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THE ARTIST IN THE TALES OF HENRY JAMES AND THOMAS MANN

The works of Henry James and Thomas Mann have been analysed by numerous literary critics. Still, they have not often been compared with each other. Brian Lee's "The Novels of Henry James" and Adela Styczyńska's "The Art of Henry James's *Nouvelle*" are two of the rare cases of mentioning the similarities between James's and Mann's books in more than one sentence. Brian Lee comments on certain similarities and differences of Henry James's and Thomas Mann's tales of the artists. He emphasizes the parallelism in their developing the idea of devotion to art, but he also stresses that in Mann's works, in contrast to those of James, art is synonymous with moral decay<sup>1</sup>. Adela Styczyńska draws attention to the similarity of devices used by Henry James in "The Turn of the Screw" and by Thomas Mann in "Der Zauberberg". She compares James's use of the point-of-view technique in his *nouvelle* with Mann's treatment of the scene in which Adrian meets Mephistopheles. She also points out that both writers make use of the motif of sickness to suggest moral deterioration<sup>2</sup>. Still, interesting as they are, these remarks cannot be called analyses because of their shortness.

Henry James and Thomas Mann have never met. It is not known whether they knew each other's works. That James was acquainted with Thomas Mann's production seems most improbable. Usually the impressions from his reading were mirrored in his criticism or notebooks; Mann's name is not there. James's dislike of Germany and Germans might have been not without influence on his choice of the books read by him. On the other hand, it

<sup>1</sup> Cf. B. L e e, *The Novels of Henry James*, London 1978, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. S t y c z y ń s k a, *The Art of Henry James's Nouvelle*, Łódź 1977, pp. 201-202.

may be assumed that Mann had some knowledge of James's works. In two of his letters we find James's name<sup>3</sup>. However, the fact that both letters come from the year 1943 would suggest that Mann came across James's books (if he really did) rather in a later phase of his life. All this causes that one cannot speak about a direct influence of one writer on the other. Still, there are a number of striking similarities between them. Some of them will be dealt with in this paper.

A basic similarity is that of their situations. I do not mean here the fact that each of them for quite a long period of his life was an expatriate and felt obliged to assume an attitude towards his fatherland; true as it is, it should not be overrated in the case of Mann. In fact, it was one of the factors which gave origin to such a masterpiece as "Doktor Faustus". However, Mann became an exile only in 1933, when he was fifty-eight and had been pursuing his literary career for almost forty years. What seems relevant to me is that both writers stood between two worlds, not belonging completely to either of them. For James these two worlds were America and Europe with their cultural backgrounds, for Mann - art and life, or, as it is usually formulated, Geist und Leben (spirit and life). For both the sense of being torn between two spheres had become a driving power of their creative work, impelling them to go into the problems connected with their complexes again and again.

James left America and settled down in Europe, but could not totally identify himself with his new homeland. He had stopped being an American but he had not yet become a European. However, his position "in between" enabled him to see the good and bad sides of both cultures more objectively.

<sup>3</sup> Both letters are addressed to the American translator of Mann's works, Mrs. Agnes E. Meyer. In the first one, from June 18th, 1943, we read: "Übrigens kenne ich ihn [T.S. Eliot] als Essayisten. Ein Aufsatz von ihm, über Henry James, wenn ich nicht irre, hat mir großen Eindruck gemacht [...]". The second letter, from August 27th, 1943, contains the following passage: "[...] es ist der Vortrag, der mich in diesen Tagen gehindert hat, Ihnen zu schreiben, obgleich ich mich Ihnen für Ihren schönen langen Brief vom 15. und besonders noch für das anheimelnde Citat von Henry James so sehr verpflichtet fühlte". Cf. T. M a n n, Briefe, vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main 1961, pp. 323 and 330.

Mann's sense of being attracted to two opposite poles resulted from his specific descent. His father was a merchant and a senator, he represented the bourgeois element. His mother, on the other hand, came from Brazil. "Sie war von ausgesprochen romanischem Typus, in ihrer Jugend eine vielbewunderte Schönheit und außerordentlich musikalisch"<sup>4</sup>. It was not without her influence that Mann developed his artistic talent.

It is not only that in their works there is always an opposition between two contradictory elements. What is more important, these oppositions seem analogous in their general outline. For James Europe with its culture means values of intellect, but at the same time decay; it is sophisticated, but endangered by corruption. This ambivalence is very close to Mann's attitude towards spirit. It is no accident that his characters - artists who create great works - usually suffer from a disease. Also the other poles of these oppositions come close to each other. James's America and Mann's Leben stand for innocence, but at the same time for simplicity little short of primitivism, for robustness and naïveté, vital forces and narrow-mindedness.

Michael Swan observes that "James is like Proust and James Joyce in that he is one of the most autobiographical of the great fiction writers. Not that he used the actual events of his life in his writing in more than a few instances; but that his mental life, his thoughts, conflicts and emotions, found expression in his work. All novelists, of course, do this to some extent, but in James one is always conscious of it"<sup>5</sup>. It seems justified to put Thomas Mann's name beside the names of the authors of "Ulysses" and "À la recherche du temps perdu". His work is at least as much autobiographical as that of James's. Also in his case these autobiographical features are not limited to the fact that his characters take part in the same events as he did, although sometimes the adventures of the persons acting in his books are almost a copy of those of his own. What is much more important, his life and his work form a kind of unity.

<sup>4</sup> T. M a n n, Lebensabriß, [in:] T. M a n n, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 12, Berlin 1955, p. 383.

<sup>5</sup> M. S w a n, Henry James, London 1957, p. 26.

How close the connections between his "everyday" reflections and his books were can be illustrated by the fact that a fragment of the short story "Schwere Stunde" is almost a repetition of a part of his letter written a year before. In this letter, addressed to Katja Pringsheim, his future wife, Mann presents the difficulties and troubles which he encounters in the process of creating his works<sup>6</sup>. This subjective complaint obtained more objective value when it was ascribed to the main character of the short story. The hero of "Schwere Stunde" is by no means Thomas Mann, although the author of "Buddenbrooks" has given him some of his own psycho features. It does not take much trouble to identify him as Friedrich Schiller, but the fact that his name does not appear in the story suggests that Mann wanted to express a more universal meaning and to write a tale about the difficulties of creation in general, instead of limiting himself to an individual case. In his letter to the editor of the journal "Sonntag", he explains that his aim was "bei aller Betreuung des Speziellen und Einmaligen sich über dieses zu erheben und der Schilderung eine symbolische Gültigkeit für die einsamen Nöte alles Schöpfungstums zu verleihen"<sup>7</sup>.

Both James and Mann were conscious artists. All the time their intellect controlled the process of creation. The domination of the intellect in their books is easily seen, as is the comparatively smaller importance of feelings. Paul West describes Thomas Mann, Henry James, and Marcel Proust as Apollonian writers, composing their works according to an earlier developed plan and subordinating their inspiration to cool reasoning. He opposes them to such writers as François Rabelais, Alexander Pushkin, or James Joyce, whom he calls Dionysian writers, creating spontaneously under the influence of sudden spiritual energy<sup>8</sup>.

Another common feature of James's and Mann's literary output is its tendency towards becoming more and more complicated. It

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M a n n, Briefe, vol. 1, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted after H. M a t t e r, Die Erzählungen, [in:] P. F i x e t a l., Das erzählerische Werk Thomas Manns, Berlin und Weimar 1976, p. 485.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. W e s t, Thomas Manns Verlegenheit, [in:] Tomasz Mann w oczach krytyki światowej, Warszawa 1975, p. 444.

seems that this tendency can be ascribed to their conscious approach to writing. First works of both writers were written in the manner of realism, in Mann's case with some traces of naturalism. Gradually, in the next works, new elements were added. New dimension, that of symbolism, enriched the writings; moreover, all episodes became strictly interrelated constituents of a sophisticated pattern. Characteristically, in the works of both writers, sentences became longer and more entangled. This has often been criticized and even ridiculed; nevertheless, these longish sentences played an important part in James's and Mann's novels. Both of them tried to achieve the highest level of organizing their material. They wanted to create works which in their structure and in their subject would encompass the complexity of human experience. Their common aim was to make their novels a carpet, a kind of gigantic tapestry. These images recur in their writings - in their fiction (one of James's stories is entitled "The Figure in the Carpet") and in their criticism<sup>9</sup>.

Among the themes dealt with by both James and Mann one requires special consideration. It is the theme of art and the artist. It would be difficult to find among their contemporaries another writer devoting so much place in his fiction to the discussion of the problems of art and presentation of the figure of the artist. Aesthetic development and moral decay of an artist and the question of devotion to art constitute the centre of two full-length novels by James, "Roderick Hudson" and "The Tragical Muse". Mann presents the artist's fate in "Lotte in Weimar" and "Doktor Faustus", but also in "Buddenbrooks", "Königliche Hoheit" and "Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull" he develops certain elements of this theme.

The motifs mentioned above quite often appear in the short fiction of both writers. Among the various interpretations of the theme of art and the artist which can be found there, two aspects seem to be dominant. One of them is the personality of the artist, the other is the artist's creative activity and the troubles and joys connected with it.

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<sup>9</sup> See H. H a t f i e l d, Thomas Mann, Norfolk 1951, pp. 138-139: "Mann is fond of citing Heine's symbol of the gigantic tapestry to characterize his later novels".

### The Personality of the Artist

Considerations concerning the specific values of the artist's character, attempts at explaining the difference between the artist and other people, and also observations referring to the problem of devotion to art constitute the focus of "Benvolio", "The Lesson of the Master", "The Next Time" by James and "Tonio Kröger" and "Tristan" by Mann.

In "Benvolio"<sup>10</sup>, James's subject is the duality of the artist's life. The main character of the tale, a thirty-year-old writer named after Romeo's friend who tried to keep the Montagues and Capulets from brawling with one another, tries to "keep the two sides of his nature from brawling"<sup>11</sup>. He is a man who belongs to two worlds at the same time. One of them is that of parties, chatter, and entertainment, in short, of worldly life; the other is that of contemplation, reflection, and creative work. Also his love affairs illustrate this dichotomy. He falls in love with two women. The Countess is rich, pretty and perfectly amiable, but also cool and calculating. Her drawing-room is always full of guests. She is very fond of Benvolio, but her knowledge of his works is only superficial. In his ironical way, James writes that "The Countess had a very lively fancy, and she had fingered, nimbly enough, the volume of the young man's merits" (p. 304). Scholastica is also pretty, but is usually dressed in black and behaves with a kind of "nun-like gentleness and demureness" (p. 321). She lives with her blind father, an old sage. Her passion is reading books, and her favourite book is one of Benvolio's authorship. She stands for the intellectual and creative power.

Changing in his moods, Benvolio also changes his preferences. The Countess and Scholastica alternatively dominate in his thoughts and feelings. He becomes disgusted with these swings of his mood and behaviour. He comes to the conclusion that he is too

<sup>10</sup> H. J a m e s, Benvolio, [in:] The Novels and Stories of Henry James, vol. XXIV, London 1923. Page references to James's and Mann's fiction will be made in the text.

<sup>11</sup> L. E d e l, The Life of Henry James, vol. 1, Harmondsworth 1977, p. 422.

independent and irresponsible and that he would be happier if he had "a little golden ball and chain tied to his ankle" (p. 308). However, he is not a man of action. He is not able to do anything conclusive and to make a definite choice of one of the two possibilities.

In the end, the Countess takes the initiative and by means of an intrigue causes that Scholastica goes to the Antipodes. Benvolio cannot forgive the Countess doing this:

"Don't you see", he said, "can't you imagine, that I cared for you only by contrast? You took the trouble to kill the contrast, and with it you killed everything else". (p. 362)

He leaves her to see her never again. From now on he leads an "extremely fretful and unproductive life" (ibid.), until one day he sails to the Antipodes and brings Scholastica home. After this he starts writing again; but "many people said that his poetry had become dismally dull" (ibid.).

The allegory suggests the necessity of making a synthesis of the two sources, symbolized in the story by the persons of the Countess and Scholastica. When Benvolio combines his experiences from a journey to Italy taken with the Countess with the atmosphere of Scholastica's company and the influence of her father's works which he is just editing, he succeeds in writing a "magnificent drama". Both a contact with life and philosophic contemplation are necessary for the artist and complement each other.

In "The Lesson of the Master"<sup>12</sup>, an experienced writer, Henry St George, advises his younger colleague to give up his matrimonial plans if he wants to be a great artist. St George himself may be a warning example of what can happen to an artist entangled in the bonds of marriage. He has been totally dominated by his wife. She has even made him burn one of his books because she has found it "bad". In order to meet the expenses entailed by her luxurious life he has become a producer of popular books - books which he despises. In his cynicism he says, "you're strong if you do read 'em! I couldn't, my dear fellow" (p. 259). It is no accident that James let him write a book characteristically entitled "Shadowmure".

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<sup>12</sup> H. J a m e s, The Lesson of the Master, [in:] The Complete Tales of Henry James, vol. 7, Philadelphia and New York 1962.

He does not deny that he is well off and that he can enjoy the pleasures of life. But he explains that it has been just this enjoyment that has destroyed his artistic talent. He tries to make his friend Overt see the fact that artists have to give up certain things:

"Try to do some really good work".

"Oh, I want to, heaven knows!"

"Well, you can't do it without sacrifices; don't believe that for a moment", said Henry St George. "I've made none. I've had everything. In other words, I've missed everything". (p. 265)

St George's intentions may be not quite altruistic, because soon he marries the girl whom Overt gave up. Still, during his first marriage St George was able to write only second-rate books, and after having got married again he ceases writing altogether, whereas Overt manages to create a magnificent work. Having lost as a man, Overt has gained as an artist.

The fate of St George, called by James "the great misguided novelist" (p. 216), is an illustration of the disastrous effect of too close a contact with life. The story seems to suggest that the writer should escape the danger of limiting his freedom. An artist devoted to his art can produce masterpieces; a writer whose independence is limited, for example by matrimony, can either write conventional literature or - at best - keep silent.

It seems appropriate to distinguish here between two aspects of life: between living as gaining experience of life and living as something that disturbs the writer and often makes him cheapen himself as an artist. James has never formulated this differentiation explicitly; however, it is implicitly contained in many of his works. The "experience" is something that the artist should strive to achieve; the example of Benvolio can be an illustration of it. The "worldly life", on the other hand, should be avoided. Especially matrimony seems dangerous to James. He gives an expression to this conviction of his in the story of St George; he makes it also one of his points in "The Next Time".

"The Next Time"<sup>13</sup> is an antithesis to "The Lesson of the Master". St George complains that after having married he is

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<sup>13</sup> H. J a m e s, *The Next Time*, [in:] H. J a m e s, *Fifteen Short Stories*, New York 1961.

able only to write popular books of no great artistic value. Ralph Limbert, the main character of this story, tries very hard to write a popular book in order to get money - first to be able to marry, then to keep his family, and in the end to be able to go to Egypt to improve his undermined health. Each time he fails. Ironically, his failures result not from lack of genius, but from excess of it. Even when he is sure that he has been primitive as much as possible, the work "unfortunately" turns out to be a masterpiece, which will find approval of critics but which will not sell.

As in "The Lesson of the Master", the family is shown here as a power that makes the artist look for popularity almost at any price. Instead of thinking of creating a true work of art, he is interested in making a commercial success. Limbert's mind is dominated by the thought how to find means to keep his children, his wife and Mrs. Stannace, his mother-in-law:

Within doors and without Limbert's life was overhung by an awful region that figured in his conversation, comprehensively and with unpremeditated art, as Upstairs. It was Upstairs that the thunder gathered, that Mrs. Stannace kept her accounts and her state, that Mrs. Limbert had her babies and her headaches, that the bells for ever jangled at the maids, that everything imperative in short took place - everything that he had somehow, pen in hand, to meet, to deal with and dispose of, in the little room on the garden-level. (p. 300)

The problems presented by James in the three stories discussed above can be also found in Thomas Mann's short story "Tonio Kröger"<sup>14</sup>. The situation of the main character, Tonio Kröger, is similar to that of Benvolio. He is also a writer, and he also stands between two worlds. His father, Konsul Kröger, is a typical bourgeois. He will recur in Tonio's memory as "ein langer, sorgfältig gekleideter Herr mit sinnenden blauen Augen, der immer eine Feldblume im Knopfloch trug" (p. 216). His mother is just the opposite of the consul. Her dark hair, her exotic name Consuelo, her coming from "ganz unten auf der Landkarte" (ibid.), and - last but not least - her artistic talents make her totally different from other people in the town. The influence of his so

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<sup>14</sup> T. M a n n, Tonio Kröger, [in:] T. M a n n, Sämtliche Erzählungen, Frankfurt am Main 1963.

berühmter Mann geworden bin? Ja, das würdest du und würdest dreimal recht daran tun! Und wenn ich, ich ganz allein, die neun Symphonien, "Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung" und "Das Jüngste Gericht" vollbracht hätte, - du würdest ewig recht haben zu lachen..." (pp. 262-263).

For Tonio, the creative man, be he as great as Beethoven, Schopenhauer, or Michelangelo, is inferior to "normal" people. Therefore even now, when he is famous, he feels to be worse than an average burgher. This feeling of inner split, so strongly dominating in his psyche, has made Lisaweta Iwanowna describe him as "ein Bürger auf Irrwegen", "ein verirrter Bürger" (p. 240).

Tonio is aware of his standing between two worlds. He knows that for the bourgeois he is an artist and for the artist he is a bourgeois, in both cases being something dubious. Still, he is also conscious of an advantage that this position gives him. He realizes that "wenn irgend etwas imstande ist, aus einem Literaten einen Dichter zu machen, so ist es diese meine Bürgerliebe zum Menschlichen, Lebendigen und Gewöhnlichen" (p. 265). Thanks to his finding himself just in between he is able to make a synthesis of both influences, resulting in a true work of art.

"Tonio Kröger" was published in book form together with five other stories, one of which, "Tristan"<sup>15</sup>, can be treated as a companion piece to it. In this short story, Thomas Mann shows how dangerous for an artist the lack of a connection with life can be. Detlev Spinell, a grotesque figure throughout, is a writer who lives in a sanatorium not because he is ill but "Des Stiles wegen" (p. 179). He stays there because he "das empire nicht entbehren kann" (ibid.). Spinell adheres to the idea of art for art's sake. His characteristic feature is sentimentality, which distorts his vision of the events around him even so much as to make him live in an isolated world of his dreams. His way of seeing the reality is summarized in the description of his manner of looking at women. He looks at them quite superficially, only as much as to awaken his imagination. He believes that "es ist

<sup>15</sup> T. M a n n, Tristan, [in:] M a n n, Sämtliche Erzählungen,

eine bessere Art, als wenn ich ihnen plump und wirklichkeitsgierig ins Gesicht starrte und den Eindruck einer fehlerhaften Tatsächlichkeit davontrüge..." (p. 181). No wonder that his only book is nothing but dull and artificial:

Es spielte in mondänen Salons, in üppigen Frauengemächern, die voller erlesener Gegenstände waren, voll von Gobelins, uralten Meubles, köstlichem Porzellan, unbezahlbaren Stoffen und künstlerischen Kleinodien aller Art. Auf die Schilderung dieser Dinge war der liebevollste Wert gelegt, und beständig sah man dabei Herrn Spinell, wie er die Nase kraus zog und sagte: "Wie schön! Gott, sehen Sie, wie schön!" (p. 176)

He has nothing to say to his readers, his work is dead.

Several years later Mann wrote words which could be treated as a kind of summary of the views presented in "Tonio Kröger" and "Tristan":

Die Moral des Künstlers ist Sammlung, sie ist die Kraft zur egoistischen Konzentration, der Entschluß zur Form, Gestalt, Begrenzung, Körperlichkeit, zur Absage an die Freiheit, die Unendlichkeit, an das Schlummern und Weben im unbegrenzten Reich der Empfindung - sie ist mit einem Wort der Wille zum Werk. Aber unedel und unsittlich, blutlos und widrig das Werk, das aus der kalten, klugen und tugendhaften Geschlossenheit eines Künstlertums geboren ward! Die Moral des Künstlers ist Hingebung, Irrtum und Selbstverlust, sie ist Kampf und Not, Erlebnis, Erkenntnis und Leidenschaft<sup>16</sup>.

Mann stresses here how necessary for the artist is dedication to his work. He also points out the necessity of making a sacrifice. Still, he says that the artist must not lose his contact with other people lest he should produce works of no artistic value. This opinion does not seem to differ from that of James expressed in "Benvolio". For both writers, a synthesis of devotion to art and contact with life is an ideal to be striven for.

#### The Artist and His Work

James's and Mann's artists are often shown while creating their works. The process of creation, difficulties connected with

<sup>16</sup> T. M a n n, Süßer Schlaf, [in:] M a n n, Gesammelte Werke, vol. 12, pp. 355-356.

it, moments of the artist's triumph and depression, stand in the centre of several stories of both writers.

The theme of "The Madonna of the Future"<sup>17</sup> is artistic failure. Its main character, Theobald, is an American painter living in Florence. The idea of his life is to paint a masterpiece of all times, "a Madonna who was to be a résumé of all other Madonnas of the Italian school" (p. 201). In order to be adequately prepared to perform this task, he spends much time studying works of the artists of the past and learning their secrets. Still, he has decided not to produce anything imperfect and therefore not to try to paint his opus magnum before he is absolutely ready to do it. However, once he portrays his model's baby, a sick boy, just before the child's death. He paints him hastily to spare him the pain of his position, and the result is surprising. The drawing, done in red chalk,

represented a very young child, entirely naked, half-nestling back against his mother's gown, but with his two little arms outstretched, as if in the act of benediction. It was executed with singular freedom and power, and yet seemed vivid with the sacred bloom of infancy. (p. 206)

This is his Madonna. Unfortunately, it is nothing more than a sketch. Working spontaneously, he manages to portray the Madonna although the form is very poor. However, this is the only time when spontaneity gets the upper hand and makes him forget his fear of producing something faulty. When at last he decides to start painting, it is too late. He is not able to be creative any more:

"I waited and waited to be worthier to begin, and wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my creation was growing, it was dying. I've taken it all too hard! Michelangelo didn't, when he went at the Lorenzo! He did his best at a venture, and his venture is immortal". (pp. 217-218)

He has not understood early enough that an ideal vision is unattainable, that the artist can only try to come close to it but he will never be able to create something as perfect as the ideal.

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<sup>17</sup> H. J a m e s, The Madonna of the Future, [ins] H. J a m e s, The Madonna of the Future and Other Early Stories, New York 1962.

The short story is also a reflection on the problem of the difference between genius and skill. Theobald has created a mental picture of his masterpiece but he is not able to transform it into a real one. His hand cannot follow the orders of his mind. He states bitterly:

"I'm the half of a genius. Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning, ready fingers of some dull copyist or some trivial artisan who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch!" (p. 218)

There is a person in the story who seems to be this "other half". It is a sculptor who produces figures of cats and monkeys in various configurations. These figures "were strikingly clever and expressive, and were at once perfect cats and monkeys and very natural men and women" (p. 215). However, although masterly in form, they are "peculiarly cynical and vulgar" (ibid.). Genius and skill are two quite different things. Only one of them, separated from the other, is not enough to make one an artist.

In the short story "The Next Time", partly discussed above, troubles connected with the creation of a work of art are presented in a humorous way. Limbert, the genial writer trying to write a popular book, has a contrasting figure in Mrs. Highmore, the author of 80 best-sellers. Being aware that it is "the age of trash triumphant" (p. 286), she knows that in such a situation the commercial success does not go with the artistic value of a book. Therefore "She yearned to be, like Limbert, but of course only once, an exquisite failure" (ibid.).

James shows the futility of those attempts. Limbert will never succeed in pleasing the public, as Mrs. Highmore will never write anything better than her usual potboilers. Still, Mrs. Highmore's efforts are nothing but ridiculous, whereas Limbert's "failure" is in fact his artistic triumph. He cannot change his style, and this is the cause of his artistic success. This finds expression in the narrator's commentary:

The only success worth one's powder was success in the line of one's idiosyncrasy. Consistency was in itself distinction, and what was talent but the art of being completely whatever it was that one happened to be? One's things were characteristic or they were nothing (p. 295).

In an exaggerated way, caused by the humorous character of the short story, James presents the opinion that artistic genius in a sense guarantees high quality of a work of art. However, to draw the conclusion that in general a genius does not have to trouble to improve his style because everything that he creates is bound to be a masterpiece would be to misunderstand the author. James was never satisfied with the form of his works, the extent of changes made in the texts prepared for the New York Edition is a proof of it.

Also one of his characters, the writer Dencombe in the tale "The Middle Years"<sup>18</sup>, is a "passionate corrector, a fingerer of style; the last thing he ever arrived at was a form final for himself. His ideal would have been to publish secretly, and then, on the published text, treat himself to the terrified revise, sacrificing always a first edition and beginning for posterity and even for the collectors, poor dears, with a second" (p. 126).

Dencombe knows that his life, and also his literary career, slowly but irrevocably comes to an end. From the perspective of his age he looks back on what he has done. He reads his last book, and its charm, already forgotten, comes back to him. He realizes that "His career was over, no doubt, but it was over, when all was said, with that" (p. 117). His last work seems to him a crowning achievement of his life.

Still, also another feeling comes over him. Being aware of the value of the book, entitled characteristically "The Middle Years", he perceives that he could have done more, that it has cost him too much time to produce this work:

It had taken too much of his life to produce too little of his art. The art had come, but it had come after everything else. At such a rate a first existence was too short - long enough only to collect material; so that to fructify, to use the material, one should have a second age, an extension. This extension was what poor Dencombe sighed for. As he turned the last leaves of his volume he murmured "Ah for another go, ah for a better chance!" (pp. 118-119)

The desire for a second chance grows after Dencombe has met Doctor Hugh, a passionate reader of his books. Doctor Hugh con-

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<sup>18</sup> H. J a m e s, *The Middle Years*, [in:] H. J a m e s, *Selected Stories*, London 1957.

firms his opinion of the high artistic value of his last work, but Dencombe is aware that this book is only a first step, that the experience which he has gained would enable him to write more and better if he only had time to do it.

It is only on his deathbed that he changes his mind. He is told by Doctor Hugh that he has renounced a fortune only to be close to his favourite writer. Dencombe realizes that "The thing is to have made somebody care" (p. 139). This is the touchstone of any artist's accomplishment. He has found his reader who understands his message and who is ready to make a sacrifice for it. Dencombe is also able to formulate the truth of the fate of the artist:

"A second chance - that's the delusion. There never was to be but one. We work in the dark - we do what we can - we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art" (ibid.)

The words "our doubt is our passion" could be the motto of Thomas Mann's short story "Schwere Stunde"<sup>19</sup>. The story presents thoughts of a writer working on his drama. It is long after midnight, he is alone in his study, and his mind dwells on his troubles. He is only thirty-seven but he feels old and exhausted. His health is not good any more, the years of uninterrupted work have undermined it. Now he has to struggle against his illness. His work seems to him both his pride and his misery, his heaven and his doom.

He is tormented by the doubts whether his work has any artistic value. It seems to him that everything in it is bad. Still, he knows that these torments are part and parcel of the fate of any true artist:

Das Talent selbst - war es nicht Schmerz? Und wenn das dort, das unselige Werk, ihn leiden machte, war es nicht in der Ordnung so und fast schon ein gutes Zeichen? Es hatte noch niemals gesprudelt, und sein Mißtrauen würde erst eigentlich beginnen, wenn es das täte. Nur bei Stümpern und Dilettanten sprudelte es, bei den Schnellsufriedenen und Unwissenden, die nicht unter dem Druck und der Zucht des Talentes lebten. Denn das Talent, meine Herren und Damen dort unten, weithin im Parterre, das Talent ist nichts

<sup>19</sup> T. M a n n, Schwere Stunde, [in:] M a n n, Sämtliche Erzählungen,...

Leichtes, nichts Tadelndes, es ist nicht ohne weiteres ein Können. In der Wurzel ist es Bedürfnis, ein kritisches Wissen um das Ideal, eine Ungenügsamkeit, die sich ihr Können nicht ohne Qual erst schafft und steigert. Und den Größten, den Ungenügsamsten ist ihr Talent die schärfste Geißel... (pp. 297-298) <sup>20</sup>

This unnamed hero has some features in common with James's Dencombe. One of them is the awareness of how painful the process of creation is. Another, more important, is their knowing that there will be no "second chance":

Die Jahre der Not und der Nichtigkeit, die er für Leidens- und Prüfungsjahre gehalten, sie eigentlich waren reiche und fruchtbare Jahre gewesen. (p. 296)

Mann's artist comes close to James's "fingerer of style" also in his passionate striving to achieve the best form of his work:

Vom ersten rhythmischen Drange innerer Kunst nach Stoff, Materie, Möglichkeit des Ergusses - bis zum Gedanken, zum Bilde, zum Worte, zur Zeile: welch Ringen! welch Leidensweg! Wunder der Sehnsucht nach Form, Gestalt, Begrenzung, Körperlichkeit... (p. 299)

Like "The Middle Years", the story ends with a positive accent. The artist's crisis is only temporary. His work is finally finished:

Und es wurde fertig, das Leidenswerk. Es wurde vielleicht nicht gut, aber es wurde fertig. Und als es fertig war, siehe, da war es auch gut. Und aus seiner Seele, aus Musik und Idee, rangen sich neue Werke hervor, klingende und schimmernde Gebilde, die in heiliger Form die unendliche Heimat ahnen ließen, wie in der Muschel das Meer saust, dem sie entflicht ist. (p. 300)

In "The Madonna of the Future", Theobald has not produced his work for fear of making something imperfect. Mann suggests that if an artist is a true one, he will in the end succeed in creating a true work of art. In this, he comes close to James's idea expressed in "The Next Time".

The tales of James and Mann discussed above show many similarities. Rarely is it a similarity of the plot, but quite often the ideas conveyed by the stories are analogous with each

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<sup>20</sup> See also note 6.

other. Similar problems draw the attention of both writers. James and Mann concern themselves with difficulties of creation, with doubts which torment the artist. Both of them ridicule spurious artists. Still, what is much more important, they not only see similar problems but they also approach them in a similar way. This can be observed best in their reflections on the process of creation which are to be found in "The Middle Years" and "Schwere Stunde".

The aim of this paper has been to point out similarities between Henry James's and Thomas Mann's works. It is by no means an exhaustive analysis, even as far as the theme of the artist is concerned. Because of its complex structure, it was not possible to discuss here "Der Tod in Venedig", the tale which shows many affinities with James's fiction, affinities that go far beyond the scope of this article. In this situation, a longer study dealing with James's and Mann's literary output seems necessary.

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#### PORTRET ARTYSTY W NOWELACH HENRY JAMESA I TOMASZA MANNA

Artykuł jest poświęcony omówieniu podobieństw w przedstawianiu postaci artysty w opowiadaniach Henry'ego Jamesa i Tomasza Manna. Choć dorobek obu pisarzy doczekał się licznych opracowań, z rzadka tylko zwraca się uwagę na podobieństwa w ich twórczości. Z tego względu w pierwszej części artykułu pokrótce omówiono zbieżność pewnych motywów występujących w utworach H. Jamesa i T. Manna. Dla obu pisarzy charakterystyczne jest poczucie zawieszenia między dwoma biegunami; w przypadku Jamesa tymi biegunami są Ameryka i Europa ze swymi tradycjami kulturowymi, w przypadku Manna - środowisko mieszczańskie i świat sztuki. Znajduje to odbicie w występującym w wielu ich dziełach konflikcie między dwiema przeciwstawnymi postawami. Tematem, któremu James i Mann poświęcają dużo miejsca w swoich utworach, jest artysta i jego twórczość. W dwóch dalszych częściach artykułu, zatytułowanych "Osobowość artysty" oraz "Artysta i jego dzieło", omówiono dwa główne aspekty tego tematu. Oba pisarze są świadomi tego, że artysta, chcąc stworzyć wartościowe dzieło, musi zdecydować się na pewne wyrzeczenia i skoncentrować się na swojej pracy twórczej. Oba jednak zgodnie podkreślają, że nie może to doprowadzić do całkowitego wyobcowania. Wspólna jest im świadomość trudności nieroz-

zgodnie związanych z procesem twórczym. Obaj też są nieufni wobec tych, którym tworzenie przychodzi zbyt łatwo. Ze względu na ograniczoną objętość artykułu pominięto opowiadanie "Śmierć w Wenecji"; występujące w nim istotne podobieństwa do utworów Jamesa wykraczają poza temat niniejszej pracy i wymagają odrębnej analizy.