

September 1966

## Meetings with Thomas Mann

Robert Nathan

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

---

### Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 7, no.7, September 1966, p.334-335

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact [mfkelly@colby.edu](mailto:mfkelly@colby.edu).

334 • Colby Library Quarterly

MEETINGS WITH THOMAS MANN

By ROBERT NATHAN

[*Ed. note:* The author's recollections are in the form of a letter written to John Eastman, Jr., from Los Angeles in March of 1965. Mr. Nathan has kindly consented to its publication here.]

Dear Mr. Eastman:

I'm not very good at describing my friends; and my memory for dates and such is not very good, either. You must forgive me.

My first meeting with Thomas Mann was at a celebration dinner for Alfred and Blanche Knopf; it may have been Blanche's birthday, or the firm's twenty-fifth anniversary, I've forgotten which. Thomas was very quiet; he had only recently arrived in the U. S., and I remember that he seemed almost unbelievably stiff and shy and uncomfortable. He and Selma Lagerlof were introduced to each other; it was like the meeting of two statues. I don't think they spoke a word to each other, they murmured a polite greeting, and stood and stared straight ahead. I was amused — and surprised — at the time; there were the two giants, each — apparently — awed by the presence of the other. Or perhaps not; perhaps it was just a terrible shyness. Years later — in the middle 'forties — I came out to Hollywood, and met Thomas again, and we became good friends. He had changed marvelously; and although he and Mrs. Mann maintained a certain wholly German and turn-of-the-century reserve, he seemed merry and outgoing by comparison with that first impression. I was very fond of the Manns (I called him "Tommie" — I never knew whether he liked it or hated it); and I think that they were fond of me. He was able to adjust to the California climate, but not to the climate of the almost hysterical witch-hunts which followed the end of the war.

I have these little pictures of him in my mind: the first time he and Katia came to dinner at my house, and he accepted — to my surprise — a highball; and (I think) almost the last time, when he sat next to a young lady to whom he had been introduced simply as Dr. Mmmmm — and who kept asking him

Colby Library Quarterly 335

about aspirin and what to take for a headache . . . also, at my house. She later became Mrs. Nathan.

These are inconsequential bits of gossip, I'm afraid, of no great help to your collection. But as I say, it was all fifteen and twenty years ago, and my memory is no great shakes.

Cordially,  
Robert Nathan



KLAUS MANN AND *DECISION*

By LLOYD FRANKENBERG

OF the Mann family I knew only Klaus, and that rather briefly. *Decision* I had come to know early on, in its all too short existence. I like to think now that I was invited to submit poems for the first issue, but that is perhaps a wish after the fact. A poem of mine did appear in the third number, March 1941, largely through the good offices of Alan Hartman, then an associate, later managing, editor.

The poem was called "The Rain in Spain, the Wind in Finland" and was an attempt to express my almost belligerent pacificism. I took God to task for alternately permitting fascists and communists to prevail.

This was, of course, before the United States became actively involved in the second world war. Even so, it seems quite remarkable now that that poem, and others in similar vein, should have been published in *Decision*. One of them, in fact, appeared on the same page as the concluding paragraph of an article by Alan Hartman attacking the America Firsters and other "appeasement" or isolationist groups.

The distinction may seem trifling today, but at the time it seemed highly significant. I refer to the difference between those who opposed that particular war on political grounds, and those who were against *any* war. Possibly the majority of