

The Artist as Daemon: *Tonio Kröger* and the Urge for Creativity

Mas'ud Hamdan

University of Haifa, Israel

Department of Theater and Department of Arabic Language and Literature

79 Main Road

Mount Carmel, Isifya 30090

Abstract

This article explores the relationship between personality and creativity as reflected in Thomas Mann's novella, Tonio Kröger. The interactions between love and suffering and creation, artist and audience are the main intersections that will be examined. The central argument is that Tonio Kröger, the eponymous hero of this novella, is a poet who clearly corresponds to the schizoid character type as defined by Anthony Storr (1972). This serves as a successful means for self-expression and as compensation for his loneliness, sense of meaninglessness in life and the impotence that derives from existential weakness, or as Laing puts it "ontological insecurity" (Laing, 1960: 40-64). Engagement in creative work grants the schizoid artist the power to bear the curse of his existence. The existential curse of the schizoid derives from his experience of profound contradictions that prevent him from creating a consistent self-identity. Creative activity helps him to establish an alternate identity which is the valid form for an erroneous life.

Introduction

The interactions between love and creation, suffering and creation, artist and audience are the main intersections that will be examined in Thomas Mann's¹ novella, *Tonio Kröger*. The central argument is that Tonio Kröger, the hero of this novella, is a poet who clearly corresponds to the schizoid character type. This serves as a successful means for self-expression and as compensation for his loneliness, his sense of meaninglessness in life and his impotence that derives from an existential weakness, or "ontological insecurity" as Laing puts it (Laing, 1960: 40-64). We shall find that being engaged in creative work provides the schizoid artist the power to bear the curse of his existence. It seems that the source of the existential curse of the schizoid lies in a deep gash in his soul expressed by the awareness of profound contradictions within it. These contradictions prevent Tonio from creating a consistent and unified self-identity. The lack of such personal identity is compensated by creative activity that establishes for him an alternative identity, that of the creative artist.

The central ideational pivot around which the plot turns is the perpetual contradiction between ordinary and simple "arranged" life and the life of the spirit and of art. This contradiction stands at the heart of Tonio's experience as a poet. It reflects his love, his yearnings, his weakness and suffering; and at the same time nourishes his creative spirit and his creative identity. The novella is composed of nine chapters whose plot can be briefly summarized as follows:

¹ The German writer and philosopher Thomas Mann (1875-1955) was born in Lübeck in northern Germany. In 1929 he received the Nobel Prize and in 1933 he went into exile. He was declared a deserter and a traitor by his country, and his citizenship was even revoked after his open denunciation of the Nazi regime. In the United States, he was seen as the conscience of another Germany. His books deal prominently with music as an expression of irrationality, physical and spiritual decadence, the frailty of love and its perturbations and with the power of creativity. The motif that recurs through his works is the clash between the life of the spirit and the life of action; between the tendency towards the sublime and the exceptional; and the satisfaction with ordinary life – the fate of many. In his own words: "The dialectic opposition of spirit and art on one side and life on the other." (Mann, 1996:46). A typical example of this motif is the novella that we are about to examine in this article. In *Tonio Kröger*, "closest to my heart ... my favorite literary child" (Mann, 1996: 44, 45), the voice of yearning for the healthy and simple life rises from the artist standing aside and far off, and longingly describes the life that is incapable of sharing. After the Second World War, Mann visited both Germanys. In the west, there were many who attacked him for his "betrayal" while in the east they tried to exploit his name for propaganda purposes. Mann then retired to Switzerland where he remained until his death.

Chapter one: A description of the system of the relationship between 14-year-old Tonio and his school friend Hans.

Chapter two: Sixteen-year-old Tonio falls in love with the young girl Ingeborg Holm.

Chapter three: Tonio leaves his small native city in Denmark.

Chapters four and five: At the age of 30, Tonio meets his friend, the painter Lisabeta Ivanovna in Munich. Chapter six: Tonio visits his native city after an absence of 13 years. First, he passes by the house of Inge, the love of his youth, then by the house of his school friend Hans. Finally, he visits his family home which has been turned into a public library.²

Chapter seven: Tonio travels to Copenhagen by boat and lodges at a "bath-hotel" in Aalsgaard.

Chapter eight: During his stay at Aalsgaard, Tonio sees Hans and Inge together at a ball.

Chapter nine: Tonio writes a letter to Lisabeta as he had promised.

The plot of the novella is of secondary importance to the figurative images and narrative and to the introspections of Tonio and the narrator during the plot's development. These elements demand the most attention, because they are of prime importance in understanding the essential path and meaning of this work. Mann once defined himself as a writer who tends to avoid arbitrarily, eschewing that which was not internally relevant to the subject. Instead, Mann claims that his writings were closely associated with autobiography in its broad and derivative sense. In this regard, *Tonio Kröger* reflects, in the broad and metaphorical sense, a mirror image of Mann himself, or as some critics have argued, his "alter ego."³

The problems of Mann's personality can be explained by the words of Nietzsche concerning the intellectual, which obviously fit Mann as well.⁴ According to Nietzsche, any spiritual seclusion, any distancing from what is acceptable by the public in general and any independence of thought, is similar in its inconsideration for others to the lifestyle of the criminal.⁵ These ideas are reflected in Mann's novella. Moreover, in Mann's essay on Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Mann explicitly says: "In order to portray a human creature, forfeit to death, too good or too weak for life, a literary artist need only portray himself ... Goethe did not kill himself, because he had to write Werther" (Mann & Bade, 1996 p. 124).⁶ Perhaps Mann meant here that artistic existence is extremely suspect by being the valid form for an erroneous life. Largely, the novella can be read as an expansion and abstraction of this statement. The artist according to Mann is incapable of living like others.

² The metamorphosis undergone by Tonio's ancestral home can be seen as a literary device to allow Tonio to visit his previous home: "a clever fictional detail to allow 'strangers' to visit the house" (Leser, 1989:125). But it is also, and mainly, a symbol of the process for forming his identity as an artist and of the transition that occurred in his life from being a private, anonymous person into a cultural asset. To a certain extent, this is also a symbol of the change that occurred in the Mann family itself: three generations of a rich merchant family whose wealth gradually declined until the development of a tendency towards art, music and philosophy in the younger generation of Thomas, his elder brother Heinrich and his younger brother Victor.

³ See Picart, 1999:93. Other alter egos of Thomas Mann are Hanno Buddenbrooks in *Buddenbrooks* (1901) and Gustave Aschenbach, the hero of *Death in Venice* (1912). "Mann more than most novelists was content to admit that many of his works are autobiographical; he said for so many years that *Tonio Kröger* was the story of his own youth that at the age of sixty-six he at last had to tell a friend that he felt it was no longer proper for him to be addressed as 'Herr Tonio Kröger' (Letters 1, p. 368) (Albright, 1978:210).

⁴ Mann recognized the influence of Nietzsche on his view of the world and on his literary works, and he dealt with it in his writings in a variety of ways. After the Second World War, he even admitted in an essay he wrote that all through his life he had felt a strong admiration towards Nietzsche mixed with compassion and mercy (Mann, 1959: 151-177). On the influence of Nietzsche on Mann, see: Picart, 1999. To no lesser degree Goethe, Wagner, Schopenhauer and Sigmund Freud also influenced Mann. *Lotte in Weimar* (1939) for example, is an autobiographical novel about Goethe's life in his old age, in which his unique style is also recognizable. On Mann and Goethe, see Apter, 1978: 112-120. On the influence of Nietzsche and Freud on Mann, see: Hoffman, 1945: 209-227; Brennan, 1962; Hollingdale, 1971; Kaufman, 1975. On Freud, Goethe and Wagner, see the three essays of Mann in: Mann, 1937. On Schopenhauer, see: Mann, 1939.

⁵ "Thomas Mann wondered at times whether there was any metaphysical justification for the totally unnecessary existence of the artist. More than once, he says about himself with a serious kind of humor, that his public position was based on illusion. What was a writer doing among honest citizens?" (Avinur, 1974: 127). On the criminality of the artist, see: Hollingdale, 1971: 125-139.

⁶ Regarding the experiences of both Goethe and Mann, Leser comments: "Just as Goethe overcame his own *sturm und drang* crisis by creating Werther, Mann freed himself for new dimensions of creativity when he achieved "Tonio Kröger", overcoming his youthful problems" (Leser, 1989:128).

He is too weak or too good--or possibly, he is too weak because he is too good: in any case there is something in his soul that prevents him from adjusting to "the right," "the ordinary" or "he proper" kind of life. Thus, artistic existence allows him to bear this non-adjustment, and in this respect, creative work becomes a salvation that enables him to live.⁷ According to Mann, without imagination, without the creative process and without art he would not know how to live. In this spirit, whoever is troubled by the question "how should one live?" will almost certainly find himself outside the acceptable circle of human life, because the very question itself demands detachment. Therefore, there are two choices facing the questioner: either he should separate himself from the circle of human life in a final and absolute manner (through death), or stand aside like a thinker or creative artist. In this way, he is incapable of serving life by living and flowing as an integral part of it in a spontaneous manner like the rest of humanity. Rather, he thinks about life in his seclusion, attributing importance to it from an isolated stance, believing in it and valuing it from within his hidden yearnings and deep sorrow for being incapable of living as other mortals do.

Part I: Soul and Curse

In his book *The Dynamics of Creation* Anthony Storr does not see creativity as a "way of exercising control over, or redirecting instinctual urges" but as a "possible means by which the ego wards off un-pleasure and anxiety" (Storr, 1972: 45). Storr builds his theory on Fairbairn's distinction regarding the existence of two basic states of mental distress that the sufferer wards off: the state of depression and the schizoid state (Fairbairn, 1952: 28). The typical feeling associated with the first situation, depression, is a lack of hope and a sense of misery; while the feeling associated with the schizoid condition is a sense of distaste and a lack of significance.⁸ The type of person that psychiatrists call schizoid is characterized by emotional detachment and isolation. In many cases a person who has this kind of temperament leaves an impression of an unpleasant mix of coldness and superiority—an absence of an ordinary human affinity. Moreover, it seems that normal, mundane problems that trouble the average person have no effect on the schizoid, who sometimes even takes a lofty attitude towards them. Therefore, the schizoid is perceived as one who is "out of touch" or "on a different wavelength." In many instances, the schizoid is accused of keeping a distance from others and refraining from intimacy. According to Storr, this accusation is justified because a person of this kind feels that they are forced to behave in this way. It is sometimes said that someone who behave like this is "wearing a mask." Since such behavior is the result of an intellectual decision and is not an expression of a person's sincere feelings, other people will most probably perceive it as giving an "impression of exaggeratedly good manners." The schizoid, writes Storr, "lacks the personal touch," the sense, if not of intimacy, at least of a common ground on which one person encounters another as a human being (Storr, 1972: 50).

Storr argues that the schizoid type of personality keeps a clear separation between thought and emotion.⁹ The schizoid therefore tends to develop a basic mistrust in people, a fact that prevents him from emotional involvement. Since such involvement gives meaning to life, he is subject to the constant danger that life itself will lose all meaning for him, and he will suffer from a schizoid sense of distaste.

⁷ On the psychological and artistic strategies that Thomas Mann employs in his attempt to master personal and general conflicts, see Wysling, 1982.

⁸ In this regard, it is important to note the words of the founder of logotherapy, Victor Frankl, who says: "According to logotherapy, we can discover this meaning of life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed, (2) by experiencing a value [a work of nature or culture, love], (3) by suffering" (Frankl, 1980: 111). We will see that Tonio Kröger finds meaning in his life thanks to this triad of love/suffering/creation. On these three ways to discover the meaning of life according to logotherapy, see Frankl, 1980: 111-115.

⁹ These two opposing aspects of the human mind, thought and emotion, that form the dualistic contradiction and the distress that results from it, have many names and take different forms. For example, Leser uses the Nietzschean terms – Apollonian and Dionysian – to interpret the contradictions in Tonio Kröger's mind (Leser, 1989: 110-129). To the same extent, Mann himself speaks of the north and south:

"It is about the south and the north and the mixture of both in one person, a mixture full of conflicts and productivity. The south is in this story the quintessence of all [that is] *geistig*, sensual adventures, of the cold passion of being an artist; the north, on the contrary, [is] the quintessence of cordiality and the burgher homeland, of all feelings residing in the depth of all intimate humanity" (Fischer, 1974 [11]: 410, Leser, 1989:111).

Similar polar opposites are Faustian and Magian (Spengler, 1926), Sisyphean and Tantalian (Shoham, 1985), extrovert and introvert (Jung, 1971), rational and irrational (Camus, 1955), Commissar and Yogi (Koestler, 1946), schizoid and manic-depressive (Storr, 1972).

One of the results of such a position is that the schizoid will begin to have a strong interest in, and inclination toward, seeking meaning and significance in objects rather than in people, a quality highly relevant to creativity. The feelings of the schizoid who is emotionally involved with other people endanger him, and for this reason, he keeps his distance and isolation. The tragedy of such a person, Storr argues, is that he is afraid of love almost as much as he is afraid of hate, since "any close involvement carries with it the risk of being overborne or 'swallowed' by the other party" (Storr, 1972: 57).

Another paradoxical characteristic of the schizoid is a sense of weakness and extreme vulnerability in comparison with others. At the same time, he develops a sense of superiority and the belief of being omnipotent, at least potentially. This paradox, Storr argues, derives mainly from an inability to develop a sense of reality with regard to the status of the schizoid within the human hierarchy, since at an early stage in their lives, schizoids cease to maintain any real interaction with their peers (Storr, 1972: 51–52). The schizoid's position outside the order of normal and acceptable human life arouses in him that same sense of weakness and helplessness, and the feeling that others do not love or appreciate him very much. This leads to feelings of inadequacy and even self-scorn. However, this same detachment also instills within him an inner faith that he is "a cut above everyone else" (Storr, 1972: 53). It gives him the halo of a saint, providing a good substitute and counterbalance to his sense of injury and the feeling that he is unloved.

Creativity, Storr says, is for several reasons, the best way for a schizoid person to express himself. Since the greater part of creative work is undertaken in isolation and without direct contact with others, it is a means of communication that allows creative artists to make their own rules. This kind of interaction with others takes place from a "safe distance" allowing the artist to show themselves through creative work. This means that one is protected while simultaneously enjoying self-exposure as a compensation for introversion and a lack of accessibility. The second reason is that creative work allows the schizoid also to fulfill his "illusion of omnipotence." Since ordinary people are unable to imitate him as an artist, he can enjoy the satisfaction of being "different" in his superiority. In addition, the schizoid artist "creates a world" through his work (a fictional one of course) but one that might exist forever. This work of creation, and the sense that accompanies it, compensates in many cases for the contrary sense of helplessness. Creative activity is also able to provide protection against the danger that threatens the schizoid, who may find the world meaningless. For most people, direct interaction with others provides most of what they need to make their lives meaningful, but this is not the case for the schizoid (Storr, 1972: 50-60).¹⁰

Storr reaches the conclusion that the source for creative activity is in the deep schism between the inner world of the creative artist and the external world. Creative work usually succeeds in bridging this gap and reuniting the schizoid with the world towards which he feels alienated. In this way, the creative artist builds innovative links between the subjective and the objective. Moreover, some artists have a weak sense of identity, and therefore creative work can express this search for identity. In addition, the basic urge to create, according to Storr, derives mainly from an inner disquiet and from the awareness of tension between contradictions in the soul of the creative artist and from the necessity to resolve this tension (Storr, 1972: 188-202).

According to Storr, the source of the problem of identity for the schizoid artist is the fact that they, more than ordinary people, are characterized as "divided selves." At the same time, since they are aware of this split and do not deny it, they have a deeper approach to their "other side" (Storr, 1972: 225). The greater the awareness of these contradictions, the harder it is to form an identity that combines them into a whole. The ambivalence in this kind of state of existence threatens to paralyze the activity of a person who suffers from a split personality. Most people cope with this problem by transference or rejection, while those who are sufficiently strong to bear the tension and the dissonance take the path of the creative artist. The artist's ability to see the problems that others do not see, to be aware of them, to not deny their existence and to bear the discomfort of the dissonance that they create, allows for a new solution to emerge shaped by formation of a new synthesis that come into view out of an uncompromising oppositions.¹¹

¹⁰ On the psychology of the split personality, see Fairbairn, 1953; Laing, 1969; Guntrip, 1974.

¹¹ With regard to awareness, for Mann, Nietzsche and Goethe knowledge is a curse in the same degree. In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says: "Understanding kills action ... the apprehension of truth and its terror ... The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence..." But Nietzsche also suggests the remedy: "Then, in this supreme jeopardy of the will, art, that sorceress expert in healing, approaches him; only she can turn his fits of nausea into imaginations with which it is possible to live."

The quest for identity therefore involves an attempt to resolve contradictions and oppositions in the human soul in order to obtain a sense of self-identity for which unity, consistency, and wholeness are the conditions for its formation. Yet the success of the creative artist in achieving an integration of his personality by defining his identity as a human being is liable to cause a total disappearance of the drive for creation. The reason that hides behind this fact is what Storr calls the "divine discontent" which is the source of every creative work (Storr, 1972: 163–174)

In addition to his technical skills, the whole structure of the schizoid artist's personality—the lack of ordinary human ties, the activity on a different plane of existence, the emotional detachment and isolation, the sense of strangeness and alienation, the keeping of distance, the lack of "human touch," the separation of thought and emotion, the existence of the divided ego that is aware of itself, the weak and faltering sense of identity—allows him to rise above the limitations of the personal and to link his personal disadvantages with that discontent that is ingrained within the very existence of humankind. In this way, by placing the impersonal instead of the personal, his identity as a thinker or creative artist is given form, while his personal identity remains undefined.

Part II: Creation and Meaning

The fountain, the old walnut tree [that creaks heavily], his violin, and the faraway sea, the Baltic, whose summer dreams he could listen to during vacation - these were the things he loved, and surrounded himself with, living his inner life among them (Tonio Kröger, 166).

The above is what the narrator of Tonio Kröger says about his eponymous hero. Clearly, for Tonio, there is no emotional involvement with human beings, but an obvious tendency to purely seek meaning in "objects." Moreover, one can already notice here a deep and sharp conflict and an inner tension within the soul of the hero: On the one hand, we see his love for the solitary walnut tree, something that symbolizes his introversion, detachment, separation and distancing which are the very embodiment of schizoid paradox. This ancient walnut tree arouses associations with nobility, glory and even superiority. Nevertheless, it creaks heavily, some internal weakness making it moan with sadness. Next, there is Tonio's love for the violin with its delicate tones and a longing for merging and harmony. In contrast to his love of the distant sea, the other homeland of the poet, that world of wonder, mystery and magic (art), he is in love also with the nearby fountain in the garden, a familiar everyday object that waters the lonely tree.

Tonio who loves objects with a tendency to find meaning in them, is aware of the strange position he holds in relation to other people. Jealousy is one of the expressions of profound alienation that he feels while in the company of others. Tonio harbors this feeling for Hans, the friend that he loved. Hans is Tonio's total opposite, because of the perfect harmony he experiences with his human surroundings. The difference between the two men is apparent from their names: as Leser notes, the "straightforward sound pattern of 'Hans Hansen' perfectly illustrates his character, in opposition to the restless combination of 'Tonio' and 'Kröger'" (Leser, 1989: 113). Tonio expresses to himself a desire to be like Hans: "To have such blue eyes, thought Tonio, and to live in such orderly and happy conformity with the whole world as you do! ... [if I could only] to be like you ..." (Tonio Kröger, p.168). Even before this, Tonio asks, "Just why am I so strange and in conflict with everyone, on bad terms with the teachers and alien among the other boys?" (Tonio Kröger, p.167). The description of the narrator overlaps with the words of Tonio to a considerable degree: "But `Tonio` was something foreign and special.¹² Yes, there was something special about him in every way, like it or not, and he was alone and excluded from normal and orderly life ..." (Tonio Kröger, p. 171). It seems that there is a contradiction in the very formation of a friendship between two opposite types of characters such as Tonio and Hans. That is why this friendship does not last: because of this disharmony between opposites, this relationship was doomed to failure from the very beginning. When the two men parted, something was amiss: "Their hands, when they shook them, were very wet and rusty from the garden gate" (Tonio Kröger, p.172).

These are on the one hand the spirit of the *sublime*, which subjugates terror by means of art; on the other hand the *comic* spirit, which releases us, through art, from the tedium of absurdity" (Nietzsche, 1956: 51-52).

¹² "Tonio ... accompanies Latin ethnic characteristics of dark hair and complexion, recalling Mann's own artistic and musical South American mother; Kröger ... evokes the Nordic qualities of dependability, a somewhat crass healthy vitality, and bourgeois virtue. The dynamic stress in the name Tonio Kröger substantializes the story's theme, simultaneously representing Mann's own structural and qualitative intellectual and emotional anatomy. Contrasting Apollinian [Walter Kaufmann's spelling to fit the Nietzsche's term] and Dionysian concepts appear in the conceptual stress represented by this name" (Leser, 1989: 112).

At Frau Consul Hustede's house, at a dancing class for youngsters, Tonio falls in love with the merry Inge Holm. However, his feeling of detachment and isolation grows even stronger than ever. When he steals away unnoticed to the corridor during the intermission, Tonio stands in front of a window whose blind is drawn so that one could not see anything. Yet, Tonio is not looking outside but inwardly into his own soul, filled with pain and longing. "Why, why was he here?" the narrator asks. However, Tonio knows that his place is not here in the company of these lively dancers, but in his room, in the company of the old walnut tree and of poetry that he would have given up if his love for Inge could ever be realized. Would such a thing happen? Was she not also his complete opposite? Tonio does not even try to make any contact with Inge. Rather he waits for her to initiate it. Even though he is sure that such an act by Inge, the perfect representative of "nice, gay, regular and blue-eyed company" is not within the range of probability. Tonio Kröger falls in love with Ingeborg Holm from afar, because he is afraid of feeling the same rust again: while Tonio evades Inge—"to Tonio Kröger's utter dismay, he found himself in one and the same square with Inge Holm. He avoided her as much he could ..." (Tonio Kröger, 176) – he nevertheless experiences pain at this estrangement: "to be shut away from her like this, to be forever strange – he felt it in his breast like a heavy, burning weight." Tonio, intuitively, feels the unbridgeable gap between himself and Inge. This can be understood as a hidden schizoid fear of too much involvement that might overwhelm and swallow him. But was the connection itself at all possible? The narrator gives the answer "even when he sat next to blonde Inge, she seemed remote and foreign and alienated, for his language was not her language" (Tonio Kröger, 179).

Since his youth, Tonio Kröger had noticed this gap in languages, and not only in relation to Inge. As an artist, he felt himself as someone set apart, who despised others and opposed them, not trusting them and not being trusted.¹³ When he was thirty, Tonio exposes this truth about himself to his friend, Lisabeta Ivanovna the painter:

Literature is no calling, it's a curse – just so you'll know. And when does this curse make itself felt? Early on, terribly early. At a time when one should be living in peace and harmony with God and man. You start feeling marked, in an enigmatic antithesis to others, the ordinary people, the respectable ones. The gulf of irony, skepticism, conflict, knowledge, emotion that separates you from other people yawns deeper and deeper. You're lonely, and there is no more communication with others (Tonio Kröger, 188).

These words express the deep gap that exists between Tonio's inner world and the world outside. This gap will later produce a creative work as a means to cope with it. Through creative work, Tonio attempts to bridge the disparity, to satisfy the need and the longing to be united once again with the world towards which he feels alienated. Tonio Kröger, this ancient walnut tree, this person set apart who strives for the heights but who moans heavily under the weight of the curse of separation and isolation that hangs over him, is the very embodiment of schizoid paradox. This paradox results from a keen sense of being distinct and different, where oppositions, such as weakness and strength, inferiority and superiority, are its main characteristics. Therefore, throughout the novella, Tonio is not satisfied with art and creativity: "Tonio Kröger himself felt that it was wanton and really inappropriate to write poems, and to a certain extent he had to agree with all the people who regarded it as a disconcerting pursuit" (Tonio Kröger, 166). Moreover, as Tonio remarks first to Lisabeta, "a healthy, upright, respectable man will never write, act, compose" (Tonio Kröger, p. 187) and then later, "We know that artists are easily hurt-well, and we also know that this usually isn't true of people with a clear conscience and solid self-esteem" (Tonio Kröger, 189). Tonio describes creativity as "sickly and ambiguous," and the artist as resembling a "clown" and a "strange actor." He even calls the artist "[a] cold and conceited charlatan" because he is engaged all the time with cooling off and freezing his emotions and adds that "[a]nything that's articulated is taken care of" (Tonio Kröger, 192).

The writer, who freezes life through his creative work, goes against himself and his work in order to protect the object of his love—life itself. He senses his own feelings of disrespect and inconsideration towards himself. As Tonio remarks, "[a]n artist is always enough of an adventurer on the inside. So, on the outside, he should dress well, damn it, and behave like a respectable person" (Tonio Kröger, 186). Tonio's remarks come as he visits a Danish seaside resort in order to cleanse his soul of strangeness, internal ugliness and the lack of honesty that he feels towards himself. From this point onward, the analogy between the artist and the criminal becomes unavoidable.

¹³ On disgust and the fascination of disgust, see: Apter, 1978: 58-77.

This comparison becomes even more concrete when Tonio Kröger justifies the intention of the authorities to arrest him when he comes to visit his native city. They suspect that he was a criminal who had escaped from Munich and was on his way to Denmark:

Should he put an end to this situation by identifying himself, by revealing to Herr Seehaase that he was no confidence man without a primary residence, that by birth he was no Gypsy in a green wagon but the son of Consul Kröger, of the Kröger family? No, he had no desire to do so. And weren't these representatives of public safety vaguely doing the right thing? To some extent he fully agreed with them... He had felt a bit depressed because they had wanted to arrest him back home as a confidence man, yes – although to a certain extent he had found it in order" (Tonio Kröger, 207, 209).

In contrast with Inge and Hans, Tonio has dark dreamy eyes, delicately shadowed and with a slightly timorous gaze. His walk is idle and uneven, and he was wont to gaze into space with his head on one side. To the same extent, he is heedless, self-willed and engaged in things that no one would consider worthwhile. Nor does he lack certain masochistic symptoms, and once thought that he should be punished for his excesses rather than "ignoring it with kisses and music" (Tonio Kröger, 167). Tonio is thus portrayed as a person with an ambivalent split personality and lacking a definite self-identity.¹⁴ On one hand, he despises ordinary people because they are ordinary, and prides himself on being different, but at the same time these ordinary people arouse his jealousy because of their simplicity and he does not cease for a moment in his vain desire to be like them—he loves them and despises himself. His deep relationship with things and the complexity of his nature, which is surrounded by the sense of being set apart, makes him dissatisfied with himself. In fact, he longs for simplicity. Moreover, those same feelings of strangeness and alienation he experiences toward others (which seem to place him above them), are what fills him with self-scorn and disgust because he is not like them. He envies them in spite of, or perhaps because of, knowing that he will never be like them. Yet, he does not want others to be like him because he will then stop loving them just as he does not love himself:

Hans would read *Don Carlos*, and then they'd have something to share... How well they understood each other! Who could tell – Tonio might even get him to write poems too ... No, no, Tonio did not want that!. Hans was not to be like Tonio; he was to remain as he was, clear and strong, the way everyone loved him, and Tonio most of all (Tonio Kröger, 172).

Tonio's weakness becomes clear to him in a harsh and cruel manner at Frau Consul Hustede's house. Because of his closeness to Inge he grows bewildered during the dance and the crowd bursts into laughter. Her simplicity, which affects him like a spell, drives him further and further away from her and causes him to stumble in the dance of life as well. But the same Inge is also his drive to succeed in another kind of dance; the frozen and cold dance of art. Through the creative work, Tonio strives to wipe the look of scorn from the face of his beloved and to draw her to him when he becomes famous: "The day was coming when he'd be famous, when everything he wrote would be published, and then they'd see whether it wouldn't make an impression on Inge Holm" (Tonio Kröger, 178). Tonio arrives to the conclusion that his destiny in life is only through creative work just when it becomes evident that he cannot resolve the contradictions within himself; a deep sadness that longs for joys of life, complexity that strives for simplicity, an incompatibility for ordinary life and the love and envy for such compatibility. This split is shown in his unrealized love for Hans and later in his romantic love for Inge. This love is doomed to be no more than a symbol for his eternal longing for integration. Just as personal suffering becomes the motivating force for creative work, so the creative work itself becomes the symbol of the faithfulness of the artist to his love of the ordinary and the simple as a kind of impersonal compensation for the lack realization of this love in real life. In other words, from the moment that Tonio Kröger stops being faithful to the love of his life, and is "no longer so absolutely ready to die for cheerful Inge" (Tonio Kröger, 179), he knows that there is no chance of bridging the gap except through the new object of his desire. This world of creativity functions as a substitute homeland for which he is even willing to die for and to leave his real homeland.

¹⁴ The novella is filled with expressions of Tonio's sense of weakness with regard to his self-identity as a person. For example, the recurrent motif: "if he went astray, it was because for some people there is no right way" (Tonio Kröger, 180). Or in the words of Lisabeta the painter: "You are a burgher who's gone astray. Tonio Kröger - a lost burgher" and Tonio's reply "*I've been taken care of*" (Tonio Kröger, 196). Moreover, when one of the policemen asks Tonio for some document for identification, he gives him the proofs of a novella.

The basic conflict in Tonio's soul grows clearer. Its external expression lacks unity with the world, and is unable to adapt to ordinary, decent life. There is an abysmal gap between his internal world and the world outside. The internal expression of this conflict can be seen in the fact that Tonio is not at peace with himself, and that he has a split personality because he is completely subject to the yearning for the opposite world. This poet, whose verbal talents allow him to express "difficult thoughts" (Tonio Kröger, 168), falls in love with Inge Holm not the first time he meets her, but the first time he sees her in a very special way:

How did it happen? He had seen her a thousand times; then one evening he saw her in a certain light, saw her laughing and talking with a girlfriend, saw her tossing her head to the side with a certain exuberance; he saw her hand touching the back of her head in a certain way, her white gauze sleeve sliding back from her elbow – and her girlish hand was by no means particularly slender, by no means particularly fine. He heard her stress a word, an indifferent word, in a certain way, with a warm resonance in her voice – and a rapture took hold of his heart ... (Tonio Kröger, 173).

The narrator describes Tonio after he returns home after this incident: "He couldn't fall asleep because he kept hearing that resonance in her voice, kept trying to imitate softly the way she had stressed that indifferent word, and he shuddered" (Tonio Kröger, 173). But for Tonio, (who can put "difficult thoughts" into words, who is fascinated by his opposite, who feels as if under a spell merely because of such a simple utterance), it becomes very clear that this attraction is one-sided. Not only were the merry, the beautiful, the commonplace and the ordinary not attracted to his complex, melancholy and strange soul, but they also laughed at it because of their simple conceitedness. Even creativity or a creative work would not succeed in wiping the scorn from their faces. How could this happen as long as Tonio knew and said that creative work only attracted people of his kind? Indeed, poetry is a kind of gentle revenge against life for the weak-bodied, the miserable, the sick, those who are filled with longing, who so often fall down, who stumble in the dance. The merry, the blond-haired and blue-eyed people on the other hand, were not in need of intellect, and they were attracted to artists of another kind, to the type of dancers like Herr Knaak for example:

How calm and unflappable Herr Knaak's eyes were! They did not penetrate to the depths of things, they did not see the sadness and complexity; his eyes knew only that they were brown and beautiful. But that was why his bearing was so proud! Yes, you had to be stupid to strut about like that; and then you were loved, for you were lovable. Tonio understood so so well why Inge, sweet, blond Inge, gazed at Herr Knaack the way she did (Tonio Kröger, 175-176).

But why did Tonio keep on creating in spite of the lack of benefit or hope? The answer seems absurd. Tonio continued to create precisely because creativity is a useless endeavor and an exercise in futility. If he could bridge the gap between the contradictions in his soul and between himself and others, if creative work could generate integration in his personality and relieves the distress that was so deeply rooted in his existence, he would then cease to create! Yet Tonio soon finds that creative work is a partial comfort. Tonio the schizoid, who discovers a way to penetrate into his own soul and the souls of others and who notices the lack of reason or meaning in life, finds salvation from this schizoid state in creative work and especially in its aesthetic aspects:

This power [of intellect and language] sharpened his eyes so that he could see through the grand words that puff up people's chests; it revealed other souls to him and his own soul; it made him see clearly and showed him the interior of the world and every last thing that exists behind words and deeds. And what he saw was this: comedy and misery... However, his delight in language and form grew sweeter and sweeter, for he was in the habit of saying and had already written that the knowledge of the soul was bound to make us melancholy if the pleasures of expression did not keep us awake and alert (Tonio Kröger, 181).

Tonio Kröger, who throughout his life was subject to a deep division that was forever implanted within his being, had complete and absolute control over the fictional world he created. This sensitive, unsuccessful boy, who had no self-identity, becomes in time a successful artist of prominence. Lonely and strange, ridden with oppositions, he perfects his creative work at the cost of his health and constructs it at the cost of his life: "The kingdom of art is growing, and the kingdom of health and innocence is shrinking on earth" (Tonio Kröger, 194).¹⁵ The man, who had been torn apart, whose experience of pain and suffering served as raw material for his creative work, slowly becomes the symbol of artistic unity:

¹⁵ This sentence is clearly written in a Nietzschean spirit's aspiration. Nietzsche detested above all other things the expression used by the average person: "Health above all!"

He surrendered entirely to the power that he considered the most sublime on earth, that he felt destined to serve, and that promised him honor and exaltation: the power of intellect and language, the smiling power that rules over mute and unconscious life... [and] For the painful thoroughness of his experiences was joined by a rare, tenacious, and ambitious zeal that, in its torturous struggle with his fastidious, his hypersensitive taste, produced an uncommon oeuvre (Tonio Kröger, 181, 182-183).

Tonio Kröger is not a bourgeois like everybody else. He is an artist, and the novella is the only identity card that grants him legitimacy for his improper style of life. The split in his soul appears most vividly not only through his awareness of the intentional contrast of opposites which he suffers but also through the comparison between the narrator's description of Tonio and Tonio's own words to Lisabeta. The narrator describes Tonio as: "alone and excluded from normal and orderly life even though he was no Gypsy in a green wagon but a son of Consul Kröger, of the family of Krögers" (Tonio Kröger, 171). Compare this to Tonio's own words in his letter to Lisabeta:

My father, you know, had a Nordic temperament: pensive, thorough, puritanically correct, and with a wishful bent; my mother, who was of indeterminate exotic blood, was beautiful, sensuous, naive, both careless and passionate, and impulsively wanton... And this was the result: a burgher who's gone astray in art, a bohemian who feels homesick for his good upbringing, an artist with a bad conscience (Tonio Kröger, 227).¹⁶

Who, then, is Tonio Kröger? Is he the bourgeois son of Consul Kröger, as the narrator describes him, or a bohemian, gypsy-artist as he describes himself? The answer is given immediately by Tonio himself: "I stand between two worlds, I am at home in neither" (Tonio Kröger, 227).¹⁷ Even in his native city, and in his parents' home which had become a public library, Tonio feels strange. He tells Lisabeta:

You have to be some kind of nonhuman and inhuman thing, you have to have a strangely distant and neutral relationship to the human, in order to be able, to be even tempted, to play it, to play with it, to depict it effectively and tastefully... An artist stops being an artist the instant he becomes human and starts feeling (Tonio Kröger, 187).

This is the necessary separation between thought and feeling that corresponds to the state of every schizoid artist. Tonio continues by admitting that he is "often utterly exhausted from depicting what's human without participating in it," and then he asks, "Is an artist really even a man?" (Tonio Kröger, 188). Referencing a brilliant actor, he once knew, our poet states "this consummate thespian became an impoverished human being." He explains "no sooner do you peer into the world and utter a single word than everyone knows you're not human, you're something alien, alienating, something different" (Tonio Kröger, 189). Later, Tonio explains his meaning: "But so far my only friends are demons, ogres, dreadful fiends, and ghosts that are dumbstruck by knowledge – that is, literati" (Tonio Kröger, 193).

Tonio Kröger is a cold, lonely, confused and detached thinker. His eagerness for life is blocked. He does not know how to live. Thus, Tonio turns into a defeated and tortured daemon whose heart is not at peace. He becomes a man of intellect and art ridden with longings for the eternal opposite, life itself. Consistently, Tonio understands art as a gall and knowledge as a curse.

¹⁶ Tonio's parents are the mirror image of Mann's parents: "Since 'Der Wille zum Gluck', dark features had represented Latin qualities he [Thomas Mann] had inherited from his beloved, beautiful half-Portuguese mother Julia Mann, a sensitive and imaginative woman who played the piano well. Mann's propensity for hard work, efficiency, organization, discipline, and achievement came from the North German father, Johannes Heinrich Mann, the embodiment of these virtues. Mann both strongly shared his parents' basic tendencies and loved them profoundly, and in him one side quite consciously observed the other" (Leser, 1989: 113).

¹⁷ In *Death in Venice*, Mann writes, "Who can decipher the nature and character of artistry? Who can grasp the profound instinctual merger of discipline and dissipation on which it is founded?!" (*Death in Venice*, p. 336). Mann, the divided schizoid artist (Tonio Kröger, Gustave von Aschenbach) is like his teacher and mentor, Nietzsche:

"Just as his name [Tonio Kröger] had to be symbolic of all kinds of hybrid ambiguity, not only of the Latin-German blood mixture, but also of the central position between health and decadence, decency and adventurousness, heart and artistry; a situational emotional appeal that again was clearly influence by that of Nietzsche who derived the cognitive value of his philosophy precisely from the fact that he was at home in *both* worlds, in decadence and in health – he stood, he said, between decline and ascent" ("Soul Searching", Mann, 1983: 63).

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche says: "I have a subtler sense for signs of ascent and decline than any man has ever had; I am a teacher par excellence in this matter – I know both, I am both" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 1 1).

The tragedy of Tonio's situation lies perhaps more than anything else in the fact that it was not he who chose to give up life for the good of artistic illusion, but rather that art was a profession that had been created for him from his birth.

At the ball in Aalsgaard, thirteen years later, without their sensing his presence, he meets the beloved friend of his youth, Hans, and his first love and the symbol of life, Inge. Watching them secretively, he muses to himself:

To be like you! To start all over again, grow up like you, upright and cheerful, plain, proper, and orderly, and in agreement with God and the world, to be loved by the innocent and happy, to take you as my wife, Ingeborg Holm, and have a son like you, Hans Hansen – to live, love, and laud, free of the curse of knowledge and the torment of creativity, in blissful normality!... Start all over again? But it wouldn't help - it would all turn out the same, everything would come again the way it has come. For some people are bound to go astray because there is no such thing as a right way for them (Tonio Kröger, 222).

Tonio Kröger, by his very nature, and with no possibility of changing this fate, is forced to remain all his life on the border between two worlds, without being able to feel a sense of belonging in either of them. In spite of this, he does not suppress this anguish, nor does he ignore this cruel ambiguity in his state of existence as one might suppose an ordinary person might do. Instead, he continues vainly and fully aware in his attempts (that are doomed to repeated failure) to try and feel that he belonged even for a brief moment: "Here, very close to him, sat Hans and Ingeborg... Couldn't he get a little closer to them? Couldn't he say something amusing to him or her... It would make him happy; he longed to do so" (Tonio Kröger, 223).

Through creative work, Tonio finds refuge from his unbearable state, and he feels protected from the dissonance it causes. But what is the nature of the thing that allows him to bear tensions, fears and such sharp divisions? What is that power that protects his soul from situations of vain longing for the kingdom of the normal, the respectable, the pleasant, the banal, the everyday, the innocent, the simple, the vital, the regular; from human friendship, human loyalty and human happiness? What power is it that exhausts a person with perpetual awareness, and with the marks of "superiority" vis-a-vis "extreme weakness and vulnerability" (Storr, 1972: 51), or of "royal[ty] and embarrass[ment]" (Tonio Kröger, 189)—that is, showing on his face Royal superiority for being a creative artist but weakness and embarrassment for being a person who has missed life?! For this, we have to turn back to Frau Consul Hustede's house, where Tonio fell in love with Inge: "For happiness is not, he told himself, being loved; that is only a nauseating satisfaction of the ego. Happiness is loving, and perhaps snatching brief moments of **deceptive closeness** to the object of your love" (Tonio Kröger, 179, emphasis added).¹⁸

In spite of the curse, Tonio is happy because happiness is merely a fleeting illusion, a "deceptive closeness." This deceptive closeness causes suffering and submission, but the first thing that the young Tonio – learns is a simple but cruel truth, that "[the] person who loves more is the underdog and has to suffer" (Tonio Kröger, 165). Therefore, since it is happiness to love, and to love means to suffer, the borderline between happiness and suffering is completely blurred -- to love means to suffer through happiness, to suffer happily or to get pleasure out of pain.¹⁹ "Deceptive closeness" provides the inexhaustible power that overcomes all tensions and irritations. It is the perpetual answer to the eternal contradiction that serves the both blessed and cursed urge to create. Such an illusionary approach feeds the creative identity of Tonio and supplies his artistic existence with taste and meaning.²⁰ At the end of the novella, Tonio writes these concluding words to Lisabeta:

For if anything can turn a litterateur into a true writer, it is my bourgeois love for what is human, alive, and normal... without which one is merely a piece of low-grade ore, a jingly bell... I look into a teeming throng of human shadows, who beckon to me, wanting me to exorcise them and redeem them: tragic shadows and ludicrous ones and some that are both – and I am very fond of them. But my deepest and most furtive love is for the blond and blue-eyed people, the brightly living, the happy, lovable, and normal ones. Do not scold me for this love, Lisaveta; it is good and fruitful. It contains yearning and mournful envy and a wee bit of scorn and a very chaste bliss (Tonio Kröger, 228).

¹⁸ In *Death in Venice*, Mann glorifies love by making Aschenbach say "the very subtlest statement": "the lover is more divine than the beloved" (*Death in Venice*, p. 334).

¹⁹ The same motif can be found in popular romantic Arabic poetry. In one of Farid al-Atrash's songs we hear him say: "Love without hope is the most sublime love" (1952, The song "banadi 'alek - I am calling you - written by Mamun al-Shinnawi).

²⁰ "Ultimately, for Mann, the only genuine realm of freedom lies in the realm of the 'as-if' – of creative (self-) birthing through art" (Picart, 1999: 96).

Conclusion

Tonio Kröger, as he is perceived by himself, by the narrator and by the author, is a poet who conforms to all the qualities of a creative artist of the schizoid type, as defined by Storr. Creative activity serves as his only alternative means of communication, since he lacks normal emotional ties with people, and especially as he lacks the ability to conduct a normal life. It seems that the meaning of Tonio's life is not dependent upon such ties as it is for other people, but instead derives from his construction of his identity as an artist. This identity serves him as a substitute and compensation for his lack of identity as a person. In the words of Mann himself, Tonio's meaning in life derives from his artistic existence, which is "the valid form for an erroneous life."

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