APPENDIX

Remarks on the Occasion of the Seventieth Birthday
of Thomas Mann (June 6, 1945) Made
at a Dinner Given to Him in
Chicago, June 29, 1945

Thomas Mann began his speech at the celebration of Freud's eightieth birthday, nine years ago in Vienna, by speculating concerning the propriety of selecting a poet and man of letters to do honor to a man of science. Those reflections may well return to his mind tonight and lead him again, as have the characters in his novels, to philosophic speculations concerning the relations of art and science, for his friends—with irony or with insight—have chosen a philosopher to do him honor on his seventieth birthday. There is irony in the selection, since the deep-seated antipathy which separates philosophy from poetry finds expression both in the philosopher's conviction that poetic feeling and diction weaken and obscure the truths vindicated by logical rules and the goods defined by moral prescriptions and also in the poet's knowledge that formal rules and traditional prescriptions yield truths that achieve neither progress nor conviction and goods that achieve neither justice nor utility. But the irony has its basis in an insight that philosophy and poetry merge in their higher reaches where truth encompasses mysteries and beauty expresses truths.

This same irony and its accompanying insight provide the themes and the forms of Thomas Mann's novels and short stories. It is the irony and the insight which have through the ages constituted the genius of Platonism and which, with a further turn of irony, have found expression for the forces that move in our times, not in the dialectic of a philosopher who writes with the sensitivity
of a poet, but in the tales of a novelist who writes with the profundity of a philosopher. Plato gave dramatic and poetic expression at once to the demonstration that the poet, inspired by divinity or madness, perceives truths and achieves values not otherwise accessible to man, and also to the conviction of the philosopher and the lawgiver that the teller of tales, whose morals and meanings are contrary to law and to truth, cannot be tolerated in either the perfect state of the Republic or the second-best state of the Laws. The novels of Thomas Mann mark him a philosopher who brings to life intellectuals, wordy and ineffectual, like Settembrini, or sinister, like Naphta, in the company of poets, like Tonio Kröger, who possess—and are sick with—knowledge, and men of feeling, like Pieperkorn. Plato took an art form, the mime, a conversation-dialogue employed by Sophron, Xenarchus, and others to exhibit characters opposed to each other in the discussion of themes, and transformed it to the uses of philosophy in the dialogue which provides, in the oppositions of characters and principles, an instrument for the discovery of truth. Mann took the novel, a narrative of characters and actions, which contemporary novelists were employing to set forth the relations of men to each other and the flow of their thoughts, and transformed it, using philosophy to explore the foundations of those relations and the significance of those compelling and questioning sequences. When Mann wrote Buddenbrooks, the novel was passing, as an art form, from a structure adapted primarily to plot and narration to a structure in which the development of the character of men, of families, and of times assumed primacy. He completed and published the Magic Mountain at a time when novelists built their narratives about the internal dialogue and the stream of thought that constituted the life of their characters. He almost alone among novelists built a new structure for the novel on the intellectual content which animates the associations of men and the flow of their thoughts and feelings, and he revolutionized the novel by using philosophy to give it form, as Plato had revolutionized the mime by putting it to a philosophic use. The change in the form of the novel no less than the change of its content removed the antithesis between art and philosophy. According to Thomas Mann, “the supremacy of the novel in modern writing” is a consequence “of the crisis in which the novel finds itself and of the fact that it must issue forth from this crisis as something new, hitherto unknown and more intellectual.”

Poetry merges with philosophy in the philosophy of Plato, and arguments depend in Plato's philosophy on poetic insight into character, situation, and feeling and on poetic use of language; yet at the height of his poetic artistry Plato was suspicious of poets. The novel becomes intellectual in the art of Thomas Mann, and plots develop an argument which sets forth the confrontation of full and varied philosophies; yet at the height of his speculations Mann retained his fears of the literal-minded limitations of purely intellectual analyses. He reproached Freud, properly, for esteeming philosophy too little, and he expressed his conviction that “in actual fact philosophy ranks before and above the natural sciences and that all method and exactness serve its intuitions and its intellectual and historical will.” Yet he came to philosophy and to his intellectual preoccupations by way of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Novalis and Kierkegaard, by speculating on will rather than by celebrating reason, and he found himself in the realm of the psychology of the unconscious even before he read Freud. Plato is a poet, but he argues that the true poet is one who knows and is therefore a philosopher. Thomas Mann is a philosopher, but he sees the true philosopher as one who transcends the limits of rationality in his understanding and who is therefore a poet. Profound differences separate a philosophy which finds the criteria of poetry in truth from an art which finds the criteria of philosophy in poetic insight, yet the two philosophies find similar preoccupations when they treat of love. In the Symposium Plato has Socrates repeat the tale of Diotima which culminates in the ladder of loves that men mount from physical to spiritual and finally to transcendent beauty. Thomas Mann has Hans Castorp recognize the attractive force of love: “It is love, not reason, that is stronger than death,” and although the magnificent tale of Castorp’s effort to mount the ladder...
of loves ends with the recognition that his "prospects are poor," his recognition of love in the adventures of the flesh and in the spirit of a dream removes all bitterness from the contemplation of his undetermined fate. In both versions of the movement of love the direct influence of music on the spirit of man gives ground and form to the more indirect influences of the refinements of argument.

The art of Thomas Mann is a structure of dialectic in which the normal unreflective life of the bourgeois is set over against the thoughtful creative life of the artist; in which knowledge is set once more against art; analysis against form; disease, physical or mental, against health; tradition against change. It is a dialectic, however, not a static or literal opposition, for art, as a departure from the normal, is grounded in and strengthened by its roots in the normal, and as antithesis to knowledge it is insight and consciousness of knowledge; form is the consequence and resolution of analysis; health is based on experience of the unhealthy; and innovation is dependent on tradition. The oppositions of our times merge and are reconciled in the evolution of the tales which Thomas Mann spins out of them. He realizes in his storytelling the functions of wisdom and philosophy for our times. When Aristotle sought to define the nature of wisdom, he found it equally exemplified in the philosopher—the lover of wisdom, Philosophos—and in the lover of myths—Philomythos. The modern world might well learn this wisdom from Thomas Mann, for we have lost our sense of the profundities of truth because we have confused truths with facts that we can see and feel and test by their utility, and we have come to suspect the myth, because we suppose literal-mindedly that, unlike history, the myth did not happen and therefore is not true. Thomas Mann has employed the monumental cycle of the Joseph novels to teach us that the myth is true precisely because it has happened so many times that it must be retold again and again to explore the dimensions and varieties of its truth. There is no first time in human history, but every beginning turns out to be the twilight of another beginning. "What concerns us," he concludes, "is time's abrogation and dissolution in the alternation of tradition and prophecy."

**Appendix**

The lover of myth, the philomythos, does not need explanation—except on festive occasions such as these—by those who aspire to the love of wisdom, to philosophia, for his art is explained in his works. The problems of the artist are the subject of his novels and short stories—the artist's struggles with the man of action (which was once even carried to the extreme of supposing that the artist could be a nonpolitical man) and the man of science. But ultimately all three—doer, knower, and maker—are transformed into one: the maker. Even in the face of this resolution we easily forget that the poet is, as his name implies, the maker. Yet the recognition of the poet as maker is essential to appreciate what Thomas Mann says of his collected short stories—that they are "an autobiography in the guise of a fable." They are the autobiography of a poet—of a maker—who could say with Tonio Kröger, "I am looking into a world unborn and formless, that needs to be ordered and shaped." His works have been the creation of an artistic order so conceived that it is also the discovery of an intelligible order in the materials from which the art has been constructed and the projection of a practical order in the ends accessible in future action and life illuminated by artistic vision.