jean-Marc de H. meets Anne-Marie Stretter, older than he and as powerful as his mother had been. Just as Johannes Friedemann had been invited to Gerda von

⁵⁵*Mother-son incest, and for that matter, father-daughter incest as well, are a frequent topic in mythology and classical literature, e.g. in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Renaissance literature too - an analogy has been made between Shakespeare and Sophocles - contains examples of the mother-son complex. Otto Rank compares Racine with Euripides, extending the incest theme into 17th century French literature until the complex finds its fullest expression in the 19th century among the Romantic writers. Yet a son who commits incest with his mother and then kills her, as Nero did, is not frequent. It is much more common for the son to kill his father or at least castrate him to prevent him to have sexual relations with his mother. Gaea, who urges her youngest son, Cronus, to castrate his father Uranus is one example. Cronus, who is then in turn castrated by his son, Zeus, repeats the same pattern. In the first volume of his Joseph tetralogy, Joseph und seine Brüder, Thomas Mann talks of Joseph and Benjamin visiting the "Adonishain". Adonis is another name for the Hebrew one: Tammuz. Tammuz is the lover of his mother Ishtar, of whom Thomas Mann speaks frequently during the early part of the Joseph novels. Joseph is as beautiful as Adonis or Tammuz. As Joseph explains the old, mysterious rites to his little brother Benjamin, he also speaks of their mother Rachel, who died giving birth to Benjamin. Joseph identifies himself with Tammuz and therefore as the lover of Ishtar, his mother. This mother-son complex theme is pursued to a far fuller extent in Mann's novel Der Erwählte, which he wrote in his old age after finishing Doktor Faustus (which contains a two-page synopsis of Der Erwählte.) Mann's own mother, Julia Bruhns, was still young and beautiful when her husband died. Getting involved with Mann's work, one is constantly tempted to see the writer nourishing an incestuous fantasy toward his mother.

Rinnlingen's red villa simply for conventional reasons, so was Jean-Marc de H. only a formal guest at the reception at the French Embassy in Calcutta. Most other guests would have preferred that he did not come, even though they were curious enough to see his concrete shape rise out of the strange rumors that had preceded his actual appearance. Anne-Marie Stretter too is not keen about the Vice-Consul's presence at her soirée and tries to avoid him several times. She makes it quite clear that she prefers the company of Charles Rossett, the young attaché. Jean-Marc de H. seems too pale and a little frightening in spite of his rather nice looks. Some guests say that the "'Vice-Consul of Lahore is a bit of a death's head. Wouldn't you agree that he's a bit of a death's head? (77, The Vice-Consul)'"

The thirty dinner guests at Gerda von Rinnlingen's home do not refer to Johannes Friedemann as a "death's head" since Mann's language differs from that of Duras, but they too noticed how deadly pale Johannes Friedemann appears. Mann uses the dialogue form less and narrative more, but he skillfully expresses the same idea:

"Es war erstaunlich, was für eine Veränderung in diesen acht Tagen mit dem kleinen Herrn Friedemann sich ereignet hatte. Vielleicht lag es zum Teil an dem weißen Gasglühlicht, von dem der Saal erfüllt war, daß sein Gesicht so erschreckend bleich erschien;..." (100)

If in Johannes Friedemann's case it takes eight days from the time he sees Gerda von Rinnlingen first and his

subsequent self-destruction, it takes five weeks for the Vice-Consul to annihilate his sanity.

The Vice-Consul, who sees the reception as his chance (as it turns out, his only one) to get close to his idol, is determined to overcome Anne-Marie's uninviting mood. It is five weeks since he arrived from Lahore. Hidden from sight, he had watched Anne-Marie every day as she walked within the confines of the embassy grounds. She, however, was not aware of being observed. Anne-Marie hardly knows of his existence, and what she does know does not interest her; the Vice-consul is even repulsive to her to a large extent, her aversion is mixed with curiosity. It is this unequal footing upon which the Vice-Consul base his masochistic dreams. He does not know how to approach a woman, particularly not this "queen of Calcutta (161)." No one taught him how to go about the art of wooing a woman. His father, supposedly his role model, did not speak to his mother when he was at home. "He talked about his father, who spent every night at home, but never addressed a word to his mother (75)." The silence in which he and his wife lived must have been unbearable for the child. Total silence by the father is balanced by the son with the smashing of furniture, light bulbs, and mirrors - and the ultimate noise, the explosion of bullets.

The Vice-Consul's youth contrasts sharply with Johannes Friedemann's adolescence. Friedemann's mother, widow of the

Consul of the Netherlands, raises her crippled son with tenderness and care. Little Johannes starts school at seven and leaves it ten years later to enter an apprenticeship at Schlievogt's large lumber business. Except for the pain he experiences at sixteen when he encounters the lively blond sister of one of his classmates, the young Johannes follows without particular difficulty a determined life, free from material worries.

During most of the late evening's reception at the French Embassy, Jean-Marc de H. is content to watch Anne-Marie Stretter. He stands next to the entrance beside a potted fern from where he is able to see everyone and where he is watched by all. He is unaware that everyone stares at him. From time to time he caresses the black stem of the fern - a substitute for Anne-Marie, whom he can only watch but not touch. She has become a mother fixation for him. In his voyeuristic pose he reminds one of Lola Valerie Stein lying in a rye field where she watches a window frame behind which a man and a woman make love. Betrayed by her fiancé, Lol wants to be in the woman's (her friend Tatiana) place - just as Jean-Marc wants to be in Charles Rossett's place since he dances frequently with Anne-Marie. In both cases there is an Oedipal fantasy. Lol wants to be her father's wife, Jean Marc his mother's husband. Lacan calls this regressed stage in which a person wants to project himself "into the image of the beloved... a 'stade du

miroir'." (Lucy Stone McNecce, "The reader in the Field of Rye: Marguerite Duras' L'amour. Modern Language Studies, XXII:1, Winter 1992, p. 16)

His face lights up for a moment when he sees her nearby. "Just for a second, every now and then, he seems crazy with happiness (76)." The emphasis here should be on "crazy" rather than "happiness", since the Vice-Consul is not only an exile among his own people but mad as well.

For a long time his courtship dance does not become the pas de deux he desires, but remains a solo performance. Eventually, as the gap between the Vice-Consul and the Ambassador's wife slowly narrows, it is filled with flashbacks of their past. It is the same technique Duras employed in Agatha.⁵⁶ One such instance is Anne-Marie Stretter's youth "in some backwater near the frontier of Laos, in French Indo-China (75)" where her father was District Officer and where her husband discovered her seventeen years before. There is also Jean-Marc de H.'s

⁵⁶*Flashbacks belong to Duras' elusive style that ignores rules of grammar and syntax, piercing the text instead with her famous "mots trous", the "forgotten words". Her "...esthetic diverges from most narrative in that the 'subject matter' is only obliquely presented, and the reader's energy is involved in deciphering a discourse that is never explicit, and must be constructed by the reader over several readings...Her fiction engages the reader in something similar to a riddle or the dream-work according to Freud, in that it appeals primarily to the senses and suggests associations that violate logical categories, forbidding the dreamer/reader to contemplate any unified action from a place of privileged objectivity..." (Lucy Stone McNecce, "The Reader in the Field of Rye: Marguerite Duras' L'amour, Modern Language Studies, XXII: 1, Winter 1992, pp. 15-16)

education in France, which was spent in part at a "corrective training school in Arras (76)." No one knows why Anne-Marie Stretter left Venice and went to Laos. People speculate whether she "was living a life of shame or sunk in despair...in Savannakhet (76)." Her life, even more than the Vice-Consul's, is enshrouded in shadow - something one can neither see or touch. Duras takes pain to create an aura about Anne-Marie which makes one feel that there is something abnormal, something connected with "shame and despair" about her. Despair and secretiveness counterbalance her regal status and set her apart from others.

Since no one at the reception is willing to talk to the Vice-Consul, the Ambassador sends Charles Rossett to talk to Jean-Marc de H..

Unlike Jean-Marc de H., who frightens people, no one fears Johannes Friedemann. Protected by the prestige and wealth he enjoys in his native city⁵⁷, people would at best show their prejudice by ridiculing him behind his back. His hunched back, his diminutive stature and polite manners, mixed with vanity, elicit pity or a false friendliness but not fear. By giving the Vice-Consul a pleasing exterior, Duras has the more difficult task of showing that internally he is as much at odds with life as Johannes Friedemann.

⁵⁷*The city is Lübeck, the birthplace of Thomas Mann. He used Lübeck also in his long first novel Buddenbrooks.

Both are crippled by life, even though it is immediately visible with only one of them.

During the soirée at the French embassy Charles Rossett and Jean-Marc de H. talk about the climate. Jean-Marc de H. quickly pronounces Charles Rossett to be a normal person and therefore of little interest to him, who is not. Duras defines the Vice-Consul's strange behavior as "...a man at a distance from other men (102)."⁵⁸ As with Anne-Marie, it is the gulf between Jean-Marc de H. and the others where the unexplainable reigns. He cannot live with other men - much less with other women - but his separateness drives him mad. "You don't strike me as the kind who is accident-prone (80)," Jean-Marc de H. says to Charles Rossett, and adds: "I'm beginning to be able to tell those who are from those who are not," the Vice-Consul goes on. "You are not (80)."

Twice during their conversation Anne-Marie, elegant, aloof and occupied as hostess of her diplomatic reception, passes them. The first time the Vice-Consul stares at her like a love-sick school boy, - "the Vice-Consul of Lahore gazes after her (80)" - the second time, he ignores her. "She goes past again, almost brushing against him, but this time he does not look at her. It is very noticeable (81)."

⁵⁸*The theme of exile which is paramount in Duras' work is a parallel to Thomas Mann's motif of the "outsider" - the artistically inclined person, who is allowed only to observe life but not to participate in it - "...a man at a distance from other men (102)," - that is inherent in Mann's early tales.

This example shows how quickly Jean-Marc de H. goes from one extreme to the other - from intense desire to total disregard for the object of his desire. By not looking at Anne-Marie, he wishes - as if he were a magician - that she would disappear. He indulges in a Vogel-Strauß-Politik and flees into a negative state of mind in which he destroys himself since he cannot identify with the object he loves and desires. Jean-Marc de H. reverts here to some early stages in a child's development during which the infant has not yet any concept of time and motion and is unaware of any repetitive movements like the coming and going of its mother. As soon as its mother leaves the room, the infant believes that she has gone forever and is dead. Hence the infant's desperate screams.

If Anne-Marie Stretter were merely attractive, Jean-Marc de H. would pay scant attention to her. There are other pretty young women at the reception, one of whom the Vice-Consul invites to dance with him. But he quickly gets bored. As Marquis de Sade says in The 120 Days of Sodom, beauty by itself is too simple. It alone does not intrigue, and does not free the spirit from its own consciousness. There must be other attractions. Jean-Marc de H. is drawn far more to Anne-Marie's position of power and the secretiveness that surrounds her than just to her physical attributes. Anne-Marie has the power to hurt him, like his mother. The Vice-Consul tries desperately to escape from

his self and the imprisonment of his consciousness. Falling in love in an ordinary way does not release him from his narcissism and his progressive madness. He needs stronger enticements, perhaps the same that pushed him to smash furniture as a boy and to shoot lepers and dogs as an adult. In his desire for a woman who is capable of dominating him, Jean-Marc de H. converts his destructiveness into masochism. The Vice-Consul's early penchant toward destruction runs parallel with what Freud calls the death instinct, which he opposes to the instinct of Eros, the life instinct. For most of his life Jean-Marc de H. has been leaning more toward the death instinct, which is responsible for the slow disintegration of his psychic faculties. His strange behavior changes briefly for the better when he meets Anne-Marie Stretter. As he falls in love with her, he starts to swing more toward the life instinct. Since his arrival in Calcutta he has not killed any lepers or dogs. His cries at night have ceased. They will start again only when Anne-Marie Stretter tells him to: By asking Jean-Marc de H. to scream, she commits her most selfish and sadistic act. By helplessly obeying her order, the Vice-Consul reveals his most masochistic nature. "When you are outside in the street, shout at the top of your voice (114)," Anne-Marie Stretter requests of him. A few moments after her demand, their dance is over and she walks away. As Jean Marc de H. sees her disappear into another room, he breaks

down and screams. "As soon as she is out of sight, the Vice-Consul of Lahore gives voice to his first cry. 'Don't leave me!'... (114)" With this peculiar behavior between Anne-Marie and Jean-Marc de H., Duras descends once more to the level of an incestuous mother-son relationship. The mother-son incest or sibling incest theme (the sister is a mother surrogate, according to Otto Rank) exists early on in Duras' work and is continued throughout her writings until her latest novel, which she wrote at seventy-seven , L'Amant de la Chine du Nord. The same holds true for Thomas Mann, whose last short novel Die Betrogene, published in 1953, two years before his death, explores almost blatantly a mother-son complex.

Chapter 8

Sadomasochistic and narcissistic aspects:

Le Vice-consul, Der kleine Herr Friedemann and Bekenntnisse
des Hochstaplers Felix Krull

In his "System of Nature", a dialogue between the Pope and Juliette, the Marquis de Sade calls "destruction" what Freud's would later call the "death instinct". It is the destruction of nature which cannot create without destroying as well. Sade, whom Pierre Klossowski in his essay Nature as Destructive Principle defines as a "metaphysician despite appearances to the contrary (78)," goes here beyond Freud, who "only envisages life at the organic level;...(78)." For Sade life and death are the same. He labels instincts "principles".

"The principle of life in all beings is no other than the death principle; we receive them both and nourish them both at the same time." (78, Sade, "System of Nature"/Juliette, quoted by Klossowski)

In Must We Burn Sade?, her introductory essay to The 120 Days of Sodom, Simone de Beauvoir defines Sade not only as a sadist and sodomist, but also as a masochist. However, his masochism is different from that of Count Sacher-Masoch. Simone de Beauvoir tells the story in which Sade has himself beaten by a prostitute in Marseilles. As he submitted to pain and shame, he would get up after every few lashes and inscribe the number received on the chimney flue. In this way, he mixed boastfulness with pain. Or, as Simone de

Beauvoir describes it: "His humiliation would immediately be transformed into swagger (27)." This is a far cry from the protagonist in Venus in Furs, who is bound by the servants of Wanda von Dunajew and nearly faints at her feet while she whips him.

Pierre Klossowski considers Sade a precursor not only of Freud but of Nietzsche also, and refers specifically to Nietzsche's "acceptance of samsara, the eternal return of the same thing (Nature as Destructive Principle, 79)." The idea of perpetual motion was already perceived by Sade as a natural phenomenon:

"There is, in the end, no difference between the first life we receive and this second life we call death; for the first is made from the matter formed in the woman's womb while the second follows the same process: matter is renovated and reorganized in the earth's entrails.... In both processes we see only causes of this immensity of successive creations; they are nothing but the initial principles of exhaustion and annihilation." (Sade, quoted by Klossowski, 79)

The idea of creation and destruction that Sade sees in nature, where "corruption, putrefaction, dissolution, exhaustion and annihilation (79, Klossowski)" are part of life, is connected with Sade's pleasure/pain principle, the more familiar aspect of his thought process:

"The man who [...] wounds or is wounded, fulfills himself as flesh. It is in its misery and humiliation that the flesh becomes a gulf in which consciousness is swallowed up and where separate individuals are united." (26, Simone de Beauvoir)

For Sade there can be no life without destruction, no pleasure without pain - just as on a religious level there can be no heaven without hell.

It is the "obsessive presence" of consciousness that Duras's Jean-Marc de H., the vice-consul, tries to flee. If the price for escape from consciousness, from the self, is "misery and humiliation" - and pain -, he is willing to pay it. Yet in his demand to be mistreated, Simone de Beauvoir explains, the masochist tyrannizes his partner. It is not only the sadist who is a tyrant.

Anne-Marie Stretter refuses to be tyrannized. When the Vice-Consul eventually succeeds in dancing with her and in his desire holds Anne-Marie Stretter too close to him, she quickly distracts him by starting a conversation. For a while it is rather a monologue that she conducts since it takes the Vice-Consul some time before he also is able to speak. When he does, his voice sounds strange.

"The Vice-Consul, addressing Anne-Marie Stretter for the first time, speaks distinctly, but with a curiously toneless delivery, the voice pitched a fraction too high, as though he were with difficulty restraining himself from shouting." (97)

The "voice pitched too high" implies the power of castration Anne-Marie Stretter seems to possess. Jean Marc de H.'s voice betrays him; it reveals the intense pressure he suffers from since falling under her spell. Desire mingles with frustration; his passion, hiding a silent plea for help, becomes so strong that there is danger of an internal

explosion which takes the form of shouts. Screams are the valve that relieves the unbearable frustrations to which Jean-Marc de H. has become a victim.

While the Vice-Consul dances with Anne-Marie Stretter, he brings up the subject of leprosy and the fear that the wife of one of the Secretaries from the Spanish Consulate has of contracting the illness. When Anne-Marie wants to know why the Vice-Consul speaks of leprosy, he admits that it is a pretext to reveal his feelings for her. He is unable to conceal his fear of being pushed away and is afraid that all the phantasies he dreamt up about her would "crumble into dust".

"'Because I have the feeling that if I tried to say what I really want to say to you, everything would crumble into dust -' he is trembling - 'for what I want to say...to you...from me to you...there are no words. I should fumble...I should say something different from what I intended...one thing leads to another.'" (98, ellipses Duras)

The ellipses here serve in place of Duras's well-known blank spaces. Similar to music, they try to express what words cannot. There are no words for what the Vice-Consul would like to say; he cannot form a rational concept of wishes that are mostly unconscious.

"'How can one put into words what he did in Lahore, what he did with himself in Lahore, if he himself didn't know what he was doing?'" (73)

Instead of divulging the reason for his killings in Lahore, the secret everyone is keen, including Anne-Marie, to know, the Vice-Consul is able only to disclose his

schizophrenic state of mind. He himself does not understand why he committed the murders.

In Sade's universe murder plays a frequent part in sexual aberrations. In his erotic fantasies, murder is often committed at the moment of orgasm. Minski, the Russian ogre whom Juliette encounters during her travels through Italy, murders sixteen shackled girls after he has just finished sodomizing and killing Augustine, Juliette's pretty chambermaid.

Murder, Simone de Beauvoir points out, is an

"act which stands as the most extreme conclusion of both cruelty and masochism, for the subject asserts himself in it, in a very special way, as tyrant and criminal;..." (29, Must We Burn Sade?)

She does not agree "that murder was the supreme end of sexuality in Sade (29)," as many critics have claimed. She sees murder in Sade's writings as a symbol of "the exacerbated demand for unrestrained and fearless freedom (29)."

There is little doubt that above all the Vice-Consul craved freedom from the self, from his own consciousness. In his quest for this freedom, he is driven by the "conflicts between consciousness and the flesh (29)," the trademark of the sadomasochist.

In order to find out why he killed, the Vice-Consul strains to see himself from the outside, as another person might see him or as if he were now altogether a different

man from what he was before. It is a painful process in which he sees himself as two persons: the "I" and the "he".

This forceful self-analysis takes place in the midst of his courtship dance with Anne-Marie at the reception in the French Embassy. For her sake, he desperately tries to make sense of the murders he committed in Lahore. She is the only one to whom he will speak. Talking with Anne-Marie Stretter is probably the closest form of a confession he is capable of. Awkwardly, he attempts to relieve himself of a terrible burden - a burden, as one will soon see, that Anne-Marie is not willing to share with him.

"What I want to try and explain, then, is that afterwards, although one knows that it was oneself who was in Lahore, it seems impossible, unreal. It is I who... I who am talking to you now...who am that man. I would like you to listen to the Vice-Consul of Lahore. I am he." (98)

That the Vice-Consul is perfectly lucid when he dissects himself, is shown by the words "...although one knows that it was oneself...(98).'" The Vice-Consul calls himself Vice-Consul; he addresses himself to his double, the mirrored self whom he wants to get rid of, to take off like a glove he no longer needs. The Vice-Consul is addressed as "he"; it is "he", who shot the lepers in Lahore, the inexplicable act that occurred in the past and from which he now wants to separate himself - in front of Anne-Marie Stretter - by using the "I". The "I" is the other, the morally "good", new man, or at least the rational one, who wants to have nothing to do with "him" - "he", who shot the lepers.

The "he" corresponds to the Freudian "id" whom Jean-Marc de H. confronts with the "I", the ego.

For a moment Anne-Marie Stretter is intrigued by the Vice-Consul's attempt to reveal his innermost self. She is willing to play his game by asking him probing question. She dances with him even though she has now increased still further the distance between them, so that he is able to see for the first time. "...her eyes, so clear, like green pools (97)." For the first time looking at him, she wants to know: "'What has he to say to me (99)?" By addressing directly the Vice-Consul's id, Anne-Marie Stretter questions Jean-Marc de. H. as if she were able to get an answer from his unconscious self. Of course the Vice-Consul can only respond in the negative - once more referring to himself as "he", instead of "I": "'That there is nothing he can say about Lahore, nothing (99).'" The Vice-Consul did try to reveal his soul. But his psyche is like a desolate, liquid landscape that lies in darkness. Nothing is visible. If there are shades that move about, they cannot be seen with the naked eye.

As in Agatha, where brother and sister feel compelled to use the vousvoient after committing incest in order to create an aesthetic distance, Duras applies here a similar device by not using the personal pronoun "you", which would have been the normal procedure, but "he", the third person singular, which serves her purpose better in the dialogue

between Jean-Marc and Anne-Marie when it becomes too complex to be followed easily.

When the Vice-Consul first becomes aware of Anne-Marie's eyes, they seem to him "like green pools (97)", a sight that makes him tremble. Is he afraid because he perceives himself in Anne-Marie Stretter's eyes in a diminutive form? Has he become a sharply reduced Narcissus, who contemplates himself on the surface of the water?

Anne-Marie's green eyes recall the grey-green ones of Clawdia Chauchat in Der Zauberberg. Clawdia, in turn, shares the color of her eyes with Pribislav Hippe and his Kirghizian eyes, her male predecessor or her "transsexual" image that entices Hans Castrop. Clawdia Chauchat and Probislav Hippe belong to the androgynous figures that are scattered through Mann's fiction.

Clumsily, with pride and humiliation swiftly interchanging while holding a firm grip on him, the Vice-Consul attempts again and again to penetrate into the killings he committed at Lahore in the Shalimar Gardens. He speculates that the murders might not have taken place had he known of Anne-Marie's existence at the time he committed them.

"Try and see it in the light of day. It is eight o'clock in the morning. The Shalimar Gardens are deserted. I do not yet know of your existence, that the world holds you as well as me.'" (99)

The love of a "simple and noble" woman might have saved him, but this is not to be. Even though Anne-Marie Stretter

has little difficulty comprehending the "inevitability of Lahore" and is rather intrigued by it - "'I can see the inevitability of Lahore,' she says. 'I could already see it yesterday, but I didn't realize it (100),'" - on an emotional level she remains uninvolved. She declines to help the Vice-Consul, who asks her: "'Do you think there is anything that you and I together could do to help me (100)?" Coldly, without a moment's hesitation, Anne-Marie Stretter turns away from him: "'No, there's nothing. You have no need of anything (100).'" She condemns him without pity, throws him back into the prison cell of his self from which he tried to escape.

Since the reader has no way of knowing what goes on in Anne-Marie's mind, one can only make an assumption in her favor or disfavor. The image of Anne-Marie, for instance, lying awake at night, conscience-stricken because of her disdainful treatment of Jean-Marc, is inconceivable in view of the overall behavior she has exhibited toward him. Far from being compassionate toward his most urgent needs, her psychic make-up is wrapped in a "magnificent selfishness", as Sacher-Masoch would put it.

As if he had anticipated her denial, the Vice-Consul is able to console himself quickly. He is willing to undergo considerable pain and humiliation from her hands. His attitude is in agreement with Sacher-Masoch's hero, Severin, who sees "every woman [being] cruel [when] in love (16,

Venus in Furs).” Sacher-Masoch contends that if a man is unable to obtain the love of a “noble and simple” woman, he has to be content with a selfish, vain, and cruel one. Not only be content with her but learn to enjoy being treated with cruelty and contempt.

“If I am not permitted to enjoy the happiness of love, fully and wholly, I want to taste its pains and torments to the very dregs; I want to be maltreated and betrayed by the woman I love, and the more cruelly the better. This too is luxury.” (43, Venus in Furs)

This stoicism in sexual matters is difficult to comprehend unless one looks at love as an absolute, as something that has to be accepted in whatever form it is offered, noble or cruel. Masochism takes here virtually the shape of the submissiveness of a believer - either Greek with its all too human gods or Christian. Severin has the attitude of Job, who accepts with great humility an inordinate amount of suffering because he believes it to be the will of his God.

The Vice-Consul of Lahore allows himself to be treated with the detached, almost cerebral, sadism that Anne-Marie Stretter directs against him. His main objective is to be close to her - at whatever cost. Only when Anne-Marie breaks off her dance with him and walks out of the room does he break down with his awful cry: “Don’t leave me (114)!” In his anguish he reverts to an infantile stage of narcissism.

* * *

The similarity between the scene at the reception at the French Embassy in Calcutta and the next-to-last meeting between Johannes Friedemann and Gerda von Rinnlingen in the spacious red villa in the southern suburbs of town, is quite striking. Gerda too, first lends a sympathetic ear to the mishaps in the life of the little hunchback. Perhaps she cannot compete with Anne-Marie, who is "the most understanding woman in Calcutta (99)", but Gerda also shows a kindly disposition toward Johannes. Up to a certain point, for her sympathy is mixed with a large dose of curiosity. She listens to Friedemann's unfortunate adventures as if she were throwing a stone into a deep well. Bending over the well, she quickly loses sight of the stone falling but her ear perceives the dim splash of the stone as it enters the water. In the echo reverberating off the well's dark and slippery walls she recognizes her own misfortunes. Steeped in narcissism, she listens to Johannes Friedemann in order to recognize her own nature, not his. His character, destiny and masochistic love for her are interesting only as far as she is able to recognize herself in them. Only then does she take a self-punishing and sadistical delight in them.

"' Sie sehen auch jetzt noch nicht gesund aus', sagte sie ganz ruhig und blickte ihn unverwandt an. 'Sie sind bleich, und Ihre Augen sind entzündet. Ihre Gesundheit läßt überhaupt zu wünschen übrig?'

'Oh...', stammelte Herr Friedemann, 'ich bin im allgemeinen zufrieden...

'Auch ich bin viel krank', fuhr sie fort, ohne die Augen von ihm abzuwenden; 'aber niemand merkt es. Ich bin nervös und kenne die merkwürdigsten Zustände.'" (95)

When Gerda tells Friedeman that he is 'not yet fully restored, even now', she takes his recent illness as an excuse to tell him that she too is sick, a fact she confirms a moment later with "...auch ich bin viel krank...", as if she had never heard Herr Friedemann's timid protest of feeling quite well. It is of no interest to her how he feels. His pride, of course, does not permit him to confess that he is ill only on account of her. But he might as well not have replied at all since she is involved in a solipsistic soliloquy from which his presence has almost vanished. At best he serves as a sounding board, or a small, half-broken mirror in which she contemplates the flutterings of her own soul. Looking fixedly at him - "...und blickte ihn unverwandt an" - "...ohne die Augen von ihm abzuwenden (95);" - is an indication that while she fixes him with a stare she is searching for an answer to her own frustrations. In Johannes Friedemann she has finally found someone who is willing to listen to her. There is no one else she can talk to, least of all her husband, who is enticed by her youth and independence but has no idea what is going on in her mind. Herr von Rinnlingen is not the sort of person to be interested in psychological procedures

- including those of his wife. Gerda von Rinnlingen has certain similarities with Madame Bovary, whose main solace in married life was the romances she consumed endlessly. Reality was too dreary and above all too boring for both women, who had only domestic matters to contend with and whose lives were controlled by their husbands' fortunes; reality had to be supplemented with dreams. Both women are too complex to be understood by their more simple-minded husbands, for whom their physical prettiness is enough.

In Johannes Friedmann Gerda senses a being similar to her own. Far more sensitive and refined than most men she knows, Friedemann in his appreciation for the arts is close to her own neurotic need. Less docile than Emma Bovary and belonging to a more modern century, Gerda was not made to submit easily, if at all, to any man. It is difficult to penetrate an opaque nature that repulses any too ardent an approach.

Intimidated by Gerda's reserved and imperious character, Friedemann lets slip his chance to offer an answer to some of her questions. He remains silent and simply looks at her in his typical way, mingling submissiveness with longing. "Er saß still und hielt seine Augen groß und sinnend auf sie gerichtet (95)." Here too, as with Jean-Marc and Anne-Marie, one recognizes an almost mother-child situation where the son is ready and willing to obey the mother's wish, but is unable to do so.

When Gerda von Rinnlingen understands that she will not get an answer - "...aber er antwortete nicht (95)" - her mood changes quickly. First curiosity wins the upper hand: she wants to know if he plays an instrument. As Johannes answers in the affirmative, her mood changes once more. Her eyes fasten again hard upon him even while they tremble strangely, and he now sees something that threatens him. Unwittingly he has opened the door to her sadistic impulses. Without realizing it, he has approached her too closely. Her words burn him cruelly. Her invitation to perform music together had caught him off guard, had elicited a happy response from him. His momentary happiness, all too clearly visible on his face, brings forth one of Gerda's hysterical impulses.

One would not be surprised if in his dreams Johannes were to envision Gerda as a whip-raising deity - his first image of her is the one in which she firmly clasps the reins of two slender horses that pull her yellow hunting gig while she holds a whip - to descend upon him and punish him for a sin he did not commit.

Mann is sometimes close to the kafkaesque sense of man condemned a priori; and, like Mann, Kafka uses protagonists with strongly autobiographical traits. Kafka openly accused his father of having pronounced the death sentence on him. "Und darum wisse: Ich verurteile dich jetzt zum Tode des

Ertrinkens!" (18, Kafka, Das Urteil, quoted by Fred Müller, p. 20)

Johannes Friedemann too dies by drowning. In Mann's early tales, where he reveals much more of himself than in his later work, the father-figure is often suspiciously absent. But substitutes are there in form of all male teachers. While he belongs to the generation of writers who opposed and exposed the rigid discipline and the pedantry of father-figures, they still represent the same inescapable authoritarian power that Kafka revolted against in his father. Mann hates and despises most of his teachers - for which Tonio Kröger and Hanno Buddenbrook give evidence. If Kafka condemns his father with a fearful passion, Mann derides his father-figures with mockery and scorn. Friedmann does not wait for a father-figure to pronounce his death sentence by drowning, but he drowns himself nevertheless. In Kafka's case the murderer is a sadistic father, in Mann's novella authoritarian power is transferred to a sadistic woman to whom a man submits in the ultimate form of masochism.

To explain the strange power that Gerda von Rinnlingen possesses over Johannes Friedemann one might refer again to Severin in Venus in Furs, who when under the spell of Wanda experiences religious reverberations and cries out that "'Gott hat ihn gestraft und hat ihn in eines Weibes Hände gegeben [143;5]'" (1102, PMLA, Oct. '91, Rita Felski, "The

Counterdiscourse of the Feminine in Three Texts by Wilde, Huysmans, and Sacher Masoch")

Mann's novella, Mario und der Zauberer is perhaps the best example of a sado-masochistic relationship between two men whose age difference is large enough to represent a father/son figuration. In this novella, the artless waiter Mario is confronted by Cipolla, an ugly, crippled magician who uses his eyes and riding whip - decorated with a "klauenartiger silberner Krücke (675, Mario) - for his sadistic pleasure and to hypnotize his spellbound audience. With a self-assured behavior that is often outright impertinent, and with several small glasses of cognac and his whip - "dies beleidigende Symbol seiner Herrschaft (697)" - Cipolla completely dominates the people of Torre during one seemingly endless evening. Arrogance, ugliness and sadism, combined with an uncanny psychological insight, rule supreme under the sign of the whip, whose dominance hardly allows any feelings other than those which take the form of masochistic submission:

"...diese pfeifende Fuchtel, unter die seine Anmaßung uns alle stellte, und deren Mitwirkung weichere Empfindungen als die einer verwunderten und vertrotzten Unterwerfung nicht aufkommen ließ." (697, Mario)

Mann here equates sadism with fascism and its dominating cruelty.

Mario does not stand simply for a sado-masochistic relationship or as a symbol for fascism, even though the short story does deal with both of these aspects. Equally

important, if not more so, are the homoerotic overtones displayed by Cipolla, the aging homosexual, toward Mario, the ingenue. When Cipolla cleverly teases Mario about his profession of waiter and tells him that he has a mythological predecessor in Ganymede, he refers to Zeus's handsome cupbearer. In his article "Thomas Mann's Mario und der Zauberer: "Aber zum Donnerwetter! Deshalb bringt man doch niemand um!"⁵⁹ Georges Bridges points out that there is not sufficient justification for Mario's murder of the magician even though Cipolla did publicly humiliate him. But so did he with other young men of Torre di Venere, and they not shoot him. Bridges feels that Cipolla's violent end demonstrates an unconscious anti-homosexual attitude: the kiss that one man bestows upon another represents such a demeaning and desecration that it justifies anything, even murder.

Not satisfied with a formal explanation, Bridges enters a deeper and more personal sphere by referring to the publication of Mann's diaries, which have revealed so much more of his homoerotic tendencies than most of his other writings. Since Mann often tends to give autobiographical traits⁶⁰ to his characters, Bridges assumes that Mario is

⁵⁹*The German Quarterly 64.4., Fall 1991, p. 501

⁶⁰*Mann identified himself to a large extent with Goethe. (His other models were Richard Wagner, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. He also knew Sigmund Freud personally and wrote an excellent essay on him.) Like Goethe, Mann saw his work and life

an attempt to exorcise, through the medium of art, the demon of his own "wayward eros, (503)." By killing the magician, Mann tries "to kill" his own homosexual inclinations that he experienced all his life as nothing but "painfully problematic and threatening, even though it was also the main source of inspiration for his art." (503)

To emphasize further the homoerotic aspects in Mario, Bridges points out that Mann's complex nature was not content to portray Cipolla's relatively straightforward homosexual penchant but also the more subtle lesbian feelings of the small, middle-aged Signora Angiolieri toward the great Italian actress Eleonora Duse. The earlier demonstration of Cipolla's art, during which Sofronia Angiolieri gently reveals her sexual inclinations toward Eleonora Duse, whom she had loved as a young girl, serves as a prelude to Cipolla's and Mario's fatal encounter.

That the last appearance of Cavaliere Cipolla takes place in the village of Torre di Venere, the Tower of Venus, is another indication of Mann's erotic intents.

The delicately hinted-at erotic attraction between Sofronia Angiolieri and Eleonora Duse has its stronger

as an entity. For Goethe his experience and his writings were interchangeable to such an extent that one needed only to mention either one in order to recognize the poet: "Die Erinnerung spielt gewiß eine wichtige Rolle im Werk und Leben des Dichters, welche so weitgehend eins sind, daß man, genau genommen, nur eines zu nennen brauchte und von dem Werk als seinem Leben, von dem Leben als seinem Werk sprechen könnte." (167, Lotte in Weimar)

parallel in such characters of Duras's fiction as Maria and Claire (Dix heures et demie du soir en été), Alissa Thor and Elisabeth Alione (Détruire, dit-elle), and Voix 1 and Voix 2 in India Song. In Woman to Woman M. Duras openly defends homoerotic love, particularly homosexuality among men:

"I know a lot of women in my position who can tolerate only the homosexual male...only men who are homosexual...That is, they live against a background of despair and fear that opens them up." (p. 111)⁶¹

Where Duras reveals an open mind and tolerance so far as homosexuality is concerned, Gerda is steeped in narcissism and indulges in sadistical pleasures when the opportunity presents itself. She is clearly incapable of bringing joy to someone she despises - and she loathes anyone who is unable to respond to her own needs, a fact which explains her icy attitude toward her husband. When she finds someone weaker than herself, she rejoices in destroying any anticipated pleasure she might have given hope to.

Gerda has probed Friedemann's soul, tested his potential, and he has failed her. Now it is only a matter of time before she will get rid of her useless suitor.

There is a parallel line of thinking between Gerda and Anne-Marie that shows up in the remark Anne-Marie made about

⁶¹*When Duras speaks of knowing women who prefer the homosexual male to the "phallic class", she includes herself. At age seventy-seven she has been living for the past eleven years with Yann Andréa, a handsome, middle-aged homosexual.

the Vice-Consul after she tries unsuccessfully to pry out his secret.

Dancing with Charles Rossett, who wants to know "'what sort of man [the Vice-Consul] is (100)'" , Anne-Marie Stretter replies "'Oh! a dead man (101).'" It is as if with a brief sentence she has pronounced judgment on the Vice-Consul. At least her own judgment. So far as she is concerned, he might as well be dead. Her judgment is rendered in a different style and context from Kafka's, but the meaning is the same.

Never having been keen for the Vice-Consul's company in the first place, surrounded by her lovers and her husband, Anne-Marie Stretter does not need the attention the Vice-Consul is paying her. Since she did not think it necessary to conceal her feelings from Jean-Mark de H., he is of course aware of her condescending behavior. But he continues to pursue her, as if he were unable to do otherwise. In this conduct he shows his masochistic inclinations and disregard for reality. Just as he had earlier displayed a fetichistic desire for Anne-Marie in the form of a bicycle.

Simone de Beauvoir points out that masochism and fetichism are closely related:

"The world of the masochist is a magical one, and that is why he is almost always a fetichist. Objects such as shoes, furs, and whips, are charged with emanations which have the power to change him into a thing, and that is precisely what he wants: to remove

himself by becoming an inert object. (24-25, preface to The 120 Days of Sodomy)

If Johannes Friedemann sees himself as a dancing Corybant and Gerda von Rinnlingen as the Anatolian Cybele, who wanders by torchlight over the mountains, whip in hand, Jean-Marc pictures himself as clown to a queen. While they were dancing together, the Vice-Consul said to Anne-Marie Stretter: "'It may help you if you see the man who is waking up as a clown (99).'" Jean-Marc de H. pictures himself as a clown with a bicycle that he rides in a circle, falling off in a deliberate ludicrous fashion and to the delight of an entranced audience. Seeing Anne-Marie as a queen is to see her as an embellished mother-figure. To a small boy there is no difference between a queen and a mother: they share the same power. And it is the powerful status of Anne-Marie Stretter that evokes the masochistic reponse in Jean-Marc de H..

Whether whip or bicycle, it is the transformation "into a thing", as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, that is seen as an important masochistic and fetichistic symbol. It is an irresistible means to escape from the self.

Simone de Beauvoir's view of masochism in which the male desires to transform himself "into a thing" stands at the opposite pole from Rita Felski's thesis, which agrees with Buci-Glucksmann with regard to male masochism. In male masochism Buci-Glucksmann sees "'the masculine desire to immobilize, to petrify the feminine body (1102, "The

Counterdiscourse of the Feminine").'" On the one hand woman is identified with nature and her uncontrollable moods, but on the other hand there is also an attempt, especially during the fin de siècle, to aestheticize woman

"so that the threat of the natural is negated by being turned into art; the female body is transformed into a visually pleasing play of surface and textures under the scrutiny of the male gaze." (1102, "The Counter-discourse of the Feminine")

Sadomasochism is one form that love may take, one of its less attractive but apparently compelling shapes. It is one branch in the large field of sexual attraction that exists in such infinite varieties and aberrations between male and female encounters. The often devastating forces of love manifest themselves in the still largely unknown and uncontrollable territories of the psyche - an immense labyrinth in which the human being can easily vanish, allowing only the animal to survive.

In his late novel Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull, into which the author poured a lifetime of erotic experiences and created one of his most intriguing mother-son relationships,⁶² Mann uses tragicomical irony - a literary device encountered in many of his late works and in contrast to the serious pathos of his early tales - to

^{62*}The mother-son complex is disguised in the forms of Diane Houpflé, née Philibert, the middle-aged, wealthy writer from Straßburg and the very young Armand, alias Felix Krull, who works as an elevator boy at the "Saint James und Albany" hotel in the rue Saint Honoré of Paris.

describe a night of love in the luxurious hotel suite number 25 of Madame Houpflé. During their love-play Diane Houpflé displays a masochistic desire and tries in vain to evoke sadistic inclinations in Armand:

"'Wenn du mich etwas schlägest? Derb schlägest, meine ich? Mich, Diane Philibert? So recht geschähe mir, ich würde es dir danken. Da liegen deine Hosenträger, nimm sie, Liebster, drehe mich um und züchtige mich aufs Blut! (140-141, Bekenntnisse)

However, the young Armand, alias Felix Krull, declines resolutely and with the inexperience of youth. He does not yet understand the older woman's cravings and her deviant sexual powers that must be excited by unusual means.

"'Ich denke nicht daran, Diane. Was mutest du mir zu? Ich bin solch ein Liebhaber nicht (141),' " he declares with inexperienced conviction.

Armand is not ready for an open display of sadomasochism, but Diane Houpflé's surprising request gives him the idea to disclose to her that he had stolen her jewelry box. Armand's confession delights Diane Houpflé and leads to a game in which the handsome elevator boy becomes a thief again.

Simone de Beauvoir agrees with other critics that Sade's "sexual character was essentially anal (25)" and that his anal retention was apparently "... confirmed by Sade's attachment to money (25)." She further argues that "theft appears in his work as a sexual act, and the mere suggestion of it is enough to cause orgasm (25)." When Armand refuses

to give Madame Houpflé a strapping but steals from her instead, the same goal is achieved in their love making: a heightened voluptuousness and the loss of self-consciousness.

While Madame Houpflé and Armand are engaged in their *ars amandi*, with every act being commented upon à haute voix by Madame Houpflé - often to the embarrassment and indignation of Armand, who has not encountered such unabashed sexual moods and revelations before - Mann reflects upon the perversity of love. He makes the categorical assumption that all love entanglements involve the breaking of incestuous taboos. Either the woman feels like a mother, who longs for a son, or the man descends into infantile stages to look for his mother in the breasts and womb of his lover.

"'Vielleicht, sag' ich, ist diese Liebe zu euch versetzte Mutterliebe, die Sehnsucht nach dem Sohn...Verkehrtheit, sagst du? Und ihr? Was wollt ihr mit unseren Brüsten, die euch tränkten, unserem Schoß, der euch gebar? Wollt ihr nicht nur zurück zu ihnen, nicht wieder Brustkinder sein? Ist es nicht die Mutter, die ihr unerlaubterweise im Weibe liebt? Verkehrtheit! Die Liebe ist verkehrt durch und durch, sie kann gar nicht anders sein als verkehrt. Setze die Sonde an bei ihr, wo du willst, so findest du sie verkehrt...(139, ellipses Mann's)

It is a devastating judgment that Mann pronounces on love when he says that all love is perverse through and through - that love cannot be anything else but wrong. Wherever one probes beneath the surface, one will find that love is aberrant. Mann breaks here through layers of

romantic feelings and ideas that are usually attributed to love. He shows not only the rather unpleasant nakedness of love - love is not Aphrodite born from the sea but a woman whose flesh shows many flaws - but he cuts that goose-pimpled flesh and shows that love is nothing but man's second most important instinct. Mann agrees fully with the realistic pessimism of Freud and Sade that is often so difficult to accept. One understands better now why Hans Castorp fell in love with Clawdia Chauchat's x-ray.

Chapter 9Homosexuality and Lesbianism:

Der Tod in Venedig, Dix heures et demie du soir en été, Le ravissement de Lol V. Stein, Savannah Bay and other works

(1)

In his study of homosexuality in Klaus and Thomas Mann, Gerhard Härle makes the point that although love is the main theme of literature, attempts to work out a "poetology of the erotic" have not been undertaken until recently. By suggesting a "poetology of the erotic", Haerle means that erotic elements and aspects in literature may be critically structured. During the mid-sixties, literary research got its new ideas from sociopolitical currents which explored emancipation in sexual areas, particularly suppressed homo and feminine sexuality. The new sexual movement had been severely suppressed during Fascism and the subsequent restorative "building-up phase".

Psychoanalysis claims that sexuality cannot be separated from creativity and its capacity for love. There is no such thing as an unclean sexual drive and a clean eros or "pure" creativity - "also nicht unreiner Trieb und reiner Eros." (37)

In Freud's psychoanalysis, homosexuality and lesbianism are seen as a "utopic potential" of creativity. Herbert Marcuse, a Freudian disciple, sees homosexuality and

lesbianism as a protest against the socially dominating "Leistungsprinzip" which demands that man use his body only as an instrument to secure propagation. Marcuse claims that imagination and creativity are a resource to oppose the "Realitätsprinzip" (38) with its intolerance toward pleasure. Pleasure can become the driving force often inherent in the homosexual artist to produce beauty.

In psychoanalysis, whose roots descend to German idealism, the images of "Kot und Gold" (107) are located next to each other and are subject to interchangeable metaphors that have great value.

In order to explore open and hidden forms of homosexuality and lesbianism and to evaluate their artistic endeavors, psychoanalysis has been an important tool:

"Eine Analyse der offenen und verdeckten Formen der Homosexualität muß in jedem Fall die psychoanalytischen Einsichten zu diesem Problem in sich aufnehmen, wenn sie ihrem Gegenstand gerecht werden will." (41, Männerweiblichkeit)

Psychoanalysis teaches us that if the individual is directed toward a homosexual disposition, a relative retardation in the area of the ego-development occurs which leads toward a prolonged abode in a magical thought process - "...einem Verharren im magischen Denken... (43, Männerweiblichkeit)" while simultaneously a comparative acceleration in the area of sexual development occurs. This results in a weakening of the controls which regulate sexual and aggressive tendencies. The process - which is a

subsequent development of homosexuality - is characterized by an overcrowding - "Überbelastung" - in the area of autoerotic activities.

The homosexual's heightened capacity to play-act - "... [das] spielerische Potential (43)" inherent in Morgenthaler's speculations - is crucial to the arts and the double identification of which homosexual is capable. He distinguishes two attitudes of the homosexual: a "sado-anal" inclination, which means a penchant toward a passive position and the phallic posture that represents the active attitude.

The "playful potential" to which Morgenthaler refers is an important part in Der Tod in Venedig. The novella belongs to the early works of Thomas Mann - written between 1901 and the beginning of World War I - and is considered the masterpiece among his tales. Thomas Mann himself felt that he had created "'das Ernsteste, das ich seit dem zweiten Band der 'Buddenbrooks' geschrieben habe.'" (57, Peter de Mendelssohn, Nachbemerkungen zu Thomas Mann)

In his Lebensabriß (1930), Thomas Mann calls the work a "Tragödie der Entwürdigung," thus putting the emphasis not on homosexuality for which the work is mainly known but on degradation.

In a letter written in 1920, Mann makes it clear that passion and degradation were the focal point of his novella and that the tale which he had originally wanted to tell had

less to do with homoerotic love than with the grotesquely visualized story of an encounter between the elderly Goethe and Ulrike von Levetzow, a young girl he met at Marienbad. With the consent of her ambitious and pandering mother, Goethe, to the horror of his own family insisted upon marrying Ulrike. Ulrike refused the marriage emphatically:

In the same letter, Thomas Mann explains that in addition to this stimulus from Goethe's life, he personally had a romantic travel experience,

"'...war ein persönlich-lyrisches Reiseerlebnis, das mich bestimmte, die Dinge durch Einführung des Motivs der 'Verbotenen' Liebe auf die Spitze zu stellen....'" (17, Peter Paintner, quoting Mann)

Twenty years later, in May 1940, Thomas Mann gave a lecture in English at Princeton entitled On Myself in which he refers once more to Der Tod in Venedig and confirms his original ambition to write about Goethe's unhappy late liaison with Ulrike von Levetzow:

"'Ursprünglich hatte ich ganz etwas anderes machen wollen. Ich war von dem Wunsche ausgegangen, Goethes Spätliebe zu Ulrike von Levetzow zum Gegenstand meiner Erzählung zu machen, die Entwürdigung eines hochgestiegenen Geistes durch die Leidenschaft für ein reizendes, unschuldiges Stück Leben darzustellen - jene schwere Krise Goethes, der wir seine herrliche Karlsbader Elegie verdanken, diesen Aufschrei aus tiefstem Verstört- und Hingerissensein, das für ihn fast zum Untergang geworden wäre und jedenfalls ein Tod vor dem Tode gewesen ist.-'" (17, Peter Paintner, quoting Mann)

The above quotation refers to the main theme in Der Tod in Venedig: degradation of a highly positioned intellect through passion for a charming, innocent creature, which in

Goethe's case represents the feminine, in Thomas Mann's the masculine; Ulrike versus Tadzio.

Mann is still possessed by the dilemma of "spirit versus life" predominant in his early writings and embodied in such tales as Der kleine Herr Friedemann, Tonio Kröger, Auf dem Weg zum Friedhof, and Tobias Mindernickel.

In Der Tod in Venedig the opposition of spirit and life is also the struggle between sensuality and morality. In a letter to Carl Maria Weber, dated July 4, 1920, Mann explains that he read Die Wahlverwandtschaften five times while working on Der Tod in Venedig because he was trying to imitate the perfect balance between sensuality and morality in Goethe's novel:

"'Ein Gleichgewicht von Sinnlichkeit und Sittlichkeit wurde angestrebt wie ich es in den Wahlverwandtschaften ideal vollendet fand, die ich während der Arbeit am T.i.V., wenn ich recht erinnere, fünfmal gelesen habe.'" (17-18, Peter Paintner)

One of the major themes in Der Tod in Venedig is, in Mann's words, the devastating invasion of passion, the destruction of a life that had apparently been mastered but then becomes degraded through a "strange god", through Eros-Dionysus, and is pushed into absurdity. The artist who gives in to the senses cannot remain dignified. A basic tendency to bitter and melancholic suspicion about all art finds its expression in a confession Mann puts into the mouth of Aschenbach, who has already been marked by death:

"'Wieder war mein Thema der verwüstende Einbruch der Leidenschaft, die Zerstörung eines geformten, scheinbar

endgültig gemeisterten Lebens, das durch den 'fremden Gott' durch Eros-Dionysos entwürdigt und ins Absurde gestoßen wird. Der Künstler, dem Sinnlichen verhaftet, kann nicht wirklich würdig werden, diese Grundtendenz bitter melancholischer Skepsis gegen alles Künstlertum kommt in dem (Platons Dialogen nachgeformten) Bekenntnis zum Ausdruck, das ich dem schon vom Tode gezeichneten Helden in den Mund legte.'" (29-30, Peter Paintner)

The person who embodies the "verwüstende Einbruch der Leidenschaft" is an almost fourteen-year-old, beautiful Polish boy called Tadzio. Tadzio was not invented - just as almost all characters in Der Tod in Venedig are composites of real people whom Mann met during his trip to Venice in May 1911. He wrote in his Lebensabriß:

"...Ganz ebenso ist im 'Tod' in Venedig' nichts erfunden: Der Wanderer am Münchner Nordfriedhof, das düstere Polesaner Schiff, der greise Geck, der verdächtige Gondolier, Tadzio⁶³ und die Seinen, die durch Gepäckverwechslung mißglückte Abreise, die Cholera, der ehrliche Clerk im Reisebüro, der bösartige Bänkelsänger und was sonst anzuführen wäre - alles war gegeben, war eigentlich nur einzustellen und erwies dabei aufs verwunderlichste seine kompositionelle Deutungsfähigkeit." (55, Peter de Mendelssohn, (Autobiography, p. 240)

Mann's own synopsis of the novella is very short. In a letter dated July 18, 1911, he writes to Philipp Witkop:

⁶³*Tadzio was the son of Baroness Moes, who together with her daughters and another Polish family stayed at the Grand Hotel des Bains at the Lido while Thomas Mann spent a week there as well with his wife Katia. Tadzio's actual name was Wladyslav but he was called "Adzio" or Wladzio". He and his friend Janek Fudakowski, who became Jaschu in the novella, remembered sixty years later "den alten Mann, der uns immerfort beobachtete (56, Peter de Mendelssohn, Nachbemerkungen zu Thomas Mann)". Actually, the "old man", de Mendelssohn reminds us, was thirty-six-years-old, fourteen years younger than his hero Aschenbach.

"Ich bin in der Arbeit: eine recht sonderbare Sache, die ich aus Venedig mitgebracht habe, Novelle ernst und rein im Ton, einen Fall von Knabenliebe bei einem alternden Künstler behandelnd. Sie sagen 'hum! hum!' Aber es ist sehr anständig". (15, Peter Paintner, quoting Mann)

When Mann defends his pederastic theme, in the novella by saying that he handled it in a decent, "anständig" manner, he understates matters, as he is apt to do. It is almost as though Shakespeare tried to explain that in the incestuous longing of King Lear for his youngest daughter there is not a shred of lewdness. Of course, Shakespeare could be lewd⁶⁴ when he chose to be, just as Mann is able to become explicit in matters of *ars amandi* when he decides to. He mostly does not. The tone in Der Tod in Venedig is one of high drama; if anything, it is indeed "ernst und rein im Ton". In this novella one sees little of Mann's famous irony; here it becomes mostly pathos. It is the only time Mann creates a homosexual relationship openly and in such elaborate, deliberate fashion. Tadzio and Aschenbach are too close to his own heart and inclinations to be approached in any way other than "decently". He does not take pederasty lightly.

While the Manns remained in Brioni, prior to their stay in Venice, the news of Gustav Mahler's death on May 18, 1911, reached them. Mann had met Mahler briefly in Munich,

⁶⁴*Avi Erlich Hamlet's Absent Father. Princeton, N. J.; Princeton University Press, 1977.

and now decided to give von Aschenbach Mahler's traits. His death

"bestimmte mich, dem Helden meiner Erzählung die leidenschaftlich strengen Züge der mir vertrauten Künstlerfigur zu geben". (55, Peter de Mendelssohn quoting Thomas Mann in Nachbemerkungen zu Thomas Mann)

In Chapter 3 of the novella Aschenbach, who is waiting in the hotel lobby for dinner, gets his first glimpse of the boy. It is an encounter where only looks are exchanged and is typical of all subsequent confrontations. Only their eyes speak; and only once Tadzio does smile at his older admirer - a smile that has devastating consequences for Aschenbach.

The entire homoerotic affair, from its innocent beginnings to its orgiastic outburst in Aschenbach's dream of Dionysian rites, is confined to Aschenbach's mind. Love exists only in Aschenbach's thoughts. While one experiences his delights, humiliation, despair and degradation, one never knows what Tadzio thinks of the older man, who quickly becomes an ardent pursuer. Eventually it becomes easy to see in Tadzio only the narcissistic reflection of Aschenbach's soul. He is the inner vision of von Aschenbach's own aspirations:

"Bezieht man beide Gestalten, Aschenbach und Tadzio, in die Betrachtung ein, so wird sich bald herausstellen, daß über Tadzio nicht sehr viel auszusagen ist. Natürlich ist er schön, wir erfahren sogar Einzelheiten seines Aussehens. Zugleich aber wirkt er blaß und etwas kränklich, das trübt das Gesamtbild jedoch keineswegs. Häufig wird er im Zusammensein mit seiner Familie und seinen Spielkameraden gezeigt. Aber in all dem liegt nichts Besonderes. Alles Wesentliche, was

sich über ihn aussagen läßt, ist eigentlich nicht Bestandteil seiner Persönlichkeit, sondern wird nur von Aschenbach in ihm gesehen. Überhaupt nehmen wir ihn nur mit den Augen Aschenbachs wahr. (80, Fred Müller, Thomas Mann)

Homoerotic love as a narcissistic projection is a trait Aschenbach shares with Johannes Friedemann and other heroes of the early tales. There is a progression from the tiny, hunchbacked Johannes Friedeman to the more self-assured Aschenbach, whose confidence is mostly based on the public recognition he received as a successful author. Yet Aschenbach's artistic self is still threatened by sensuous and bodily manifestations, by life itself.

Countering Aschenbach's success are regressive inclinations that damage his artistic self-esteem: his doubts about the moral purpose of his existence provoke the nightmare that threatens his artistic ego:

"Inhalt dieses Traums ist die Bedrohung des künstlerischen Ichs durch das Sinnlich-Körperliche, das "Leben". Diese Gefahr erweist sich als tödlich, der Held geht an ihr zugrunde." (79, Fred Müller)

According to Herbert Anton (Die Rettung des Narziß. Eine 'transzendente Linie' im Werk von Thomas Manns, in: Thomas Mann 1875-1975 (75), there is an ascendancy in Mann's art that leads from narcissism to self-love.⁶⁵ In 1913,

⁶⁵*Herbert Anton and Marcel Kunz see narcissism as a negative form of the ego encapsulated in self-adulation and inferiority complexes that end in depression and sometimes self-destruction since the escape toward the exterior world is blocked by an emotional blindness which at best mirrors itself in a close relative: mother/sister, father/brother of the narcissistically afflicted person. By contrast self-love is seen as an inverted mirror image of narcissism: acceptance of the self in all its

Thomas Mann wrote in his Vorwort zu dem Roman eines

Jungverstorbenen:

"'Liebe zu sich selbst', hat ich weiß nicht mehr welcher Autor gesagt - es war ein geistreicher Autor, soviel ist sicher - 'Liebe zu sich selbst ist immer der Anfang eines romanhaften Lebens'".⁶⁶ (76, Herbert Anton quoting Thomas Mann)

The author is Oscar Wilde, whose dwarf in his tale The Birthday of the Infanta is gradually destroyed by a deadly self-recognition in front of a mirror.

Aschenbach's disposition shows traits similar to those of Johannes Friedemann, who while still an adolescent makes the conscious decision to withdraw from life into an existence filled with repose, contemplation and peace. The appearance of a strangely beautiful, but cold and cruel woman, symbolizing an invasion of this protected life, destroys the peaceful hero.

But Aschenbach has not enjoyed the same peaceful conditions as those of Friedemann. On the contrary, prior to his encounter with Tadzio he has led a disciplined life dedicated to the arts and 'morals'. His favorite motto is

positive aspects, particularly the creative instinct and its output, which is frequently inherent in the narcissistically inclined person.

⁶⁶*Oscar Wilde, An Ideal Husband, Act III: "To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance". (76, Herbert Anton)

"durchhalten"⁶⁷ which, for him, is the essence of morality, summing up a life-work endured in suffering and constant action. In this respect a progression from narcissism (indulgence of the self) to self-love (achievement through hard work and moral integrity) has occurred. Narcissism and self-love are usually used synonymously, with self-love being one of the main varieties of narcissism. As Paul Zweig points out (The Heresy of Self-love, Harper, 1968), our moral tradition has described the sin of Narcissus as formless self-indulgence. However, Herbert Anton (Die Rettung des Narziß. Eine 'transzendente Linie' im Werk von Thomas Mann, p.75) sees narcissism as the negative part of self-love; its positive side he equates with self-acceptance.

With the appearance of the young Polish boy life impinges on the world of the intellect with the same disastrous consequences on Aschenbach as Gerda von Rinnlingen had on Johannes Friedemann.

When Aschenbach sees Tadzio for the first time in the hotel lobby on the Lido the boy's delicate beauty reminds him of a noble Greek sculpture "...erinnerte an griechische Bildwerke aus edelster Zeit..." (469) This immediate imprint of Tadzio on Aschenbach's mind testifies to the writer's attitude, which is controlled by the arts. On the

⁶⁷*"Durchhalten" is a self-quote by Mann, from his essay "Friedrich und die große Koalition".

surface there is not yet any trace, of homoerotic stirrings - just delight in beauty and disappointment at being separated from his object of admiration by many tables in the dining hall. This desire to behold beauty is mixed with frustration and encourages erotic longings in Aschenbach. Joy once more gains the upper hand when Aschenbach observes Tadzio at the beach, where the boy displays contempt as he passes a Russian family. Tadzio's disdain of the Russians has put him within reach of human emotions worthy of a deeper interest than just the aesthetic effect the boy's beauty had on Aschenbach.

At first still thinking of unfinished work to be done, Aschenbach soon becomes lost in idle contemplation of Tadzio. As he watches him walking along the beach with his friend Jaschu, taller and stronger than he, and Jaschu kisses Tadzio, two things happen: First, Aschenbach calls Tadzio "Kritobulos". The name refers to a story by Xenophon in which Kristobulus kisses the son of Alcibiades, a young man famous for his exceptional beauty. Kristobulus's amorous approach is given an ironic warning by Socrates, who tells him that the effects of beauty can be poisonous - even deadly. And second: Immediately after Aschenbach calls Tadzio "Kristobulos", he eats large, ripe strawberries. The strawberries are contaminated by cholera, that has invaded Venice during Aschenbach's stay. They also suggest the

unattainable beauty of Tadzio, Aschenbach's erotic frustration and the deadliness of certain delights.

At this point Aschenbach's feelings for Tadzio have not yet become conscious. Only after his hasty departure from the Lido and his subsequent quick return does he realize what the boy means to him.

Day by day he continues to observe Tadzio, in whom he sees the embodiment of all that he ever attempted to express in his writing. Once more Aschenbach's narcissistic inclinations become visible. To explain this attraction to himself, he takes refuge in Socrates, who instructs Phaedrus, the student for whom the philosopher has homoerotic feelings, that man worships beauty:

"because it is the only aspect of the spiritual that we can perceive with the senses. Beauty is visible thought." (25, John D. Simons)

Desperately Aschenbach tries to find a parallel between his own feelings and a homoerotic relationship between a Greek teacher and his pupil.

Aschenbach then composes almost two pages of exquisite prose. Not, as one would assume, about Tadzio, but in the spirit of the boy's impeccable proportions, which left such a deep imprint on Aschenbach's spirit. The short piece leaves him utterly exhausted. It represents the conscious invasion of the sensuous, Dionysian element, so long absent in the writer's life that it now threatens to destroy him.

If Aschenbach takes shelter among the Greeks to solve the age-old riddle of homosexuality, Thomas Mann turns to war, militaristic races and the Germans for a possible explanation of homosexuality - which he does not see as an effeminate syndrome but as its opposite:

"Übermännlichkeit".

In his "Tagebuchblätter aus den Jahren 1933 and 1934", he comments (July 1, 1934) on the homosexual affair of Röhm-Heines⁶⁸:

"Bekanntwerden des Massakers nach rechts und links. Das elende Hinausspielen auf die längst bekannten 'sittlichen' Verfehlungen der Röhm-Heines'schen Sphäre. Als ob die Homosexualität nicht wesentlich dazu gehörte! Sie ist ja nicht immer Effeminiertheit, sondern oft auch Übermännlichkeit und gehört zur militaristisch-heroischen und Kriegsmanns-Haltung (Röhm in Bolivien). Sie gehört zum Kriege, stammt aus ihm und ist bei militaristischen Völkern zu Hause, zum Beispiel beim deutschen, das im Gegensatz zu den weibliebenden und galanten Franzosen, ein homoerotisches Volk ist. Siegfried und Jeanne d'Arc. Die Erotik Stefan George's. Das will man verleugnen?..." (291, "Leiden an Deutschland," Politische Schriften und Reden, 2)

In order to defend homosexuality, Mann attacks the French, of whom he was not fond - in contrast to his brother Heinrich. Thomas Mann's comparison of Siegfried and Jeanne d'Arc seems rather arbitrary. Charlemagne and Roland are as

⁶⁸*Ernst Röhm, national-socialist politician was executed without a trial on June 30, 1934. He had been chief of staff of the SA since 1931 and federal minister (Reichsminister) since December 1933. He was accused by Hitler - though it had never been proven - that he had made plans in 1934 for a 'second revolution', the so-called Röhm-Putsch" (Der Neue Brockhaus, 4)

virile as Siegfried. Brunhilde defies the law as much as Jeanne d'Arc. Both women wear armor equally well.

In the fourth chapter the pinnacle and subsequent rapid descent of Aschenbach's amorous intentions are reached one morning during an extraordinary sunrise, which symbolizes the sexual union which never takes place on a physical plane between man and boy. It starts rather innocently with baby cloudlets which "schwebten gleich dienenden Amoretten im rosigen, bläulichen Duft... (495)" But soon the sensuous and sexual longings of Aschenbach are expressed in special images:

"...Purpur fiel auf das Meer, das Meer, das ihn wallend vorwärts zu schwimmen schien, goldene Speere zuckten von unten zur Höhe des Himmels hinauf, der Glanz ward zum Brande, lautlos, mit göttlicher Übergewalt wälzten sich Glut und Brunst und lodernde Flammen herauf,...(495)

Here is the transition of Aschenbach's entanglement with Tadzio from a detached objectivity to eroticism.

Soon the day arrives when Aschenbach receives Tadzio's smile. It leaves him devastated. It is a moment of self-recognition. The sweetness and beauty of Tadzio's smile remind him of Narcissus, who stretches his arms toward his own reflection in the water. In Tadzio's smile, thoughts and dreams of beauty that the writer had carried inside most of his life find brief but highly intense and concrete expressions. Aschenbach recognizes himself in Tadzio's smile. When Aschenbach says the magic words "ich liebe dich", he sees himself as Tadzio.

(2)

In her article "The Pain and Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras" (which constitutes a translated chapter from her book Soleil noir: Mélancolie et dépression), Julia Kristeva speaks of the decline of the 20th century that started with World War I and reached its lowest point in the concentration camps, the atomic bomb, and the gulag during and after World War II. The madness of death and destruction induced by human will had its repercussions in the human psyche that found its expression in depression, mania, borderline disorders, false personalities and psychoses. This crisis

"at once religious and political finds its most radical expression in the crisis of meaning. The problem of naming leads no longer to the 'music in letters' (Mallarmé and Joyce were the believers and aesthetes of narration⁶⁹) but to illogicality and silence." (139, translated by Katharine A. Jensen)

Where silence reigns, "nothing" (139) comes forth. And silence is a

"prudish defense in the face of such incommensurable, internal and external, disorder. Never has a cataclysm been so apocalyptically exorbitant. Never has its representation been relegated to such inadequate symbolic modes." (139)

⁶⁹*Thomas Mann must be added to this listing of Mallarmé and Joyce as "believers and aesthetes of narration".

In the case of Duras her silence - the strange blanks and holes which fill the text of her work attract the reader and often leaves him puzzled if not actually unsatisfied. The text itself sometimes assumes a clumsiness that is deliberate.

"Often one is jolted by a last-minute addition that seems crammed into an unexpected clause but that gives the clause its meaning - surprise: "She aroused in him his special penchant for young girls, girls not completely grown into adults, for pensive, impertinent, inarticulate young girls." (140, Julia Kristeva quotes from The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein, 20)

Duras's style is the antithesis of Mann's elegant prose, his "music in letters". Her writing reminds one at certain times of surrealism, the deliberate distortion of objects - like Salvator Dali's watches hanging like half-cooked pancakes in a landscape. In her novels there is some of the joy in destruction the Dadaists manifest. André Breton's Nadja, who moves between not-madness, "la non-folie," and madness, "la folie," has something in common with Lol V. Stein and Alissa Thor. They resemble each other namely in their decomposition and genuine madness, which they hide under their cool girlish appearance. They are afraid of life, "...afraid of being abandoned, afraid of the future, afraid of loving, of violence, of numbers, of the unknown,..." (149, Julia Kristeva)" There is only one way

out of this labyrinth of entangled fear and madness:
destruction - "Détruire, dit-elle"⁷⁰

In the past nine chapters I have attempted to show that the ars amandi of Mann's early stories can also be traced quite readily in Duras's work. This is particularly true of lesbianism, which is a familiar if often concealed theme quite early on in Duras's fiction. Its first intimations start already in Les Petits Chevaux de Taquinia, published in 1953, where three bored wives who spend their vacation together with their families in Italy get along far better with each other than with their husbands. Nowhere in the novel do the three women engage in any physical demonstration of their lesbian inclinations, but they treat each other with a delicacy and affection that contrasts sharply with the coarseness of their husbands.

In the Durassian novel it is difficult to detect the well-concealed borderline between friendship and lesbian love, for the Durassian female character, although more modern than Mann's women⁷¹, is mostly afraid to display

^{70*} Whereas a considerable amount of research has been done on Duras's Le Vice-Consul, L'Amant, Moderato Cantabile, Les petits chevaux de Taquinia, Un Barrage contre le Pacifique, Le Marin de Gibraltar and on La Maladie de la Mort - ("considerable" is relative here when compared with the staggering amount of research on Mann), very little has been done on Agatha and Savannah Bay.

^{71*} Even Mann's socially most advanced and desirable women are but wives and mothers. His idea of a femme fatale, a Gerda von Rinnlingen for instance, is a young, married woman of the upper class, who treats her husband coldly and rejects a too ardent admirer. Mann's projection of an educated woman, like Märit

sexual desire openly. If Durassian women do show an erotic independence (the sophisticated Anne-Marie Stretter sometimes sends out explicit sexual messages), they are quickly confined within the Law by being converted into desire for "death, or sleep, or 'oblivion'... 212, Trista Selous)"

This is one of the reasons why the Durassian woman is either a voyeur or a masochist, since neither one of these converted sexual impulses brings her into conflict with the law. Both writers portray mostly conventional women.

Even when Duras becomes quite explicit, declaring desire in an unambiguous way, as Maria does with Claire in Dix Heures et demie du soir en été, this desire is not expressed by the sense of touch but only through the eye - in voyeuristic terms. In this respect Duras is quite close to Mann, whose Aschenbach does not once approach Tadzio with his hands - only with his eyes. Mann and Duras remain in the realm of the imagination. The desired person is conjured up in one's mind. But the lover remains alone, enclosed in a narcissistic self.

When Duras describes a heterosexual relationship she is often more graphic than Mann. This is particularly the case in La Maladie de la Mort, where a woman gets paid to explore her own body and her partner's. In Blue Eyes, Black Hair, which deals with the relationship between a homosexual man

Aarenhold, is a flat-bosomed blue stocking.

and a heterosexual woman, there are also rather short, descriptive scenes that share some of their outspoken sexuality with someone like Moravia rather than with Mann, for whom an explicitly sexual scene would have been unthinkable.

In Blue Eyes, Black Hair one observes - the reader becomes here the voyeur - an erotic encounter between a man and a woman. Yet in spite of its sexual openness - Duras's descriptions are quite graphic - there is no movement in the image. The homosexual lies totally still as if he were dead. Out of horror and disgust for the female genitals, he cannot move. In order to endure the detested sight and smell of the woman he wishes were a man, were like himself, he takes refuge in immobility.

The concrete images Duras sometimes chooses when she works with heterosexual relationships become almost diffused and sparse when she portrays incestuous or lesbian scenes. When the brother in Agatha discovers the nude, sleeping body of his sister, Duras takes refuge in a sort of deification. "Son corps a la magnificence d'un dieu." That is precisely what Mann does also. Since Aschenbach is unable or afraid to recognize his feelings for Tadzio, he turns him into a young god. Aschenbach worships Tadzio's beauty; the writer deliberately never speaks to Tadzio because he does not want to humanize him. If Aschenbach were to get too close to his idol, he would destroy the image of god-like beauty he has

created for himself. Erotic feelings mixed with fear and guilt that arise from the inescapable social taboos imposed upon Western man lead to religious images. That which is unmanageable on an emotional level grows into oversized dimensions and seems godlike.

In Dix Heures et demie du soir en été, published in 1960, lesbian love between wife (Maria) and mistress (Claire) is portrayed in definite terms. Maria plays the role von Aschenbach has in Der Tod in Venedig: desire seems to be more or less one-sided and is viewed strictly from the perspective of one person - Maria. The narrator, who uses the third person singular only, appears to be omniscient. In reality the action is seen exclusively through the eyes of Maria, the narrator. One does not know what Claire and Pierre think or feel. Similar to Der Tod in Venedig, only the interior of the protagonist is given. The thoughts and desires of the other characters are hidden from view:

"Maria retrouve Claire, la beauté de Claire qui en ce moment pourrait la porter jusqu'aux larmes. Claire est là, posée de profil sur le ciel et contre les montagnes sulfureuses et lactées qui, à l'horizon, annoncent l'avance toujours plus grande du voyage et de son terme, ce soir, Madrid. Ce soir Pierre. Elle a eu peur tout à l'heure, lorsque Pierre roulait vite, de mourir dans une telle attente..."

-Je t'aimerais toujours, Claire, dit Maria.

Claire se retourne et ne sourit pas à Maria. Pierre ne se retourne pas. Un silence se fait dans la Rover. Jamais encore Claire ne s'est montrée nue à Maria. Elle le fera ce soir, devant Pierre. Cette échéance est aussi inéluctable que celle, tout à l'heure, du crépuscule. Dans le regard de Claire, le sort de cette nuit se lisait." (154-155)

Whereas in Der Tod in Venedig Tadzio's beauty and the emotion of love that springs from it are seen in the breaking of a spectacular dawn, Claire's beauty is projected against the sky and the sulfurous and milky mountains on the horizon at sunset. In the ménage à trois between wife, mistress and husband, it is Maria (the wife), who issues the magic words "je t'aimerais toujours" to the mistress (Claire), whom husband and wife desire with the same ardor. Claire, being aware of Maria's feelings, responds only to Pierre's desire, to the phallus. In the silence of the fast-moving car, destined for Madrid where the consummation of Claire's and Pierre's love will take place, Maria imagines the naked body of Claire. When Pierre and Claire make love in a hotel room in Madrid, they will have an invisible spectator: Maria caught in a voyeuristic pose. If Maria is unable to possess Claire physically, she will possess her in her mind:

"Elle voudrait voir se faire les choses entre eux afin d'être éclairée à son tour d'une même lumière qu'eux et entrer dans cette communauté qu'elle leur lègue, en somme depuis le jour où, elle, elle l'inventa, à Vérone, une certaine nuit." (169)

Of the three people involved in one of the love triangles in Dix Heures et demie du soir en été - there are two such triangles⁷² - Claire is the most narcissistically

⁷²*The second triangle is composed of Toni Perez, the lover, Rodrigo Paestra and his nineteen-year-old wife from Madrid, whom he has just murdered as the novel opens.

inclined. She is beautiful, so pretty that she appeals to women as well as men - "...qu'elle est belle. Que tu es belle, Dieu que tu l'es - (51)", Maria comments about her while she visualizes her husband undressing Claire. But beauty is all there is. Claire is form who absorbs other forms - reflecting herself in others just by being there.

In Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein there is also an ambiguous relationship between Lol V. Stein and Tatiana Karl, two young women who had been best friends in high school, then meet again ten years later after they were both married, and in Lol's case had three children. The most binding experience the two teenage girls had together was the sudden and definite departure of Lol's fiancé, Michael Richardson. Lol and Michael had attended the grand ball of the summer season in Normandy, where Tatiana had also been present. At some point Anne-Marie Stretter, who is here the wife of the French consul in Calcutta⁷³, steps onto the scene accompanied by her daughter. Michael Richardson dances twice with the thin and seductive Anne-Marie Stretter, then walks away with her and out of Lol's life. She never sees her fiancé again and it is assumed that he might have died young. "Il est mort peut-être? - Peut-être. Tu l'aimais comme la vie même. (118)"

⁷³*In Le Vice-consul, she appears as the wife of the French ambassador.

Lol V. Stein is so stunned by this sudden abandonment that her latent schizophrenia becomes apparent:

Elle donnait l'impression d'endurer dans un ennui tranquille une personne qu'elle se devait de paraître mais dont elle perdait la mémoire à la moindre occasion." (11)

When Lol sees Michael Richardson and Anne-Marie Stretter disappear into the garden of the club-house, she faints, and afterwards - too ill to function normally - is confined to her room for several weeks.

Ten years later we meet Lol V. Stein and Tatiana Karl again. Lol is still ill, although her sickness is hidden under a smooth and pretty exterior. Tatiana shows a tender concern for her old friend. Tatiana married a wealthy man and now has several lovers. But that does not change her affection for Lol, who at first shyly evades Tatiana's demonstrations of endearment, but soon loses her fear:

"Alors, Lol d'abord s'écarte et puis elle se rapproche de Tatiana, revient et caresse légèrement les cheveux de Tatiana." (106)

Similar to Maria, who watches during a night storm as her husband and Claire embrace each other, Lol V. Stein, hiding in a field of rye, observes Tatiana making love to Jacques Hold at the l'Hôtel des Bois. And like Maria, who desires her husband and his mistress, Lol desires Tatiana and Jacques Hold. But Tatiana is foremost on her mind since she sees in her a reincarnation of Anne-Marie Stretter, her old rival who stole her fiancé. The only fulfillment these lesbian desires can aspire to is voyeurism: Maria stands on

a balcony, Lol V. Stein lies in a rye field. Hidden from view, both women yearn with their eyes only. Longing, however, does not become tangible apart from an almost imperceptible touch. Like Mann's males, Durassian women are unable to touch the homosexual object they love. They can only look at them like Narcissus, who looks at the surface of the water.

Lesbianism in Duras's work is frequently accompanied by voyeurism. This we see to be particularly the case with Maria and Lol V. Stein.

Maria, who steps at first innocently into a night scene: above her on a balcony she observes her husband and Claire as they embrace. In order to remain invisible in the dark - it is just 10:30 pm when the adultery occurs: Dix heures et demie du soir en été - Maria puts out her cigarette. She then remains glued to the spot as her husband makes love to Claire. In order to bear her jealous pain better, Maria identifies with Claire. When Pierre touches his mistress's breasts, Maria imitates him by touching hers in a narcissistic gesture: "Tandis qu'il le fait, elle le fait aussi, elle porte ses mains à ses seins solitaires,...(48)" She is unable to move: "Non, elle ne peut pas se passer de les voir. (48)" Only when the two figures above her disappear as suddenly as they had appeared, Maria is able to leave her observation spot.

Maria's voyeurism is similar to Aschenbach's enamoured spying on Tadzio. But whereas in Dix heures et demie du soir en été, Maria indulges in voyeurism and then imagines further scenes of seduction, voyeurism in Der Tod in Venedig gradually unfolds in small episodes throughout the novella. Aschenbach watches Tadzio in the hotel lobby the dining room, the beach; he pursues him through the streets, into blind alleys and churches of Venice. One night he even ventures as far as Tadzio's door, where he desperately embraces the door post in lieu of the boy, risking instant discovery and humiliation. Tadzio becomes progressively more conscious of Aschenbach's unrelenting desire. In Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein Jacques Hold is aware as well that Lol, hidden in a rye field, watches him and Tatiana Karl making love during their brief stay at a hotel. Jacques Hold's knowledge of Lol's presence renders him impotent. Tatiana does not realize that Lol is concealed outside their window, but she senses her presence and guesses that Jacques Hold has fallen in love with Lol. Yet she remains solicitous, even protective toward Lol.

In Détruire dit-elle there is a lesbian relationship but without the strong voyeurism so apparent with Maria and Lol V. Stein.

The young Alissa Thor is not only loved by her husband, Max but also by his friend Stein. Both Jewish men are in the process of becoming writers, when Elisabeth Alione joins

them in a gloomy hotel which seems inhabited only by people who are ill. Elisabeth seduces Stein, and Alissa, younger than Elisabeth, imitates her by having Stein make love to her as well. Alissa is surprised when she discovers that her husband, who is also fond of Elisabeth, enjoys this complex relationship in which each member is represented by its double.

Alissa and Elisabeth are emotionally so close they speak for each other:

"[Alissa] repeats Elisa's remarks, reveals her past, forsees a future only of repetitions and doubles since the strangeness of both women means that each becomes in time the other's double and her own other." (149, Julia Kristeva, "The Pain of Sorrow in the Works of M. Duras")

The strange closeness between Alissa Thor and Elisabeth Alione reveals hardly any demonstrations of overt lesbianism but is confined to a verbal world, which in Alissa's case is involved in madness. Alissa sees herself reflected in Elisabeth; Elisabeth for her part would like for Alissa to be the daughter who died at birth, not her teenager, who is alive and well and difficult. Yet in the end their identification does not come about. The arrival of Elisabeth's husband breaks up any further intimacy between the two women.

Identification and homoerotic feelings are revealed in before a mirror:

"Elles se trouvent toutes les deux prises dans un miroir...Leur têtes se sont rapprochées. - 'Nous nous ressemblons,' dit Alissa - 'nous aimerions Stein s'il

était possible d'aimer.'...Elles se regardent dans le miroir, se sourient. - 'Comme vous êtes belle,' dit Elisabeth. - 'Nous sommes des femmes,' dit Alissa. 'Regardez.' Elles se regardent encore. Puis Elisabeth met sa tête contre celle d'Alissa. La main d'Alissa est sur la peau d'Elisabeth Alione, à l'épaule. - 'Je trouve que nous nous ressemblons,' murmure Alissa... Alissa regarde le corps habillé d'Elisabeth Alione dans la glace. 'Je vous aime et je vous désire,' dit Alissa." (99-101)

Their desire to resemble each other - Alissa even cuts her hair to look more like Elisabeth - "'...pourquoi les avoir coupés? J'ai regretté...' - 'Pour vous ressembler encore davantage - (101)'" - leads to a delicate bodily contact and a declaration of desire. A moment afterwards Alissa spots Elisabeth's husband in the park, thus ending their tête-à-tête.

The male figure becomes the intruder who renders conscious that which was at least partly concealed. Elisabeth's husband plays a similar role as von Beckerath in Wälsungenblut. Both men act as catalysts in an amorous situation - lesbianism and sibling incest. They give concrete form what is forbidden according to societal codes.

Lesbianism takes a rather unusual form in Savannah Bay, in which the adulation of a granddaughter for her grandmother is depicted. Madeleine, the old woman and a well-known actress, is an ideally projected mother-image. Where Duras is critical and often condemnatory of her mother-figures in Un Barrage contre le Pacifique and in L'Amant, the reverse holds true in Savannah Bay. Madeleine is a sympathetically drawn figure who is endearing in her

vulnerability. She is an older version of Anne Marie Stretter and externally the most thoroughly executed female character in Duras's fictitious world. The narrator identifies herself more with Anne Marie Stretter than with her other figures, including Lol V. Stein and Anne Desbaresdes. Perhaps this is why Anne Marie is portrayed from the outside only, whereas her thoughts - identical with those of the narrator - are concealed beneath a smooth surface. In Savannah Bay one senses the redemption of a mother-figure: youthful hatred in her early works or in novels like L'Amant, where Duras returns to childhood experiences and adolescence, has developed into adoration of the mother.

Savannah Bay has two distinct parts. The first is subdivided into four sections with the fourth part being explained as: "La quatrième période sera conform à la représentation théâtrale traditionnelle. On ne pourra plus s'y tromper. (72)". Duras is careful not to call Savannah Bay a novel, yet she does not call it a play either. Technically, it is a dialogue, but one is tempted to call it a soliloquy that two women deliver separately - as if the other woman were not visible when one of them speaks. This technique reminds one of Jean Cocteau's one-act play La Voix humaine, where a woman has a telephone conversation with her lover - at the end of which she hangs herself. While it is clear that another person is involved in this scene, one

sees only the woman. The man remains totally hidden. He exists just as a voice. His invisibility is a symbol of alienation that the woman desperately tries to change.

The focal point in Savannah Bay is Madeleine, an old lady - "une comédienne qui aurait atteint la splendeur de l'âge (9)" and a young, nameless woman, who is simply called la Jeune Femme. "...Elle ne portera pas de nom - (11)"

All movements, physical and psychological, occur in the past where the terrible and unexplainable suicide of a sixteen-year-old girl occurred. This event connects the two women, who love each other passionately. Like the love of Aschenbach for Tadzio, their feelings do not find physical expression except in the most innocent way. Half-way through the dialogue one learns that the two women are grandmother and granddaughter - two actresses of whom the older one had been famous in her youth.

The second part of Savannah Bay is less complex. It moves the locale from a Siamese city called Savannah Bay to Italy. This is the theatrical version of Savannah Bay, created at the Théâtre de Rond-Point in 1983. The play repeats in simpler form the same story: the mysterious suicide of a very young girl, who shortly after giving birth to a daughter, leaves her baby and lover and drowns herself. Whether she drowns from sheer exhaustion - she went into the water the moment after she gave birth - "...la chose a dû lui être facile, elle était si fatiguée...ses couches dans

la même nuit...(126)" - or for another reason, no one knows. Madeleine and la Jeune Femme speculate that she did not want to live even when she was a small girl: "...On ne pouvait jamais tout à fait croire qu'elle consentirait à vivre encore... - Cela depuis l'enfance (38)."

This fragility of a small girl that caused her mother to think that she might not live long, has a similarity with Aschenbach's concern about Tadzio's longevity:

"Er hatte jedoch bemerkt, daß Tadzio's Zähne nicht recht erfreulich waren: etwas zackig und blaß, ohne den Schmelz der Gesundheit und von eigentümlich spröder Durchsichtigkeit, wie zuweilen bei Bleichsüchtigen. 'Er ist sehr zart, er ist kränklich,' dachte Aschenbach. 'Er wird wahrscheinlich nicht alt werden.'" (479)

The play circles around the secret of a young girl's death in endless discussions between the two women, who use the formal "vous" to each other (not customary between grandmother and granddaughter). Yet they are apparently related - possibly the same way Alissa Thor wants to be related as the daughter of Elisabeth Alione. If the two actresses are grandmother and granddaughter, then the drowned girl is the mother of la Jeune Femme. La Jeune Femme, without a name during the entire play, calls herself at the end: "Savannah". "Elle s'est donnée le nom de Savannah. Celui de la mer (132)." La mer is of course phonetically synonymous with la mère, the mother.

In the beginning of the first part when Madeleine is introduced to the reader/spectator, she dominates the center

of the stage for what seems a long time but is in reality only about two minutes. Thus the spectator can see her "... dans sa solitude, son égarement d'enfant, l'accomplissement de sa majesté (10)." Duras deliberately exposes the silence and loneliness of her protagonist; Mann's Aschenbach on the contrary, suffers his distress hidden from public view in his room or, at night, sitting on a park bench.

In Madeleine Duras creates a type of incomprehensible earth goddess similar to the mother in Les petits chevaux de Tarquinia, whose son was blown to pieces when he stepped on a mine and is mourned by his silent mother. She too had sat in total silence for several days, refusing to move from the spot where her son had been killed and from where she had collected as much of his body as possible.

When the nameless young woman finally appears, la Jeune Femme, who is the only other actress, positions herself at the feet of the old woman in a gesture of adulation and puts her face on Madeleine's knees. "La Jeune Femme met son visage sur les genoux de Madeleine (11)." This behavior is at once intimate and innocent, and shows the great love between the two women. It would be impossible to imagine anything similar between Aschenbach and Tadzio.

There is a touching meeting between a father and a five-year-old daughter in Mann's Unordnung und frühes Leid: Professor Cornelius adores his little daughter, the pretty

Eleonor, "...sein Eleonorchen, die kleine Eva - ...(178)."

Yet once more this love which was:

"...Liebe auf den ersten Blick und für immer ein Gefühl, das ungekannt, unerwartet und unerhofft - soweit das Bewußtsein in Frage kam - von ihm Besitz ergriff, und das er sofort mit Erstaunen und Freude als lebensendgültig verstand" (179)

is innocent.

The trusting gesture la Jeune Femme extended toward Madeleine is returned by her a little while later when she caresses the head of the young woman "...comme une aveugle le ferait (13)." Madeleine behaves as if she were blind because in her subconscious she remembers the third absent woman, the sixteen-year-old girl who committed suicide. The Jeune Femme feels that and, wanting to console the older woman, she puts Madeleine's hands on her head again:

"La Jeune Femme prend les mains de Madeleine et les pose sur sa propre tête pour qu'elle continue à caresser 'la troisième absente'". (14)

But Madeleine becomes desperate and her hands drop.

"Les mains de Madeleine retombent encore désespérées (14)."

While the two women caress each other, a love song by Edith Piaf is heard. Part of it the young woman sings:

"C'est fou c'que j'peux t'aimer.
C'que j'peux t'aimer des fois
Des fois j'voudrais crier..." (14, elisions Duras)

Madeline responds; like a student she repeats part of the love song, without any precise punctuation:

"C'est fou c'que j'peux t'aimer
C'que j'peux t'aimer des fois" (15)

As the plot approaches the part where the mysterious young girl appears in the imagination of the two actresses, the young woman takes the older one into her arms and holds her close to prevent her from suffering as one holds a child who is afraid. Feeling safe, Madeleine descends into the past and evokes the image of her dead daughter.

If Duras were inclined toward a religious expression of her art, the three women she portrays in Savannah Bay, two living ones and a dead girl, might appear in the form of a gold-leaf-bordered triptych. As it is, the love between the three women often takes a concrete and earthy shape with erotic overtones. Rather cleverly Duras succeeds in drawing at once the image of innocence and temptation. In the end, the reader is not sure what he has actually seen and what took place in the two women's minds: - where eroticism is at home.

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