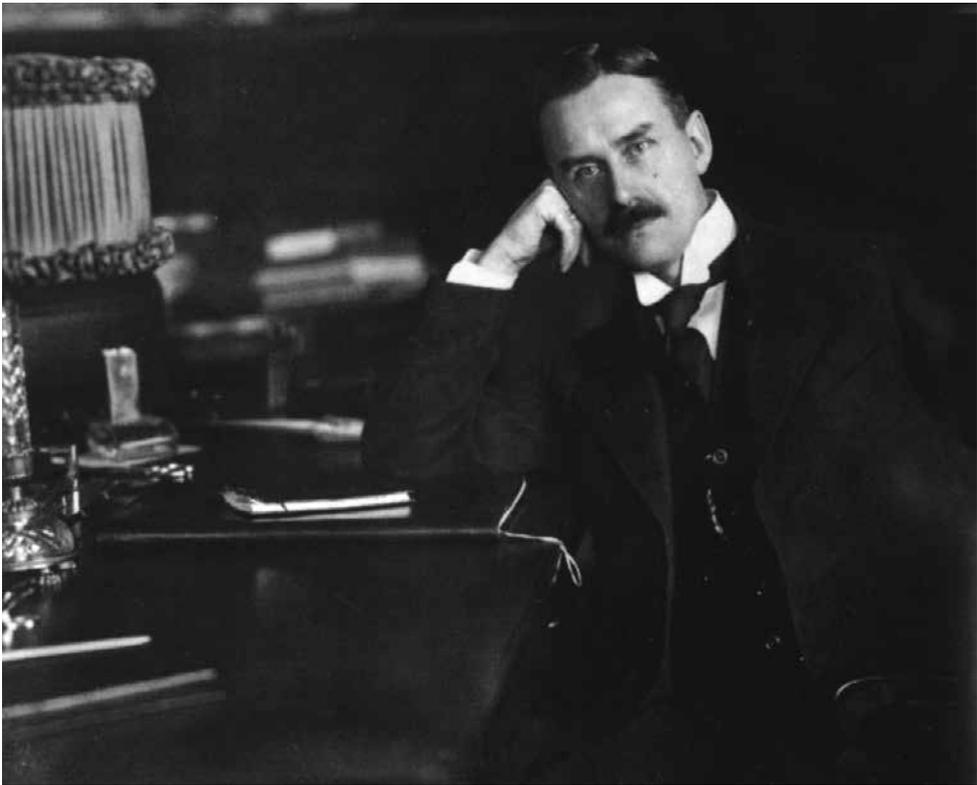


From *Death in Venice* to *The Magic Mountain*: Thomas Mann's Ironic Response to Wagner

William Kinderman



Thomas Mann (1875–1955)

In his short essay 'Auseinandersetzung mit Wagner' (Engagement with Wagner) written in Venice in May 1911, Thomas Mann confessed that:

For a long time the image of the Bayreuth artist hovered over all of my artistic thinking and activities. For a long time it seemed to me that all artistic striving and efforts of our time led to this enormous figure. At no time however – even as I took in every

Tristan performance at the Munich Court Theatre – was my Wagnerian commitment a confession of faith in Wagner. Spiritually and in his character he seemed to me suspect, though as an artist irresistible. Because of his being deeply questionable with regard to the nobility, purity and virtue of his motives, I could never grant to him in my youthful commitment that trust which I invested in the great poets and writers – those artists about whom Wagner believed he could speak almost pityingly as 'literary poets'.¹

Important aspects of Mann's attitude toward Wagner surface in this revealing passage. His longstanding fascination with Wagner's works – abundantly evident in his earlier novel *Buddenbrooks* and his novellas *Der kleine Herr Friedemann*, *Tristan*, and *Wälsungenblut* – coexisted with a distrust that was reflected in ironic distance. This critical perspective on Wagner yielded deeply penetrating traces in a pair of works by Mann whose genesis stems from around the time of his Venice essay: *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*) and *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*).

Death in Venice and *The Magic Mountain* were closely linked projects. Mann at first envisioned *The Magic Mountain* as a novella, a 'humorous counterpart' (humoristisches Gegenstück) or 'satyr play' (Satyrspiel) in relation to *Death in Venice*. In both works, the milieu is shadowed by illness, while the protagonist is intoxicated by his love for a Slavic figure whom he admires (at least initially) from a distance. Whereas *Death in Venice* underwent a concentrated genesis before appearing in print in 1912, *The Magic Mountain* developed over more than a decade, growing into the expansive novel we know, while absorbing through its dark conclusion the author's response to World War I and its aftermath. *The Magic Mountain* displays intricate points of connection to Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and particularly *Parsifal*. Mann explicitly acknowledged the parallel between the ailing community of Grail Knights in the latter drama and his collection of convalescents in the Swiss sanatorium Berghof in *The Magic Mountain*. After attending a performance of *Parsifal* at Munich in September 1919, Mann's response to the sphere of the sick in Wagner's drama triggered an exchange with the author Ernst Bertram, as the novelist recorded in his diary: 'I feel that it "hopelessly hits home", as I say to Bertram. Whereupon we both say at once: "It is precisely the *Zauberberg*."' ²

A new production of Wagner's *Parsifal* directed by Alvis Hermanis that opened at the Vienna State Opera in March 2017 displays some striking affinities to Mann's *Zauberberg*. In this production, the *Gralsburg* is rendered as a 'Wagner Spital' (Wagner Hospital), while design features of Vienna's Steinhof or St Leopold Church and Sanatorium Purkersdorf – buildings planned by Otto Wagner and his pupil Josef Hoffmann

¹ 'Auseinandersetzung mit Wagner' in *Im Schatten Wagners: Thomas Mann über Richard Wagner*, ed. Hans Rudolf Valet (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 44. This 1911 essay was a contribution to a collective publication about Wagner issued by the Viennese music journal *Der Merker*. The present essay, pursuing afresh the role of irony in Mann's Wagnerian allusions, overlaps with two of my recent essays that explore these works in closer detail: 'Exploring the "Temple of Initiation" on Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*: Wagnerian Affinities and "Politically Suspect" Music', *Monatshefte für deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur*, cix (2017), 404–29; and 'The Motive of the Gaze (*Blick*) in Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*', *German Studies Review*, xvi (2018). Most translations in the present essay are my own, but some translations from *Der Zauberberg* are taken from Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain: A Novel*, tr. John E. Woods (New York, 1995). For valuable suggestions I am grateful to Katherine Syer.

² *Im Schatten Wagners*, ed. Valet (note 1), 67–8.



The 'Wagner Spital' in Alvis Hermanis's production of *Parsifal*, Wiener Staatsoper, 2017

– are evoked. In this production, Gurnemann is depicted as a figure somewhat suggestive of Dr Behrens, chief medical officer on *The Magic Mountain*, while certain parallels can be perceived between Klingsor and Dr Krokowski, on the one hand, and Kundry and Claudia Chauchat, on the other. The early gramophone – which is so important in *Zauberberg* – is extensively employed as a stage prop, and the temporal setting in the early 20th century also corresponds to Mann's *Magic Mountain*, though the suggested locality is unmistakably Freud's Vienna.³

In pursuing Mann's Wagnerian affinities in *Death in Venice* and *The Magic Mountain*, I begin by noting the author's visit to Venice from 26 May to 2 June 1911, during which he penned the aforementioned essay on Wagner. The city remains rife with ties to Wagner. It was, after all, the place where, after a five-month stay, the composer died in 1883. The title of *Death in Venice* alone carries unmistakable Wagnerian associations, but Wagner's activities there and recollections of those times further stimulated Mann. Decades earlier, in 1858 and 1859, Wagner sought creative refuge in Venice while composing *Tristan und Isolde*, and completed the second act of the music drama there during the spring of 1859.⁴ Wagner's impressions of Venice from that period as recorded in his autobiography *Mein Leben* influenced Mann's *Death in Venice*: the black gondola with a passenger compartment covered with black cloth reminded

³ The production is reviewed by Michael Fuller on 84–7, where further illustrations can also be found.

⁴ A detailed account of Wagner's periods spent at Venice is offered by John W. Barker in *Wagner and Venice* (Rochester, NY, 2008).



The Palazzo Vendramin, Venice, 16 February 1883, with Wagner's coffin and funeral gondolas, draped in black



The Grand Hôtel des Bains, Venice Lido, c. 1920

Wagner of the fear of cholera and the transport of coffins during epidemics.⁵ Venice cast a haunting spell on Wagner. A quarter-century later, Wagner's own corpse was borne by a black-draped gondola from the Palazzo Vendramin.

During his own visit to Venice in 1911, Mann stayed with his wife Katia and his brother Heinrich at the Grand Hôtel des Bains on the Lido, which served as the model for the hotel of his protagonist in the novella, Gustav von Aschenbach.

Many incidents in the novella had real-

life parallels. Mann drew generously on his own experience, endowing the tale with self-irony, but the fictional figure should not be regarded as a literary version of the author. While Aschenbach is depicted as a writer, a musician who provided a model for some aspects of the character was the composer and conductor Gustav Mahler, whom Mann had encountered at Munich in 1910.

⁵ See Wagner, *Mein Leben*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin (Munich, 1963), 664–5. The first public edition of Wagner's autobiography appeared in 1911 with Bruckmann Verlag in Munich, while Mann was writing *Der Tod in Venedig*.



The death mask of Gustav Mahler,
taken by Carl Julius Rudolf Moll

After hearing the premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, and meeting the composer, Mann was moved by the news of Mahler's death in 1911. The author later described how he gave his hero, 'who succumbs to lascivious dissolution', Mahler's first name as well as his facial features, placing the 'mask' of the great musician on Aschenbach.⁶ We should note that when Mahler died, his fame rested mostly on his conducting career rather than on his own compositions; one of the works with which he was most closely associated was *Tristan und Isolde*. The new production of the opera that Mahler mounted in Vienna on 21 February 1903 was his first collaboration with the designer Alfred Roller, and yielded a provocative outcome. This was no mere homage to Wagner; Mahler and Roller boldly challenged traditional stag-

ing and design practices associated with Bayreuth. When Mahler's activities in his last few years took him to New York, he would have liked this production of *Tristan und Isolde* to travel across the ocean to launch his tenure there.

Studies of Thomas Mann's creative process have already uncovered an extensive, sometimes bewildering range of pre-existing sources. Hans Wysling has referred to this quality as 'a poetic alchemy, whereby an amazing and heterogeneous range of pre-existing materials is integrated into the text, often remaining recognisable without compromising its stylistic unity, and this quality is one of the most original achievements in the art of Thomas Mann'.⁷ The connections in *Death in Venice* to *Tristan und Isolde* and in *The Magic Mountain* to *Parsifal* support Wysling's perception. Study of such kinships sheds light on Mann's impressive capacity for ironic transformation, as a critical interrogation of the model serves as a creative springboard for a richly textured artwork.

Wherein lies this ironic capacity? In his essay on 'Goethe and Tolstoy', Thomas Mann refers to the 'indispensable value of reserve in art' while identifying this restraint with irony. Alluding to music, Mann espouses:

⁶ See Mann's letter of 18 Mar. 1921 to the Munich painter Wolfgang Born, cited in Philip Reed, 'Aschenbach Becomes Mahler: Thomas Mann as Film', in *Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice*, ed. Donald Mitchell (Cambridge, 1987), 180. Mann used as a model for his description of Aschenbach a picture of Mahler he obtained from a newspaper: see Terence J. Reed with Malte Herwig, *Thomas Mann: Frühe Erzählungen 1893–1912. Kommentar, Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), ii.ii.364, 490.

⁷ Hans Wysling, 'Thomas Manns Verhältnis zu den Quellen: Beobachtungen am "Erwählten"', in *Quellenkritische Studien zum Werk Thomas Manns*, ed. Paul Scherrer and Hans Wysling (Bern/Munich, 1967), 373, cited in Michael Neumann, *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), v.2, 55.

a type of irony which glances at both sides, which plays slyly and irresponsibly – yet not without benevolence – among opposites, and is in no great haste to take sides and come to decisions [...] the real goal to reach is not decision, but harmony, accord. And harmony, in a matter of eternal contraries, may lie in infinity; yet that playful reserve called irony carries it within itself, as the sustained note carries the resolution.⁸

He draws attention here to both the play of opposites and role of music. Elsewhere he observed about the role of music in his works that

the novel was always for me a symphony, a work of counterpoint, a web of themes, whereby the idea of musical motives is important [...] I myself have drawn attention to the impact of Richard Wagner's art on my own works [...] I especially follow Wagner in the use of leading motives carried into the narrative [...] not just in a merely naturalistic manner or reductionistic treatment, but instead in the symbolic representation of music.⁹

Mann's handling of irony as an essential artistic resource was described by Hermann Weigand as follows:

For the ironic temper the concrete situation never has the character of finality; it is the meeting-ground, so to speak, of relations that extend forward and backward, into space and time, into the self and into the cosmos, of energies that link the individual with the universal.¹⁰

Contemplating the ironic parody of Wagner in Mann's earlier works from the beginning of the century, such as *Buddenbrooks* and *Tristan*, Walter Frisch writes that 'the "target" is surely not Wagner or Wagner's music [... but] the characters [...] and their bourgeois milieu'.¹¹ By contrast, although the links to Wagner in *Death in Venice* and *The Magic Mountain* are less immediately obvious, they are more profound and far-reaching in connection with Wagner's artistic legacy. With *The Magic Mountain*, completed in 1924, a significant difference in Mann's ironic treatment of the Wagnerian legacy can be attributed to his post-war political attitude.

By the time Thomas Mann wrote his Nietzsche-influenced chapter on 'Irony and Radicalism' in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (*Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*) from 1918, he observed that 'if I don't claim that art must always be ironic, so would I still identify irony, in contrast to radicalism, as an artistic means'.¹² For Mann, primary qualities of irony are modesty and melancholy. Elsewhere in the *Betrachtungen*, he regarded 'irony as modesty, as a form of morality through its backwards-directed scepticism, as a personal ethical principle, and as an "inner political" conviction'.¹³ In yet another essay not lacking in irony – one written on his trans-Atlantic ocean crossing in 1934, 'Meerfahrt mit Don Quijote' (Voyage with Don Quixote)¹⁴ – Mann recalled a

⁸ Mann, *Essays of Three Decades*, tr. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1947), 109.

⁹ 'Einführung in den Zauberberg für Studenten der Universität Princeton als Vorwort', in Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg: Roman* (Stockholm, 1950), xxii–iii.

¹⁰ Hermann Weigand, *Thomas Mann's Novel 'Der Zauberberg'* (New York and London, 1933), 62–3.

¹¹ Walter Frisch, *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley and London, 2005), 213.

¹² Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt, 1920), 592.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 596.

¹⁴ This sea voyage to America in 1934 took place after the beginning of his exile from Germany the preceding year. See in this regard Gene R. Pendleton and Linda L. Williams, 'Themes of Exile in Thomas Mann's "Voyage with Don Quixote"', *Cervantes*, xxi (2001), 73–85; and Clifford A. Berndt, 'Thomas Mann's "Meerfahrt mit Don Quijote"', *German Quarterly*, xxxviii (1965), 652–9.

conversation with Hugo von Hofmannsthal, and reflected as follows on Hofmannsthal's striking characterisation of modern German artists as 'sick eagles' (kranke Adler):

Artists have become sick eagles through a process of solemn glorification [Verfeierlichungsprozess] that art has undergone, changing the artistic calling as a whole so that it has become unhappily elevated and melancholy, impacting art itself, having made it lonely, melancholy, isolated, and incomprehensible, becoming a 'sick eagle'.¹⁵

* * *

At the very end of *Death in Venice*, the writer-protagonist Gustav von Aschenbach appears as a 'sick eagle' when he stares out at what he perceives as alluring gestures by the young Tadzio, his 'little Phaedrus' wading in the ocean in the distance. Mann links this prose description to earlier passages, such as the section in chapter 3 in which he describes Aschenbach's love of the sea as bound up with the 'yearning for peace of the hard labouring artist', who is powerfully drawn to what is 'forbidden and precisely opposed to his task', seductively attracted 'to what is unordered, unlimited, eternal, void'. 'Is nothingness [das Nichts] not a form of perfection?' muses Aschenbach, whose gaze then discerns the figure of the beautiful Tadzio, to whom he is drawn.¹⁶ Later, in chapter 5, Aschenbach takes irrational, delicious delight in joining the official conspiracy of silence about the health epidemic menacing the resort, resolving to withhold that information from Tadzio's Polish family. 'What then did art and virtue mean to him in relation to the advantages of chaos? He remained silent.'¹⁷

Aschenbach's ensuing experience is dominated by night (*Nacht herrschte*), which points in the direction of *Tristan und Isolde*, in which the lovers unite and celebrate their longing for each other in darkness. Here Mann inverts his Wagnerian models with Aschenbach's nightmare manifested by dark demonic forces. Distantly foreshadowed by his earlier dream vision of the tiger and jungle in chapter 1, Aschenbach's nightmare is punctuated by chaotic sounds, drums, wild cries and persistently penetrating flute sounds, sonorities worlds apart from the gently pulsating, elongated dreamlike stretches of music for the lovers in *Tristan und Isolde*.

Some commentators have acknowledged the affinity between the conclusions of Mann's novella and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Ellis Shookman finds that 'the similarities between [Mann's] ultimate scene and Wagner's – the beloved's apparent smile and the indications, near the sea, of wind and waves – would seem to invite the interpretation that Aschenbach's death is likewise elevating'.¹⁸ In Wagner's works perception and understanding can lead to compassion, a network of related ideas that are often artistically explored through the gaze or *Blick* motif, from his youthful first opera *Die*

¹⁵ Thomas Mann *Essays*, iv.: *Achtung, Europa! 1933–1938*, ed. Hermann Kurzke and Stephan Stachorski (Frankfurt, 1995), 131. This essay first appeared in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 5–15 Nov. 1934.

¹⁶ Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig und andere Erzählungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1989), 42–3.

¹⁷ Mann emphasises this point in the narrative through the terse rhyming line 'Er schwieg und blieb' ending a paragraph, followed by the description of Aschenbach's nightmare.

¹⁸ Ellis Shookman, *Thomas Mann's 'Death in Venice': A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT, and London, 2004), 43.

Feen through to *Parsifal*, but especially in *Tristan und Isolde*.¹⁹ As she reveals in the opera's third scene, Isolde, upon recognising the wounded man she has been healing is her fiancé's killer, is prevented from slaying him in retaliation when their connected gaze opens up deeper, unspoken feelings of connection and compassion. Aschenbach, however, overtly dismisses the principle of compassion as mere laxity ('Laxheit des Mitleidsatzes') in chapter 2 and never yields that position. In this aesthetic context, *Death in Venice* stands in sharp contrast to the aspiring strains of Isolde's 'transfiguration' in Wagner's drama, embodying an opposing perspective, which critiques Aschenbach's limited self-understanding and lack of compassion. In contrast to *Buddenbrooks*, we can see the Wagnerian sphere in *Death in Venice* appearing in a more positive light, with its ironic negation conveying Aschenbach's decline. The writer's death is 'elevating' only in an unhappy, melancholy way, abjuring the passionate subjective idealism that infuses *Tristan und Isolde*.

At the close of *Death in Venice* Mann conspicuously incorporates the detail of an unattended camera on the beach, a camera strikingly positioned at the edge of the water, as 'a black cloth, spread over it, fluttered loudly in the cold wind'. This is one of those symbols that engages the reader on multiple levels. The black cloth draped over a gondola springs to mind, but Mann suggests more by connecting the detail to its larger context, glancing 'at both sides', playing 'among opposites'. The black cloth, his narrator notes, cracked like a flag in the cold wind. What else fluttered in the wind, attracting the gaze of the faltering writer? From his position on the beach, Aschenbach stared out at a godlike figure²⁰ 'with fluttering hair, out beyond in the ocean, in the wind, before the cloudy endless expanse' (mit flatterndem Haar dort draußen im Meere, im Winde, vorm Nebelhaft-Grenzenlosen).²¹ Tadzio's distinctive long hair fluttering in the wind is poetically associated by Mann with the audible fluttering of the dark banner atop the camera, a sly allusion to the 'black flag' in the long tradition of *Tristan* myths, from Gottfried von Strassburg to Wagner. In the mythic tradition, the black flag was supposed to signal that Isolde was not in sight, not yet arriving to heal the seriously wounded Tristan. Wagner replaced the black flag from the medieval sources by the mournful 'Alte Weise' or tune signifying the 'bleak and empty' sea at Kareol, with no ship bearing Isolde yet visible, which heightens Tristan's delirium. The black flapping camera cover hints at the delusional quality of Aschenbach's obsessive gaze in Tadzio's direction, cause of his 'lascivious dissolution'. In his last moments, it seems to Aschenbach that Tadzio again smiles or beckons to him; but the implied Wagnerian music – the 'sustained note' – remains mournful and bleak, suggesting that nothing meaningful binds them together.

¹⁹ In *Die Feen*, Prince Arindal imagines himself hunting a beautiful doe and striking it in the heart with an arrow; as tears gleam in its eye, he recognises the doe as the metamorphosised Ada, his wife. A similar broken gaze or *Blick* characterises the swan slain by Parsifal. Wagner's most far-reaching treatment of the gaze or *Blick* motif in relation to compassion is found in Act II of *Die Walküre*, in which Brünnhilde – responding to Siegmund's searching gaze – is moved to disobey Wotan and intervene on Siegmund's behalf.

²⁰ Mann's term 'Psychogog' for Aschenbach's final vision of Tadzio stands for the Greek 'psychagogos', a Hermes-like conductor of souls to the afterlife.

²¹ Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* (note 16), 98.

While the motive of the gaze has deep roots in Wagner's primary poetic source, *Tristan* by the medieval writer Gottfried von Strassburg, the composer gave it special emphasis, which contours the musical score at several key points. At the pivotal juncture in Isolde's Act I Scene 3 narrative, she relates to Brangäne: 'The avenging sword, instead of wielding it, powerlessly I let it fall!' (Das rächende Schwert, statt es zu schwingen, machlos ließ ich's fallen!). The quiet musical climax at her words 'I let it fall!' marks A minor – a tonality that is implied yet never confirmed in the related music first heard from the outset of the opera's Prelude. This chromatic music, which embodies the unfulfilled yearning of the couple, gains substantial definition within Isolde's confessional narrative.²²

Later in Wagner's music drama, Tristan's fixation with his beloved Isolde involves a consuming gaze reaching beyond the sphere of immediate tangible experience. Noteworthy in this respect is Tristan's delirious waking dream or vision of Isolde in E major in the third act. At a seminal stage in his labours on *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner had weighed the idea of introducing at this point the wandering figure of Parzival seeking the Grail, and he even sketched music in this key for 'Parzival's Refrain'.²³ Tristan's vision of Isolde in E major eventually replaced 'Parzival's Refrain' and expresses a transcendent yearning as his imagination of her beckoning to him anticipates her arrival, possibly even seeming to help bring it about.

In *Death in Venice*, on the other hand, Mann's irony is felt in his negative treatment of the motive of the gaze. Instances of a false or strangely disquieting *Blick* are hardly less important than the intense, intoxicated visions that Aschenbach experiences of Tadzio; they form a kind of inverted image-collection often involving people with odd or disfigured appearance. The first such example is the weird figure Aschenbach stares at near the Munich cemetery: the aggressive response forces the writer to avert his gaze. Then there is the character with goatee resembling an old-fashioned circus director, who congratulates the writer on travelling from Pola to Venice. The old man greets Aschenbach with exaggerated, obsequious sentiments only to suddenly lose his false teeth.

The strangely uncommunicative, red-haired gondolier who lacks a licence is of 'brutal physiognomy'. Mann's description of the gondola as a 'strange conveyance [...] so peculiarly black such as among all things only coffins are' and bearing a passenger seat 'painted coffin black [...] the softest, most opulent seat in the world' echoes earlier writers including Wagner and harbours mythological allusions.²⁴ Aschenbach reflects sarcastically that the sinister gondolier will have 'ferried him well' even if he should be struck from behind by the oar and sent to Hades. Since Aschenbach dies at Venice, the ominous gondolier turns out to be comparable to Charon, the mythological boatman

²² More detailed discussion of this music and its dramatic context is offered in my study 'Dramatic Recapitulation and Tonal Pairing in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal*', in *The Second Practice of Nineteenth-Century Tonality*, ed. William Kinderman and Harald Krebs (Lincoln, NE, 1996), 180–95.

²³ 'Parzival' is the spelling used in Wagner's primary medieval source, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.

²⁴ Goethe compared the Venetian gondola to a coffin in his *Venezianisches Epigramm*; Byron referred to the gondola as a 'coffin clapt in a canoe' in his *Beppo*.

who ferries souls to Hades across the River Styx. The later scene of the novella when Aschenbach's hair is dyed and cosmetic make-up applied to his face carries the suggestion of an embalming, a pre-funereal preparation of a corpse.

Yet another curious red-haired figure emerges among the group of serenading musicians in the final chapter. Mann unmistakably links his description of this suspicious figure – a 'dangerous and entertaining' guitarist combining in Aschenbach's impression the roles of pimp and comedian – with the disturbing encounter near the cemetery at the start of the tale. Both figures have a lean, beardless, 'blunt-nosed' (stumpfnäsiger) appearance with a prominent Adam's apple (Adamsapfel); both display a character that is dominating (herrisch), even wild (wild). This deliberate overlapping of words and images can be regarded as an aesthetic strategy akin to Wagnerian leitmotifs, with the ominous harbingers of death or *Todesboten* almost merging into one as music assumes prominence through the figure of the guitarist. The grotesque, almost surreal atmosphere of this musical episode is heightened by the encore of the group, with its 'Lach-Refrain' of mocking, scornful laughter. One might even be tempted to perceive an inverted narrative parallel here to Wagner's use in the last act of *Tristan und Isolde* of an onstage musical figure – the shepherd playing the mournful 'Alte Weise' – whereby this melancholy Wagnerian character is replaced by the grotesque leader of the sarcastic 'Lach-Refrain'.

* * *

In *The Magic Mountain*, Mann's main point of Wagnerian reference is *Parsifal*. At the end of his 1939 commentary on the novel, he entertained the notion of the central protagonist Hans Castorp being a 'Gralssucher' or seeker of the Grail, and hence a parallel figure to Parsifal. In this regard, Mann referred specifically to the chapter entitled 'Snow':

Hans Castorp as seeker of the Grail – you will not have thought of that when you read his story, and if I thought of it, that was more or less than conscious thought. Perhaps you can read the book once more from this perspective. You will then find that the Grail – as insight, as initiation, as elevated quest – is something sought after not only by the simple hero [*tumbe Held*], but the book itself. You will find it namely in the chapter entitled 'Snow', where Hans Castorp – disoriented on those dangerous slopes – imagines his dream poem about humanity. If he doesn't find the Grail, he at least senses it in his dream close to death, before being torn from this height and cast down into the European catastrophe. It is the idea of humanity, the conception of a future humanity approached through knowledge of sickness and death. The Grail is a mystery, but humanity is that as well. The human condition is veiled in mystery, and all humanity instills awe before this human enigma.²⁵

The climax of Castorp's dream vision in the snow – emphasised by Mann through spaced-out print – is as follows:

²⁵ 'Einführung in den Zauberberg für Studenten der Universität Princeton als Vorwort', printed in Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg: Roman* (Stockholm: Fischer Verlag, 1950), xxviii–ix. In this essay, Mann refers to Hans Castorp as a 'Quester Hero', alluding thereby to an essay by the then 19-year-old student at Harvard University, Howard Nemerov (1920–91) on 'The Quester Hero: Myth as Universal Symbol in the Works of Thomas Mann'.

Der Mensch soll um die Güte und
 Liebe willen dem Tode keine
 Herrschaft einräumen über seine
 Gedanken.
 The human being should on
 account of goodness and love not
 allow death to exert dominance over
 his thoughts.

How is this 'dream of love' as a Wagnerian leitmotif treated in Mann's work? This thread is prominently woven through to the close of the novel, where the narrator describes our final glimpses of Hans Castorp in the dismal trenches of World War I and then bids farewell to the simple hero:

Adventures in the flesh and spirit, which enhanced and heightened your ordinariness, allowed you to survive in the spirit what you probably will not survive in the flesh. There were moments when, as you 'played king', you saw the intimation of a dream of love rising up out of death and this carnal body. And out of this worldwide festival of death, this ugly rutting fever that inflames the rainy evening sky all round – will love someday rise up out of this, too?²⁶

In this connection, we may recall the scepticism about the potentially propagandistic use of music voiced by the sympathetic humanist figure in *The Magic Mountain*, the freemason Ludovico Settembrini:

Music awakens – and in that sense it is moral. Art is moral, in that it awakens. But what if it were to do the opposite? And music can do that as well. It knows all too well the effect the opiates have. A devilish effect, gentlemen, Opiates are the Devil's tool, for they create dullness, rigidity, stagnation, slavish inertia. There is something dubious about music, gentlemen. I maintain that music is ambiguous by its very nature. I am not going too far when I declare it to be politically suspect.²⁷

This warning to Castorp and his cousin in chapter 4 about the ambiguous nature of music holds relevance in relation to the conclusions of the novel and of Wagner's *Parsifal*, the latter of which had already entered a problematic phase in its German reception history by the time Mann was at work on *The Magic Mountain*.

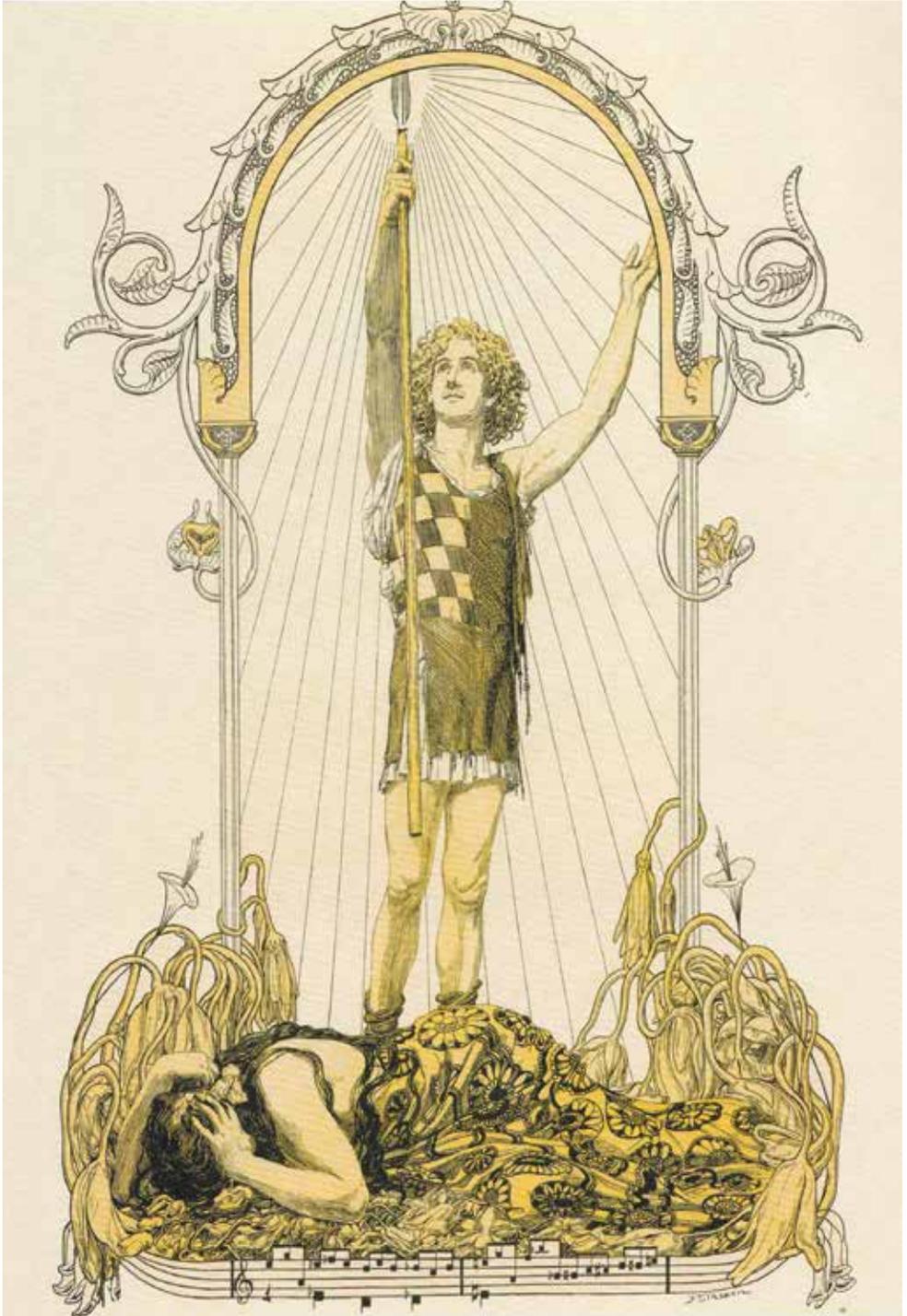
During the Third Reich, it was possible to (mis)represent Adolf Hitler as a Parsifal-like redeemer figure; a poster from this time even transposed images from Wagner's work in order to project such political propaganda. In this later period, Settembrini's concerns about music becoming an 'opiate' – fears which might seem exaggerated or misplaced in the context of the novel by itself – turned out to be fully justified. The scene in question in Wagner's *Parsifal* is the 'unforgettable closing scene' that deeply impressed Thomas Mann at a performance at Bayreuth in 1909, a conclusion he found 'meaningful and thoroughly irresistible'.²⁸

In this Hitler poster from 1935, the slogan 'Es lebe Deutschland!' can be translated as 'Long live Germany!' Light streaming from above identifies the leader as a

²⁶ Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (note 1), 706.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

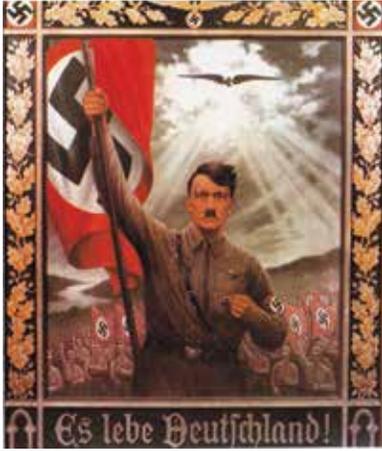
²⁸ Letter to Ludwig Ewers of 23 Aug. 1909, *Im Schatten Wagners*, ed. Vaaget (note 1), 40.



Franz Stassen, *Parsifal Holding the Holy Spear*, from *Fifteen Illustrations for Wagner's Bühnenweihfestspiel*



Franz Stassen, *Parsifal Holding the Grail*, from *Fifteen Illustrations for Wagner's Bühnenweilfestspiel*



Nazi propaganda poster by Karl Stauber with Adolf Hitler as Parsifal-like saviour

light-bearing figure or *Lichtgestalt*. The poster combines imagery from two depictions of *Parsifal* by Franz Stassen, an artist friend of the composer's son, Siegfried Wagner, who joined the National Socialist party in 1930 and received special honours from the regime in 1944.²⁹ In the first of the Stassen images corresponding to the end of Act II, the young Parsifal holds up the spear in his right hand while light streams down, and Kundry lies at his feet beside wilted flowers. The second depiction by Stassen shows a more mature, Christlike Parsifal holding the glowing Grail touched by light from above while Kundry gazes upward and the assembled knights stare transfixed; the scene is framed by an angelic host rising up from the musical excerpt at the foot of the image. The poster by Karl Stauber, on the other hand, shows Hitler holding the Nazi flag in his upraised right hand in place of the Holy Spear as the focus of light streaming from above; instead of the dove and assembled knights in *Parsifal*, the *Führer* stands beneath a hovering eagle in front of a host of his brown-shirted followers. These followers are not shown as distinct individuals but as uniform examples of a type.³⁰ The landscape

in the background of the Hitler poster suggests the Rhine Valley, with the river flowing north past the fabled rock Die Lorelei; one is reminded of the northern landscape provided for Stassen's depiction of a blond, bearded, Christlike Parsifal figure with Grail and two doves to illustrate a publication entitled *Deutscher Glaube* (German Faith) in 1909.³¹ Stassen was no stranger to political propaganda; his strident World War I poster 'An das deutsche Volk' (To the German People), opposing surrender in the war, achieved wide circulation. Although the Hitler poster is not by Stassen, it shows a similar treatment in its iconography and symbolism; its decorated border, with oak leaves as a German symbol, is characteristic of Stassen's mythic illustrations. The affinity of these depictions underscores how images from Wagner's drama were ideologically transposed to negative ends.

Not only the visual imagery but also the music at the end of *Parsifal* became subject to propagandistic (mis)use. Already in 1933, the year Hitler came to power, Alfred

²⁹ Stassen was an intimate figure in the Wagner family circle by 1913.

³⁰ A comparison might be drawn to Francisco José de Goya's painting *The Third of May, 1808*, with its depiction of the hard, inhuman brutality of the undifferentiated row of soldiers making up the firing squad.

³¹ The poem 'Die Lorelei' by the Jewish writer Heinrich Heine (1798–1856) was too popular to be suppressed during the Third Reich, so the German authorities falsely claimed that the author was unknown.



Franz Stassen's depiction of a Parsifal-like Christ figure, *Deutsche Glaube*, 1909

Lorenz published a book on *Parsifal* in which he interpreted the stirring music at the conclusion as an 'Erlösungswort' (word of redemption), a rising exalted melodic gesture proclaiming the 'new *Parsifal* religion' and enabling the listener to experience thereby the following insight:

Wir sollen den Verfall überwinden und als rassisch
hochgezüchtetes Volk zum Siege schreiten.

We should overcome decay and as a racially
high-bred people advance to victory.³²

More than anything musical included in Mann's novel, this example illustrates the opiate-like, 'politically suspect' or 'devilish effect' of which Settembrini warns.

It should not be supposed that Wagner's *Parsifal*, properly understood, actually supports such propagandistic use, but the framework of the drama nevertheless offered a conclusion well suited to glorification of a new leader replacing the old order. By contrast, *The Magic Mountain* does not leave itself open to such appropriation. For the music referenced at the close of his novel Mann turns to 'Der Lindenbaum' (The Linden Tree) from Franz Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise* (Winter's Journey).³³ Mann alludes to this song cycle even before the narrator identifies Hans Castorp moving in the dismal flatlands.

³² Alfred Lorenz, *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners 'Parsifal'* (Berlin, 1933; repr. Tutzing, 1966), 153. Lorenz uses spaced-out letters for emphasis in his original text. For more detailed discussion of related issues, see my study *Wagner's 'Parsifal'* (New York, 2013), esp. 3–43, 270–71, 279–301.

³³ See Volker Mertens, *Gross ist das Geheimnis: Thomas Mann und die Musik* (Leipzig, 2006), 239. Mann once praised *Die Winterreise*, set to poems by Wilhelm Müller, as 'the world's best song cycle'. Mertens' book includes a CD with the 1923 recording of this song by Richard Tauber, a recording that Mann himself owned.

The section of the narration begins gropingly – 'Where are we? What is that?' – leading to a description of 'groans and screams' and of 'drumbeats urging onward', as a yet undefined, ominous broken landscape is revealed. The scene is vividly cinematic, as we discern a 'rutted quagmire [... and] tree trunks jut[ting] into the cold rain, naked and stripped of branches'. Then something comes into view: 'Hier ist ein Wegweiser' (Here is a signpost). But it is illegible, 'ripped to jagged shreds', useless for the purposes of practical orientation, whether 'east or west'. The related song (no. 20) in Schubert's cycle is named explicitly 'Der Wegweiser' (The Signpost), which culminates in the following lines:

Einen Weiser seh' ich stehen unverrückt vor meinem Blick.

Eine Strasse muss ich gehen die noch keiner ging zurück.

I see a signpost standing evermore before me

I must follow a path from which no one has ever returned.

The signpost to death marks the path for Mann's protagonist, with Schubert's eerie musical offering an implied soundtrack. The above lines are set musically to a circular chromatic progression known as the *Teufelsmühle* (devil's mill) ensnaring the trudging steps of the marching wanderer.

The snatches of Schubert's 'Der Lindenbaum' sung by the exhausted Hans Castorp before his demise on the battlefield identify music as a source of solace for the individual, not the collective. The individual reader can seek consolation in words and music which represent an organic extension from Thomas Mann's text, following the last recorded words of the limping, stumbling figure (corresponding, even blending here indivisibly into the wanderer figure in Schubert's song cycle). Castorp sings out one last time, unconsciously, stammeringly, lines he has often dwelt upon in *The Magic Mountain*:

Und sei-ne Zweige rau-uschten

als rie-fen sie mir zu-

And all its branches ru-ustled,

As if they cal-led to me-

At precisely this point Castorp's tale ends, and he becomes lost to view. 'Fare well, Hans Castorp, faithful problem child of life! Your story is over.' (Lebe wohl, Hans Castorp, des Lebens treuherziges Sorgenkind! Deine Geschichte ist aus.) The song's fragment, breaking off as Castorp becomes lost to view, nevertheless implies its continuation (in the reader's mind's ear), which is the call of nature to the weary wanderer:

komm her zu mir, Geselle

hier find'st du deine Ruh'.

come here, my fond companion

here you will find peace.

Schubert's wanderer trudges forward, losing his hat to the wind and sustaining himself through the power of memory, a perspective that merges with Castorp's. This memory touches upon the reflective song 'Der Lindenbaum', not the patriotic 'Deutschland über alles'.

Opposing this perspective of the individual quest pitted against heavy odds is that of collective transfiguration, whereby the individual is subsumed into a larger community. In Wagner's final drama, the closing *tableau* conveys a larger-than-life redeemer figure surrounded by an indivisible body of followers, a utopian scene that leaves itself open to the risk of ideological appropriation. No such risk would seem to be present

in Mann's assimilation of the wanderer archetype into the end of *The Magic Mountain*. On the largest level, and into the period in which Wagner's works were sometimes appropriated as political propaganda, Mann's *Magic Mountain* can be seen as involving an ironic inversion of *Parsifal*, turning the narrative sequence of Wagner's drama inside out. Unlike Wagner's positive collective redemptive outcome, Castorp's Grail-like vision in the snow is confined to a solitary dream-vision, and he later expires alone, singing snatches of Schubert on the battlefield.

Other aspects of Mann's novel also invite comparison to Wagner's *Parsifal*, too many to be outlined here, but let me offer a string of clues that illuminate aspects of the process.³⁴ The title of the book itself – *Der Zauberberg* – recalls the 'Olympian magic mountain' in Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* but also the setting of the second act of *Parsifal*: Klingsor's *Zauberschloss* or Magic Castle. Unlike Klingsor's darkly manipulated world, Mann's novel unfolds with much realistic incident, so that the symbolic level of the work must be recognised as residing behind its colourful and often humorously textured surface.

Of special importance is the role of Clavdia Chauchat, the novel's key figure in relation to the theme of the body and its seductive power. Clavdia's centrality to the novel's narrative structure parallels that of Kundry in *Parsifal*, and they both enact *femme fatales*. Whereas the midpoint of Mann's novel falls at the end of the fifth chapter, the 'Walpurgis Night', the midpoint of Wagner's *Parsifal* comes in Act II, at the delivery of Kundry's poisoned kiss to Parsifal. In both works, the centrepiece is a pivotal amorous encounter toward which the entire narrative has led, and whose outcome has an impact on all that follows. In *Parsifal*, the title character gains compassionate insight into Amfortas' suffering through experiencing and rejecting Kundry's seduction. In *The Magic Mountain*, by contrast, Castorp shares a 'riotously sweet hour' of erotic pleasure with Clavdia, which is just what Kundry offers to Parsifal once Parsifal has resisted her main seduction efforts: 'nur eine Stunde', she pleads. A further inverted correspondence occurs later in the novel when Castorp refuses Mynheer Peeperkorn's command to kiss Chauchat on her forehead. In response to Peeperkorn, Castorp replies bluntly that 'I cannot exchange kisses on the brow with your traveling companion', a gesture of decorum that nevertheless hints to the informed reader that his prior sexual experience with her would be hard to conceal if he were to carry out such an act. This motif of a kiss on the forehead resonates with the kiss Parsifal gives to Kundry when he baptises her in Act III of *Parsifal*.³⁵ Whereas he resists her kiss in Act II, in Act III eros is superseded by agape, or compassion. In *The Magic Mountain*, Mann indulges in an elaborate ironic reshaping of these key moments, as a 'riotously sweet hour' of erotic fulfilment precedes the later withholding of the Platonic kiss on Clavdia's brow.

Most mischievous of all, perhaps, is Mann's treatment of the symbol of the pencil in *Der Zauberberg*. An object Clavdia lends to Castorp on Walpurgis Night, its return is combined with the promise of their sexual union. Clavdia's playful words to her 'Carnival Prince', with their invitation to the *Liebesnacht* to follow, are: 'Don't forget to re-

³⁴ For detailed discussion, see my aforementioned article 'Exploring the "Temple of Initiation" on Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*' (note 1), esp. 408–15, 425–6.

³⁵ Peeperkorn's startled recognition of an erotic bond between his companion and Castorp encourages comparison to Wagner's King Marke in *Tristan und Isolde*.



The Holy Lance, the oldest piece in the Treasury of the Holy Roman Empire

turn my pencil.' Holding her little silver pencil, Clavdia strokes Castorp while he quivers and sways on his knees. The pencil itself is unusual and is described as elongated but a bit fragile (un peu fragile), with lead 'that could leave no real mark'. While its meaningful practical utility is questionable, she seems to imply that their potential sexual encounter would be harmless, casual, and to her at least without lasting meaning. This is surely more transparent to Clavdia, and us, than to the more inexperienced Castorp.

The elongated shape and silver colour of Clavdia's little writing instrument, and the obvious hints at her willingness to have sex with him, point once more and for the last time in our exploration of these correspondences to the central scene of *Parsifal*. Mann's pencil can be regarded as a Freudian phallic symbol that overlaps with Wagner's handling of the Holy Spear in *Parsifal*, which has been controlled by the genitally self-mutilated Klingsor. The distortion of the allusion takes many forms, beyond that of scale. Parsifal's main goal in journeying to Klingsor's realm is to retrieve a spear of tremendous and enduring symbolic meaning for the Grail community. The Parsifal/Kundry seduction scene is no way lighthearted flirting. Kundry's efforts to prepare Parsifal for sex are psychologically complex and disturbing, with much at stake for her as well as for Amfortas and the Grail Knights.

Farthest-reaching is Mann's implied deconstruction of the Wagnerian symbol of the spear in relation to the Grail community, which deflates the drama's redemptive sublimity and thereby disarms its propagandistic potential. In his novel, the author allusively and mischievously links Clavdia's little pencil with the fabled silver spear tip – a symbol evocative of that medieval relic held in the Vienna Hofburg which supposedly pierced Christ, and which Hitler transported to Nuremberg in 1938.³⁶ In so doing, Mann heeds Settembrini's warning. By the 1920s, a very different time than the pre-war era of *Death in Venice*, Mann saw abundant reason to expand his literary use of irony in relation to Wagner, thereby restricting that ambiguity of meaning that later allowed moral values to be subverted for politically suspect ends.



³⁶ In *The Magic Mountain*, the motif of the borrowed pencil is also bound up with Hans Castorp's earlier attraction to Pribislav Hippe. The fabled spear tip in the Vienna Hofburg dates from the 7th to 8th centuries. It belongs with the Imperial Crown Jewels and can be viewed through the website of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien/Die Kaiserliche Schatzkammer Wien and seen in the museum catalogue: Rudolf Distelberger and Manfred Leithe-Jasper, *Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien. Die Kaiserliche Schatzkammer Wien* (Munich, 2013), 51. Hitler's seizure of and the later recovery of the relic in 1945 is the subject of the 2012 ZDF documentary 'Hitler und die Heilige Lanze' available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_12TGHz-e4> (accessed 2 May 2018).