

The author's bodies. Construction and “symbolic capitalization” in photographic portraits and the illustrated press following the example of Thomas Mann

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An author's body is a fact of literary relevance ascribable to the paratextual dimension (specifically the epitextual)¹ of his or her work. Influencing the hermeneutical pre-comprehension of the reader,² the strategies of an author's visual (auto-) representation in fact manage to profoundly condition his or her reception to the degree that, quoting Wilhelm Genazino, a careful observer of the affective mechanisms and identifying marks underlying literature, “the image of the author” inexorably tends to become “the novel of the reader”.³ Recent studies on the concept and historical evolution of authorship seem to confirm this affirmation. The widely proclaimed and debated thesis of the “death of the author” has by now been amply surpassed by theories that have relentlessly demonstrated, in fact, evidence of the author's return.⁴ Even Michel Foucault's idea of authorship is generally considered reductive as it confers upon the author's name a simple “classificatory function” though in the area of a wide and fruitful theory of literary discursivity.⁵ According to

¹ See Gérard Genette, *Palinsesti: la letteratura al secondo grado*, trans. by Raffaella Novità (Turin: Einaudi, 1997).

² The reference is to that “fore-conception of completeness” that Gadamer suggests is at the beginning of every process of comprehension in history. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Verità e Metodo*, edited and trans. by Gianni Vattimo (Milan: Bompiani, 2001), p. 609.

³ Wilhelm Genazino, *Das Bild des Autors ist der Roman des Lesers* (Münster: Kleinheinrich, 1994).

⁴ See *Rückkehr des Autors. Zur Erneuerung eines umstrittenen Begriffs*, edited by Fotis Jannidis et al. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999); Carla Benedetti, *L'ombra lunga dell'autore indagine su una figura cancellata* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999) and *The Empty Cage Inquiry into the Mysterious Disappearance of the Author* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005); *Autorschaft Positionen und Revisionen*, edited by Heinrich Detering (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002).

⁵ Michel Foucault, *Che cos'è un autore?*, in *Scritti letterari*, edited by Cesare Milanese (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004), p. 8.



these new lines of research, authorship is not covered by simple “names” or “figures” that refer to various individual authors. It does not exhaust itself, that is, in either a mere operational implication of the text or in a collection of elements of a purely anagraphic-documental nature; rather, it substantializes itself – and this is the point – in an artfully constructed totality of sense, powerfully suggestive and fascinating.

As far as the essential function of writing is – even if from only a practical point of view – that of making a dialogue of distance and *in absentia* possible between addresser and addressee,⁶ an exquisitely performative moment exists within literature that is not to be underappreciated there where the body emerges from the invisibility that the *medium* of writing imposes and makes of itself a *medium*. Every work emerges “because of” an author and it is precisely “because of” the author, his or her body, his or her image, that the reading public recognizes it. The exhibition of a profile only, of a particular physiognomy in a more or less distinguishing *habitus*, is in any case part of those unavoidable functions of every literary phenomenon that promotes deployment and interaction within the force-field – given it by the reading public, the editorial market, the field of criticism, the humanities and scholastic institutions – in which and through which it subsists. This self-exhibition takes place through the media, the operators who favor, and at the same time condition, communication within modern society.

On the basis of similar considerations, over the last few years research perspectives of a socio-cultural character have gained ground within authorship studies, which have clearly been influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s symbolic forms of sociology and his concepts of a “literary field” and “symbolic capital”. This has to

⁶ See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsesti: la letteratura al secondo grado*, cit. According to Konrad Ehlich the culture of textuality is born and established in concurrence with the rise of the necessity of overcoming the obstacle of diatopia in space and time between the two poles of communication. See in fact Konrad Ehlich, *Text und sprachliches Handeln. Die Entstehung von Texten aus dem Bedürfnis nach Überlieferung*, in *Schrift und Gedächtnis. Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation*, edited by Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann and Christof Hardmeier (Munich: Fink, 1983), pp. 24-43.



do with a perspective sensitive to the various inherent aspects of the rhetoric of the image of each and every writer understood as being an integral part of his or her *Werkpolitik*.⁷ For this type of research, the photographic portrait, and more generally speaking the many diverse strategies of mediatization of the figure of the author in highly circulated magazines and periodicals, becomes a central element, connected as it is to the conquest of a status and symbolic surplus value within a context in continuous transformation like that of the literary business, which is itself made up of, in its largest sense, a mixture of interactive demands which follow their own internal logic.

However, is there not something within this perspective that risks reducing authorship to nothing more than a pure and simple *mise-en-scène*?⁸ Perhaps. Suggestion – Stephen Greenblatt speaks of strategies of “self-fashioning”⁹ – is doubtless one of the key terms as far as the complex process of the creation of an authorial media identity in which many elements of a pre-rational and subliminal nature, not to speak of *marketing*, are involved. This is what is meant by the authorial *mise-en-scène* as a professional duty from which the modern writer cannot escape, a mechanism with which he or she is able to simultaneously increase symbolic and social capital. Nevertheless, there where the pose is an integral part of the construction of a literary personality, the product of the pose assumes an aesthetic value and a precise combined meaning that the interpreter cannot ignore. It is thus easy to understand why this is a good hunting-

⁷ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Le regole dell'arte. Genesi e struttura del campo letterario*, trans. by Anna Boschetti and Emanuele Bottaro (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2005). A study of *longue durée* on *Werkpolitik* in criticism and poetics of canonical German authors has recently been conducted by Steffen Martus, *Werkpolitik zur Literaturgeschichte kritischer Kommunikation vom 17. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert; mit Studien zu Klopstock, Tieck, Goethe und George* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007).

⁸ On this theme see *Autoinszenierungen Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*, edited by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007).

⁹ See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).



ground for the field of *Media* and *Gender Studies*, provided one never loses sight of the texts themselves.

It is often the authors themselves who anticipate the critics' thoughts, as the scholar Claudia Schmölders has recently demonstrated in a profile dedicated to the physiognomy of the author in modernity. She reminds us that in German the term *Gesicht* has a double meaning. Indeed, it suggests both one's "face" or, in other words, one's "organic mask", and "sight", or our ability to see.¹⁰ This slightly "phenomenological" perspective allows her to convincingly associate apparently disparate facts, like Goethe's reflections on Homer's head and Madame Tussaud's wax figures, in a wide-ranging portrait of both historical-cultural and literary references, which, departing from the physiognomy of Lavater, finally lead her to a consideration of the columns of *Vanity Fair* reporting on contemporary German authors. For those who are concerned with literature, however, the entire question ceases to be banal the moment in which the process of an author's media coverage itself becomes an object of literary reflection. The underlying ambition of this attempt is that of integrating textuality into a broader perspective, transcending the margins of the text itself up to understanding every form of hypo- and epitext.

In the case of Thomas Mann, it is the author himself that comes to meet the reader. Is it not perhaps the writer himself to often thematize the conviction in his writings that he is "performing a role" through his work as an author, a role that goes beyond his own individual self in a physical sense up to embracing the totality of the myth? And is he not perhaps the first to make this position ironic? Perhaps no other writer of the twentieth century reflected longer or more deeply than Thomas Mann upon the mechanisms of "representation" both in terms of its meaning of delegation and substitution, and its simultaneous meaning of reproduction and re-visitation, so much so that it is precisely in the execution of this role that he loves to place morality and the moralizing function of

¹⁰ Claudia Schmölders, *Die Gesichter der Dichter*, in "Merkur", LXII (2008), n. 2, 705, pp. 132-141, here p. 133.



writing.¹¹ The value attributed to this conviction of photography is difficult to quantify in purely empirical terms. *Thomas-Mann-Forschung* is not lacking in vast studies on the relationship between literature and photography, beginning with Hans Wysling's *Bild und Text bei Thomas Mann*, which is concerned with pictorial sources,¹² and arriving at more recent studies, above all Eva-Monika Turck's *Thomas Mann. Fotografie wird Literatur*, in which a specific interest in the communicative strategies and the rhetoric of the image that such a relationship entails made particular in-roads.¹³

The present essay, as compared to these other studies, introduces at least two innovative elements: precise contextualization and, where possible, documentation of the photographic sources. Too often photographic portraits of Mann have simply been offered without an adequate examination of their function and their original destination, sometimes without even providing any indication of who the photographer was, or in which periodicals the photographs first appeared. In as much as the categories of the analysis of pose and authorial mise-en-scène may be productive even in the abstract, if the images are isolated from their communicative or media context, if they are considered sufficient unto themselves in a sort of musealization *ex postero*, in the final analysis their interpretation always

¹¹ An investigation of the role of the photographic portrait in an author like Thomas Mann may not be removed from its analysis of the position of the author in our time. Seeing that in the present contribution it would not be possible to enter into the topic if not through citations, it is preferable to defer to Hans Wysling's considerations, *Narzissmus und illusionäre Existenzform zu den Bekenntnissen des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), for example p. 259; and Jochen Strobel, "Gut deutsch sein heißt sich entdeutschen". *Thomas Mann zwischen aporetischer Repräsentation und glückender Repräsentanz*, in *Die Erfindung des Schriftstellers Thomas Mann*, edited by Michael Ansel, Hans-Edwin Friedrich and Gerhard Lauer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 317-350.

¹² Hans Wysling, *Bild und Text bei Thomas Mann. Eine Dokumentation* (Bern: Francke, 1975).

¹³ Eva-Monika Turck, *Thomas Mann Fotografie wird Literatur* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2004). See also Bernd Hamacher, *Thomas Manns Medientheologie*, in Christine Künzel - Jörg Schönert, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-78; Friedhelm Marx, *Durchleuchten der Probleme. Film und Fotografie in Thomas Manns Zauberberg*, in "Thomas-Mann-Jahrbuch", XXII (2009), pp. 71-81; Tim Lörcke, *Bürgerlicher Avantgardismus*, in "Thomas-Mann-Jahrbuch", XXIII (2010), pp. 62-75.



emerges distorted, misleading or at the very least reductive. If instead they are placed in relation to their context of use, to the precise representative conventions that are behind the visual culture of an entire age, or in relation to the individual style of the person who produced them, their historical meaning cannot but become clearer, just as their function within the “literary field” they help to generate does. It is evident how the treatment of such an argument, even as regards only Thomas Mann, cannot claim to exhaust itself within the frame of an essay. From the following comments then let us expect at most a brief foray into a field of research that for the most part is still unspoiled.

I

With the advent of photography, lights, plates and magnesium lamps took the place of the old material support of traditional portraiture. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century, photographers rapidly appropriated an enormous portion of that which until that moment had been the uncontested domain of illustrators and painters. In the Parisian *atelier* of Nadar and Le Gray, famous images were born that were destined to establish the standards of poses and gesture in the portraits of the decades to come. In addition, with Disdéri’s introduction of the *carte de visite*, as described by Jean Sagne, the way the photographic portrait was used radically changed from display piece to collector’s piece, passing from frame to album.¹⁴ Departing from pre-requisites of a technical nature, therefore, in the *fin de siècle* an unprecedented use of the portrait made in-roads within the history of communications. The faces of famous personalities became easy-to-find material and objects of conversation in themselves, circulating far and wide, spreading deeply throughout the homes of the bourgeoisie. As has often been observed, this phase of the rapid expansion of photographic portraiture represents nothing other than the first rumblings of contemporary *celebrity cul-*

¹⁴ See Jean Sagne, *Portraits en tout genre l’atelier du photographe*, in *Nouvelle histoire de la photographie*, edited by Michel Frizot (Paris: Bordas, 1994), pp. 102-129.



ture, even if, as compared to today, substantial differences connected to typical paradigms of the age cannot be considered of secondary importance.

The new communicative possibilities offered by photographic portraiture did not leave the literary world indifferent. August Strindberg's serially conducted photographic experiments at the end of the 19th century collected in the so-called *Gersau Album* (1886) still manage to impress viewers today with the level of performative tension the author achieved. They demonstrate how within the artist's self-portrait the exhibition of creative torment and psychological research cohabit in an attempt to capture the moment in which the normally invisible soul manifests in different poses assumed by the body of the artist himself.¹⁵ In Germany, Stefan George was among the first authors to employ mediatization and popularization strategies of his own image through photography.¹⁶ Already in a famous letter written in the summer of 1893 to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, he discloses the project to publish a collection of portraits of his closest disciples and collaborators in *Pages for Art*.¹⁷ As Gert Mattenklott noted in a well-known study, the author's body in George becomes an instrument of his own "aesthetic opposition" to bourgeois con-

¹⁵ These visual experiments, which exceed pure and simple dilettantism, are accompanied by short reflections, written as a gloss to the instantaneous capture of an aspect of the image itself. See in particular Bernd Stiegler, *August Strindbergs Theorie der Photographie Versuch einer Rekonstruktion*, in August Strindberg, *Der Dichter und die Medien*, edited by Walter Baumgartner and Thomas Fechner-Smarsly (Munich: Fink, 2003), pp. 211-235; David Company, *Art, science and speculation: August Strindberg's photographs*, in Olle Grangath, *August Strindberg: Painter, photographer, writer* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 113-129.

¹⁶ For this privileged relationship with mediality, Thomas Wegmann even considers George a type of forerunner of contemporary *pop* culture, see Thomas Wegmann "Bevor ich da war, waren all die Gedichte noch gut". *Über Stefan Georges Marketing in eigener Sache*, in "Text + Kritik" (2005), n. 168, pp. 97-104.

¹⁷ This has to do with the letter of June 28, 1893. However, that which for George may still represent a moment of "memory" to seal a relationship of shared familiarity, for Hofmannsthal already represents something akin to the "advertising" that was infesting the press. See in particular *Briefwechsel zwischen George und Hofmannsthal*, edited by Robert Boehringer (Munich: Kupper, 1953), p. 65.



ventionality.¹⁸ More recent, highly detailed studies have moreover documented the charismatic and at the same time regressive potential of the poet's portraits, artfully constructed portraits that commanded respect and admiration but that at the same time circulated among his acquaintances and disciples like portraits of the saints or family photographs.¹⁹

In fact, the poses the authors assume in their portraits along with the fashions of the dandy, erudite, Adonis or shaman, united in an unmistakable personal physiognomy, are elements of an *imaging* that constitutes the paratextual "threshold" necessary to enter into their works. The image of the author thus becomes an integral part of his or her "symbolic capital" (in the sense given the term by Bourdieu) in the moment in which it becomes a function of the work itself. The young Thomas Mann must have been conscious of this pure and simple fact when in the process of publishing *Buddenbrooks* – the novel that made him famous conferring upon him the *status* of successful author – he wrote to his brother Heinrich in 1901: "Ich werde mich photographieren lassen, die Rechte in der Frackweste und die Linke auf die drei Bände gestützt; dann kann ich eigentlich getröst in die Grube fahren".²⁰ From these few lines the writer's awareness of being, first and foremost, image emerges. Attaching itself immediately to the idea of having produced something of worth – "drei Bände" – however is the (guilty) conscience of the pose, which results in an act of self-irony, itself also a brief parody of the role of the bourgeois writer the author turns against himself – "dann

¹⁸ See Gert Mattenklott, *Bilderdienst: ästhetische Opposition bei Beardsley und George* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1970). That this "opposition" at bottom without a doubt anticipates some characteristics of contemporary diva-like behavior, it does not negate its character *kontrapräsentisch*.

¹⁹ On this theme see Cornelia Blasberg, *Charisma in der Moderne Stefan Georges Medienpolitik*, in "Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte", LXXIV (2000), pp. 111-145; Ulrich Raulff, *Plastische Passbilder. Stefan George, die Fotografie und die Skulptur*, in "Bildwelten des Wissens" Vol. 1, 2 (2003), pp. 28-36.

²⁰ Thomas Mann, letter to Heinrich Mann, February 13, 1901, in *Briefe I 1889-1913*, edited by Thomas Sprecher, Hans R. Vaget and Cornelia Bernini, vol. 1, *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* (GKFA), n. 21 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002), p. 155.



kann ich eigentlich getröst in die Grube fahren". Tim Lörke spots in this and similar passages the presence of an alienated point of view through which the exquisitely bourgeois *habitus* of the writer is continuously placed in perspective and destructured, confirming that apocryphal avant-garde nature hidden so well in the texts of the writer from Lubeck, which an important part of recent criticism, beginning with Luca Crescenzi, has just begun to once again dust off.²¹

Through the multiplication of the layers of meaning within his production, the writer, still according to Lörke, would make both himself and his work "symbolically" pleasing in both contexts or "fields"; in other words, in the elite realm of the intellectual avant-garde as well as in the more traditional bourgeois and commercial one.²² Thomas Mann, however, is not the only one in this era to count on strategies of mediation between himself and his public. At this point of his career, in fact, comparing himself with other authors of the so-called *Klassische Moderne* like Hofmannsthal and George was an important point of reflection.

The young Mann always placed these two in the group of those artists whose psychological irritability and "hatred of knowledge" furnished the necessary "malice" to "extract virtue from their own weaknesses".²³ Yet, more than their style, it was their totalizing rela-

²¹ In relation to this point, see Tim Lörke, *op. cit.*, p. 69, who believes the "Überbietungsästhetik" of the avantgarde should be associated to Mann's changes of critical positions as regards his contemporary authors. In addition, see Luca Crescenzi, *Melancholia occidentale. La montagna magica di Thomas Mann* (Rome: Carocci, 2011), in which the novel's surrealist substratum is convincingly evidenced, as well as *Apokrypher Avantgardismus Thomas Mann und die Klassische Moderne*, edited by Stefan Börnchen and Claudie Liebrand (Munich: Fink, 2008).

²² Indicative of this sort of refined double game is Mann's famous reaction to Hermann Hesse's – certainly rather unflattering – assertions of *Altezza Reale*, of seeking public favor, to which the author responded affirming his strong desire to attract even those less intelligent readers: "*Mich verlangt auch nach den Dummen*", cit. Thomas Mann, letter to Hermann Hesse April 1, 1910, in GKFA 21, 448. See Paolo Panizzo's notes on this passage, *Ästhetizismus und Demagogie: Der Dilettant in Thomas Manns Frühwerk* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), p. 43.

²³ Thomas Mann, *Spirito e Arte Saggio sulla letteratura*, edited and translated by Maurizio Pirro (Bari: Palomar, 1997), p. 17, fragment n. 19.



tionship with their own work that interested him the most as it was precisely this relationship that contributed to defining the role of the writer within modern society. One can infer this from Mann's notes written around 1910, the years of the outline *Spirit and Art*, a crucial phase not only in terms of the production of his essays but also in relation to his overall artistic development. Taking Goethe as a model of authorial discursivity, Mann punctually records the comeback of a tendency in art to become “*completely exterior*”,²⁴ a tendency that must be amplified by the writer, on the one hand, with the reawakening of the “conscience [...] of the great masters” precisely from the Renaissance idea of Burckhardt;²⁵ and on the other hand, with the refinement of literary sensibility for phenomena related to the corporeality of the author, as for example the performative quality of the author's voice during a public reading of his or her works. In fact, in a notebook from 1909 one reads:

Daß das Dichterwerk ein Teil des Autors sei, der wohl selbständiges Leben habe, aber erst mit dem Autor vereint sein eigenstes, bluthaft lebendigstes Sein gewinne. [...] Kein Verständiger wird den intimen Reiz leugnen, den die Wiedergabe einer Dichtung durch ihren Autor haben kann, und der lebhafteste Zuspruch, den heute überall die Autoren-Abende finden, beweist, daß auch weitere Kreise diesen Reiz zu würdigen wissen. [...] Er [sc. Lion Feuchtwanger] vergißt, daß die „literatura“ längst nicht mehr Surrogat der Poesie ist, sondern ihr Leib, ein vom Allzupersönlichen gereinigter Leib, der aber des Rhythmus, des Tons, der Geste deshalb nicht entbehrt.²⁶

This particular attention given to the “gesture” in any case is part of a sensibility that Thomas Mann, at least at that particular moment, completely shares with his contemporaries – in this specific

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18, fragment n. 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19, fragment n. 22.

²⁶ “*Geist und Kunst*”. *Thomas Manns Notizen zu einem “Literatur-Essay”*, edited by Hans Wysling, in *Quellenkritische Studien zum Werk Thomas Manns*, edited by Paul Scherrer and Hans Wysling [Thomas-Mann-Studien, vol. 1] (Bern: Francke, 1967), p. 189 and following, fragment n. 72.



sense the parallel with George is not at all peculiar. It is precisely within this sensibility that the aforementioned proverbial irony lurks, which, however, does not prevent the writer from feeling authorized to serve himself from that “gesture” through all of his creative existence, adapting it to his richest interior vein and making it his own. As for the rest, as demonstrated from the beginning, the stylization of his image as representative is a fundamental characteristic of his authorial *habitus*. This is not the place to enter into the details of a more profound analysis on the evolution of the Mannian icon, which can be well deduced beginning with the texts of a critical and biographical character. Below, however, the specific contribution of the illustrated press to the formation of this unmistakable “gesture” will be underlined.

II

In Germany it was initially the *Familienblätter*, or familial periodicals, to spread celebrity images and portraits throughout 19th and 20th century society. Before the introduction of screening, however, the printing of photographs remained a rather labor intensive procedure and consequently was undertaken sparingly, so much so that until the 1880s it was always the design to prevail on the photograph. Only from the 1890s onward, thanks to the rapid and impressive development of the reproduction techniques of photographic images in magazines, the era of the illustrated periodical began. Thus the photographic portrait became a product of widespread consumption, “ephemeral merchandise for the day’s need”.²⁷ In the beginning of the 20th century, it was up to the weekly and monthly periodicals like *Die Gartenlaube* (1853-1932), *Über Land und Meer* (1858-1923), *Dabeim*

²⁷ Dirk Halfbrod, *Philipp Kester - Bildjournalist Fotografien und Reportages 1903-1935*, in *Philipp Kester - Fotojournalist New York Berlin München 1903-1935*, edited by Dirk Halfbrod and Ulrich Pohlmann (Berlin: Pohlmann, 2003), p. 51. On the history of press photography in Germany see in particular Bernd Weise, *Fotojournalismus. Erster Weltkrieg-Weimarer Republik*, in *Deutsche Fotografie. Macht eines Mediums 1870-1970*, edited by the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland and Klaus Honnef, Rolf Sachsse and Karin Thomas (Cologne: Dumont, 1997), pp. 72-87.



(1864-1944), the *Illustrierte Zeitung* (1843-1944), *Die Woche* (1899-1944), or *Zeit im Bild* (1903-1919) to distribute the images of writers and artists, making them available to a vast reading public. It is precisely in these years that the figure of the media photographer was born, that is, one who made his work exclusively available to the press. According to the information collected by Dirk Halbrodt and Ulrich Pohlmann, up until 1918 in Germany alone at least forty were active.²⁸

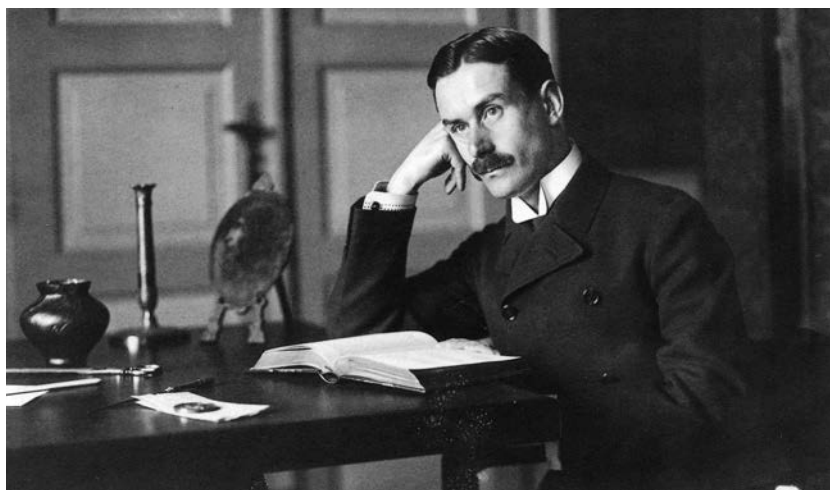
To this professional category belongs Philipp Kester, the author of numerous photographic *reportages*, active in Germany and in the United States between the 19th and 20th centuries. Kester made a name for himself around 1905 through illustrated articles on the literary life of Berlin and Munich, articles that he was able to place in widely circulated magazines, guaranteeing both himself and the objects of his work visibility and success. In one of these features, entitled *Das junge München*,²⁹ a famous photograph of Mann appeared in the center of the page (fig. 1). The portrait is encased in an oval, significantly occupying the center of the page. At this point one can already see how in this type of publication the image prevails over the word. The *layout* of the written text adapts itself perfectly to the photograph and not vice versa. Leaning with his elbow on a table, the writer is presented as “author of the best-selling novel *Buddenbrook*.” His chest is clearly tilted to the right, nevertheless his head remains straight, he is photographed frontally, and there is almost a hint of the serpentine in his stance. His forearms, folded at the height of the abdomen, bring his hands to the foreground with a book open in the direction of whoever observes the photograph. The *mise-en-scène*-like character is obvious. In this photograph one observes numerous small representative rigidities, attributable both to the conventions of the illustrated periodicals of the time as well as to

²⁸ See Dirk Halbrodt - Ulrich Pohlmann, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²⁹ Philipp Kester, *Das junge München*, in “Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung”, XV (4/1/1906), n. 13, pp. 204-205. The article in question contains nine authors’ photographs. Alongside Thomas Mann appear: Fritz von Ostini, Georg Hirschfeld, Otto Julius Bierbaum, Ludwig Thoma, Eduard Keyserling, Kurt Aram, Frank Wedekind and Max Halbe. See in particular Ivo Kranzfelder, *Die Anfänge der popularisierten Prominenz*, in Dirk Halbrodt - Ulrich Pohlmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-231.



Fig. 1. Philipp Kester, Thomas Mann 1905, Munich, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Sammlung Fotografie, Archiv Kester.



1.

2.

Fig. 2. Philipp Kester, Thomas Mann 1905, Munich, Münchner Stadtmuseum, Sammlung Fotografie, Archiv Kester.



Kester's personal style, of which one may find more information in the aforementioned monograph. The detail of the book, for example, is part of a symbolic code easily recognizable to a newspaper-reading public, in as much as it is immediately associable to the quality of an "author". Thanks to the ostentatious way it is placed in the foreground, it appears more like a piece of "merchandise" than a work of art.

In the same series of shots, most likely realized at the end of 1905, there is another photograph of Kester's (fig. 2) illustrating an analogous article of the literary life of Munich and published in the weekly *Über Land und Meer*.³⁰ Even if we knew nothing about this man, a simple inventory of the objects that occupy the visual space of the image in question would leave no doubt as to his profession. This man is an author. More than anything else, the desk is a fundamental element for the identification of the "trade" of novelist, as are the objects placed upon it in plain view: the open book, the pen, the inkwell, a letter opener, a candlestick and even some paper, as if from a manual. It has been recently noted that the presence of the work-table in many photographic portraits of Mann represents a symbol of his condition as a member of the haute bourgeoisie, a sign of his Hanseatic origins.³¹ On the contrary. The purpose of the desk is simply that of typical conventions of the time, the unwritten visual rules that nevertheless were applied with regularity among the most diverse writers. The domestic atmosphere, the illusion of privacy, the desire to enter into a celebrity's intimate space, even at the risk of descending into *kitsch*, all of these are typical elements of the age's celebrity photography, which with its so-called *illustrierten Besuche* or "illustrated visits" one could already expect a great public response.³²

³⁰ Wilhelm Michel, *Das literarische München*, in "Über Land und Meer", Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart -Leipzig 1906/07, octavo edition, pp. 463-470. The photograph of Mann is found on p. 467. In addition to the authors cited in the preceding footnote, there are Paul Heyse, Michael Georg Conrad, Ludwig Ganghofer, Max Bernstein, Georg Hirth, Joseph Ruederer, Korfiz Holm and Franz Blei.

³¹ See Tim Lörke, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

³² On the topic of Kester's *illustrierten Besuche* see Dirk Halbrod - Ulrich Pohlmann, *op. cit.*



Aware of all of this, Thomas Mann thereafter did not hesitate to make public even images connected to his own personal sphere and that of his relatives, making them an integral part of that myth of the “bourgeois artist” that he himself contributed to developing within his writings.

Returning to the photograph, one cannot but notice within it the search for a chiaroscuro effect. The clear complexion of the writer's face confers an unmistakable aura of spirituality to the portrait that was typical for the time. At this point in his chronology, there is not yet any family photograph on the table; instead, one clearly notices the famous oval portrait of Savonarola, which served as the model for the drama *Fiorenza*, the draft of which was concluded precisely in January 1905. Without a doubt it is a message from the writer to his public, yet again a *mise-en-scène*, a play of mirrors. The sole presence of the “portrait within the portrait” indeed suggests infinite similarities and contrasts. The austere Savonarola could be considered the author's double – even if the texts relativize this hypothesis – or as a species of memento – *a punctum* according to Roland Barthes' semiology of the photographic image – about the dialectic between the writer's two souls.³³

The complexity of this photograph prompts a further interpretation plan. Among the most apparent elements of the rhetoric of the image in this photographic portrait is that of the head resting on the arm, deep in thought. For this type of pose it is unnecessary to return to the iconography of the melancholic, as depicted by Dürer, for example, in his famous engraving *Melancholia I* or in his painting *Saint Jerome* of 1521; it is sufficient to consider Anton Graff's 1786 portrait of Friedrich Schiller.³⁴ This detail brings one to the traces of another text, which, as opposed to *Fiorenza*, seems to be registered in the image in question; a text which, in effect, presents

³³ For a definition and explanation of the term see Roland Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), pp. 1105-1197, especially p. 1144.

³⁴ For a close examination of the painting and its 18th century imitations see Rose Unterberger, *Friedrich Schiller. Orte und Bildnisse. Ein biographisches Bilderbuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), pp. 88-94. The reproduction of Graff's painting is found on p. 89.



important contiguities with the drama not only on a chronological level. The text is *Schwere Stunde*, written between March and April 1905 and appearing in *Simplicissimus* on May 9th of the same year on the occasion of the centenary of Schiller's death.³⁵ If at this moment Schiller is the authorial type in which Thomas Mann most identifies himself, he will also be the iconic model of reference for the latter's portrait – that which Warburg would define as the *Pathos-formel* of the author.

Remaining in this period and the selfsame series of shots, a third photograph of Kester's appears in *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit*, one of the most fortunate treatments of contemporary literature ever in Germany, edited by Albert Soergel and published for the first time in 1911.³⁶ An important part of this work's success is without a doubt its engaging and futuristic look, capable of integrating text and image in a way comparable to today's scholastic anthologies. There is a lot of space given over to designs, paintings and photographs, even caricatures. Among the merits of this artwork, duly noted by the editor in the preface, is the creation of a "small gallery of modern portraits". According to its express wishes, the portraits were neither put on the side nor shrunk, rather "reproduced in large dimension and with feeling" following the principle in which the poetic and figurative arts must move at the same pace, illustrating one another.³⁷ Here therefore once again one encounters Thomas Mann seated before a dark background, gaze directed into the lens and right hand resting on the arm of a chair while his back is to the desk. In this case as well both the role of the intellectual and that of the "decadent" bourgeois (an ostentatious ring on his right hand) are to be inferred from the set-up. The presence of a portrait of Mann in such a context – in a constant succession of new editions Soergel's

³⁵ Thomas Mann, *Schwere Stunde*, in GKFA 2.1, pp. 419-428.

³⁶ Albert Soergel, *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit. Schilderung der deutschen Literatur der letzten Jahrzehnte* (Leipzig: Voigtländer, 1911-1928). Mann's photograph is found on p. 803, the reference edition: 1919. This was an outright best-seller. Beginning in 1961 it appeared under the title *Dichtung und Dichter der Zeit, vom Naturalismus bis zur Gegenwart* a new version of the work in collaboration with Curt Hohoff.

³⁷ Albert Soergel, *op. cit.*, p. VI: "Bemerkung der Verlagsbuchhandlung".



manual remained in fact on the German market at least until the beginning of the 1960s – represents an unambiguous sign of the privileged *status* the writer has achieved within the literary field.

Along with this type of photographic portrait of Mann, clearly destined for the public, there exist others of a more casual nature – apparently – less “constructed”, of more relaxed tones. With time, in any case, the private sphere tends ever more often to penetrate the representative orbit of the personality-writer, up to imprinting his very *imaging*. In Turck’s book, for example, shots dating to the very early 1930s appear, like the famous photographic feature from the *Atelier Krauskopf* on the Mann family’s stay in Nida on the Baltic Sea; or the famous photograph of Mann with his dog Lux, immortalized at his master’s side by Kuno Fiedler in ’32.³⁸ In these images exoticism, intimacy and pedigree form a product that could make any advertising agency jealous. In more than one case, as seen here, to that which is fixed by photography for a large public, pieces of an autobiographical nature echo, they too destined to be diffused and read.³⁹ Therefore, at least for the interpreter, it cannot be simply a case of publicity. The figure Thomas Mann creates itself and is created through a process of one-to-one assimilation, where the exteriorization of the private and interiorization of the public represent two sides of the same coin. The bourgeois and the arts, the two bodies of the representative individual, do not neutralize each other in this process; rather, they appear to grow together. The mythologization of the familiar is a phenomenon that has always concerned the media, through which the daily assumes an exceptional value precisely through its diffusion within mass society. The presence of a Nobel Prize, in the end, elevates the scene in and of itself.

³⁸ As far as the series of Nida is concerned, see Eva-Monika Turck, *op. cit.*, p. 17 and following. The famous photograph with his dog is found for example on the cover of the book by Dirk Heißerer, *Im Zaubergarten: Thomas Mann in Bayern* (Munich: Beck, 2005), who I thank for the invaluable indication of the name of the photographer and on the originally private character of this shot.

³⁹ As regards to experience of Nida, see Eva-Monika Turck’s comments, *op. cit.*, p. 19 and following, in particular on *Mein Sommerhaus*, the conference held by the Rotary Club of Munich December 1, 1930.



Yet, Thomas Mann maintains his ironic *habitus* even before the flash. In as much as he is in front of objects, as in his works, that which he presents to his public is always a herm; or rather, that mixture between *understatement* and *noblesse oblige* that qualifies it and determines the symbolic position within the “field”. Just such behavior is found to be prefigured whether in the Goethe of *Poetry and Truth* or whether – and on the contrary – in Nietzsche’s criticism of Wagner as a type of modern artist, both authorial paradigms well known to have been interiorized by Mann. For the representative figure “there cannot be” any distinction between the quotidian and the exceptional, between life and work, because those differences attach themselves precisely within the sphere of his image. Before proceeding with argumentation in this direction, however, it is necessary to briefly conclude the panorama on the process of the symbolic capitalization of the image of the author with some considerations on Mann’s American years.

The ill-concealed awareness of being an “image” permits Thomas Mann, abroad, to navigate his role of being a *public figure* with non-chalance, a role which by that point, at the end of the 1930s, was as obvious as it was connected to the pragmatic rules of American publishing culture and its communicative contexts. The speed with which the writer adapted to the efforts required by the visual culture of American periodicals is still impressive. Finding his face filtered through the lens of photographers from *Condé Nast*, like Edward Steichen for example, the photographer of Hollywood’s divas; or of famous photographers like Man Ray and Liselotte Strewlow⁴⁰ certainly has a strange effect. His portraits were reproduced in high-profile magazines like *Vogue* and *Life*, in which the written word is nothing more than an accessory to the image, as one can see in the first great photographic feature to appear in *Life* on April 17, 1939. In that feature, one of the very few color photographs of the author was reproduced as a full-page image, accompanied by a number of photographs that showed him together with his wife, children and friends and which demonstrated details stolen from daily life like the inevitable desk, study and even his walking sticks. A chronology of

⁴⁰ See Eva-Monika Turck, *op. cit.*, p. 40 and following.



his life and his works in images completes the *reportage*. In this as in no other case it is clear how the photograph itself becomes a story. The private and the public appear juxtaposed without any solution of continuity. Here too work and family, personal history and national stereotype permeate one another and are absorbed into the sphere of the author's name printed in block letters in the title.

One could ask oneself whether all of this corresponds to a loss of style or not. Formulated this way, the question could be poorly phrased, in as much as the relationship between Thomas Mann and the mass media not only concerns the American period in particular; rather, it marks his entire career as a writer from his very beginnings in Munich. In that relationship, that tendency of art and of the artist to make himself *completely exterior* is accomplished, upon which he also reflects, as one can see, at least beginning with the notes for *Spirit and Art*. This tendency, which in any case is not simply a fact of "character", impresses the rhetoric of the image in its constituent aspects of gestuality, of *habitus*, or rather the way of being an author through one's very body. Bringing just such a becoming-surface of the seen back to the pure logic of the market would therefore be reductive as regards the possibilities of play and action within the "literary field" that just such perspective opens up to the writer.

III

Not all of the shots find their way to the market. Many, for one reason or another, are destined to remain in family drawers or photographers' archives. Over the last few years, for example, a series of shots executed for Thomas Mann *in situ* around 1922 by Theodor Hilsdorf⁴¹

⁴¹ Originally from Bingen on the Rhein, Hilsdorf operated around the beginning of the century in Munich, beginning in 1905 highlighting the prestigious qualification of being a *Königlich-Bayerischer Hofphotograph*. On his activity see the recent monograph *Münchener Kreise der Fotograf Theodor Hilsdorf 1868-1944*, edited by Hans-Michael Koetzle and Ulrich Pohlmann (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2007), realized upon the occasion of the homonymous exhibition at the Stadtmuseum of Munich, March 30, 2005 to November 25, 2007. As regards the photographs of Thomas Mann, see p. 56 and following and 180 and following.

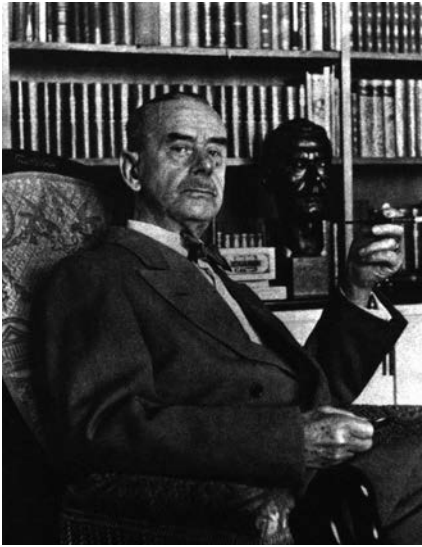


have come back to light. In the first half of the last century, members of Munich's cultural elite and politics posed in Hilsdorf's studio; for example, Alfred Pringsheim, the writer's father-in-law; Karl Wolfskehl, the "Zeus of Schwabing"; and of course the inevitable Stefan George, who was even a schoolmate of the photographer. Hilsdorf's studio was an obligatory address for that part of the bourgeoisie which at the time considered itself as having socially arrived. The official art of Munich, a veritable *Kulturstadt*, was on parade in his photographs, so as to form a sort of Pantheon. The presence of Thomas Mann within this Olympus demonstrates the level of notoriety he had reached. From rediscovered notes one may legitimately suppose that it was the photographer to approach the writer, and not vice versa.⁴² Behind the phenomenon – at the beginning of the 20th century already rather wide-spread – of the *galeries contemporaines* of photographic portraits, lurks the interests of images and profit fed by the vast market of collectors. There where the artistic range of the photographer is based on the literary prestige of the author, the photograph becomes a product to be collected, the photographer a creator of relics that this prestige symbolizes and consequently reinforces.

It is clear that this type of photography should not be placed on the same level as that of the periodicals. The accents, the tones and the gaits are distributed differently. What is important, in fact, is the return of the values of stability and continuity in time, which at times emerges in a monumentalizing of the quotidian in a rather particular way. How does Thomas Mann react to this type of setup? Hereafter we will see how, in this case as well, the author manages to give the monumental in photography his own unique touch, adopting an aesthetic of excess and making the representational requisites of his own image ironic through the superimposition of diverse levels of meaning.

It is not only photography that lends itself to covering the niche of the market reserved for celebratory art, but the plastic and figu-

⁴² In a brief letter, in fact, the author asks for a pair of personal copies of a photograph in which he is, as always, seated at his desk, with the hope of a good price (*ibid.*, p. 56).



3.
Fig. 3. Unknown Photographer,
Thomas Mann 1954, Klichberg. Keystone,
Thomas Mann Archiv, ETH Zürich.

rative arts naturally do so as well. Hans Schwegerle, active in Munich during the first half of the last century, in his long career as a sculptor prepared a series of medals bearing profiles, among which figures also Mann, which closely resemble that of Pisanello.⁴³ One of his famous busts depicting Thomas Mann emerges clearly from the background of a photo taken in 1954 and shows the writer in his study in Klichberg, near Zurich (fig. 3).⁴⁴ The photograph speaks for itself. In the foreground one sees the author in flesh and blood while he poses

in a bourgeois fashion in an armchair. The signs of worldliness, in one hand a cigarette and in the other a pair of glasses, do not escape the photographic eye. In the background we see a library, the materialization and the symbol of his intellectual activity. Immediately beside his face, which appears slightly drawn back from the median axis of his body, one clearly sees Schwegerle's bronze bust towering in a central position, a manifest signal of *dignitas* and social status.

The immortalizing of a person through the rendering of a more or less dependable image from the body's lineaments, a use rooted in Greco-Roman antiquity and beyond, corresponds to a need for representation, individualization and memory deeply rooted in various societies. The portrait may function not only as a means of docu-

⁴³ See Wolfgang Hasselmann, *Hans Schwegerle-Medailien und Plaketten* (Regenstauf: Gietl, 2000).

⁴⁴ It is not by chance that this multilayered image appears on the cover of one of the last collections of the writer's essays, see Michael Ansel - Hans-Edwin Friedrich - Gerhard Lauer, *op. cit.*



mentation, but also as an instrument for the communication of values and identification through precise signs. In any case, the roots of the culture of occidental portraiture are to be found in the emergence of individuality in painting and sculpture and coincide with the progressive abandonment – never fully realized – of forms connected to pre-established types and human characteristics.⁴⁵

Portraits may have a public or private character, and may be destined for institutional, familial or other use. The places and means of consumption of a portrait change according to the function they serve, which does not always depend on the social status of he or she who is represented. The series of “illustrious men”, for example, not only carpeted the walls of the *camere di consiglio* in the Renaissance and the modern age, but have always been collectors’ objects on the part of the bourgeoisie of all classes, levels and epochs. Whether simply for intellectual curiosity or whether for a typical need of the modern human being for visibility and synthesis through cataloguing, collections of celebrity photographs destined for public or private use are numerous. The conception of a *Ruhmeshalle* like Leo von Klenze’s Walhalla, constructed in the first half of the 19th century on the orders of then-king Ludwig I of Bavaria, is based on the same principle of innumerable personal collections of busts, portraits and relics of every type with which a large part of the 19th and 20th century German bourgeoisie loved to adorn and surround themselves.⁴⁶

The ancient ethical principle “*intra illa moenia domus ac penates mei sunt*” was therefore internalized and assimilated by a *Bildungsbürgertum* perennially seeking a *Heimat* above all at a cultural level; or rather, seeking an intimate space in history to connect to their re-

⁴⁵ See in particular Gottfried Boehm, *Bildnis und Individuum über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der italienischen Renaissance* (Munich: Prestel, 1985).

⁴⁶ Friedrich Gundolf, for example, famous Germanicist and member of the George circle, used photographic collections of famous personalities in a cultural context. His studio was dominated by a bust of Caesar. See Michael Thimann, *Mythische Gestalt - magischer Name - historische Person. Friedrich Gundolfs Bibliothek zum Nachleben Caesars und die Traditionsforschung, in Geschichtsbilder im George-Kreis. Wege zur Wissenschaft*, edited by Barbara Schlieben, Olaf Schneider and Kerstin Schulmeyer (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), pp. 317-330.



spective national traditional culture, which in the *fin de siècle* continued to live in the contrast between the awareness of irreparable loss and the euphoria connected to a political and economic phase of expansion.⁴⁷ In this precise sense, the roots of the art of consumption could seem to be the same as that of the avantgarde. Nevertheless, at the very moment this search for an intimate space assumes the characteristics of a collection of “heads” as if they were trading pictures, the formation of personal greatness through the portrait necessarily encroaches upon *kitsch*. The aesthetic category of *kitsch*, not to be confused with the simply trivial, has been recently defined by Wolfgang Braungart as a response of contemporary art to the disorienting logic of the flight of horizons within modern aesthetics, or as an attempt to “return home” through the artistic in which would be translated an immediate domestic need openly colliding with avant-garde estrangement.⁴⁸

In the photograph taken in the 1950s in Kilchberg, the two aspects of *kitsch* and the monumental combine to form, yet again, a whole through the use of irony. Without making the gesture stiffen into a plastic and forced pose, Mann exhibits himself while *nonchalantly* smoking before a representation of himself in bronze. The two planes simply coexist on the surface of the image, they neither neutralize nor strengthen each other. As has already been touched upon, for “representative” individuals like modern writers and artists, the margin between the public and the private is often rather unstable, is anything but clearly defined. Public and private, indeed, coexist in the photographic perspective, as Roland Barthes writes:

Chaque photo est lue comme l'apparence privée de son referent:
l'âge de la Photographie correspond précisément à l'irruption du

⁴⁷ Customs connected to the portraiture of the *Gründerzeit* live on within *Décadence*, arriving, around 1900, at a cohabitation chronologically with the first mature manifestations of the avant-garde portrait. The Latin citation is from Livy, *Ab urbe condita* II-40, §7.

⁴⁸ See Wolfgang Braungart, *Kitsch Faszination und Herausforderung des Banalen und Trivialen. Einige verstreute Anmerkungen zur Einführung*, in *Kitsch Faszination und Herausforderung des Banalen und Trivialen*, edited by Wolfgang Braungart (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), pp. 1-24.



privé dans le public, ou plutôt à la création d'une nouvelle valeur sociale, qui est la publicité du privé: le privé est consommé comme tel, publiquement [...].⁴⁹

Reformulating Barthes' thought, within modernity, the identity of the man of letters ceases to function individually in order to assume a "corporate" status instead. The multiplicative factor of that individuality, which in reality thus becomes a plurality, is given by that photography which, in as much as it is a *medium*, when "read like the private appearance of its referent" tends to make of itself a "body". And precisely through these its bodies, through its being – symbolically – a multiplicity to a large public, the author affirms himself still today on the inside of the literary field.

At this point, a reference to the theory of Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, whose fundamental contributions to the area of theories of the corporation and *Bildwissenschaft* have only recently been acknowledged,⁵⁰ on the king's two bodies is obligatory. The "hybrid" approach which Kantorowicz adopts in his study on the juridical double nature of the sovereign's body, between an antiquarian and an iconological outlook, takes on a paradigmatic value for studies on the image of the representative individual as this position not only helps to distinguish between the documentary component and the socio-cultural component of such an image, but, above all, because his analysis is based on a wide iconographic and literary background following the perspective of a history of the idea of representation itself.

Within modern civilization, the image of the author seems to be swallowed up within the sphere of his or her art, just as at one time the monarch was within his kingdom. It is no accident that the illustrious medievalist's volume closes with a literary example, which focalizes upon the profound historical meaning of Dante's poetic coronation from the hands of Virgil in Canto XXVIII of *Purgatory*.

⁴⁹ Roland Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 1176.

⁵⁰ See Jost Philipp Klenner's considerations, *Souveränes Kleingeld Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1985)*, in *Ideengeschichte der Bildwissenschaft: Siebzehn Porträts*, edited by Jörg Probst and Jost Philipp Klenner (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), pp. 137-160.



According to the historian, the formula read by the Latin poet, “per ch’io te sovra te corono e mitrio” (XXVII, 142), alludes to the symbolic superimposition of a purer and more immortal body, as it is uncontaminated by sin, to the protagonist’s mortal and fleeting body; or, in other words, to the process of redemption of the *Vetus* wrought by the *Novus Adam*.⁵¹ It is a process of metamorphoses of the realized image, according to medieval symbolism, through the investiture, that is, by means of a ritual disguise through which the individual is raised by the worthy representative of all of *humanitas* in spite of retaining in himself the negative traits connected to his transient existence. Through this process of symbolic transfiguration, Dante, in Kantorowicz’s opinion, in as much as he is a poet, by means of his work becomes the promoter of an idea of royalty no longer centered on God and his laws, but on the human being. That the origins of this interpretation of humanism are to be sought in the circles of early 20th century *Bildungsbürgertum* should come as no surprise.

It is precisely this idea that is de-functionalized and made ironic by a play of mirrors, in an authentic *mise en abyme* of the role of the writer in the photograph of Mann here under consideration (fig.3). Through the image in question, which for many reasons should be considered typical for the way in which the author is portrayed, the existence of two planes, or better still, of the writer’s two bodies – one mortal and connected to his person and one immortal and connected to his myth – thus acquires an emphasis of a purely visual nature, the definition of which as “superficial” could be misleading. Indeed, the photographic portrait’s level of meaning is complicated if we intersect its function of *medium* with the same function of the image of the writer as *medium* of the *oeuvre* to which it refers.⁵²

⁵¹ See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s two bodies. A Study in medieval political theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 451 and following.

⁵² The influence on Thomas Mann of the ideologema of Hermes, god of commerce and inventor of writing, has long been an object of research. See in particular Helmut Koopmann, *Die Kategorie des Hermetischen in Thomas Manns Roman “Der Zauberberg”*, in “Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie”, LXXX (1961), pp. 404-422; Hans Wysling, *op. cit.*, p. 254 and following.



Literary reflections of such a *mise en abyme* are not lacking, which demonstrates that the relationship between the body and photography, at a textual level, represents a rather inexhaustible source of themes. Above all, a research perspective based on criteria of the rhetoric of visuality should bear fruit in the case of an author like Thomas Mann who, through a refined perspective of demasking acts as both a cultural analyst as well as a peerless characterizer. This does not mean abandoning potentially detailed research of the figurative sources of the narration. It means, rather, that one must not forget that he or she is always concerned with a “perspective”. In evaluating the relationship between photography and literature, analyses and exegeses should therefore aim at a systematic and in-depth definition between the typologies and the semiotic procedures developed within the respective systems thereby making clear new levels of meaning helpful to their comprehension.⁵³

Limiting oneself to the only cases in which Mann proposes photography and the aesthetic individual in a relationship of reciprocal meaning, one might ask, for example, why the only trace that the absent protagonist leaves to the public rushing to read his “Proclamations” in a story of such a markedly meta-literary subject like *At the Prophet's* is a “kleine [...] Amateurphotographie” resting at the feet of the image of a saint.⁵⁴ Or why, in the very last scene of *Death in Venice*, on the beach there towers “[e]in photographischer Apparat, scheinbar herrenlos, [...] auf seinem dreibeinigen Stativ am Rande der See”.⁵⁵ It is evident that, if this last figure is an integral part of the allegorical landscape of Gustav von Aschenbach's death and transfiguration, the meaning of the allegory underlying it is to be found in the relationship between the cold and indifferent impersonality of the camera's lens and the mythologizing and ecstatic gaze of the dying writer. Finally, that the photographic perspective in *The Magic Mountain* – in the most various means and forms, de-

⁵³ For a tentative multidisciplinary definition of the rhetoric of the image, see the volume *Bildrhetorik*, edited by Joachim Knape (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 2007).

⁵⁴ Thomas Mann, *Beim Propheten*, in GKFA 2.1, p. 411.

⁵⁵ Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig*, in GKFA 2.1, p. 590.



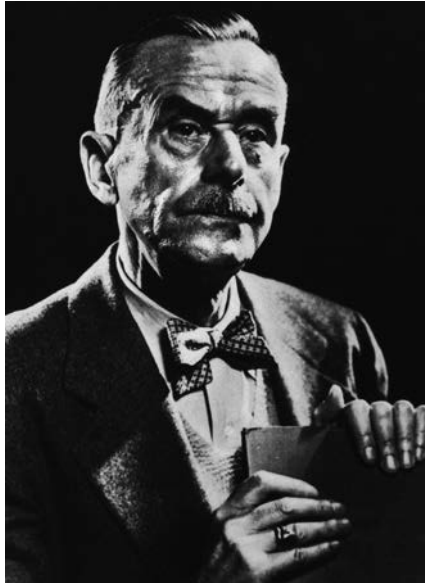
parting from the amateur photograph to the X-ray or to the visual registration of phenomena of teleplastia – constitutes one of the principal nodes of meaning of the “extremely problematic experience” developed in the context of an agonizing search for truth in an age of “great hebetude”, has not been lost on the most attentive commentators.⁵⁶

One further example of this “perspective” is found in *The Genesis of Doctor Faustus*, a text characterized by a continuous alternation of narrative levels in which the reflection upon literature often leaves space to reports of the ongoing war. Thomas Mann, following a typically diaristic logic, indulges in detailed accounts of his then precarious state of health. The insistence on bio-medical datum, the continual return to the description of his conditions, not without stopping to look at “photographische Experimente eindringlicherer Art”,⁵⁷ and the X-ray data of his chest, constitute a veritable red thread structuring the entire narrative setting of the Genesis, where the author’s bodily reality represents, so to speak, the realistic counter melody to Adrian Leverkühn’s fictitious “pains of the little mermaid”, so much so that the narrator himself alludes many times to a possible cause-effect relationship between his illness and the fatigue connected to the drawing up of the book. Author and personality in this manner establish themselves within the same symbolic sphere. The cumbersome presence of the body and illness in the text, when seen as a function of the work, therefore, is nothing more than a reminder of the consubstantiality of the two bodies of the author, which was previously discussed.

It is no coincidence therefore when, at the height of his illness, Thomas Mann recounts the visit of the Canadian maestro Yousuf

⁵⁶ The reference is naturally to the chapters “Der große Stumpfsinn” and “Fragwürdigstes”. See Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. by John E. Woods (New York: Knopf, 1995). On the symbolic theoretical foundations of para-photography in *The Magic Mountain*, see Eric Downing’s interesting interpretation *After Images. Photography, Archaeology and Psychoanalysis and the Tradition of Bildung* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), p. 17 and following.

⁵⁷ Thomas Mann, *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus. Roman eines Romans*, in GKFA 19.1, p. 527. “Photographic experiments of an intimate nature”.



4.
Fig. 4. Yousuf Karsh, Thomas Mann 1946,
Thomas Mann Archiv, ETH Zürich,
Pacific Palisades. Keystone.

Karsh, author of celebrity photographic portraits of markedly heroic and intimate tones,⁵⁸ whose image of the writer with the manuscript of his novel in hand is certainly not removed from Mann's usual style (fig. 4):

Mit großem Apparat, der wiederholt Kurzschluss verursachte, arbeitete er beinahe zwei Stunden lang mit mir an einer Serie von Aufnahmen, von denen einige an glücklich abgefangener „Ähnlichkeit“ und plastischer Lichtwirkung wirklich das Vollendeste darstellen, was ich nicht nur von eigenen Bildern, sondern über-

haupt je gesehen habe. Nur schade, dass ich gerade damals als Modell in so schlechter Form war und die sonst unvergleichlichen Porträts eine Blässlichkeit der Züge und spitzige „Vergeisterung“ zeigen, die wenig Authentisches hat.⁵⁹

With one of his acts of supreme self-irony, in this passage Mann initiates a process of literary demasking of precisely this type of image – and, similarly, his very own – seeking the causes of his particularly “spiritualized” appearance in the illness of his body. A truly paradoxical mechanism, the reporting of the authentic in order to captivate through the inauthentic, which literature, in as much as it is a *medium*, truly shares with photography.

⁵⁸ See Dieter Vorsteher - Janet Yates, *Yousuf Karsh: Heroes of Light and Shadow* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001); Yousuf Karsh - David Travis, *Regarding Heroes* (Jaffrey: Godine, 2009).

⁵⁹ Thomas Mann, *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*, cit., p. 527.