In Defense of Democracy?
Masculinist Reasoning, Homophobia, and the Impossibility of Gender Democracy in Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician*[1]

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Abstract:
Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician* is frequently deployed in political and literary education to teach the lesson of democracy in defense against fascism. Recent analyses focus on the themes of homoeroticism and homosexuality, and raise the question whether a homophobic murder is an appropriate defense of democracy. However, only a few scholars explore the political ideas inscribed in the discourse of the so-called "masculinists" Mann refers to. This article provides an interpretation of the novella from a political science perspective by elaborating on masculinists reasoning advocated by Hans Blüher, who supported pre-fascist male associations in the Weimar Republic. Masculinist reasoning challenges a simplistic notion of the public-private divide and puts (homo-) sexuality center stage in the discussion of the political. The analysis shows that *Mario and the Magician* tells the story of the defeat of Blüher's vision of a homoerotic male association and of the re-erection of a patriarchal society characterized by homophobia and heteronormativity. However, this defeat does not affect antipluralistic, antisemitic, and antifeminist ideologies of 'masculinist reasoning'. Therefore, the alleged defense of democracy promotes a hegemonic project of masculinity, which hinders any vision of social or gender democracy.
Keywords: Gender democracy, masculinists, homophobia, Thomas Mann, Hans Blüher, masculinities, homoerotic male association, fascism

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Demokrasiyi Savunurken? Erkeklikçi Düşünce, Homofobi ve Thomas Mann'ın *Mario and the Magician* Eserinde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Demokrasisinin İmkansızlığı

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Özet:

Thomas Mann'ın *Mario ve and the Magician* eseri, faşizme karşı demokrasi savunusu dersini öğretmek için siyasal ve edebi eğitimde sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Son analizler homoerotizm ve eşcinsellik temalarına odaklanmakta ve homofobik bir cinayetin uygun bir demokrasi savunusu olup olmadığı sorusunu gündeme getirmektedir. Bununla birlikte sadece birkaç bilim insanı Mann'ın "erkeklikçiler" dediği kişilerin söylemlerinde bulunan politik fikirleri araştırır. Bu makale, Weimar Cumhuriyeti'nde faşizmi önceleyen erkek örgütlerini destekleyen Hans Blüher tarafından savunulan "erkeklikçi düşünce"yi ayrıntılı olarak inceleyerek bu kısa hikayeye siyaset bilimi perspektifinden bir yorum sağlayacaktır. "Erkeklikçi düşünce", kamusal-özel ayrımına yönelik basit kavrayışa meydan okur ve politik tartışmada (eş)cinselliği merkeze koyar. Analizlerimiz *Mario and the Magician*'ın, Blüher'in homoerotik erkek örgütü vizyonunun ve homofobi ve heteronormativite ile karakterize edilen patriarkal toplumun yeniden kurgulanmasının bozguna uğrama hikayesini anlattığını gösteriyor. Bununla birlikte bu bozgun, "erkeklikçi düşünce"nin antiplüralist, antisemitik ve antifeminist ideolojilerini etkilemez. Bu nedenle demokrasinin savunulması iddiası, her toplumsal demokrasi ya da toplumsal cinsiyet demokrasisi vizyonunu engelleyen hegemonik bir erkeklik projesini desteklemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal cinsiyet demokrasisi, erkeklikçiler, homofobi, Thomas Mann, Hans Blüher, erkeklikler, homoerotik erkek örgüt, faşizm.

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Mario and the Magician is Thomas Mann's first political fiction. It presents an allegorical criticism of fascism (Müller-Salget, 1983; Schwarz, 1983; Spelsberg, 1972) and is usually characterized as a "milestone in the author's supposedly exemplary metamorphosis from the apolitical German[1] to the antifascist defender of democratic virtues" (Geulen, 1996, p. 16f.). The novella, first published in 1930 (backdated 1929), was Mann's first publication after he had won the Nobel Prize (Goll, 2000, p. 217). Consequently, the German audience was awaiting a fresh literary statement from the public intellectual. Readers, sensitive to the political message of the story, which takes place in a fictional seaside resort in fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini's rule, recognized Mann's criticism of Italian fascism and his warning of a similar development in Germany following the gains of the National Socialist Party in the elections to the Reichstag in 1930 (Galvan, 2015, p. 139; Müller-Salget, 1983, p. 53; Stockreiter, 1994, p. 330). Others equated the first-person narrator with the author Thomas Mann and suggested an exposure of Mann's private family life, while neglecting any political innuendo (Goll, 2000; Vaget, 1984).[2] Recent interpretations focus on the theme of homosexuality against the backdrop of the flourishing homosexual culture during the Weimar Republic and growing homophobia from the late 1920s to the persecution of homosexuals under Nazi rule (Bridges, 1991; Härle, 2002; Morgan, 2012).[3]

Political readings analyze the novella's depiction of an unpleasant atmosphere, which is described as "childish" nationalism, as Mann's critical stance toward fascism. "From the first moment the air of the place made us uneasy, we felt irritable, on edge" (Mann, 2000, p. 113)[4] and the discomforting atmosphere grows over the course of the story's first part. The second part introduces the magician or rather hypnotist, *Cipolla*, who manipulates and humiliates his audience; he breaks their will by hypnotizing them, and hence seems to be the prototypical fascist leader. In the final sequence, *Mario*, a local waiter, shoots the magician when he awakes from trance, hallucinating to kiss his secret love. Following an early interpretation by Georg Lukács (1964), political

readings detect a tyrannicide by a "working-class hero", understood as an act of defense of democracy against fascism and totalitarianism.

However, the narration challenges a simple opposition of fascism vs. democracy. The narrative strategy places the reader in a complicit relationship with the (fascist) narrator. "Whoever claims to recognize the structures of seduction, remains entangled in the maze of complicity." (Geulen, 1996, p. 21) Eva Geulen concludes that resistance is futile within the totalizing narrative, which eliminates any distinction between representation and the represented. *Mario's* shots are an act of resistance because they resist explanation and any explanation would have to reanimate the narrative strategy of totalization (ibid., p. 29). On the other hand, shooting *Cipolla* can hardly be conceived as an act of political, let alone democratic resistance (Baker, 2009).

Alan Bance (1987, p. 386) assumes that the novella deals with the ambivalent positioning of the artist facing the aesthetic politics of fascism, presuming that the problematic relationship between arts and politics had been the core issue of Mann's writing for years. He observes the narrator's secret affinity to *Cipolla*, who figures as fellow-artist, and suggests that *Mario and the Magician* is a "statement of Mann's own struggle with the relationship between literature and political responsibility" (ibid.). This struggle culminates in the very problematic ending: "the liberal humanist [...] finding himself willing to sanction a murder" (Bance, 2002, p. 115) and the intellectual who "is already infected with a moral malaise" (ibid.). This ambivalence creates doubt about the democratic persuasiveness of the story.

Another scholarly strand of discussion focuses on "male fantasies" (Theweleit, 2002) expressed in Mann's obsession with homoeroticism and homosexuality (Bridges, 1991; Elsaghe, 2012; Härle, 2002; Izenberg, 2000; Liebrand, 2012; Morgan, 2012; Webber, 2002; Widdig, 1992), although only a few of these scholars explore the political ideas inscribed in the discourse of *masculinist* homosexuality Mann refers to. In this article, I will elaborate on the political meaning of *masculinist reasoning* from a political science perspective. Masculinist reasoning supports

antipluralistic, antisemitic, and antifeminist ideologies, which form an integral part of pre-fascist political thought of early twentieth century Germany (Bruns, 2001; Kreisky, 1994; Sombart, 1988). It underpins the novella's political argument and thus constitutes an obstacle to the alleged defense of democracy. However, the appreciation of homosexuality as a masculinist ideal could be an important step towards *gender democracy* understood as practices and institutions that challenge the patriarchal gender order. Here, at least the hierarchy between men based on homophobia (Connell, 1995, p. 78) is delegitimized. This article aims at clarifying whether Mann's criticism of fascism makes gender democracy imaginable.

Masculinist Reasoning: Male Association and Charisma

The autonomous bourgeois subject, constituted during the late 18th and 19th century, has long remained the unmarked gender, although philosophy and science have implicitly presumed its masculinity. Whenever scientific discourse problematized masculinity, only deviant sexuality (perversion, inversion, or homosexuality) was an issue of concern until, in the late 19th century, the women's movement challenged the superiority of men, while those characterized as sexually deviant attempted to inscribe themselves into the formation of hegemonic masculinity (Bruns, 2001, p. 88). According to Claudia Bruns, these developments are exemplified by the *masculinists*, a movement which opposed Magnus Hirschfeld's theses of a third sex (male body with a female soul) and, instead, claimed a particularly virile masculinity of the homosexual man. Hans Blüher (1888-1955), psychoanalyst, writer, and chronicler of the *Wandervogel* movement, a precursor of the so-called "conservative revolution" (Breuer, 1993; Brunotte, 2004, p. 70), was a protagonist of masculinist reasoning, who synthesized the theories of Gustav Jaeger (1832-1917), Heinrich Schurtz (1863-1903), and Benedict Friedlaender (1866-1908) (Morgan, 2012, p. 50).

Jaeger was one of the early masculinists who posited the "supervirile" sexuality of the homosexual male (Bruns, 2001, p. 92).

According to him, same-sex desire between men creates the *Männerheld* (men's hero), the etymological counterpart to the *Frauenheld* (womanizer), who is, in Jaeger's view, a mentally inferior man. The ethnologist Schurtz (1902) conceptualized the *Männerbund* (male association or male bond) by arguing that women are subjected to a "family drive" (*Familientrieb*), while men in contrast are motivated by a "sociability drive" (*Geselligkeitstrieb*), which allows them to establish higher forms of public life, such as politics and the state (Kreisky, 1994). Schurtz directed this line of argumentation against Johann Jacob Bachofen's *Mother Right*, first published in 1861, and his followers, who claimed that motherhood was the archaic source of human society (Brunotte, 2004, p. 31). Finally, philosopher and zoologist Friedlaender explained male bonding within an extended notion of sexuality based on *eros* (Bruns, 2001, p. 94). According to Friedlaender, homo- and heterosexual identities do not conflict each other because homoerotic attraction consolidates the homosocial male association between bi-, homo-, and heterosexual men, which is intended to resist the growing public influence of the feminist movement.

Friedlaender and Wilhelm Jansen, the leader of the *Wandervogel* movement greatly admired by Blüher, were members of the homosexual civil-rights movement, *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*, founded by Adolf Brand (1874-1945). In their journal, *Der Eigene*, they propagated the masculinist notion of homosexual superiority, aiming at a reform of criminal law (Paragraph 175) pertaining to homosexuality (Brunotte, 2004, p. 72f.).[5] Until 1914, Blüher collaborated with this movement. Later, while still advocating the abolition of Paragraph 175, he elaborated his political theses on male association with undisguised antifeminist, antiliberal, and antisemitic impetus.

In a first attempt, Blüher promoted the male association grouped around a leader, the true men's hero (*Männerheld*), who possesses the vigor of same-sex eros (Bruns, 2001, p. 98f.). Therefore, only homosexuals or inverts would be able to become political leaders, while the sexual orientation towards women would exclude the heterosexual man, as much as the woman, from the state-building project. In his major

work, Blüher integrates heterosexuality into his concept of homoeroticism by introducing the male creative or aesthetic capacity to create an image of the adored (ibid., p. 101ff.). Although the original image might be the mother, the young man does not adore his mother, but his imagination of her, and later on his imagination of the leader or men's hero. The specific form of masculine spirituality synthesizes female eros (adoration and subordination) and male logos (rationality) into an aesthetic subject, Blüher's vision of the new man. The political leader is an artist who brings the people (*Volk*) into being through his creative imagination. He transforms the metaphorical female masses into a structured (national) male super-subject devoid of the political struggles that characterize liberal democracies. Blüher excludes women and Jews from the political: women lack rationality, while Jews are fixated on rationality (logos) and hence lack the political ability of imagination and male association.

During the war and early in the Weimar Republic, Blüher's theory was very popular and Thomas Mann, among others, embraced his work (Brunotte, 2004, p. 79; Bruns, 2001, p. 108; Kreisky, 2012, p. 129; Webber, 2002; Widdig, 1992). He elaborated on the (homosexual) artist figure and discussed the relationship between politics and aesthetics. In his novels, Mann explored homoeroticism through androgynous figures and dealt with his own homoerotic inclinations (Bridges, 1991, p. 503). Bernd Widdig (1992, p. 52) demonstrates that Blüher's conceptions have fueled Mann's speech *On German Republic* (1922), which marks his alleged conversion to a defender of democracy, but lacks any conventional democratic attitudes. In this speech "he sought to wed homosexual eros to the program of Weimar democracy" (Morgan, 2012, p. 57) and ignored or rather accepted Blüher's antifeminist and antiliberal intensions. Moreover, Mann agreed with Blüher's idea of the *homoerotic eros* as the foundational drive towards the republic, at a time, when Blüher's antisemitism had already been obvious (Brunotte, 2004, p. 74).

Blüher's vision of male association and the men's hero as political leader correspond with Max Weber's notion of charisma (Brunotte,

2004, p. 89ff.; Widdig, 1992, p. 50). In 1918, Weber joined the *German Democratic Party* and delivered various political speeches, which contributed to the discourse of political leadership. In his vision of politics, the rational, unemotional, and distanced professionalism of the modern officer, who runs the state apparatus (Weber, 1980, p. 831), needs a corrective, which is provided by a charismatic political leader. Weber's ideal-type of charismatic domination is rooted in premodern conceptualizations, but was, at the same time, adapted to become the essence of modern politics. Charisma was supposed to provide an emotional basis from which the disenchantment of the world, linked to the process of rationalization in industrial societies, could be countered (Hansen, 2001). The modern political leader is not simply a politician by profession (*Beruf*), but by vocation (*Berufung*) (Weber, 1988, p. 559), a notion taken from Weber's sociology of religion (Fitzi, 2004, p. 269), which indicates a spiritual meaning of charisma. Translated into Blüher's dualism of logos and eros, modern rationality embodied by the bureaucrat is bound to the logos, while the charismatic leader resembles the men's hero whose charisma is likely based on homoerotic attraction. In accordance with the ideology of male association, Weber's vision of the political, too, is that of a homosocial sphere (Bologh, 1990; Brown, 1988), although Weber advocated liberal representative democracy.[6]

The Disease of Femininity

The masses and their fusion with their charismatic leader constitute the central topos of *Mario and the Magician* through which the functioning of fascist seduction is explored and illuminated (Widdig, 1992, p. 128ff.; Zeller, 2006). The audience of *Cipolla's* show, including the first-person-narrator, is mesmerized, which represents a crucial characteristic of fascism. This is indicated by the frequent use of the adjective "fascinating" (*faszinierend*) which, as Egon Schwarz (1983, p. 216) points out, derives from the Latin word *fasces* – the symbols of power in ancient Rome –, which is the etymological source of the word *fascismo* (fascism).

Some scholars have analyzed the depiction of fascist seduction through the framework of Blüher's theory. Widdig (1992), for instance, adds Freud's conception of the masses to the analysis and discusses the formation of a common body resulting from the re-ordering and re-positioning of the audience during the show and, by applying Weber's concept of charisma, *Cipolla* seems to be the ideal-typical fascist leader. The rearrangement of bodies starts during the prelude to the evening event, when the hotel management places the narrator, who "feels quite isolated and even temporarily déclassé" (Mann, 2000, p. 115), and his family on a table in the dining room and not on the veranda, which is exclusively reserved for the Italian tourists. Later the family must leave the Grand Hotel and the narrator finds himself surrounded by "a middle-class mob" (Mann, 2000, p. 119) at the beach. These events indicate the narrator's loss of social status (Widdig, 1992, p. 129), which is an ingredient of the discomforting atmosphere and prepares the narrator for becoming a part of the masses. Critics consistently interpreted the narrator's inability to leave as an allusion to the political passivity of the German bourgeoisie facing the rise of National Socialism.

The narrator deploys the metaphor of a disease, which is "acoustically contagious" (Mann, 2000, p. 116), to explain Italian nationalism: "these people […] were just passing through a certain stage, something rather like an illness" (ibid., p. 120), and finally he confesses that "we had caught the general devil-may-careness of the hour" (ibid., p. 151). The disease motif underpins the depiction of the discomforting atmosphere and it enables the narrator to present himself as a victim of circumstance who is not responsible for his passivity.

The narrative strategy, which Eva Geulen (1996) reveals as complicity, constitutes a vicious circle: the narrator's complicity with *Cipolla* and the reader's complicity with the narrator. Its totalizing effects rest on the construction of an implicit reader who shares the narrator's assumptions. Actually, the narrator frequently appeals to his reader for understanding and support (Bridges, 1991, p. 507) and, as I argue, their complicity is based on the masculinist eros-logos balance, which provides the homosocial cohesion in Blüher's male association as well as

in the German nation. Consequently, the narration does not merely perform fascist seduction; it also alludes to male bonding between Germans.[7]

Correspondingly, some critics have mentioned that the depiction of the Italian people is rather racist and nationalist from a German point of view, when e.g. the narrator complains about the "African heat" and that "the deeper, more complex needs of the northern soul remain unsatisfied" (Mann, 2000, p. 118). Moreover, the narration of the unpleasant atmosphere is openly misogynous (Liebrand, 2012, p. 363ff.) and hence supports Blüher's antifeminist stance.

Mario and the Magician is a story about masculinity and the problem of homosexuality (Bridges, 1991, p. 508; Morgan, 2012, p. 56), narrated by a respectable bourgeois German, educated and cultured, head of a family with two children and wife, who remains nameless, speechless, and invisible (Bridges, 1991, p. 507). The narrator represents "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 76f.) and claims moral authority, which includes a hegemonic perception of femininity within the framework of a patriarchal society. His invisible wife seems to represent the perfect absence of women from the public sphere. In contrast, the people at the beach are loud: "The voices these women have!" (Mann, 2000, p. 119). The "outraged womenfolk" (ibid., p. 121), the women's voices, and their "hypersensitive prudishness" (ibid., p. 122) represent the nationalist and fascist Italian middle-class and cause the narrator's discomfort. Edgar Rosenberg (2002, p. 34) comments that "dictatorships are notoriously prudish". The narrator also complains about "the naïve misuse of power" (Mann, 2000, p. 118) by a Roman *Principessa*, who "[i]n the fullness of her feminine self-confidence" (ibid., p. 116) orders the narrator's displacement from the Grand Hotel. All these negatively stereotyped female figures surround themselves with representatives of failed masculinity (Elsaghe, 2012, p. 130f.): "the proverbial frock-coated manager" (Mann, 2000, p. 116), who is submissive towards the *Principessa*, the "gentleman in city togs" (ibid., p. 121), who reaffirms the prudishness of his outraged womenfolk, and the ill-bred boy *Fuggièro*, who "was a great coward" (ibid., p. 119).

The national disease turns out to be an infection with femininity, the country being "reduced to a state of hypersensitive prudishness" (Mann, 2000, p. 122). The German original term used to comment on this prudishness is *Rückschlag* (backlash). Klaus Müller-Salget (1983, p. 56) remarks that Mann used to apply the term *Rückschlag* to fascism, which he characterized as a mental backlash (*geistig-seelischer Rückschlag*). Yahya Elsaghe (2012, p. 134) suggests that Mann borrowed the term from Bachofen, who problematized a return to a pre-patriarchal society, which is ruled by the mother-right. Therefore, the novella's depiction of *Torre di Venere* is one of female domination in a "primitive" archaic sense, which causes a crisis of hegemonic masculinity. This perspective helps to illuminate the narrator's feeling of discomfort, as his (hegemonic) masculinity depends on a patriarchal society.

A further matriarchal feature causing discomfort is the implied irrationality of this society. Only the physician, "a faithful and honest servant of science" (Mann, 2000, p. 116), seems to represent rational masculinity. Considering the presumed general infection with the national disease, the physician's immunity is in need of explanation. The narrator mentions his distanced rationality and the annoying fact that the Italians ignore his advice. Accordingly, Geulen (1996, p. 24) comments on the physician, who figures as "the implied principle of sober objectivity", that "a doctor is obviously what the characters and what the story itself needs". The fact that he cannot cure the disease clarifies that he does not participate in the nationalist community. Following Blüher's conceptions, the physician is fixated on the logos, and thus figures as the prototypical Jew, who lacks the erotic sensitivity, which seems to be a basic prerequisite for catching the nationalist illness.[8] In contrast, the narrator is not immune, but succumbs to the irrational force of fascination. He tries to explain, to exculpate, and to justify his transformation from an honorable patriarchal family father and respectable representative of the bourgeois upper class to a member of the masses during *Cipolla's* performance. The unpleasant atmosphere depicted in the first part of the novella prepares his transformation.

Women's command and the excluded, concealed Jew constitute the narrative components used to illustrate the narrator's discomfort. The physician is the rational logos-centered counterpart to the dominant irrational female eros, which results in a feminized social and political climate with de-masculinizing effects. These effects find an ironical symbol in the name of the city, *Torre di Venere*, i.e. "tower of Venus", and the fact that the name-giving tower, a phallic symbol, "is gone long since, one looks for it in vain" (Mann, 2000, p. 113). Political interpretations of the novella identify the depiction of a fascist society in the first part. Others, like George Bridges (1991, p. 501), cast doubt on this view: "if the unpleasant incidents that create the oppressive atmosphere in *Torre di Venere* are indicative of a fascist, or even pre-fascist, society, then surely that is the kind of society we live in today." In addition, I argue, this society is a patriarchal one. Therefore, only masculinist reasoning can elucidate the narrator's uneasiness: the scene misses the vigor of homoeroticism, while female prudishness indicates homophobia.

The Liberation of the Patriarchal Society

While the prelude of *Mario and the Magician* is composed of female domination and failed masculinities, its main part, the appearance of the magician *Cipolla*, challenges different masculinities, which can be studied along Raewyn Connell's typology (Löffler, 2014). "From the start the narrator casts the theater as an all male affair." (Geulen, 1996, p. 21) *Cipolla* puts his male audience into a hypnotic trance and tests their virility by exposing their (homo-) sexual desires (Bridges, 1991, p. 504). The performance consists of a contest among men for mastery and submission, in a political and homoerotic sense (Morgan, 2012, p. 59). Bridges (1991) identifies Mann's homoerotic inclinations at the core of the novella. Only once, *Cipolla* picks a female victim, *Signora Angilieri*, whose friendship with the actress *Eleanora Duse* indicates a same-sex relationship and thus fits into the homoerotic framework. That *Mario* finally shoots the magician because of a kiss seems to be either a homophobic reaction or the

attempt of a homosexual to conceal his sexual desires from a homophobic society.

Political readings of the novella usually focus on the impossibility of resistance against the sorcerer's spell and thus on *Cipolla's* mysterious authority over his audience, symbolized in his whip, that makes him a charismatic fascist leader. "Freedom exists, and also the will exists; but freedom of the will does not exist, for a will that aims at its own freedom aims at the unknown."(Mann, 2000, p. 139). Freedom of the will is an idealized male trait, essential for the autonomous subject. *Cipolla's* tricks reveal its fictive character and deconstruct the masculine self-esteem of his adversaries. He seems to break their will by forcing them to perform ridiculous gestures. However, *Cipolla* – the word means onion, a fruit without a stone – has no substance. After each trick, he regains strength by consuming alcohol and nicotine and he frequently complains to his amused audience that he is the actual victim, who deserves their pity, although he emerges as the winner from each struggle.

His tricks are humiliating because they are "an utter abandonment of the inmost soul, a public exposure of timid and deluded passion and rapture" (ibid., p. 156), a characterization the narrator exclusively applies on *Mario's* seduction, although almost all previous encounters entail comparable public exposures with sexual overtones. *Cipolla* reveals the machismo of "marginalized masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 80) or rather "protest masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847) represented by a "young cockerel" who's "bumptiousness only served to betray the simplicity of his mind" (Mann, 2000, p. 135). *Cipolla* forces him to stick out his tongue (ibid., p. 129), later he makes him grovel upon the ground (ibid., p. 136). "And yet he seems to want to do it as well. Humiliation and desire go hand in hand." (Morgan, 2012, p. 59). The "lady-killer" (Mann, 2000, p. 130) and "tower of Venus" (ibid., p. 135) are defeated, symbolically castrated and emasculated. In a similar vein, *Cipolla* forces a young military man into a stiff posture, places him between two chairs and sits on him, an image suggestive of sexual domination and submission (Morgan, 2012, p. 59). The magician also

reveals the inferiority of (heterosexual) "complicit masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 79), represented by the quiet and bald, *Signor Angioleri*, who "did not look as though he would know how to defend his happiness" (Mann, 2000, p. 148). *Cipolla* seduces his wife and exposes *Angioleri's* social and sexual impotence.

Even "hegemonic masculinity" personified in a "gentleman from Rome" (ibid., p. 149), who, with "a heroic obstinacy, a fixed resolve to resist" (ibid., p. 150) challenges *Cipolla* to a duel, proofs incapable to "save the honour of the human race" (ibid., p. 150) or more precisely of masculinity. The man tries to resist the magician by refusing to dance like a puppet, and finally, when he surrenders and starts to dance, the narrator comments: "we could see his face as he 'enjoyed' himself […] he was having a better time than he had had in the hour of his pride" (ibid., p. 151). Again, humiliation and desire go hand in hand. Humiliation results from his broken will to resist, a negative will without content, while his satisfaction comes from the positive will to dance, although it is *Cipolla's* will or command. Müller-Salget (1983) and others refer to this scene as illuminating the functioning of fascism. In this line of argumentation, the sexual innuendos become part of *Cipolla's* sexual-pathological character. Peter Morgan (2012, p. 60), in contrast, suggests that "Cipolla plumbs the wellsprings of patriarchal society, namely the deep structure of male rivalry and male bonding". Although male rivalry and homoerotic bonding condition *Cipolla's* performance, I argue that he does not repair patriarchy, but rather destroys those masculinities available in a patriarchal society to prepare them for participation in a male association as willing followers of the charismatic men's hero. Therefore, the subordination of formerly hegemonic masculinity under the magician's command completes the process of demasculinization of the fascist society.

Finally, *Mario*, the supposedly weakest link in the chain of masculinities, defeats *Cipolla*. *Mario* secretly loves *Silvestra*, whose female name is a masquerade to conceal his homosexuality (Härle, 2002, p. 16ff.). The careful depiction of Mario's fragile and sensitive constitution and the fact that *Cipolla* calls him *Ganymede* support this

assumption (Bridges, 1991, p. 505- 511). In the context of the prudish society described in the first part of the novella, and despite the people being amused by the obscene performance, his homosexual desires make *Mario* an exemplar of "subordinated masculinity" (Connell, 1995, p. 78). His heterosexual weakness is symbolized by the tiny weapon he uses to shoot *Cipolla*, "that small, dull-metal, scarcely pistol-shaped tool with hardly any barrel" (Mann, 2000, p. 157). However, "Mario asserts his masculinity through violence" (Morgan, 2012, p. 61) and though he cannot resist the hypnosis, he rejects the passive victim status and adopts the role of active masculinity, while the rest of the audience, including the narrator, remain passive. Putting into *Blüher's* framework, *Mario* embodies masculinist virility. *Cipolla* has no identity of his own and hence, by kissing *Mario,* he unleashes *Mario's* extreme masculinity, which Blüher ascribes to the homosexual, the "full invert", who is the heroic warrior male (ibid., p. 51).

Only after the shots and a moment of instant silence, the audience starts to act, shouting "for a doctor, for the police. People flung themselves on Mario in a mob, to disarm him" (Mann, 2000, p. 157). These activities restore their previously deconstructed masculinities and the patriarchal gender order. "Ladies hid their faces, shuddering, on the breasts of their escorts" (ibid., p. 157), who regain their socially ascribed male roles of protectors. The narrator takes action, too: "And now – now finally, at last – we took the children and led them to the exit" (ibid., p. 157), clarifying that he was not able to leave earlier because *Cipolla* and his performance mesmerized him. However, the audience owes their awakening from trance and their remasculinization to the deed of a homosexual, who, although the narrator calls the fatal end of liberation, does not become the hero of the day. On the contrary, the mob attacks and disarms him and thereby destroys his heroic masculinity. Even if his homosexuality was concealed or unconscious before his enforced public coming out; after the show, he would be a stigmatized and subordinated man in the patriarchal society he has restored.

The narrator, presented as honorable and responsible family father, undergoes a transformation during the show, which makes it

impossible for him to leave, although his children are tired and fall asleep. His transformation results in a bifocal narration: On the one hand, he is a rational man who is familiar with mesmerism: "he alone in *Cipolla's* audience is fully initiated into the mysteries of the Magician's uncanny art" (Bance, 1987, p. 385). Therefore, he can easily comment on the occurrence and report to his implicit reader. On the other hand, he is mesmerized or infected, though not with the national disease, but with homoeroticism. He seems to be the only one who comprehends and experiences the homoerotic tensions when *Cipolla* seduces *Mario* to kiss him: "That was a monstrous moment, grotesque and thrilling, the moment of Mario's bliss" (Mann, 2000, p. 156). The narrator divides his perception into two conflicting masculine identities: The bourgeois man as unmarked gender, who finds *Cipolla* and his sexualized tricks ugly and disgusting, and the masculinist, who is complicit with *Cipolla* and gives in to his homoerotic inclinations.

The narrator characterizes the fatal ending once as "the horrible end [that] had been preordained and lay in the nature of things" (ibid., p. 113) and another time as "a liberation – for I could not, and I cannot, but find it so!" (ibid., p. 157). The notion of liberation has inspired political interpretations that turn the final homicide into an unequivocal good (Baker, 2009, p. 364): the liberation from fascism. On the other hand, Mario lacks the necessary political consciousness to commit a tyrannicide (Müller-Salget, 1983, p. 59). Moreover, the notion of a preordained finale laying in the nature of things may suggest that heterosexuality is natural and homophobia is legitimate. Consequently, "only a certain unacknowledged anti-homosexual bias can explain the fact that critics have not questioned the rightness of the conclusion to the story" (Bridges, 1991, p. 503). Bridges concludes that Mario's deed is a symbolic act, the outcome of the psychological drama a homosexual experiences within the binding restrictions of bourgeois morality (ibid., p. 514). However, it is still unclear to whom or what the words of liberation apply (ibid., p. 509). In my above interpretation, the liberation applies to the patriarchal society and its corresponding masculinities. At the same time, *Cipolla's* attempt to establish a male association fails. This

view poses the question whether this liberation would clear the way for democracy.

Conclusions: A Defense of Democracy?

When the first reviews of *Mario and the Magician* were published, Thomas Mann rejected a political interpretation and claimed art and ethics constituting the core topics of the novella (Baker, 2009, p. 353; Bridges, 1991, p. 510; Müller-Salget, 1983, p. 52). In the years that followed, he became increasingly willing to see politics at work in the story and finally, while in US exile, he called it an initial political action (*Kampfhandlung*) against Nazism. However, the diversity of interpretations demonstrates that the story has several layers: the relationship between arts and politics, the aesthetics of fascism, irrationality at work in fascist propaganda, homosexuality and bourgeois morality, among others. Each of these layers is likely to support an interrogation of fascism. Alan Bance (2002, p. 117) concludes that there are public morals to be drawn from *Mario and the Magician*, a view supported by the fact that the novella is frequently deployed in political and literary education (Andreoli & Bär, 2011). Bridges, in contrast, who prefers an autobiographical reading, claims that the story "never really leaves the realm of the mainly private" (Bridges, 1991, p. 510). I argue, however, that these comments rest upon a simplistic notion of the public-private divide: Civic education on the public side and sexuality on the private. Masculinist reasoning and Blüher's discourse on male association challenge this dualistic distinction and put (homo-) sexuality and homoeroticism center stage in the discussion of the political.

There is no doubt that Mann opposed National Socialism. In October 1930, immediately after the enormous gains of the National Socialist Party in the general elections, he gave a speech with the subheading "an appeal to reason" (*Deutsche Ansprache: Ein Appell an die Vernunft*). He called on his fellow-Germans to support the Social Democrats, who seemed to be the last bastion against fascism (Zeller,

2006, p. 109). Even Blüher, at least retrospectively, criticized Hitler, albeit only after the execution of the openly homosexual SA-leader Ernst Röhm and the subsequent replacement of Paragraph 175 of the criminal law with a more punitive one in 1934, which made homosexuality a capital offence (Morgan, 2012, p. 52). These politics of the National Socialists reaffirmed heterosexual masculinity and forced homosexual men to either repress their sexuality or distance themselves from the political male associations (ibid., p. 53). In a way, *Mario and the Magician* tells the story of this masculinist defeat.

The narrator applies masculinist reasoning to convince his implicit reader of the discomforting atmosphere in *Torre di Venere* by pointing to a return of homophobia caused by the society's backlash into an archaic state of the mother-right. A constitution of masculinity able to balance homosexual eros and male logos must fail in the feminized and emasculating environment. Feminine irrationality, exemplified in hysterical hypersensitive prudishness, prevails, while the only masculine identity available is pure rationality, fixated on the logos, and, like the Jew in Blüher's concept of male association, is expelled from the national community. *Cipolla's* performance turns out to be a parody of male bonding and association. The alleged "men's hero" is a "charlatan" (Mann, 2000, p. 127), bodily "deformed" who faces his audience with "an arrogant grimace" (ibid., p. 128). He has no charisma of homoerotic attraction; instead, he applies a whip to enforce his command. General applause and laughter acknowledge the public humiliations of his chosen victims. If *Cipolla* represents the prototypical fascist leader, then the fascist version of male association is a perversion of Blüher's ideal. Accordingly, in his speech of 1930, Mann explained the National Socialists' success with reference to irrationality and cultural barbarism, which engender a grotesque form of politics (*Politik im Groteskstil*) (Müller-Salget, 1983, p. 54).

As argued above, *Mario and the Magician* makes clear that the masculinist strategy has failed, because fascists all over Europe have returned to homophobia and heteronormativity. The masculinist narrator experiences this patriarchal turn as a backlash into the rule of

archaic mother-right. *Mario*, the last masculinist, draws the right conclusion and shoots *Cipolla*, the faked men's hero. With this deed, he cannot restore the masculinist vision of male association; the patriarchal society is the only available alternative. However, patriarchal society does not guarantee democratic plurality, individual freedom, and equality. On the contrary, it reinstalls male supremacy over women on the one hand and the "specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell, 1995, p. 78) on the other. It reaffirms the gendered public-private divide and the political as a homosocial sphere. Consequently, the homoerotic male association's retreat from the political acknowledges homophobia and the subordination of homosexual men. In addition, the common ground of male association ideology and modern patriarchal society remain unchallenged. The novella does not problematize Blüher's extreme antifeminism and antisemitism. On the contrary, it legitimates his ideology by concealing his support of pre-fascist male associations. Therefore, the ending of *Mario and the Magician* suggests that these features do not inflict liberal democracy. Moreover, the liberating ending promises a novel hegemonic project, which would terminate the crisis of masculinity, experienced in the Weimar Republic.

It is likely that Mann modeled hegemonic masculinity along liberal ideals of emotionally detached male rationality and social autonomy. Accordingly, the novella discusses some crucial issues of liberal democracy: Autonomous freedom of will vs. interdependency, civil courage vs. passivity, rationality vs. irrationality, and individual responsibility vs. collective hysteria and incitement of the masses. However, the choice seems to be either fascism including homophobia, antifeminism, and antisemitism or democracy including homophobia, antifeminism, and antisemitism. Consequently, the liberation at the end of the novella clears the way for liberal democracy. At the same time, it hinders any vision of social or gender democracy.

Notes:

1. "Apolitical German" refers to Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man), first published in 1918, when he rejected a democratization of Germany after the First World War. However, already in 1922 in the speech *Von Deutscher Republik* (On German Republic) he advocated democracy (Fechner, 1990, p. 106ff.).
2. This interpretation does not come as a surprise as the story's backdrop is a real vacation of the Mann family. Mann claimed that most of the story is true, except the lethal ending, which was an idea of his elder daughter Erika (Geulen, 1996, p. 28).
3. This line of criticism started after the publication of Mann's diaries in 1975, which disclosed his homosexual desires and thus enriched the interpretation of his work in terms of the problematic self with the issue of homosexuality (Izenberg, 2000, p. 99).
4. I have taken all English quotations from the standard translation by H. T. Lowe-Porter.
5. After frequent attacks by the Nazis, Brand quit his homosexual activism in 1933.
6. Like Mann in his speech On German Republic, also Weber does not mention women's suffrage granted in the Weimar Constitution. This is surprising because his wife, Marianne Weber, was a leading figure of the women's movement (Kreisky, 2012; Widdig, 1992).
7. An Italian translation was published only after the War in 1945. In a letter, dated February 1930, to his Italian friend, Lavinia Mazzuccheti, Mann confessed that the story was "impossible" for Italian readers (Galvan, 2015, p. 139).
8. Alexander Raviv (2007) points to the discrepancy between Thomas Mann's antisemitic portrayals of Jewish figures in his novels and rather philosemitic views and feelings he expressed in his non-fictional writings.

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