

Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man by Thomas Mann

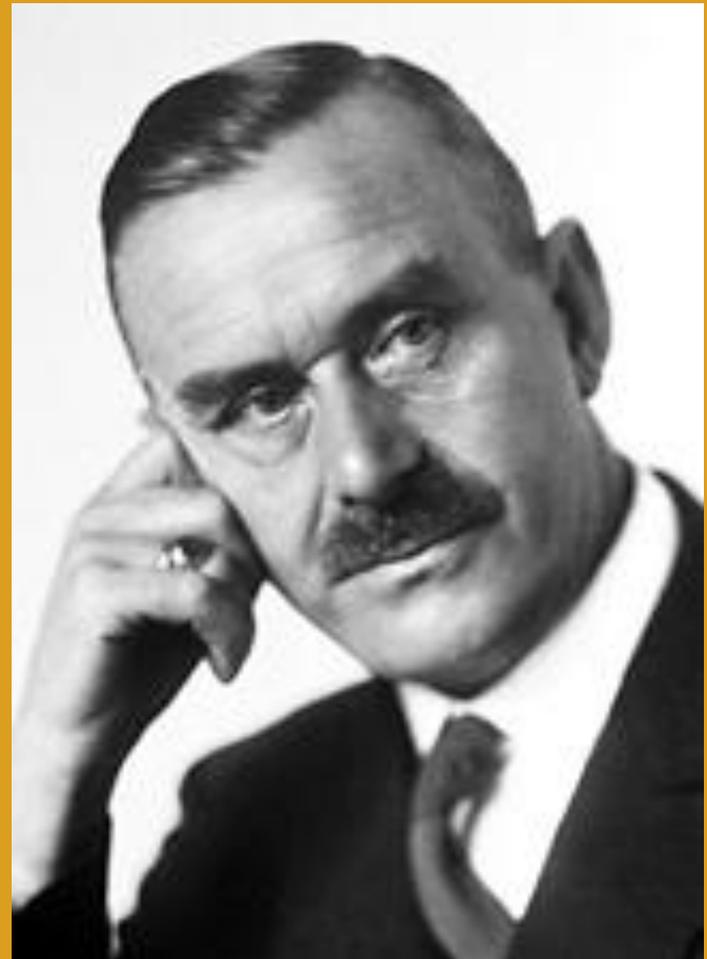


DR. ALAN HAFFA

Biography (1875-1955)



- Father was a merchant and Senator in Germany; mother a Portuguese-Creole Brazilian
- Studied Journalism in school and started writing fiction
- *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man, 1922*
- *Death in Venice, 1913*
- Critic of Fascism; Moved to Switzerland, 1933
- America 1940
- Nobel Prize for Literature



Genre: Parody of Autobiography



- Thomas Aquinas's *Confessions*
- Goethe's *Autobiography*
- Rousseau's *Confessions*
- Purpose of Aquinas's: to present his life as morally depraved without Christ and then the transformation and blessedness after his conversion
- Krull's is inimitable
- Like Augustine, he has two formative childhood experiences
- Theft of chocolates
- Sexual encounter with a prostitute
- Rousseau also describes sexual affairs with taboo women
- Goethe's is more light and artificial

Mann on Krull's Genre



- It is based on an idea of parody, that of taking an element of venerable tradition, of the Goethean, self-stylizing, autobiographic, and aristocratic confession, and translating it into the sphere of the humorous and the criminal. The novel has remained a fragment, but there are connoisseurs who consider its published sections my best and most felicitous achievement. Perhaps it is the most personal thing I have written, for it represents my attitude toward tradition, which is simultaneously loving and destructive and has dominated me as a writer.

Genre: Picaresque Novel



- Spanish, Renaissance genre: Lazarillo de Tormes, 1554;
- Picaro—rogue or rascal
- Satirical presentation of realistic life
- Parody of autobiography
- Abnormal family
- Hints of unusual character in childhood
- Formative events that turn him toward a life of crime
- Social commentary on class and religious divisions

Sample of Picaresque Novels



- Mateo Aleman's, *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599)
- Francisco de Quevedo, *El Buscon*
- Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, 1722
- Henry Fieldings' *Tom Jones*, 1749
- Voltaire's *Candide*, 1759
- Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884

Krull's Origins



- Bourgeois family, but with a bad reputation
- Famous for parties that get a bit out of hand
- Friend could not come to his house to play “because our family was not quite respectable”
- Mother and daughter with a painter, “roused him to such a pitch that he pursued them giggling up the stairs.”
- Artists; actors and actresses; Jewish banker; journalist
- “It was mostly these social affairs that provoked the town gossip...but I learned early that it was the economic aspect of the situation that was principally in question.”

Krull's character



- Dreamy and imaginative
- He likes to pretend to be the Kaiser or other types of people
- His Godfather dresses him up in costumes and paints him
- He watches some musicians play and learns how to play violin like a prodigy.
- For the first time he wins the applause of aristocrats and wealthy...especially ladies...A Russian princess “took my head between her be-ringed hands and kissed my brow...then in a burst of enthusiasm she snatched a lyre-shaped diamond brooch from her throat and pinned it on my blouse...”

Costume Makes the Man



- “in each disguise I assumed, I looked better and more natural than in the last.”
- “My godfather even asserted that with the aid of costume and wig I seemed not only able to put on whatever social rank or personal characteristics I chose, but could actually adapt myself to any given period or century.”
- Foreshadows his later adventures and his ability
- Criticizes social class by showing the artificiality of its most visible manifestation—clothes as status

What Is Real?



- He goes to theatre and is impressed by the main actor
- In his dressing room, he sees the actor without his make up and clothing
- “I shall never forget the disgusting sight that met my boyish eyes”: heavy make-up; wig; pimples
- “this, then—such was the tenor of my thoughts—this grease smeared and pimply individual is the charmer at whom the twilight crowd was just now gazing so soulfully! This repulsive worm is the reality of the glorious butterfly in whom those deluded spectators believed they were beholding the realization of all their own secret dreams of beauty, grace, and perfection!”
- Realizes that if such a man can be so successful, he can pretend to be anyone

Learns how to Pretend



- Fools his mother and even the doctor
- Knows how to reinforce the assumptions of others
- Doctor expects him to have had headaches...and so he asserts that he does
- He will play a part again at the Army Recruiter: He acts like he wants to be enlisted; he is enthusiastic; reluctantly he reveals that he has “migraines.”
- The Army doctor is disdainful of civilian doctors and so he reinforces this and leads the Army doctor to conclude that his ailment is epilepsy and not merely migraines
- He is denied by the Army, but he acts shocked and sad

Art vs Nature



- Reflecting on his deception of Doctor
- “I had improved upon nature, realized a dream; and only he who has succeeded in creating a compelling and effective reality out of nothing, out of sheer inward knowledge and contemplation—in short, out of nothing more than imagination and the daring exploitation of his own body—he alone understands the strange and dreamlike satisfaction with which I rested from my creative task.”
- Art is superior to Nature

Sexual Awakening



- Part of the Picaresque tradition
- Relates how he suckled at the breast of his nurse when he was 8
- As a teenager, he sees a young prostitute and she takes him for free to educate him
- Unlike Augustine who feels guilt for his sexuality, Krull revels in his sensual nature
- Pleasing people is part of his motivation for playing roles, and he will do this with women too

Life as a Waiter



- In Paris, works as an lift operator and then waiter
- Steals jewelry
- Has a fling with a wealthy woman
- The money gives him the freedom to lead a double life
- During the day a waiter, at night, he goes to expensive restaurants and theatre and dresses the part
- He sees one of his customers and begins his next adventure

Prince and the Pauper episode



- His wealthy friend, the Marquis, is in love
- Parents want to send him away on trip
- Krull will go as him and the Marquis will live in Krull's apartment with his girlfriend
- Krull goes to Portugal and befriends a Museum curator
- He flirts with the curator's wife and daughter
- After chastising the daughter, the mother seduces Krull
- Krull has the charm of the Actor from the beginning, only he is more Real than the Actor; yet, he is pretending too...
- Modernist ambiguity—real and artificial
- Moral Ambiguity

Conclusion



- Krull is a Picaro...but unlike traditional picaros, he succeeds and make a success of his life of deception
- Unlike Augustine, he revels in his sensuality and does not question his life from a moral point of view
- Unlike Rousseau, he is a likable character—Mann has succeed in creating a likable rascal whom we root for...
- Unlike Goethe, Mann strips the artificiality of bourgeois life
- Art is equal to Nature: he is a better Marquis than the Marquis himself
- Illustrates the Modern uncertainty toward Real and Artificial