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The World of Yesterday versus The Turning Point: Art and the Politics of Recollection in the Autobiographical Narratives of Stefan Zweig and Klaus Mann

“A turning point in world history!” I hear people saying. “The right moment, indeed, for an average writer to call our attention to his esteemed literary personality!” I call that healthy irony. On the other hand, however, I wonder if a turning point in world history, upon careful consideration, is not really the moment for everyone to look inward.

Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*¹

Abstract: This article revisits the world-views of Stefan Zweig and Klaus Mann by analyzing the diverse ways in which they shaped their literary careers as autobiographers. Particular focus is given to the crises they experienced while composing their respective autobiographical narratives, both published in 1942. Our re-evaluation of their complex discussions on literature and art reveals two distinctive approaches to the relationship between aesthetics and politics, as well as two alternative concepts of authorial autonomy within society. Simultaneously, we argue that in spite of their different approaches to political involvement, both authors shared a basic understanding of art as an enclave of humanistic existence at a time of oppressive political circumstances. However, their attitudes toward the autonomy of the artist under fascism differed greatly. This is demonstrated mainly through their contrasting portrayals of Richard Strauss, who appears in both autobiographies as an emblematic genius composer.

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¹ Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: F. Ungar, 1983), 47.

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On February 23rd, 1942, some three weeks after Stefan Zweig's suicide, Klaus Mann wrote in his autobiography, *The Turning Point*:

The news of Stefan Zweig's suicide was so utterly unexpected that I at first refused to believe it. Since I have read his farewell message, and moreover, reread some of the notes I received from him recently, the event seems less incredible but all the more saddening. [...] The humanist and zealous man of letters, the connoisseur and creator of subtle lovable things – he could not bear the gruesome spectacle of a world bursting asunder.²

However, in spite of this mournful tone, at the bottom of the very same page, Mann develops an idea for a satirical article on suicide:

It may be most timely, just now, to debunk the romanticism of suicide. With death being so terribly close to all of us, the suicidal gesture appears pompous [...]. The lugubrious fuss of preparations and farewell messages becomes disproportionate, indeed, a bit fatuous, considering the perfunctory apocalypse of mechanized modern warfare.³

These diary entries, included in the autobiography, hint at Mann's appreciation of Zweig, yet also reveal some of the tension that existed between the two men. This article seeks to further explore this tension by inquiring into their two autobiographies: *The World of Yesterday* (*Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers*) and *The Turning Point* (originally written in English), both published in 1942.⁴ Each autobiography has gained what may be called "classic" status, and also serves as a popular textbook for those interested in the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the authors had much in common: bourgeois backgrounds, an affinity for the biographical genre, a desire to speak to both "high" and "low" audiences, and the experience of exile. Additionally, their deaths were surrounded by similar circumstances, and the reception of both of their autobiographies has been informed by the fact that they each committed suicide soon after their publication: Zweig in Brazil (on February 2nd, 1942) and Mann in the south of France (on May 21st, 1949), shortly after having completed his German translation and revision of *The Turning Point*. Uprooted and exiled, the autobiographies thus may be seen as *Nachlässe* that document not only the historical events, but also cultural tendencies and ideological impulses of the two authors.

² Klaus Mann, *The Turning Point: Thirty Five Years in this Century* (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1984), 356–357.

³ An entry from February 14th, 1942, *ibid.*, 357–358. The German edition, translated and edited by the author, and published posthumously in 1952, does not contain this entry: Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt: Ein Lebensbericht* (Munich: S. Fischer, 1952).

⁴ Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday* (London: Cassel and Company, 1947).

This article sets out to reread the autobiographies of these two literary émigrés, placing each author's concept of art's role in society within the discourse of political exile. We wish to revisit Zweig and Mann's artistic worldviews by focusing on the various ways in which they shaped their literary careers as autobiographers in relation to the crisis they each experienced during the construction of their narratives.⁵ We suggest that a re-evaluation of the complex discussions regarding literature and art in their memoirs, mainly around the "boiling point" of 1933, reveal two distinctive approaches to the relationship between aesthetics and politics, as well as two alternative concepts of authorial autonomy within contemporary society. This will be demonstrated mainly through their different portrayals of composer Richard Strauss (1864–1949).

Recent scholarly accounts have offered a novel understanding of these authors' personal politics, as well as their differing modes of political engagement. Noticeably, some of these accounts reveal that Zweig, especially during the interwar period, was very actively engaged in commenting on political developments from a literary, pacifist and humanistic point of view.⁶

However, this new historiography stands in contrast to a critique present in the early reception of *The World of Yesterday*, a critique that portrays Zweig as an irresponsibly apolitical writer. During this time, Zweig was perceived by many as an artist who sought to approach art as a "holy temple," a museum

5 Both authors explored the literary genre of biography extensively. Among their many works are: Klaus Mann, *Alexander: Roman der Utopie* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1930); *Kind dieser Zeit* (Berlin: Transmare, 1932); *Symphonie Pathétique: Ein Tschairowsky-Roman* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1935); *Vergittertes Fenster: Novelle um den Tod des Königs Ludwig II. von Bayern* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1937); *Escape to Life*, co-authored Erika Mann (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939); *André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought* (New York: Creative Age, 1943). Stefan Zweig, *Drei Meister: Balzac–Dickens–Dostojewski* (Leipzig: Insel, 1920); *Romain Rolland: Der Mann und das Werk* (Frankfurt a. M.: Rütten & Loening, 1921); *Drei Dichter ihres Lebens: Casanova–Stendhal–Tolstoi* (Leipzig: Insel, 1928); *Marie Antoinette: Bildnis eines mittleren Charakters* (Leipzig: Insel, 1932); *Triumph und Tragik des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Wien: Herbert Reichner, 1934); *Maria Stuart* (Wien: Reichner, 1935).

6 See for example: Vivian Liska, "A Spectral Mirror Image: Stefan Zweig and his Critics," in *Stefan Zweig Reconsidered: New Perspectives on his Literary and Biographical Writings*, ed. Mark H. Gelber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2007), 203–218; Mark H. Gelber, "Autobiography and History: Stefan Zweig, Theodor Herzl and Die Welt von Gestern," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 57 (2012): 3–33; Mark Gelber and Anna-Dorothea Ludewig, eds., *Stefan Zweig und Europa*, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2011); Stephan Resch, "Widerstrebet nicht dem Bösen mit Gewalt: Die Rezeption des Tolstoischen Pazifismus bei Stefan Zweig," *Neophilologus* 96, 1 (2012): 103–120; George Prochnik, *The Impossible Exile: Stefan Zweig at the End of the World* (New York: Other Press, 2014); Daniel Laqua, "Pacifism in Fin-de-Siecle Austria: the Politics and Limits of Peace Activism," *The Historical Journal* 57 (March, 2014): 199–224; 223. For recent studies on Mann, see footnote 9.

created by an elite of genius individuals. Hannah Arendt was among those who, as early as 1943, had initially formulated this view in her critique of the autobiography: “Naturally, the world that Zweig depicts was anything but *the* world of yesterday; naturally, the author of this book did not actually live in the world, only on its rim. The gilded trellises of this peculiar sanctuary were very thick, depriving the inmates of every view and every insight that could disturb their enjoyment.”⁷

Furthermore, many of his contemporaries often attributed Zweig’s apolitical stance to his manifested aversion to politics both in his fiction and in his public attitude. He refused to join the political struggles of his time, was reluctant to participate in political action, and refrained from “contaminating” literature with political concerns. He was also accused of selfishness, cowardice and lack of solidarity with those who were less fortunate than himself.⁸

While current research presents a more nuanced analysis of Zweig’s relations to politics, as well as his commitment to social change, this article seeks to re-examine Zweig’s inner world, related to his previous apolitical image, in light of new understandings regarding the political dimension of his work. As we shall see, notwithstanding his growing political awareness during the 1930’s, Zweig nonetheless maintained a distinction between the public and private sphere, a concept that led him to construct a solipsistic literary existence vis-à-vis the collapse of liberal discourse. In that sense, Zweig’s insistence on the existence of an inner world does not necessarily contradict his pacifist-humanist stance. However, in relation to fascism, it may be seen as a compatible position, or at least as one that is insufficiently effective.

Contrary to Zweig’s early reception, Mann was paradigmatically perceived by many of his contemporaries as a politically engaged activist-writer.⁹ He was strongly devoted to the anti-fascist cause, and is nowadays mainly known as

7 Hannah Arendt, “Stefan Zweig: Jews in the World of Yesterday,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 58–68; 60.

8 Liska, “A Spectral Mirror Image,” 210. According to Liska, since Zweig’s death many documents have emerged that prove Zweig’s discreet generosity and support for friends and acquaintances, though perhaps these new accounts have not sufficed to undo his image as an irresponsibly apolitical writer (ibid.).

9 This is still a dominant interpretative paradigm in Mann’s case. For a comprehensive view on Mann’s progressive stance, see: Shelly L. Frisch, Introduction to Mann, *The Turning Point*, 1–13; James R. Keller, *The Role of Political and Sexual Identity in the Works of Klaus Mann* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); Andrea Weiss, *In the Shadow of the Magic Mountain: The Erika and Klaus Mann Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008); Samuel Clowes Huneke, “The Reception of Homosexuality in Klaus Mann’s Weimar Era Works,” *Monatshefte* 105, 1 (2013): 86–100.

the author of *Mephisto* (Amsterdam, 1936), a novel that provides a critique of the artist-collaborator's position under fascism, and one that according to Max Brod stands as "one of the sharpest foils against Nazism."¹⁰

As to the relationship between the two authors, one may say that it had a rather promising start: Mann received early encouragement from Zweig during the formative stage of his career, when he had struggled to distinguish his voice from that of his father:

The most encouraging message came from Zweig himself. The tireless promoter of striving talents gave me one of his most hearty and heartening pep talks: "saying go ahead young friend! There may be prejudices against you because of your famous parentage. Never mind. Do your work! Say what you have to say!"¹¹

However, the friendship turned sour in the fall of 1933. Mann was planning to inaugurate a journal for writers in exile, titled *Die Sammlung*. The first issue appeared in September, and Zweig's name was mentioned in it as a future contributor. Zweig had accepted the editorial team's invitation to write for the journal based on the understanding that the new venture was a "purely" literary issue. The mere fact that Zweig had agreed to contribute was soon to cause him difficulties due to the journal's political tenor. Immediately after the first issue was published, Zweig withdrew his offer of collaboration. According to biographer Oliver Matuschek, "He preferred to wait [...] until everyone was speaking with one voice – and until that happened he would not be working for any of the journals."¹²

In contrast to Mann's clear and decisive stance rejecting any contact with the new regime, Zweig was more ambivalent and obviously less decisive. His reaction was still driven by worries concerning the sales of his books in Germany and his desire to preserve the sanctity of his social world. He was subjected to certain pressures from Strauss, with whom he was collaborating, and from his publisher Anton Kippenberg (who had also been Strauss's publisher). Both strongly urged Zweig to withdraw his offer to publish in Mann's journal. Therefore, shortly afterwards, a press announcement disclaiming Zweig's involvement in *Die Sammlung* was sent by Kippenberg on Zweig's behalf to the Ger-

10 Originally: "Eines der schärfst geschliffenen Florette gegen das Nazitum." Quoted in: "*Ruhe gibt es nicht, bis zum Schluss*": Klaus Mann (1906–1949): *Bilder und Dokumente*, ed. Uwe Naumann (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 334.

11 Mann, *The Turning Point*, 113. Their friendly relationship is also well documented in existing correspondence, which amounts to dozens of letters spanning a period of almost twenty years, beginning in the early 1920s and lasting until Zweig's suicide.

12 For further details on this affair see: Oliver Matuschek, *Three Lives: a Biography of Stefan Zweig*, trans. Allan Blunden (London: Pushkin Press, 2011), 265.

man book trade journal,¹³ which in turn provoked outraged responses from various opponents of the Nazi regime.

In response to these accusations, Zweig wrote anxiously to Mann specifying that he did not want his letter reprinted or made public in any form: “My dear Klaus Mann, this business has made me ill [...] Need I say that I have never in all my life entertained the least desire or thought of publishing such an inflammatory document, which would be a kind of moral suicide for me?”¹⁴ By suggesting that forced political involvement may lead to “moral suicide,” Zweig again reveals his characteristic aversion to politics, which would become ever stronger throughout his life.

Zweig later summed up his view on the matter in his correspondence with Strauss, articulating his concept of literary autonomy at the time of crisis:

In my own mind [*innerlich*] I have found my way back to my work. There was much I had to ward off. Attempts continue to drag me into political arguments, even by the coarsest means. Political people cannot understand that there are others to whom all aggressiveness and one-sidedness is repulsive and who, like Archimedes in his time, even in the turmoil of war, merely want to draw their quiet circles.¹⁵

Zweig’s usage of the word *innerlich* in this letter should not be overlooked. Several scholars have connected the notion of *Innerlichkeit* (inwardness) with the apolitical stance shared by the fin-de-siècle Central European bourgeoisie, of which Zweig had been a proud member. Carl P. Schorske paradigmatically explored this cultural tendency in his *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, highlighting the desire to maintain an artistic enclave separated from the political sphere.¹⁶

Indeed, one may detect in Zweig’s letter to Strauss an expression of this autonomous impulse, originating in the turn of the century conceptualization of art in relation to society. Even in the face of the new political reality of the 1930’s, Strauss and Zweig strove to maintain their somewhat anachronistic worldview. In this light, the *Sammlung* incident reaffirms Zweig’s consistent un-

¹³ *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, October 14, 1933.

¹⁴ Stefan Zweig to Klaus Mann, November 18th, 1933. Quoted in: Matuschek, *Three Lives*, 266.

¹⁵ Zweig to Strauss, January 23rd, 1934. See: *A Confidential Matter: the Letters of Richard Strauss and Stefan Zweig, 1931–1935*, trans. Max Knight; foreword by Edward E. Lowinsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 40.

¹⁶ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981); idem, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). In recent years, different historians have undermined many of Schorske’s main assumptions. See, for instance: *Rethinking Vienna 1900*, ed. Steven Beller (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001).

willingness to pay the price for political engagement. In an earlier letter dated April 13th, 1933, he writes to Strauss: “Politics pass, the arts live on, hence we should strive for that which is permanent and leave propaganda to those who find it fulfilling and satisfying.”¹⁷

In this context, Zweig’s desire to turn inwards should not be seen merely as a regression towards his formative fin-de-siècle years, but rather as a means of protection against an oppressive political situation. Under these new circumstances, it served him as a complex survival mechanism. *The World of Yesterday*, written almost a decade later, represents Zweig’s last clear attempt to carve out a subjective space of existence through a literary medium at a time of crisis.

Zweig’s choice to turn inwards may also be understood as a subtle mode of political resistance in praxis. Yet, at the same time, the way in which Zweig articulates his *Innerlichkeit* in the autobiography transforms this praxis-relevant choice into an aestheticized gesture within the realm of art. In his essay *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Herbert Marcuse maintained that: “The utopia in great art is never the simple negation of the reality principle but its transcending preservation [*Aufhebung*] in which past and present cast their shadow on fulfillment. The authentic utopia is grounded in recollection.”¹⁸ Bearing this conceptualization in mind, it is possible to observe that once Zweig’s *Innerlichkeit* is publicly manifested as a text, it loses its negating potential. Hence, the notion of resistance that had been part of his biography undergoes a process of reification in the autobiography, becoming a rigid cultural myth.¹⁹ However, the intersection of biography and autobiography, of outside telling and controlled recollection, reveals the boundaries of *Innerlichkeit*: how real can *Innerlichkeit* be if it is promiscuously displayed for a posthumous audience?

Through his persistence on constructing a historical autobiography from an aestheticist perspective, in which art functions as an antidote to political reality, Zweig had in fact undermined the political potential of his position: namely, the potential to articulate the aesthetic as a “dissonant” act within the oppressive political sphere. Curiously enough, as will now be demonstrated, it appears that

¹⁷ *A Confidential Matter*, 35.

¹⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, trans. Herbert Marcuse and Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 73.

¹⁹ In an aphorism titled “*Monade*” in his *Minima Moralia*, Adorno cites the problematic “liberal pattern” that characterizes Zweig and Strauss’s stance. Adorno denounces the position of the liberal-individualistic artist as one that is pretentious and irresponsible. In the context of an oppressive society, he claims, the individual’s separatism strips him of the ability to be free, transforming one instead into a weakened abstraction. See: Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 148–150.

both Zweig and Mann, who was anything but indifferent in his political orientation, were drawn to the same aestheticist pattern in their autobiographical narratives.

I. *Sunset* versus *Olympus*: In Search of a Lost Literary *Heimat*

A comparison of two interrelated chapters at the core of each autobiography, Zweig's *Sunset* (*Sonnenuntergang*) and Mann's *Olympus*,²⁰ shows a somewhat unexpected resemblance.²¹ These chapters are inserted into the narratives right before the handling of the Nazi rise to power and each author's forced exile (Mann's in 1933, Zweig's in 1938). Thus, the political drama of the events preceding the collapses of both the Weimar Republic and the Austrian Republic is postponed, and instead an in-depth discussion on art is inserted. By using the literary technique of suspension, both authors invoke artistic discourse in order to achieve a dramatic effect before the culmination of the political events. This similarity demonstrates how, in spite of the ideological rift between the authors, both chose to approach the aesthetic sphere and render it as sacred.

Therefore, art appears in both chapters as an enclave of "humanistic existence," as opposed to the Nazis's "barbaric usurpation," which they discuss immediately afterwards. In this sense, both writers constitute art as a domestic, harmonious sphere, depicted in contrast, or as an antidote, to the harsh reality that lurks outside the confines of the narrative.

In *Sunset* Zweig discusses the years 1924–33, which he considered "peaceful days." While the first half of *Sunset* deals with his impressions of post-revolutionary Russian territories, the second half is devoted to his return to his home in Salzburg. As the author states: "It was pleasant to travel during those years of the last period of calm, but home-coming, too, was agreeable."²²

²⁰ Mann's *Olympus* chapter exists only in the original English, and was omitted by the author from his later, postwar, German edition. Whether Mann had in fact decided that this chapter was superfluous for the German reader, or whether he regretted its inclusion in the original, is a matter left for speculation. See: Klaus Mann, *Der Wendepunkt: Ein Lebensbericht mit unbekannten Texten aus dem Nachlass* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2006).

²¹ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 248–270; Mann, *The Turning Point*, 196–229.

²² Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 262.

Whereas art is indeed discussed throughout Zweig's autobiography, nowhere is this theme, or leitmotiv, more telling than during this exact moment in the narrative. His enthusiastic account of the Salzburg summer festival, which he refers to as a "modern Olympics of the arts," serves to demonstrate his vision of the new Salzburg, the small town that had become a lively cultural center overnight – no longer a peripheral town between Germany and Austria but the capital of European culture.²³

Zweig's polarized view of art versus politics, as well as home versus world, is aptly captured in the following description:

Fate had again granted a wish of mine which I had hardly dared dream, and our house on the Kapuzinerberg had become a European house [...] what happy hours we spent with our guests there, looking out from the terrace into the beautiful and peaceful countryside without suspecting that on the Berchtesgaden, directly opposite, sat the one man who was to destroy all this!²⁴

In contrast to the restless voyages he recounts elsewhere in his memoir, it is only here, with the establishment of the Salzburg festival as a leading cultural event, that Zweig's spiritual and temporal homes unite (his house was in fact named "Villa Europa"). His repeated references to celebrated artists who came to Salzburg are essential to his case, in that they invoke his cosmopolitan vision of a community of geniuses. However, as a result, the artistic activity that had taken place seems to lose its meaning as a productive experience, reduced to a mere journalistic item, or a catalog of a long-gone golden era. Nonetheless, he assumes his position as a self-absorbed patron and host to all artists – including those who had already been driven into exile from Nazi Germany, such as the Berlin born Jewish conductor Bruno Walter. Ultimately, for Zweig, art at this critical time signifies a return home. Art not only offers him a safe haven, it also plays a key role in the process of re-defining European culture as a non-nationalistic, cosmopolitan entity following the crisis of "the Great War."²⁵

While Zweig marveled at the festival's harmonization and celebration of living legends in the public sphere, he also turned his private home into a

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 263. It is not surprising that Zweig felt he had become part of the festival only after Hugo von Hofmannsthal's untimely death in 1929. For further details on the tensions that resided amongst the organizers of the festival, see: Lisa Silverman "Max Reinhardt between Yiddish Theater and the Salzburg Festival," in *Jews and the Making of Modern German Theatre*, eds. Jeanette R. Malkin and Freddie Rokem (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 197–218.

²⁵ For further discussion on the ideology that lies at the core of the Salzburg Festival, see Michael P. Steinberg's classic analysis: Steinberg, *Austria as Theater and Ideology: The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

“pantheon” for both the living and the dead. Thus, he built a wall of grandeur, a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in order to escape reality:

Many desired and famous guests came into our house in those years, but in the hours of solitude, too, a magic circle of exalted figures whose shadow and trace I had slowly succeeded in conjuring up, gathered around me: in the manuscript collection, which I have already mentioned, the greatest masters of all times, had assembled in their handwriting. That which I had begun amateurishly at the age of fifteen had, in the course of the years, thanks to much experience, larger means and an even augmented passion – developed from a mere accumulation into an organic structure and I feel free to say into a real work of art.²⁶

This section of the memoir resonates with Arendt’s critique of Zweig’s fetishistic tendency to appropriate the past in relation to his social rank: “[Zweig’s] collections were stolen from him, and with them his intimacy with the famous dead. His house in Salzburg was seized, and with it his bond with the famous men among the living.”²⁷ Still, later in the chapter, Zweig offers an illuminating reflection on loss, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s own thoughts on collecting, that Arendt is not attentive to in her critique:

My joy always lay in the act of creating, never in what had been created. So I do not lament for what I once owned; for if we, driven and hunted in these times which are inimical to every art and every collection were put to it to learn a new art, it would be that of parting from all that once had been our pride and our love.²⁸



Similarly to Zweig’s *Sunset*, Mann’s *Olympus* appears as an artistic *intermezzo* before the political chapter titled *The Writing on the Wall*, which recounts the events that led to the collapse of the Weimar Republic. The chapter begins with Mann’s aesthetic credo, not so distant from Zweig’s:

The worship of masters and martyrs is the finest privilege of youth. [...] I certainly was, and for that matter, still am, a loyal follower, fervently devoted to those, living or dead,

²⁶ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 264.

²⁷ Arendt, “Stefan Zweig,” 120. Arendt herself had engaged in biographical writing, though, at the time of Zweig’s death her work on Rahel Varnhagen remained unpublished. See: Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (London: East and West Library, 1958).

²⁸ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 268. In his essay “I Am Unpacking My Library” Benjamin states that “only in extinction is the collector comprehended.” See: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 67.

who modeled and enriched my intellectual life. It is from the example of my saints and heroes that I drew the strength for my own endeavors.²⁹

However, if Zweig's approach to his pantheon is rather hermetic and sealed, particularly in the objective manner of an observer-collector, Mann's approach is more idiosyncratic. Mann avoids the former's tendency to mythicize work of art; instead he attempts, in a self-reflective manner, to provide a map to his alternative *Olympus*, which contains his cultural heroes.³⁰ Thus, he reveals more awareness of power relations and of the cultural construction of the artistic canon. Mann's goal, therefore, is to mediate his literary tastes and provide the reader with more than merely personal aesthetic judgment, as we shall now see.

His first step in this direction is to position himself within the patriarchal father-son structure. His iconoclasm is embedded in his resistance to his father's generation: "Fame and authority of the father become a stimulus, a thorn, an obsession to the striving son. Inevitably he will try to imitate the paternal model and at the same time to underline his own originality."³¹ At this moment, we witness Mann's act of resistance to hegemonic culture, accompanied by a critical stance, which does not exist in Zweig's case. For instance, this attitude is manifested in his dismissal of Goethe and Wagner – his father's idols and emblematic symbols of German *Kultur*. Mann's resistance is also embodied in his self-fashioned Catholicism, as opposed to the protestant ethos he associated with his father: "I prided myself on being disorderly and eccentric, as my father is punctual and disciplined."³²

Among his alternative heroes one may find an abundance of writers associated with an avant-garde, homosexual background, including Rimbaud, Wilde, Whitman and Gide, to name a few – all of whom were according to his view marginalized figures, somewhat detached from "normative" bourgeois society.

Another prominent literary figure introduced along these lines is Heinrich Heine, whose outsider qualities and divided position Mann chooses to highlight:

The Heine of my Olympus is by no means the popular author of the "Book of Songs," but the wretched invalid of his last years in Paris, Stricken with disease and poverty. [...]

²⁹ Mann, *The Turning Point*, 196.

³⁰ For instance, Zweig maintains in the chapter that: "If we look at the whole world with its countless insoluble riddles the secret of creation remains still the deepest and the most mysterious one." See: Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 264.

³¹ Mann, *The Turning Point*, 196.

³² Ibid. In fact, entire segments in the chapter invoke a catholic mystery play. The chapter ends with the words: "Sanctus, Sanctus, repeat the sinners and prophets. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (ibid., 229).

The versatile go-between and interpreter between French and Germanic culture. Jewish and Christian philosophies, becomes a prophet – forecasting with striking insight the scope and impact of developments subterranean, invisible at that time, but which have meanwhile revealed their devastating dynamics. His warnings to the French to beware of the Teutonic danger anticipate not only the disasters of 1871 and 1914 but, moreover, the calamity we now witness.³³

From these examples one notices Mann's profound identification with a liminal cultural position – one that was not an inherent part of Zweig's own sensibilities, as a cultural interpreter and as reader.³⁴ Thus, their interpretations of literary currents, as well as the divergent ways in which they saw the artistic field in relation to their own self-definition, are still considerably different.

Bearing this difference in mind, we shall now outline one of the watershed moments in their autobiographical interrelations through an examination of their encounters with composer Richard Strauss. Their profoundly contrasting accounts of Strauss, a living legend who outlasted many of his colleagues from the fin-de-siècle era (and also outlived Zweig and Mann themselves), will help uncover another dimension of the epistemological chasm that existed between the authors. First and foremost, we shall explore their abilities and inabilities to compromise and diminish their own egos vis-à-vis the emblematic symbol of hegemonic German culture, the figure of musical genius.³⁵

II. “Der Fall Strauss”

The recurring figure of Strauss plays a crucial part in the two autobiographical narratives. Both authors discuss the composer's problematic official position as *Präsident der Reichsmusikkammer* during the Nazi regime, served between the

³³ Ibid., 208.

³⁴ Zweig's situation in exile was emotionally rendered by him as one of external and materialistic constraint, which had set him off course. However, this new situation did not necessarily lead him to critically rethink the past: “I thought without fear of death, of illness, but not the remotest picture came into my mind of what I was still to live through. That homeless, pursued, hunted, as a refugee I would again have to wander from land to land, across oceans and oceans, that my books would be burned, forbidden, proscribed, that my name would be posted in Germany like a criminal's and that those friends whose letters and telegrams lay before me on the table pale if by chance they encountered me.” See: Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 269.

³⁵ Another depiction of the figure of the German genius musician and his diabolic potential from the 1940's is, of course, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. See: *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn erzählt von einem Freunde* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1947).

years 1933–1935. Although they reach vastly different conclusions, neither one denies Strauss's opportunistic character.

One may start this episode in the aftermath of the war: in 1945 Mann visited Strauss incognito at his home in Garmisch-Partenkirchen as a US army journalist writing for the newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. The 1984 English reprint of *The Turning Point* includes a short text, entitled “An American Soldier Visits his Homeland”, in an appendix.³⁶ On the occasion of his return to Munich, his hometown, Mann provides a strongly critical account of his encounter with Strauss, who is depicted as the emblematic demonic composer. Mann stresses the composer's loss of humanistic values and his moral decadence. His judgment is based on Strauss's formal rhetoric, alongside his collaboration with the Nazi regime. He thus writes:

To him nothing in the world seemed to matter except the personal affairs of Dr. Richard Strauss – his comforts, his income, his fame [...] Hitler? No, Dr. Strauss didn't think that Hitler was so good. His musical tastes were deplorably one-sided. “Wagner, and Wagner again! Hardly ever did he go to hear any of my operas...” I looked at him, flabbergasted. Could I ever enjoy *Rosenkavalier* and *Salome* again, having listened to his shockingly callous talk?³⁷

Through his encounter with the genius-artist-collaborator, Mann conveys his critical stance toward the aestheticist conduct that characterized Strauss and many others of his milieu, who ignored the ethical dimension of politics in order to further maintain the autonomy of the arts. Therefore, Mann concludes: “What a strange country this was, when even the creative artists, even the geniuses seemed to have forgotten the language of humanity!”³⁸

Contrary to Mann's rigorous critique that led to a state of *Heimatlosigkeit*,³⁹ Zweig, who did not live to revisit German culture after the war, praised Strauss's dedication to the act of artistic creation during troubled times. Shortly after Hugo von Hofmannsthal's sudden death in 1929, Zweig, flattered by the composer's invitation, collaborated with Strauss on a new joint project, the opera titled

³⁶ Mann, *The Turning Point*, 367–372.

³⁷ Ibid., 372. In a private letter to his father, dated May 16th, 1945 (written in English), Mann further expressed his aversion towards Strauss in a less subtle manner: “It was one of the most amazing hours I have ever passed in my life. His selfishness and naiveté are absolutely staggering – and in fact rather disgusting. [...] It's just that he happens to be the most rotten character one can possibly imagine – ignorant, complacent, greedy, vain, abysmally egotistic, completely lacking [sic] in the most fundamental human impulses of shame and decency.” See: Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten 1922–1949* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991), 535–6.

³⁸ Mann, *The Turning Point*, 372.

³⁹ Mann ends his postwar account following the visit of Strauss, with a disillusioned statement: “You can't go home again.” Ibid., 372.

Die schweigsame Frau (1935). The collaboration caused the composer, already in his official post, some trouble with the Nazi authorities. The fascinating correspondence between composer and librettist throughout the whole affair is an instructive historical document about dissidence and collaboration, politics and culture.⁴⁰

More importantly, Zweig and Strauss's relationship was based on a mutual understanding of art – and music in particular – as self-sufficient and indifferent to politics.⁴¹ As Michael P. Steinberg has pointed out, the artistic compatibility between Zweig and Strauss was based on the harmony between their personal ambitions. As artists, both wished to exist outside politics, and, with *Die schweigsame Frau*, to create “an old fashioned comedy” void of political concerns.⁴²

However, despite Strauss and Zweig's rejection of formal politics, in their cultural dialogue one can still trace a gesture of resistance to the totalitarian regime, in that they insisted on an independent creative enclave in the face of fascism. This form of ambiguous, indeed non-reflective, resistance is fully articulated in an intriguing letter Strauss sent to Zweig in June 1935. Although Zweig never received the letter, it was read by the authorities and led to the composer's dismissal from his official post.⁴³ At this critical moment in their collaboration, Strauss had lucidly revealed his “blind” individualism:

Do you believe that I am ever, in any of my actions, guided by the thought that I am “German” (perhaps, *qui le sait*)? Do you believe that Mozart composed as an “Aryan”? I know only two types of people: those with and those without talent. The people [*Das Volk*] exist for me only at the moment they become audience. Whether they are Chinese, Bavarians, New Zealanders, or Berliners leave me cold. What matters is that they pay full price for admission.⁴⁴

40 For a rich survey of Strauss's conduct under the Nazi regime, as well as his spiritual and creative life at this time, see: Bryan Gilliam, “*Friede im Innern*: Strauss's Public and Private Worlds in the mid 1930's,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 3 (2004): 565–598.

41 Illuminating in this regard are Zweig's words of advocacy on Strauss's behalf: “Despite his art-egoism, which he always acknowledged openly and coolly, he was inwardly indifferent whatever [was] the regime.” See: Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 282.

42 Michael P. Steinberg, “Politics and Psychology of *Die Schweigsame Frau*” in *Stefan Zweig: The World of Yesterday's Humanist Today: Proceedings of the Stefan Zweig Symposium*, ed. Marion Sonnenfeld (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 227–235.

43 For a detailed historical account of this incident, see: Albrecht Riethmüller, “Stefan Zweig and the Fall of the Reich Music Chamber President, Richard Strauss,” in *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933–1945*, eds. Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2004), 269–291.

44 *A Confidential Matter*, 99–100.

In spite of – or perhaps because of – Strauss's instrumental, capitalistic and in that respect, also a-national justifications, Zweig held him in high regard. He saw in him an estimable colleague who shared his meritocratic views. His willingness to forgive the composer's faults and make some pragmatic concessions in his favor, distinguishes Zweig's stance from that of Mann's.

Gradually, while working on their next project, Zweig became aware of Strauss's exploitative approach towards him. Especially offensive to Zweig was the composer's request that the author provide him with another libretto without giving him credit for his work, due to Nazi prohibition.⁴⁵ Yet, even seven years after the abrupt end of their relations, Zweig chose to address the matter in an awe inspired tone: "Friends urged me to protest publicly against a performance [of *Die schweigsame Frau*] in Nazi Germany. But fundamentally I loathe public and pathetic gestures; besides, I was reluctant to cause difficulties for a genius of his rank."⁴⁶

Unlike Zweig, Mann sought to publicly expose and reproach the composer as a "German phenomenon" regardless of his aesthetic contribution to the culture Mann grew up in. Yet, simultaneously, it seems that Mann, much like Arendt and Theodor Adorno, tends to disregard the limited space that was left for subjective expression and minor acts of defiance under fascism, dismissing it as vain activity. Thus, during the postwar era, when historians began to construct the dominant *Sonderweg* interpretative paradigm in relation to German history, Strauss and Zweig's apolitical artistic stance was identified retrospectively as emblematic of their generation's political decadence. Adorno devoted himself to propagating a negative portrait of Strauss during this time, accusing him of being responsible for promoting "the cult of inwardness," with which we have dealt here extensively.⁴⁷

However, in another moment in *The Turning Point* from June 16th, 1942, one finds Strauss's name mentioned once more, in a different light.⁴⁸ Surprisingly,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁴⁶ Zweig, *The World of Yesterday*, 282.

⁴⁷ In this context, Adorno claims that "Strauss's superficiality is itself a quality of form. It thumbs its nose at the inwardness which stood before its eyes in caricature as Hans Pfitzner's German soul [...] Music, nonobjective, and non-conceptual, moves inwards of its own accord. Hence, it became involved in the cult of inwardness as practiced by declining segments of the bourgeoisie, especially in Germany – that impotent and malicious reversion to the private sphere, tucked away in its nook with all its joys and miseries." See: Adorno, "Richard Strauss, Born June 11, 1864," trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber, pts. 1 and 2, *Perspectives of New Music* 4, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 1965): 14–32; no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1966): 113–129; 16.

⁴⁸ As he mentions on the top of the page, it is also his father's birthday. See: Mann, *The Turning Point*, 365.

Mann confesses, in a rather sentimental mood, that he and a close friend listened, late at night, to records of Strauss's opera *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911):

Hofmannsthal's libretto is undoubtedly one of the finest things ever written for the queer medium which is opera. The moment that struck us most was when the aging Marschallin [the heroine] confides to her young lover that sometimes she would get up in the middle of the night and stop all clocks in her house [...] Time flies, she is no longer young, she has to renounce her love. She will die. It is all very simple. The simplest things are the most mysterious ones. The basic facts of our lives are horrifying beyond lament.⁴⁹

As we may gather from his account, even Mann himself occasionally sought comfort in the distant sounds of Strauss's perhaps most lyrical and harmonious musical piece. As Vivian Liska argues, part of the resentment towards Zweig among his contemporaries was due to the fact that many of them saw in him "a spectral image of themselves and the world they no longer wanted to call their own. The unburied spirits of a former age that continued to inhibit them."⁵⁰ Bearing Liska's argument in mind, what could possibly demonstrate this spectral image more vividly than Mann's above-mentioned melancholic act of listening to *Der Rosenkavalier*, a work that deals with the difficulty and necessity of letting go? Furthermore, this mode of introspection, or even self-understanding through a work of art (and more closely with a female figure), is undoubtedly an echo of Zweig's own inner world.

III. Conclusion

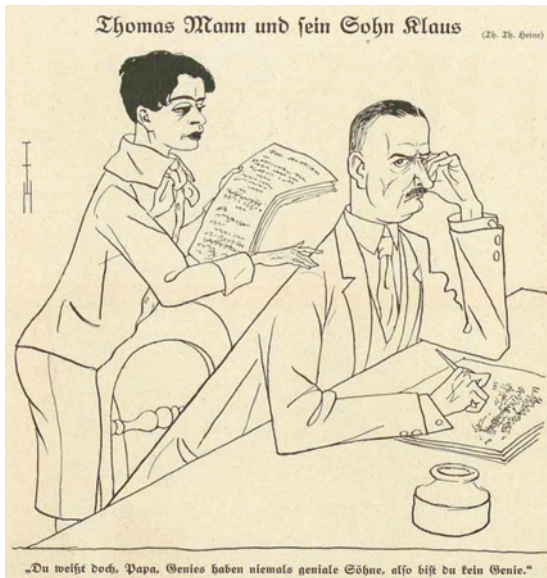
In this article we have attempted to show that both Zweig and Mann sustained a similar spatial division of *outside* versus *inside* that continued and even intensified during the Nazi era. Despite their numerous differences, using their juxtaposition as an analytic tool has enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of each author.

Both were preoccupied with a set of similar themes, such as the politics of the German literary canon; the notion of inwardness vis-à-vis the political situation; the interrelations between art and society; the cult of artistic genius – particularly the figure of the German composer. Zweig and Mann shared a basic modernist drive towards artistic self-assertion within oppressive political circumstances. This gesture of "resistance," in their autobiographies, was dialectically projected upon a somewhat over-aestheticized past. Nevertheless, each drew different conclusions about how to face the inheritance of apolitical bourgeois culture.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Liska, "A Spectral Mirror Image," 215.

In a letter to Zweig from May 13th, 1934, relating to his work on a new novel as “the most beautiful distraction” from troubled times, Mann concludes: “The circle of readers to whom one turns, inwardly, grows ever smaller –.”⁵¹ As this statement reveals, beyond any divergences these popular and industrious writers might have had, both understood early on the political – and artistic – problem of their time as a problem of their dwindling audience due to the new politics of exclusion, banning and exile.



Thomas Mann and his son Klaus. “You do know, Papa, geniuses never have genius sons, therefore you are no genius.”⁵²

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⁵¹ In the original: “Der Kreis der Leser, an den man sich innerlich wendet, wird ja immer kleiner - -”. Our translation. See: Klaus Mann, *Briefe und Antworten*, 167.

⁵² “Du weißt doch, Papa, Genies haben niemals geniale Söhne, also bist du kein Genie,” illustration by Thomas Theodor Heine, *Simplicissimus* (November 9th, 1925): 454, accessed April 27, 2014, http://www.simplicissimus.info/index.php?id=6&tx_lombkswjournaldb_pi1%5BissueId%5D=1478&tx_lombkswjournaldb_pi1%5Baction%5D=showIssuePages&tx_lombkswjournaldb_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=YearRegister&cHash=66ac5dd77990f9e2a065fa945e4fe7d9.