

The psychology of humiliation: Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and Mann's "Mario and the Magician"

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Curiously, the psychological impact of being thoroughly and devastatingly humiliated has never received much theoretical literary exposition and interpretation. A scholar of ancient Icelandic literature with a special interest in the psychology of humiliation, remarks, "Although humiliation figures in the life of almost all scholars it has had virtually no scholarly life."¹ The DSM-III-R has neither humiliation nor its close affiliate shame in the index. Besides its pervasiveness in ordinary affairs, humiliation has often involved whole nations and peoples. Close study of the psychological and even the political ramifications of humiliation and the trauma and spiraling reactions that it causes is in its relative infancy.²

In any case, ever since Achilles dragged Hector's body behind his chariot as he circled the walls of Troy, men have known how to shame enemies and drive them to despair and loss of will. The motions to disgrace deviants, military foes, and under-classes of race, religious faith, and ethnicity has a sadly universal history. We are horrified to learn that during the Iraqi War, for instance, U.S. personnel forced detainees to perform obscenities in their nakedness. The ostensible purpose was to extract intelligence with problematic results as experts on the topic constantly but fruitlessly point out. The

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¹ William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 131.

² I should mention, however, the fine work of James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper, 1998); Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguilings of Evil* (New York: Albany State University of New York, 1993); Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963): 371-078; Stanley Milgram, "The Compulsion To Do Evil: Obedience to Criminal Orders," *Patterns of Prejudice* 1 (1967): 3-7; Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), and Evelin Linder, "Were Ordinary Germans Hitler's 'Willing Executioners'? *Idea: A Journal of Social Issues* 5 (December 11, 2000).

swift amputations of limbs of Sierra Leonians, the raping of women in the presence of their Somalian families, Jordanian honor killings for a woman's so-called sexual offenses, and the reduction of Jews' identity to tattooed numbers in the death camps of Nazi Germany – these are all familiar, fairly recent examples.

Yet, as mentioned, the topic itself is seldom set in terms of the social and psychological processes involved. After all, horrendous deeds of humiliation do occur in both dictatorial and democratic societies. We would expect the former connection but not the latter. In fact, as William Ian Miller observes, “rather than subverting democracy,” the implementation of humiliating acts largely makes “available to the low as well as to the high a strategy of indifference” and, we might add, even delicious pleasure in the maltreatment of victims.³ Actually Sigmund Freud, like Thomas Mann later in the 1920s, recognized the way in which leaders and followers strengthened each other in the pursuit of sometimes hideous violence. To be sure, Freud incorporated it into his psychological theories when in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) when he stressed the pressure that ordinary people *en masse* can exert on their leaders. They must do their will or face rejection. The leader “must himself be held in fascination by a strong faith (in an idea) in order to awaken the group's faith; he must possess a strong and imposing will, which the group, which has no will of its own, can accept from him.” Such a figure must be a fanatical believer in his own ideas. Yet, they must be ideas shared among his followers or cohesion and obedience are lost.⁴ Thus, the man in charge is most likely to win full command of his public by charismatic means that those present find not only compatible but inspiring. The two stories illustrate this point.

Beforehand, though, we need a helpful definition of the procedure that fashions the giving and receiving of humiliation. Evelin Lindner, a German-born psychologist with worldwide experience, provides it. She divides the issue into three divisions: “the perpetrator's act, the victim's feeling, and the social process.”⁵ She stresses, though, that it does not end there. Reactions of the humiliated may take a number of different forms – acceptance of the tormentor's power in obsequiousness, reaction in revenge that begins, perhaps, a cycle of violent aggression and response that grows out of control, or deep psychological depression – perhaps post-traumatic stress disorder. We can only touch on the three initial components here.

The analysis begins with Nathaniel Hawthorne's grim and gothic short story, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux.”⁶ It was written in 1832, exactly a hundred years before our second example, Thomas Mann's “Mario and the Magician.” A century may separate the pair, but they both bear startlingly rich examinations into the human tragedy of mesmerizing, dictatorial exertions over ordinary people. Hawthorne and Mann both understood the vulnerabilities of human beings under the spell of more powerfully willed magnetic, political figures. They lend themselves to such leaders in order to gain a power derived from that seemingly godlike source. These commanding figures exploit their victims' frangible identities and their willing followers' desire for a supremacy over others, however temporary that mastery may

³ William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 206.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. Ernest Jones, and James Strachey (1921; London: Liverwright, 1951), 57. I thank Dr. Lars J. Schalin, a psychoanalyst of Helsinki, Finland, for calling attention to Freud's insights in his plenary address, “In the Problems of Envy with Examples from the Stage and from History,” the 23rd International Conference on Literature and Psychology,” University of Helsinki, 28 June 2006.

⁵ Evelin Lindner, *Making Enemies: Humiliation and International Conflict* (2006), ix.

⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux,” in *Complete Works* (12 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 3: 616-41. Ironically for so grim a story, the tale was first published in S. G. Goodrich, *The Token*, a gift book with largely sentimental and pleasantly romantic poems and prose. According to the historian George Forgie, it was largely “ignored by literary critics before 1950” but has since risen in scholarly estimation to being one of “Hawthorne's most important works.” See George B. Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York: Norton, 1979), 110; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 6-24.

be. A brief synopsis of Hawthorne's masterpiece follows.

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" takes place in a colonial port – Boston though not so named – a hundred or so years before its publication. To give it greater universality, Hawthorne notifies the reader this is not a parable about an incipient American Revolution. Nonetheless, as Hawthorne notes early in the tale, popular discontent with the reigning government is running high. In fact, one historian claims that for the representation of Major Molineux, Hawthorne had in mind Thomas Hutchinson, a hated Massachusetts colonial governor. His house was burned to the ground by a mob in 1765. It had been led by two disguised figures.⁷ If so, the New England author reconfigured the situation quite severely so that Molineux, a fallen member of the Court or colonial party, is the victim of mob action, not the governor who appears in the tale as a man of "authority." Since Hawthorne was a close student of ancient folklore, the fiction conforms, however, to the notion of the disgraced "Scapegoat King." The failed ruler is sacrificed to appease the ancient gods, as Freud explained in *Totem and Taboo* and Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*.⁸ Anyhow, both Hawthorne and Mann's stories to be discussed are political in character. These authors perceptively recognized that democracy was a fragile thing, that unscrupulous crowd manipulators could bring disorder, humiliation, and cruelty in the name of order and justice.

Robin, an eighteen-year-old youth is the central character. He has arrived after sundown from his distant rural home to make his career in the dark, unwholesome grimness of the city. He feels as if he was already subject to a magical conjuration. Perhaps it only a dream, but he knows that his bearings are gradually slipping away.⁹ His task, though, is to find his much respected first-cousin-once-removed – Major Molineux. "The Major," Robin later tells a kindly gentleman that his powerful relative "had visited" Robin's family "in great pomp, a year or two before."¹⁰ He had indicated interest in young Robin. To have a patron was most necessary in that period when jobs were scarce, advancement slow and scanty. Seeking directions, Robin first hails, as the shadows grow, "a man in years, with a full periwig of gray hair, a wide-skirted coat of dark cloth, and silk stockings rolled above his knees. He carried a long and polished cane, which he struck down perpendicularly before him at every step; and at regular intervals he uttered two successive hems, of a peculiarly solemn and sepulchral intonation." When queried about the residence of the Major, the old fellow rages, "I know not the man you speak of! What! I have authority. I have – hem, hem – authority." Two barbers in their shop roar with laughter over the unequal and humiliating outburst. It is as if they are demonstrating how the lowly join in the cruel plans of those above them. The scene illustrates the point that Miller has made. As in a Greek drama, the townsmen's derision stalks the discomfited Robin throughout his miserable search from an inn, a tavern, and a brothel. Turning angry at last, Robin then runs up to another man whom he had seen earlier. Only now the cloaked stranger's face has become a hideous mask. He had besmeared one half of his countenance with a black substance. Red dyestuff covered the other side, with a huge and

⁷ Peter Shaw, "Their Kinsman, Thomas Hutchinson, Hawthorne, the Boston Patriots, and His Majesty's Royal Governor," *Early American Literature*, 11, (1976): 183-90. Neal Frank, *Hawthorne's Early Tales: A Critical Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 231; Alexander W. Allison, "The Literary Contexts of 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, 23 (1968): 304-05n, and Frederick Newberry, *Hawthorne's Divided Loyalties: England and America in His Works* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 1987), 62-66, see the story in terms of a moral and religious context, not altogether a political one.

⁸ See Peter Shaw, "Fathers, Sons, and the Ambiguities in 'My Kinsman, Major Molineux,'" in Albert J. Von Frank, ed., *Critical Essays on Hawthorne's Short Stories* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1991), 110-23. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (London: Moffat, Yard, 1918), and Sir James George Frazer *The Golden Bough A Study in Magic and Religion*, ed. Robert Fraser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁹ Samuel Chase Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 41-42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 631, 632.

disfigured nose between. Roughly he dismisses the lad with the admonition that he should wait right there for an hour – and then disappears.¹¹ The youth obeys and sits on the roadside before a cold, solitary church building.

Homesick, Robin thinks of the unworldly joys of his rustic parents and how they must be sending up prayers for their beloved son so far away. But he knows that they would be disappointed if he returned a failure. Another, more affable stranger approaches, and learning of his quest, advises Robin to linger as the previous figure had warned. Yet, he promises that Robin would soon see the Major. As they converse, the pair hear a sour blast of a trumpet along with increasingly loud shouts of a mob. Night has completely fallen. Carrying bright torches, they noisily march along. At their head, on an enormous steed, is the devil-like stranger with the parti-colored face, clothed in full military regalia. Members of the crowd are also dressed in fantastic, frightening costumes. Their leader orders a halt and “the trumpets vomited horrid breath, and held their peace; the shouts and laughter of the people died away, and there remained only an universal hum, nearly allied to silence.”¹² There, in their midst Robin sees a poor wretch in a wooden cart. It is his patron, Major Molineux. He is attired in what Hawthorne describes as “tar-and-feathery dignity.”¹³ Despite his muscular build and graying stateliness, the Major had been brought low. His face is pale as death and yet far more ghastly. The broad forehead has become contracted in his agony. His eyes are red and wild. Frothy spittle drips from his trembling lips. His body wracks with convulsions, which he vainly tries to control out of pride, even under the pressure of overpowering degradation. Molineux’s punishment for falling out of favor with the provincial government leaders is as demeaning and severe as if he had been castrated.

The Major looks up and sees his young cousin in the crowd, a further abasement for someone whose “head,” Hawthorne comments, had “grown gray in honor.” The kinsmen stare at each other. Robin’s knees shake. His hair almost stands on end, overcome, it could be said, in an Aristotelian manner, by “a mixture of pity and terror.” All those whom he had encountered only to be rejected are in the crowd. They wait expectantly to see his reaction. The brothel strumpet, the brusque innkeeper, the tavern guests, and the barbers. Then, overhead, from the governor’s balcony he hears a raucous laugh – “Haw, haw, haw, – hem, hem, – haw, haw, haw.” On the head of the pompous stroller was no longer the powdered wig but a nightcap. His silk hosiery hangs loosely at his knees. Still, he still grasps the polished cane, symbol of authority. With this final blow to his self-confidence and sense of autonomy, Robin bursts into uncontrollable laughter, as if in answering bray. The crowd joins in his shouts. His, though, are the loudest of all. The grim-faced commander then moves the crowd away.¹⁴

“On they went,” Hawthorne writes, “like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony.” Freud and Frazer could not have improved on this observation. The ceremony of disgrace ends, and the revelers scatter. The major’s cart moves away. Drained of all feeling, Robin turns to his companion and says in resignation, “Thanks to you, and to my other friends, I have at last met my kinsman, and he will scarce desire to see my face again.”¹⁵ He asks for directions home, but the kind gentleman suggests instead that Robin stay longer. After all, he is a promising lad who may well succeed regardless of Molineux’s fate.

Although the perspective is that of a very young man meeting a cruel world, in a few pages Hawthorne has also described a basic moral theme that applies to more societies, circumstances, times, and cultures than the setting indicates. The narration clearly indicates the pace of humiliation as the psychologist Lindner has outlined: first, the tormentor’s act of control – in this case the governor and his Satanic military

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 618, 628, 629.

¹² Hawthorne, *Works*, quoted in David Leverenz, “Historicizing Hell in Hawthorne’s Tales,” in Millicent Bell, ed., *New Essays on Hawthorne’s Major Tales* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 105-6.

¹³ Hawthorne, *Works*, 3: 637.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 638.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 639-41.

aide to a pre-arranged understanding among all the townspeople that the Major must be mocked and rendered impotent. Fortuitously Robin's arrival increased Major Molineux's anguish and disgrace.

In both Hawthorne and Mann's stories, as later explained, mesmerism is part of the horror, a hellish nightmare of foreboding with a theatrical hypnotist or sorts squeezing individuality out of his subjects. Robin's series of humiliating experiences are designed to break his sense of identity, as it happens, so that even familial loyalty and honor are gradually expelled from his soul.¹⁶ The governor, the militia officer, and the crowd all conspire to bring dishonor on the pair, but, of course, especially on the major, who had once been a figure of substance and power.

Finally, there is the social process in which the desired confrontation takes place. What effect the Major's downfall has on the impressionable young man is psychologically plausible. It might be called an early example of the Patty Hearst and Stockholm hostage syndromes. The mental condition is named after the robbery of a bank in Stockholm in late August 1973. Armed with machine guns, Jan-Erik Olsson and a partner seized four hostages, three women and a man, strapped them with dynamite, shoved them into a bank vault, and held them for six days. When they were freed, the rescuers discovered that the prisoners had grown fond of their captors. One woman even became engaged to one of the perpetrators. Another worked up a legal defense fund for the hostage-takers. The forensic psychiatrist on the case, Nils Bejerot, coined the phrase Stockholm Syndrome.¹⁷ This form of identification with an oppressor has wide implications in wife abuse cases, Hitler's manipulations of followers, the treatment of war prisoners, victims of incest, and other such horrors.

The Freudian analyst might explain that Hawthorne had in mind a proto-Oedipal enactment here – with Robin the putative “son” of the Major whose removal opens possibilities for himself. Robin, still the innocent, sees the pageant as a child would, with himself the center of adult concern. Nonetheless, the old man under the balcony and the demonic militiaman had more serious business to perform. In this case, the “father” or patriarchal figure of the community is the victor. The individual with power can manipulate others, especially the young and easily misled. In any case, the climax of the story demonstrates a social fact of traditional and even modern life.

When crises arose, Hawthorne implies, rich and poor, high and low, join together in the selection of a figure or group to blame. Justice was only public retribution, not abstract principle. If these inclinations were peculiar to New England in its pre-Revolutionary years, the story would be a curious comment on antique ways and little more. But the ethic of shame – the use of the scapegoat, as previously mentioned – that produced Molineux's total disgrace belongs to a barbarous world that we would hardly recognize. Unfortunately, however, we find that it surrounds us in current foreign and military affairs. The weight of the community upon the individual is most dramatically demonstrated in Robin's reaction to the sight of the mob and its prize. Robin's shout is the catharsis attending any tragedy. Yet, it is one we have seen in the humiliation of Iraqi prisoners and in the humiliation and murder of civilians out of revenge at Haditha in Iraq and most likely elsewhere.

¹⁶ See also Arthur T. Broes, “Journey into Moral Darkness: ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’ as Allegory,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 19 (1964): 171-84; Thomas E. Connors, “‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’: A Reading,” *Modern Language Notes*, 74 (1959): 299-302. Simon O. Lesser, “The Image of the Father: A Reading of ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’ and ‘I Want to Know Why,’” *Partisan Review*, 22 (1955): 372-90; Seymour L. Gross, “Hawthorne's ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’: History as Moral Adventure,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 12 (1957): 97-109; Harvey Pearce, “Hawthorne and the Sense of the Past or, the Immortality of Major Molineux,” *ELH*, 21 (1954): 327-49; Peter Shaw, “Fathers, Sons, and the Ambiguities of Revolution in ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux,’” *New England Quarterly* 49 (1976): 559-76; and Julian Smith, “Historical Ambiguity in ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux,’” *English Language Notes* 8 (1970): 115-20.

¹⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_syndrom. See also, Joseph M. Carver, “Love and Stockholm Syndrome: The Mystery of Loving an Abuser,” <http://www.mental-health-matters.com/articles/article.php?artID=469>.

Turning to Thomas Mann's story, which in German is *Mario und der Zauberer*, a similar pattern develops. We see how humiliation psychologically distorts the moral compass of victims or destroys them and how that state of mind makes possible the exercise of raw power.¹⁸ Like the latter's story, Mann explores the psychology of shame, embarrassment, and reaction. So much of his writing poses order and convention against disorder and the human capacity for and fascination with chaos and evil. Hawthorne dealt with the same issue. Personally Mann was a proper bourgeois. His attire was always impeccable. He had the manners of a cultured upper middle-class refinement and formal bearing. But he also was aware of a deep sense of alienation from such constrictions.

Mann, as we all know, suffered his own self-humiliation in his apparently unrequited homosexuality. Married and respectable as he was, though, he knew the dangers of slipping off the pedestal of respectable manhood into momentary gratification and then ruin. The literary critic Irvin Stock writes how Mann, then fifty-two, fell in love with a handsome nineteen-year-old boy, "Klaus H," one of the many for whom he developed a yearning.¹⁹ His biographers Ronald Hayman and Anthony Heilbut leave no doubt regarding his intense homosexual longings for young adult males. Earlier in his career he sought to find a means to express his feelings without self-exposure and the inevitable censure and humiliation it would arouse. In 1897, he discovered the device of the "break-through story." He was referring to *Little Herr Friedemann*, a novella. Like Cipolla in "Mario and the Magician," the protagonist is a hunchback, representing the perverse nature of homosexuality. The deformed Herr Friedemann is infatuated with a young girl, not a male. Astrid Lange-Kirshheim explores the tale with great skill.²⁰

The personal experience that prompted the tale of "Mario and the Magician," though, occurred earlier, in 1926. Thomas Mann and his family went to the Italian seaside on holiday.²¹ The effort to control his sensibilities left him depleted and feeling much older than his actual years.²² Of course, "Death in Venice" has been interpreted as Mann's most confessional work on that subject. It appeared in America in 1931, a year earlier than "Mario's" English publication. The main character is the aging Professor Gustave Aeschenbach, craving the attention of Tadzio, the teenage beauty at the Venetian hotel. Although homosexuality is involved, "Mario and the Magician" seems much more oblique and more political than either "Death in Venice" or Hawthorne's tale, which does not have the immediacy of impending disaster that Mann's story conveys.

The plot concerns a German narrator who takes his wife and two children to the Italian resort of Torre di Venere (Tower of Venus) on the Tyrrhenian Sea. As in progressing the case of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman," the reader feels a growing sense of unease and even horror as Mann's tale unfolds. At the fashionable Grand Hotel, the family runs afoul of a domineering Italian duchess. Her complaints to a simpering management force the German family to relinquish a favored table in the dining room. A bully likewise makes life miserable for the narrator's little boy. Worst of all, the lad's father permits his eight-year old daughter on the sandy seaside to wash out her bathing suit naked. The other bathers vocally denounce this breach of decorum in strenuous and humiliating terms. Harassed by an indignant hotel guest with bowler hat, the father has to appear before the municipal authorities, endure further verbal chastisement, and pay a fine. The beleaguered family leaves for a modest pensione nearby.

¹⁸ "Mario and the Magician," first appeared as a serial in the *Nouvelles Littéraires* 11 (10 Sept. to 15 Oct. 1932): 517-522. The edition used here is Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Random House, 1989), 133-178.

¹⁹ Irvin Stock, *Ironic Out of Love: The Novels of Thomas Mann* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 9.

²⁰ See Astrid Lange-Kirshheim, "Gender Trouble in Thomas Mann's Novella, *Luischen* [Little Louise]," paper presented at the IPSA Conference, Helsinki, 2006. *Luischen* is a companion novella to *Little Herr Friedemann*. I thank Dr. Lange-Kirshheim for giving me a copy of her presentation.

²¹ Ronald Hayman, *Thomas Mann: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 378.

²² Ronald Hayman *Thomas Mann: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995) and Anthony Heilbut, *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

There, the two children are thrilled to attend a mesmerist's performance. He is a bombastic, super-patriotic, Mussolini-like Italian. He calls himself Cavaliere Cipolla. This manipulative hunchback is no less frightening than Hawthorne's demonic horseman and no less theatrical in appearance and in action. He wears a top hat, white gloves, a hidden riding-whip, "a wide black pereline with a velvet collar and satin lining."²³ The manner he presented was not at all to put the audience at ease. He is the personification of nationalistic arrogance and contempt for others. A young and handsome tough mocks him. Cipolla has his quick revenge. He hypnotizes the workingman against his will. On command, the young man throws out his tongue at the crowd – a serious insult in Italian convention. Gloating in his victory, Cipolla boasts that "the brother of Il Duce has honoured me by his presence." He then performs various hypnotic acts, each more seemingly implausible and demeaning to the participants than the last. The audience thoroughly enjoys these little shaming dramas. The hypnotist orders a whole group of young men to dance in a peculiar way. Perhaps Mann had in mind the military goose-step that had become popular in Italy as well as Germany. The dancing participants are seemingly happy to submit to Cipolla's will. One of them, however, refuses with "heroic obstinacy" to move about crazily. Cipolla, though, wins. Hypnotized, the boy eventually succumbs and dances. The narrator explains, "it was the negative character of the young man's fighting position which was his undoing."²⁴ The narrator's children are enchanted. Yet the dancing was as grotesque as the reveling procession that Hawthorne's Robin witnessed.

Just as Major Molineux enters Hawthorne's tale late in its telling, so too does the shy and melancholy Mario, whose name oddly begins the title. He is a good-looking twenty-year old waiter at a garden café. Like Robin, Mario has had little experience with the evils of the world. The children idolize the waiter, who serves them chocolates and ice cream nearly every day. Hailing him first as a "Ganymede," Cipolla makes the youth think that, he, the conjurer, is Silvestra, the lad's girl friend. "'Kiss me!' says the hunchback. 'Trust me, I love thee.'" Mario does as bidden. It was, writes Mann, "a moment, grotesque and thrilling, the moment of Mario's bliss. In an evil span of time, crowded with a sense of the illusiveness of all joy, one sound became audible, and that not quite at once, but on the instant of the melancholy and ribald meeting between Mario's lips and the repulsive flesh which thrust itself forward for his caress." Somehow in this and other scenes, Mann makes clear that the members of the audience gasps in revulsion but quickly turn to awe and admiration for the clever manipulator of their emotions. The spectators, especially Mario's peers, break out in wild glee to see him made into a humiliated dupe. At the crack of Cipolla's whip, Mario recovers and staggers down the stairs from the stage. The crowd howls its delight and approval. Mario suddenly turns around. The audience then hears two "shattering detonations."²⁵ Cipolla falls back dead. The narrator hurries his children from the scene, as others scream and the carabinieri rush in. Mann says the horror was over. Yet, there is the implication that what the novella represents had only just begun.

It should be clear that humiliation is a central feature of the Fascist phenomenon. James Waller in *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* argues that blind obedience to authority may involve "a mystical shift from one self to another that enables a person to commit extraordinary evil" or at least fall under the spell of a mesmerist like the parti-colored militia officer, the magician Cipolla – or his doppel-gänger, Mussolini.²⁶ How is it possible to transform otherwise rational people to participate in acts of vicious hatred? Christopher R. Browning in his studies of the Holocaust found that common folk fell into the killing mode without recognizing any moral inhibition. "Once a regime like the Nazis gets in, they mobilize and harness most people to do what they want them to do. Once they've destroyed alternative political movements, then resistance in the modern era is very

²³ Mann, "Mario," 147.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 177-78.

²⁶ Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 111.

difficult.” Few were coerced at the point of a gun to fire on victims in a massacre. Walter Mattner, a self-confessed executioner recalled, “When the first truckload [of victims] arrived, my hand was slightly trembling when shooting, but one gets used to this. When the tenth load arrived, I was already aiming more calmly and shot securely at the many women, children, and infants.”²⁷

Robert Jay Lifton and Waller both explain that a process of disassociation takes place with the result the individual separates one part of his self from another. The doubling makes possible the preservation of a conventional self-identity, but the second permits a denial of guilt and responsibility. The demonic horseman has a divided face – red and black. Since perhaps prehistoric times those colors have marked the polarities in hell – the blackness of death, the redness of fire and blood.²⁸ “Doubling involves,” Lifton argues, “both an unconscious dimension – take place largely outside of awareness – and a significant change in moral consciousness.”²⁹ Such a description might certainly fit the reaction of the crowd to Cipolla and his eerily hypnotic tricks in “Mario.” But, as Waller pointedly asks, is the doubling the cause of the cruelty or its consequence, or in other words is this unconscious bifurcation simply a means to avoid thinking very hard about what one is doing, a casual lapse of conscience?³⁰ The fact is that genuine pleasure in destructive behavior arises because the object of contempt and hatred is deemed not really human. The “Major” is made into a feathered and castrated figure, a capon, no longer like other men in dress, pride, or manner. The transformation of his appearance permits the crowd to see him as an object of derision, not even of pity. As the philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum puts it, human beings require a means to bound themselves together against the “other,” who thus helps them “to exemplify the boundary line between the truly human and the basely animal.”³¹ The satisfaction of making the outsider into a beast or fool arises from the sense that we are happily far from vile animality and clownishness ourselves.

In the Rumanian playwright Eugene Ionescu’s *Rhinocéros*, human beings become rhinoceri in seriatim until only the narrator remains intractable against the forces of conformity and Orwellian Group Think. Just as Mann was prompted by the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany, Ionescu was appalled by the Iron Guard in his native country in the 1930s. Mussolini, however, was Fascism’s founder and its mastermind, and hence Mann set his story in Italy. But he recognized that his fellow Germans were also fast succumbing to the Cipollian mentality, to coin a phrase. In the late 1920s Hitler was thought to be a second-hand Mussolini, not a premier figure. That reversal of notoriety would occur only after “Mario” was published. Both Hawthorne and Mann understood the nature of human suggestibility and how leaders could play with the hidden and sexual urges of their followers – the joys in humiliating the vulnerable and the terrors and evil that the process engenders.

This is a subject, as mentioned at the beginning, that should engage much concern within the social-science field. After all, we have seen how the torture of detainees at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib – and presumably elsewhere too – have employed the techniques of shame and humiliation by forcing unclothed prisoners to perform obscene acts even more grotesque than Cipolla’s mesmerized subjects. Nakedness signals shame even now as it did in the Garden of Eden. But the United States military

²⁷ Christopher R. Browning quoted in David Williamson, “How Hitler Reached the Final Solution,” *USA Today* (Society for the Advancement of Education) (September 2004):1 (*Questia* reprint: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5007106518>).

²⁸ See Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 59-92, especially 74; Richard Broxton Onians, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time, and Fate: New Interpretations of Greek, Roman and Kindred Evidence Also of Some Basic Jewish and Christian Beliefs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 535-36, 541-42; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 455-56.

²⁹ Lifton quoted in Waller, *Becoming Evil*, 115.

³⁰ Waller, 118-19.

³¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 347.

torturers were themselves shamed, at least in the eyes of the world, by the acts they commanded prisoners to perform – even if they did not know it. John Limon, a professor of English literature, asks, “Is there anything to be learned from the way shame works on all levels: leaders who order acts of torture to be performed; American citizens who are ashamed of their leaders; soldiers and civilian interrogators who perform the acts; detainees on whom the acts are performed?”³² The two stories, “My Kinsman,” and “Mario” do not resolve such questions with finality. Yet they succeed in compelling us to seek answers.

³² John K. Limon, “The Shame of ‘The Shame of Abu Ghraib,’” paper presented at the 23rd Annual Conference for the Application of Psychoanalysis to the Arts, University of Helsinki, Finland, 28 June 2006.