

M. Ángeles Díaz Barbado

Tristán

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Transfiguración (Transfiguration)

The period from *Tristan*, written in 1903 to that of *The Magic Mountain* of 1924, was an intensely creative time in the intellectual life of Thomas Mann. It resembled an ellipsis that travelled through an epoch and capsized in a sea that shook the foundations and, as Kubin believed, invited us to dance the "macabre dance of principles". Mann was a privileged witness of this time. *Buddenbrook* was a veritable history lesson, the subject of which was none other than the 19th century German bourgeoisie, subjected now to a difficult destiny. In tandem with Fontane, Mann had pointed to the journey in which he observed how pessimism lodged in the conscience of the German bourgeoisie. Lukacs would realise the political-ideological implications of such an attitude.

In this context Mann's *Tristan* has a special significance. Written as a novella it shows us a change in narrative register, far from the history lesson and open to a fantasy from which questions regarding the moment emerge. As will occur in *The Magic Mountain* a sanatorium is the place chosen to tell of a time of illness and death, clinging to the experience of desire and passion in a journey that proclaimed the impossibility of a *Bildung* or moral development from the start. *Bildung*, core of German classicism philosophy was elevated even higher by Romanticism. At this point, from Hölderlin to Kleist, it heralded its failure as the negative expression of the modern.

Two untimely friends appeared on this journey who would decisively affect the direction of Mann's thought. The first of these was Nietzsche whose spiritual and stylistic world assumed a unique fascination that widened the horizon of his reflections and liberty to interpret them. The ethos and art of Nietzsche illuminated the path — the perpetual Wanderer — through a time of anxious searching for a world that Zarathushtra had invoked in the prophetic cry from Sils María. Mann secretly admired the 'relativity of this great moralist's immoralism'. His glorification of life at the expense of the spirit would feed the perplexity that would always accompany the reading of his work.

And together with Nietzsche, Schopenhauer. He had been the philosophic horizon of

Buddenbrooks and had announced the death of Thomas. But his presence in Mann's work transcended this first phase of his youth. In his *Sketch of my Life* he pointed out the differences between Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's influence in his life. Nietzsche's was more artistic and cultural while that of Schopenhauer was an 'unforgettable psychic experience'. He recalls 'the satisfaction the powerful negation and moral-spiritual condemnation of the world and life in a mental synthesis whose symphonic musicality seduced me profoundly. I was extra-sensitively enchanted by the erotic and mystically unitary element of this philosophy that had so much bearing on the music of *Tristan and Isolde*'.

Tristan and Isolde represents both for Nietzsche and Mann the highest and deepest expression of 19th century music. Wagner assembles elements from Arthurian tradition in a new dramatic structure that he envelopes in turbulent chromatic music nourishing the sensuality of story of Isolde and her decision to follow her deceased lover Tristan and find the unity of their lives through the transcendence of their love. Wagner captures this idea with his music in an admirable handling of harmony and melody, constructed in a repeated sequence of the fundamental elements that gives the work a unique expressive power, making the opera into something sublime and incomparable. From the second A minor chord of the Prelude everything is prepared for the idea that Wagner had previously expressed: 'The accord between music and the soul must be put to a moral use'. To shape an experience was already becoming the principle of all philosophy of art and music.

Maria Angeles Díaz Barbado's exhibition, entitled *Tristan*, must be contemplated from this perspective. It is a journey lasting many years, devoted to considering the meaning of *Tristan*. The path linking the Einfried sanatorium with the first *Tristan* and with the Berghof of *The Magic Mountain* reveals itself as an impossible journey. The endless wait, the silent steps of illness as a condition of life, take refuge in the icy landscape whose pinnacles already herald the transfiguration of the bodies, displayed awaiting the embrace of the cosmos. Meanwhile we may seek protection in Hardenburgh's Hymns to the Night or Schubert's Winter Journey by following in the steps of Hans Castorp.

**Francisco Jarauta
Curator**

Tristán

In 1903, Thomas Mann wrote the brief story *Tristan* that anticipated the theme which would later be developed in the extended and complex of *The Magic Mountain* in 1924. The work is influenced by the myth of Tristan and Isolde and the opera of the same name by Richard Wagner's who Mann greatly admired although over time this opinion changed. The story ironizes on illness and passion, on the tedium and the possibility of art being death, being salvation. Vital subjects of Mann's literature begin to be detected. 'Literature is death' he wrote to his brother Heinrich months before the work was published. In *Tristan* it will be the music, the surrender to passion that plays the deadly part.

In an impeccable white building the sanatorium Einfried tidies life, arranges and names the pain; a building where routine and care rule. It is enfolded in a landscape of clearly romantic significance: mountain, forest, the night, the cold forming the background of the story itself. Mann states that Wagner's Tristan, heavily bound to the thinking and sensitivity of Romanticism, imposes the cult of the night as truth, the kingdom of sensitivity versus the rational, opposed to the 'futile worship of the day'.

Tristan is a project in which painting, through gesture, musicality, spacial and luminous tension trys to construct an icy atmosphere capable of evoking the recreation of a slow tempo, continuity, permanence and fragility. The cold and the night, the ascent and the contemplation suggest an emotional representation that hints at the interior-exterior tension present in Mann's tale.

Angeles Díaz Barbado
Artist