



Themes of Exile in Thomas Mann's "Voyage with Don Quixote"

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n May 19, 1934, Thomas Mann began his first journey to America at the request of Alfred Knopf to promote a volume of his new book, *Joseph and his Brothers*.¹ He took with him Tieck's translation of *Don Quixote*, in four volumes,² and a firm commitment to values best described as liberally humanistic—values which would receive reexamination during the voyage. Mann, who had already moved to

Zurich to avoid possible repercussions from his anti-fascistic sentiments, was a reluctant and ambivalent exile from his native land. He shared his voyage with refugees fleeing the countries that had originated and nurtured the very values that Mann exemplified. Their flight and Mann's uncertain relation to his homeland give

¹ Prior to his American trip, Mann had left Germany to live in Zurich, to avoid what might have been unpleasant repercussions resulting from his anti-fascistic sentiments. His journey to America is an extension of his voluntary exile from his homeland.

² That it was Tieck's translation is found in Nelson, p. 49.

the author the opportunity to reflect on the cultural and political changes ushered in by the rise of the totalitarian regimes that would eventually transform Europe into a slaughterhouse. But that is in the future. What Mann sees in 1934 is a regime in Germany tottering on shaky legs, doomed to fall in a relatively brief time. Nevertheless, he must ask himself what all this fulmination means. Are these changes in Europe the cultural consequences of those values that Mann believes are the foundation of his being? Can he distance himself, and those he believes to be true Europeans, from the fascist claims to be the logical inheritors of properly European values—what Mann calls the “traditions of my blood”?

The catalyst for this self-examination is the physical voyage itself and the reflective journey prompted by Mann’s reading of *Don Quixote*. The comparison of the reading of a book to a journey is an old, tired metaphor drawn by Mann himself when he speaks of “this ocean of a book” (330). However, our interest lies in the passage at the end of the essay where Mann describes his arrival in New York as greeted by a dream brought about by the quieting of the ship’s engines. Mann’s dream is the focal point of our reflections. The identification of Don Quixote with Zarathustra and the portrayal of the latter as his creator, Nietzsche, the advocate of transvaluing all traditional, Christian moral values, are the culmination of Mann’s cultural self-examination. It is his dream that points us toward the meaning of the essay, a reflection on the morality of exile.³

I

In Ronald Hayman’s biography of Mann he maintains that Mann wrote “Voyage with *Don Quixote*” in lieu of a political essay. Hayman declares the essay to be “light-hearted” and, at the same time, a reflection of Mann’s fear of voicing resistance to the fascists

³ While there have been numerous commentaries on this essay of Mann’s, none have linked the role that exile plays in this essay with Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For other commentaries on this essay, see Barbera, Remak, Bell, Picart, Paz, Bertrand, and Hayman.

(414). We agree that the essay concerns fascism. However, it is neither “light-hearted” nor the apolitical travel essay that Hayman believes it to be. Rather, Mann’s account of his journey to America is a reflection on properly European values as antithetical to fascism. His discussion of Cervantes and his linking of Don Quixote and Zarathustra are attempts to show that the exiles of Mann’s time retain the right to be called true Europeans.

Mann, a writer gloriously steeped in the values of liberal humanism, recognizes his own *de facto* exile from a homeland whose contemporary political climate he sees as a direct affront to the traditions and concerns that are his foundation: “And home: what does that mean anyhow? Does it mean Kussnacht near Zurich, where I have lived for a year and am more of a guest than at home? ...Does it mean further back, my house in Herzogpark, Munich, where I thought to end my days and which has now revealed itself as nothing but a temporary refuge and *pied-à-terre*? Home—that must mean even further back, to my childhood home, the parental house at Lübeck, which still stands at present and yet is so deep-sunken into the past?” (337). For Mann home is also the locus of the “twin pillars” of European civilization, Christianity and classical antiquity. His essay is marked by ruminations on the European character as the direct result of the influence of these mainstays.

The question then becomes: can one be a European while rejecting these cultural ancestors? “The denial of one of these fundamental premises of our civilization and education—how much more both of them—by any group of our European community, would mean its break with that community and an inconceivable, impossible diminishment of its human stature, who knows to what extent?” (356). It is not difficult to see Mann’s aim in these remarks. The political extremists in Germany promoting nationalistic and Eurocentric views are, in fact, rejecting the very foundations of what it is to be European. The Western liberal humanist tradition dates from the ancient Greeks, whose cardinal concerns were truth, justice, beauty, and goodness. The fascists’ claims to be the true inheritors of the European psyche ring hollow in Mann’s ears. It is this hollow sound that turns Mann in the direction of a truly European icon—*Don Quixote*.

Mann's remarks on *Don Quixote* are largely confined to Part II of the novel, rushed into print by Cervantes to combat the counterfeit adventures spawned by his own remarkably successful Part I. Nevertheless, the second part is weightier both in tone and in substance: "The second part has no longer the happy freshness and carelessness of the first, which shows how, *par hasard et par génie*, a blithe and vigorous satire grew into the book of a whole people and of all humanity" (334). What has happened? What began modestly enough has grown to magnificence. This, for Mann, is exemplary of all truly great art. Humble beginnings and ambition held in great restraint mark the possibility of the masterpiece.

However, Mann's attitude seems to run counter to the modern trend in art. Consider the pre-bourgeois notion of the artist—the artist of the guilds: "The genius, the great ego, the lonely adventurer, was an exception produced out of the modest, solid, objectively skilled cult of the craft; he achieved royal rank, yet even so he remained a dutiful son of the church and received from her his orders and his material. Today, as I said, we begin with the genius, the ego, the solitary—which is probably morbid" (362). Mann finds the image of artists and their art to be that of "ailing eagles," brooding over their own frustrated greatness, isolated and alone, living in the heights denied to lesser mortals and completely divorced from the past. His antimodernist stance is reflected in his use of Cervantes' work as foil to the contemporary artistic pose. *Don Quixote* is rooted in tradition and the cultural soil that is solidly European. Even the extremes of character and action, the degradation and ennobling of the dignified yet ridiculous hero, are paradigmatically Christian. "But abasement and exaltation are a twin conception, the essence of which is distinctly Christian. Their psychological union, their marriage in a comic medium, shows how very much *Don Quixote* is a product of Christian culture, Christian doctrine, and Christian humanity" (355). Christian values, Christian mores, Christian concepts ground this tale of a madness both ridiculous and admirable in the guise of a clown, imbued with the morals and motives true Europeans profess to hold dearest.

What began as satire has become epic. This is how a master-

piece is generated, according to Mann: through crafting and the labor of the journeyman who has served his apprenticeship in the workshop of tradition. This allows Mann to reflect on the European thinker who remains for him an anomaly: Friedrich Nietzsche. Having said that a true European cannot reject the twin pillars of classicism and Christianity, what is Mann to make of Nietzsche, who seems to reject both? "The hectic attack of Nietzsche, the admirer of Pascal, upon Christianity was an unnatural eccentricity; it has always puzzled me, like much else in the character of that tragic hero" (356). Are Nietzsche's attacks on the religion of the cross in keeping with his character? Mann contrasts him with Goethe, pointing out that the latter's lack of belief was no barrier to his admiration for the religion's civilizing tendencies. Of course, Goethe was "more happily balanced and physically less hampered" (356) than Nietzsche. This, in itself, might indicate why Nietzsche was obliged to reject (or, perhaps, appear to reject) the values that Mann and all good Europeans espouse. Certainly, Mann will not simply acquiesce in the notion that Nietzsche's anti-Christian sentiments were a fully integrated aspect of his thought and character.

Instead, the aberrational aspects of Nietzsche's attacks on Christianity are emphasized by Mann through Cervantes' story of Ricote, the Moor. The tale occurs in Part II of *Don Quixote* as Sancho Panza is forced to flee his governorship. He meets Ricote, a former neighbor, who was sentenced to exile along with other Christian Moors. He returns to his homeland even though it may result in his death. Ricote bemoans his fate, although he considers the edicts of banishment to be just: "Not that they were all to blame, for some were true Christians, but these latter were so few in number that they were unable to hold out against those that were not. In short, and with good reason, the penalty of banishment was inflicted upon us, a mild and lenient one as some saw it, but for us it was the most terrible one to which we could have been subjected. Wherever we may be, it is for Spain that we weep; for, when all is said, we were born here and it is our native land." The Moor is sent away even though he is thoroughly Christian. Expecting a better life among the Moors of North Africa, he is confronted with the grossest inhumanity and laments, "We did not know our

good fortune until we had lost it...sweet is the love of one's country" (*Don Quixote*, II, 64).

The fable is used by Mann for several ends. Ostensibly, it demonstrates Cervantes' loyalty (or, as Nietzsche complains, obsequiousness) with respect to tradition and institutions. Also, it reflects Cervantes' (and Mann's) own recognition of the pain of exile. Significantly, Mann employs the tale to emphasize the enlightening aspects of exile—the exile as cultural adjudicator, the one compelled to recognize and evaluate the foundations of his distant culture. What better example than the Nietzschean hero in exile, Zarathustra?

II

Zarathustra, however, is in exile voluntarily. In the prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* we learn that Zarathustra has exiled himself to the mountains. The analogy of Zarathustra to Christ in this section has been well documented (see Lampert): Zarathustra is thirty years old and goes into self-imposed exile before he begins his preaching and his search for disciples. The differences in the analogy are also worth noting, since Nietzsche quite deliberately creates them: Unlike Christ, who goes into the desert, Zarathustra goes to a mountain top; Zarathustra stays in exile for ten years rather than for forty days and nights; Zarathustra does not fast but returns from exile "overflowing with himself," having enjoyed rather than merely survived his solitude.

After the prologue sets the stage for Zarathustra's speeches to his disciples, the first speech is the story of the three metamorphoses of the spirit. The first is the camel. The camel represents reverence for the traditional values of his culture. He heroically bears the burdens of these values: stoically bearing sickness and suffering alone, loving his enemies. But being so burdened and so heroic becomes too much for the camel to bear. "All these most difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into the desert" (138).

In the desert, alone, the camel wants to be master of his do-

main, but the only way he can feel a master is by defeating his old master—the traditional values with which he burdened himself. Thus, the camel transforms himself into a lion in order to vanquish the revered values. “[H]ere the spirit becomes a lion who would conquer his freedom and be master in his own desert. Here he seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for the ultimate victory he wants to fight the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and god? ‘Thou shalt’ is the name of the great dragon” (138). The lion wants to change the “thou shalt” values, clearly a reference to Christian commandments. The lion, however, wants to change the “thou shalt” to “I will.” This implies a creation of values rather than an adoption and reverence for values externally imposed upon mankind by a god. The camel must transform himself into a beast of prey in order to destroy these values. Despite the camel’s desire to overcome his old master, the beast of burden does not have the stomach for the battle. “He once loved ‘thou shalt’ as most sacred: now he must find illusion and caprice even in the most sacred, that freedom from his love may become his prey: the lion is needed for such prey” (139).

But a third metamorphosis is necessary. There is a void left by the lion’s destruction of the traditional values. New values are needed to replace the old ones, but this is no simple inversion of the vanquished ones. The lion transforms into a child. This is a curious choice. One might expect to turn to a sage for the wisdom to create new values. Instead, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proposes the opposite. “Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes.’ For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred ‘Yes’ is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world” (139). The lion is a “No”; he reacts against the traditional values handed down to the camel, which the camel bore heroically. With the metamorphosis into the child, Nietzsche suggests that the creator of new values starts out value-free. There is no memory of the old values nor of the overthrowing of those values. This renders the child fully free to create, through childlike play and experimentation, his own values. Some, perhaps many,

of the values created by the child might resemble values the camel bore. However, the difference between the camel's values and the child's values is that the child is aware of his creation as his own, while the camel's were thought to be externally imposed upon it.

The camel, exiled into the desert, becomes overburdened with the values unsuitable for his solitary existence. He wants to shed those values and create ones better for his situation. To defeat the values, he turns into a lion, capable of overcoming such a difficult task. Nietzsche uses the image of a dragon to represent values that shine like gold on the dragon's scales. The dragon tells the lion: "All value has long been created, and I am all created value" (139). The problem with Christian values is that they are presented as absolute values, imposed upon humans by an omnipotent God. But these Christian beliefs, the dragon tells the lion, are a human creation, too. Now the lion must turn into a child to create new values suitable for its new situation—the self-conscious creation of individual values.

This point is reiterated later in Part One, where Zarathustra claims that any culture's value system reflects that culture's will to power. "A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold it is the tablet of their overcomings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power.... Verily, men gave themselves all their good and evil. Verily they did not take it, they did not find it, nor did it come to them as a voice from heaven. Only man placed value in things to preserve himself—he alone created a meaning for things, a human meaning" (170-71).

The three metamorphoses are necessary for a revaluation of values. It is not sufficient, according to Nietzsche, to tinker here and there, or question within an ethical code. The entire ethical code must come under scrutiny. But how is one able to question the values in which one is immersed? Nietzsche's answer is clear: The camel speeds into the desert; Zarathustra heads for the mountaintop. For Nietzsche, there must be distance, an exile beyond the limits of the culture, and there must be solitude. "For the task of a *revaluation of all values* more capacities may have been needed than have ever dwelt together in a single individual—above all, even contrary capacities that had to be kept from disturbing, destroying one another. An order of rank among these capacities: distance;

the art of separating without setting against one another" (*Ecce Homo* 254). Distance, then, is a necessary condition for the transvaluation of values. As Mann sails farther from Europe and closer to America, his exile allows him the time, distance, and solitude to reconsider the cultural and ethical roots of his heritage.

Nietzsche, too, had experienced a kind of exile. His fragile health, exacerbated during a non-combat accident in the Prussian army, eventually forced him to quit his teaching position. He then decided to pursue his writing outside of Germany, spending the winters in the much warmer climate of Italy and the summers in Switzerland. Later he would claim that his health-imposed exile from his homeland allowed him to gain a better vantage point from which to view German culture and reject it (*Ecce Homo* 319-25). For Nietzsche, Zarathustra's solitary journey mirrors his own, and in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's most autobiographical book, he makes it clear that Zarathustra is his mouthpiece (333).

III

I feel dreamy from the early rising and strange experience of this hour. And I dreamed in the night too, in the unfamiliar silence of the engines; now I try to recall the dream which assembled itself from my reading. I dreamed of Don Quixote, it was he himself, and I talked with him. How distinct is reality, when one encounters it, from one's fancy! He looked different from the pictures; he had a thick bushy moustache, a high retreating forehead, and under the likewise bushy brows almost blind eyes. He called himself not the Knight of the Lions but Zarathustra. He was, now that I had him face to face, very tactful and courteous. (Mann 369)

Mann's essay ends with a dream. The irony of appealing to a dream as "reality" notwithstanding, it is apparent that Mann is identifying Don Quixote with the creator of Zarathustra. The identification of author with creation is foreshadowed earlier in the essay: "The change in the point of view permits and even causes a considerable identification of the author with his hero, an inclination to assimilate his intellectual attainments to the author's own,

to make him the mouthpiece of Cervantes's convictions and to heighten by cultural and intellectual gifts the picturesque charm which, despite his doleful exterior, his own mad idea develops in *Don Quixote*" (344). The physical portrayal of *Don Quixote/Zarathustra* in Mann's dream is obviously that of Nietzsche himself. But what is the significance of this identification? All the principals involved (i.e., the authors and their respective heroes) have experienced exile. Cervantes remains in captivity in Algiers for five years; his hero is in a self-imposed exile in quest of adventure; Nietzsche confines himself primarily to Switzerland and Italy until the onset of his madness; Zarathustra has his mountain. What of Mann himself? He has exiled himself from the fascist regime, knowing that his freedom was at stake because of his opposition to fascism and his brother's banishment from Germany. Mann understands the nature of exile, and, consequentially, this journey awakens his reflections on the meaning of one's homeland.

The exiles are alike in their allegiances to the European culture that spawned them. For all of Nietzsche's egregious railings against Christianity, he appears in Mann's dream as what Mann believes him to be—a good, middle-class German intellectual, polite, courteous, and enculturated through the very mores that he appears to reject. Why does Mann emphasize this point? Consider Mann's comment on Ricote's description of the peace the Moor found in Germany: "[F]or Ricote tells how he went from Italy to Germany and there found a sort of peace. For Germany was a good, tolerant country, 'its people not standing much upon niceties and everybody living as he pleased, for in most parts of it there is liberty of conscience.' Here it was my turn to feel patriotic pride, let the words be old which awaken it in me. It is always pleasant to hear praise of home out of a stranger's mouth" (361).

Is Mann's Germany the land of benevolent tolerance described by Cervantes? The fascistic sentiments in his homeland suggest otherwise. And what writer is employed in justification of such sentiments if not Nietzsche? It is incumbent upon Mann to use the case of Nietzsche to stress the nature of fascism as antithetical to the essence of the Germanic soul, much as Nietzsche's strident anti-Christian stance is contrary to his European background.

Mann believes that Nietzsche may turn his back on Christian dogmatics and religion in the narrower sense, but his soul is still imbued with Christian values. Only in this way can he be European.

What Mann has recognized in Cervantes is the significance of the Moor's account. Ricote is emblematic both of the plight of the exile and the self-evaluation that exile brings in its train. The view that Spain's Moorish past has somehow cast doubt on that country as exemplifying traditional European values (witness Wagner's *Parsifal* and the location of the castle of the Grail—facing France—as opposed to Klingsor's—facing Spain) makes Ricote's tale even more poignant.

Ronald Hayman is mistaken in considering "Voyage with Don Quixote" as "lighthearted." Although it is not the vigorous and vociferous attack reminiscent of his speech in Berlin in 1930, it nevertheless is part of Mann's continuing attempt to demonstrate the aberrational nature of fascism, aberrational in the sense that the movement is a rejection of everything that Mann believes Europe to stand for. Mann believed that this aberration would be corrected in a relatively short time. To this end he issues, in this essay, a rallying cry for a rejection of the contemporary totalitarian movements. From exile he recognizes them as deviant, and certainly not the return to the "real" Europe that the fascists claimed as their goal. Mann's prediction that these movements would not prevail was ultimately correct. What he did not foresee was the unthinkable consequences of their hegemony. Instead, their short lives and demise were a descent into an apocalyptic madness that Mann did not foresee—a madness he would address in his essay "Nietzsche in Light of Recent History," and in his last novel, *Doctor Faustus*.

But all of that is in the future. What he now faces are the skyscrapers of Manhattan, the "giants" of the New World that may turn out to be windmills after all. What is it that Mann takes with him on his quest? Like Zarathustra's transformation into the lion, he takes with him a reconsideration of his own values and a reappraisal of what it is to be a European. The voyage with the Knight of the Lions has compelled him to a reevaluation, not necessarily a repudiation but perhaps a greater appreciation, of what his

culture has wrought. The exile imposed upon him by the totalitarian wave sweeping over his homeland distances him enough to bring about this reexamination of what he truly is. This is the morality of exile—an intensification of the ties that appear to be severed, but are, in fact, only made more evident when they appear to be lost.

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