Eastman, Jr.: Remembering Thomas Mann

THOMAS MANN

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you are quite a frivolous prodigal, my dear Jack, to spend so much money for this cross-breed of a book and of a manuscript which you even cannot read. But I like this sort of squandering, I find it very moving and am sincerely proud of it. Thank you for your faithfulness!

To Jack Eastman

Paciif. Palisades, Calif.
Nov. 6, 1947

Thomas Mann

Inscription in DOKTOR FAUSTUS

See pages 310, 317
I CANNOT remember how many times I have been asked, "How did you get to know Thomas Mann?" But I shall always remember how I came to meet and know him.

It started in June 1935 when I went to Europe for the first time. The trip, on a twelve-passenger freighter, took twelve days from New York to Rotterdam. Although I had an assortment of paperback books with me, the only books I recall from that trip are Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and *Joseph and His Brothers*, the first of the great tetralogy. Anyone who has read *The Magic Mountain* will understand that being aboard a freighter — where, day after day, all there is to do is sleep, eat, read, and philosophize stretched out in a deck chair bathed in the warm sun — is the perfect atmosphere to be in while reading that magnificent creation. Before I finished those two books, Thomas Mann had become my hero. Now, thirty years later, he remains my great literary hero and a person who has had a most profound effect upon my philosophy and way of life.

On my return from that trip, most of which was spent in the Nazi Germany Dr. Mann and his family had so recently fled, I started buying all of his works that had been translated into English. Although I continued for years to read everything I could find by Thomas Mann, I learned little about his wife, children, and home life until the fall of 1942. While on a visit to New York City, I was browsing in one of my favorite bookstores, and saw a book entitled *The Turning Point* by Klaus Mann. I had not heard of Klaus, but the cognomen attracted my attention. On examination of the dust jacket, I found that Klaus was the "son of Thomas Mann" and a writer of distinction in his own right. *The Turning Point* is autobiographical,
but it is far more than merely a recitation of Klaus’s own life. In this volume Klaus presents not only his own story but also a marvelous portrait of his family, and of many intimate friends in many lands: André Gide, Ernst Toller, Maxim Gorki, Jean Cocteau, Bruno Walter, Jacob Wassermann, Bruno Frank, Stefan Zweig, Julian Green, Somerset Maugham, and dozens of others connected with the creative arts and social problems.

Klaus’s life had been an active one — as a playwright, actor, and dramatic critic in the newly-awakened Germany after World War I, before the rise of Nazism. He took up the social novel and the political essay as weapons to fight Hitler and his henchmen before they came to power. In exile, he did not “live above the battle” but fought by any means at hand. With his books, pamphlets, essays, and lectures he was very much in the thick of it. Klaus explained his perspectives and his objectives with these words:

To tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, to tell my own story . . . that of one who spent the best time of his life in a social and spiritual vacuum, striving for a true community but never finding it; disconnected, restless, wandering, haunted by those solemn abstractions in which few believed — civilization, progress, liberty . . ., to tell my story not despite the crisis but because of it . . . . It is from the turning point that we should examine the path we have covered. In measuring its serpentine curves and paradoxical zigzags, we may learn something as to the next step to take. For one thing is certain at least, in the midst of so many staggering uncertainties; the next step will carry us into new land with landscapes and conditions as they have never been seen before. Nobody can foretell whether things will be worse or better in this transformed world to come. The horizons may be brighter or darker than the skies we know. But surely the light will alter . . . Whom should I try to please or to impress? I am alone; I am free. I possess nothing, nor do I wish to possess anything. Whatever I may have owned has been taken from me — even the language I used to consider mine . . . . All I believe in is the indivisible universal civilization to be created by man.

I doubt that anyone, feeling as I did about Thomas Mann, after reading these few words of Klaus’s could possibly have left that bookstore without The Turning Point under his arm.

I finished The Turning Point in less than the next forty-eight hours and was moved to sit down and write a sixteen-page letter to Klaus. I wrote even though I did not anticipate hearing
from him, for at the conclusion of the book he tells of waiting for an imminent call to the army. He had volunteered for service with the U. S. forces before his naturalization had been completed. Much to my surprise and delight, he answered on December 11: "This is just a brief, inadequate note to thank you for a fine and moving letter. ‘C’est pour des amis comme vous que j’écris mes livres,’ Rilke was wont to write to those who not only praised his poetry but actually understood its meaning and melody. Unfortunately, however, we are not free, nowadays, to indulge in a long, lyrical correspondence, à la Rilke, and his ‘young poet’ friend. As for me, I am in a hurry to wind up as many current things as possible, before I report for induction on December 28, 1942. With my best regards and wishes, Cordially yours, Klaus Mann.” Of course, I did respond to Klaus’s letter and thus initiated a steady interchange which caused us both to feel we were the closest of friends long before we finally met on Klaus’s return from Italy to this country, after the end of World War II.

About seven or eight weeks after my first letter from Klaus, the Atlantic Monthly published an article, “The Joseph Novels,” by Thomas Mann. It was through this source that I first learned that the Joseph novels had been completed, and my joy knew no bounds. My fear that Thomas Mann might die before he finished the series was now at an end. A critic in the New York Times called the tetralogy a “remarkable work,” and went on to say that “It stirs us more profoundly than any other work by Thomas Mann. Let us avow it openly; this is the most powerful book ever written by Thomas Mann.” In the Foreword to the 1948 single-volume edition, Dr. Mann himself wrote:

Is it asking too much of posterity . . . to expect a bit of puzzled surprise that this narrative of seventy thousand calmly flowing lines telling of the primitive occurrences of human life, of love and hate, blessing and curse, fraternal strife and paternal grief, pride and penance, fall and rise, a humorous song of mankind . . . could have come into being in the turbulent circumstances of those years 1926 to 1942, when every day hurled the wildest demands at the heart and the brain? As for me, I yield not to surprise but to gratitude. I am grateful to this work which was my staff and my stay on a path that often led through dark valleys. It was my refuge, my comfort, my home, my symbol of
steadfastness, the guarantee of my perseverance in the tempestuous change of things.

How will posterity regard this work? Will it soon become a dust-covered curio for antiquarians, the easy prey of fleeting time? Or will its pleasanties cheer those who come after us, its pathos touch them? Or will it perhaps be numbered among the great books? I do not know and no one can tell me. But as the son of a tradesman, I have a fundamental faith in quality. What is it that has helped many a product of human hands through the ages, given it strength to resist the centuries, and restrained mankind in its wildest days from destroying it? Only one thing: quality. The son of Joseph is good, solid work, done out of that fellow feeling for which mankind has always been sensitively receptive. A measure of durability is, I think, inherent in it.

My excitement on learning of the completion of the tetralogy was the catalytic agent that caused me to write my first letter to Dr. Mann. The fact that I dared to write to my literary hero without tremor was due to the reaction I had had from my letters to his son Klaus. I felt that if the son was as warm and responsive, why should the father be any different? Possibly a naive conclusion, but I went ahead.

My first letter to the father was far shorter than the sixteen pages I had written to the son, and it was to some extent a "fan letter." I told him that if only he were still a resident of Princeton, New Jersey, rather than of Pacific Palisades in California, on my next trip to New York I should have brought some of his books with me, knocked on his door, and asked that he inscribe them for me. Almost by return mail, he thanked me for my letter and said that if I would trust my books to the mails he would be happy to sign them for me. At the time I received Dr. Mann's letter, I was in the hospital, and with my weakened physical condition as an excuse to myself, I made no decision as to which of his works to send. Instead, I had all the books mailed to him, and wrote that I was selfishly placing the decision in his hands as to which he would choose to write in. I silently prayed that he would at least autograph each book. It is impossible to describe my state of mind when later, upon opening the returned package, I found that he had fulfilled my fondest hope — he had written something in every one of the books!
Some time afterward I learned that Dr. Mann was to give a lecture at the Ford Hall Forum in Boston. I had thanked him by letter, but I could not overlook the entrancing possibility of meeting and thanking him in person. I wrote, inviting Dr. and Mrs. Mann to spend the weekend — his lecture was to be on a Sunday evening — with my family in Framingham Centre. When I look back, I am somewhat overwhelmed by my daring to invite, let alone expect that they would accept my invitation. I was soon disappointed to receive a letter from Dr. Mann saying that much as they would have enjoyed visiting, they could not, as he was to lecture in New York on Saturday night, after which they would take the midnight train to Boston. My disappointment was not total, however; he suggested that I have Sunday midday dinner with him and Mrs. Mann.

Just before I met them at the hotel, I succumbed to a horrible case of stage fright. I wondered — what could I possibly have to talk about with Dr. and Mrs. Mann — I’d be thoroughly tongue-tied. Not at all. From the moment we met, he and his extraordinarily charming wife made me feel as if we had been friends for years. Following dinner, which lasted more than two hours, Dr. Mann went to his room to nap. Before we parted, he invited me and my mother, who was coming in for the lecture, to join them later for hot chocolate and sandwiches. When the lecture was over, Mother and I went backstage to join the Manns. Shortly thereafter, we all walked from the auditorium two or three blocks back to the hotel. At the Copley Plaza, we went to the main dining room to a table Dr. Mann had reserved. I cannot remember what we talked about, but I am sure it was not just about his work. My impression at this writing, twenty-two years later, is that we talked largely about our families, world conditions, war, Hitler and company, et cetera, et cetera. Then the end came to what was one of the truly memorable days of my life.

A few months later I was given a present of $1,000 to obtain something that would be permanently important to me. After much debate with myself about how I should use the money, I came to the conclusion that nothing would be more desirable than a Thomas Mann manuscript. This was probably an unrealizable dream, but then I fell back on the old cliché, “nothing ventured, nothing gained.” A note to Dr. Mann telling him of...
my dream brought a letter which said in part: "Your wish is very touching . . . anyhow money transactions between the two of us are not quite in place. Therefore, I am sending you, as a token of friendship, a few pages which I wrote a short time ago for an American periodical. The article is called 'Vom Buch der Bücher und Joseph,' and deals with my relation to the Bible and with the conception of the extensive work, whose final volume will be published by Knopf next month. Of course, you cannot read my handwriting — but that would not be possible for you with one of my big manuscripts either; and this way you have at least something authentically by me in your hands. It is a pleasant thought for me that you are the possessor of a small manuscript of mine.” The handwritten script, in German, had at its conclusion: “This manuscript I dedicate to my young friend John Eastman. Pacific Palisades, May 9, 1944, Thomas Mann.”

I knew, of course, that possession of the manuscript of a work by Dr. Mann such as Buddenbrooks, The Magic Mountain, Dr. Faustus, the Joseph tetralogy, or others of that magnitude would be wrong as well as impossible for any individual. Outside of these major manuscripts I could not and still cannot imagine any of his I would rather have received than this one, which sets forth his relationship to the Bible and his conception of the Joseph tetralogy. The dilemma I faced as to how I could adequately thank Dr. Mann for my gift of gifts was enormous, but after many days of rumination I decided on the course to take.

My thanks, other than written, commenced in June of 1944 and saw their twenty-second anniversary this year. They are in the form of an annual award given for "Excellence and Achievement in the Field of Literature" to a senior at Deerfield Academy "in honor of Thomas Mann." The award consists of the following books: Buddenbrooks, The Magic Mountain, the Joseph tetralogy, Stories of Three Decades, and Essays of Three Decades. The selection represents those of his works I feel are indispensable if one is to begin to know Thomas Mann. I list the books in the order above because it is the order I recommend to anyone who has not read any of his works.
In a letter, two weeks after sending the manuscript, and in answer to a query from me, Mann wrote: "I am sorry that you searched in vain after the magazine for which I wrote the article the manuscript of which I presented to you. I forgot to tell you that I wrote it for the Good Housekeeping magazine, whose editor happens to be an acquaintance of mine. . . . For Good Housekeeping, the article is too long, and towards the end, too difficult. I have shortened it considerably for publication." In another note a few months later — after publication of the article — he wrote: "Among my papers I found a copy of the complete English translation of the Bible article which I enclose; I am glad that in this way, I can satisfy your friendly curiosity about that part of the article which was omitted in Good Housekeeping." Later, I sent my copy of Good Housekeeping to Dr. Mann to inscribe. He declared: "I think this is the complete English version of the manuscript you possess. Obviously the editor couldn't bring himself to cut it. Thomas Mann." (A friendly and amusing aside: My "friendly curiosity" was such that I found by a comparison of the complete English translation he sent me and the version printed by Good Housekeeping that the editor had indeed cut it, and Good Housekeeping had not printed "the complete English translation.")

In the manuscript, Dr. Mann wrote: "In these last rooted-up decades, all of us have asked ourselves anew the questions about man, whence he comes, where he goes, what may be his position in the universe. This question has become a concern of mind and religion; though it is a question incapable of answer, a problem destined to remain a secret; yet it is a secret to which the thinker, the anthropologist, the antiquarian, the paleontologist, the theologian, the political philosopher, the poet — everyone in his way and with his means wants to offer his creative tribute." And in referring to the story of Joseph and his brothers as "this pearl of the Old Testament," Mann said, "It is a story which is also told in the Koran. But it is most beautifully and humanly told in the Bible . . . even though it is here told in a form which is too laconic and terse. Goethe had already expressed this regret. 'Most charming, is this natural story. But it seems too short, and one is tempted to
carry it out in all its detail.' It was a temptation which then seized me and to which I succumbed.”

Looking back, I find I have always been moved most by those things which succinctly set forth in writing, in a way I wish I had been able to, my instincts and beliefs as to what is good. Certainly there is nothing unique in this. But for me, more than any other writer, Thomas Mann was saying what I wanted to hear. And this was in a time when the world was full of many voices and confusions. Among his millions of words, the following lines from the manuscript have been to me among his most meaningful:

Art is the magic by which the physical becomes the spirit, and the spirit becomes corporeal. Art is the endowment which hails from the maternal depths of life, from the sphere of the instinct, the emotion, the dream, the passion — and at the same time, it is the endowment from the paternal sphere of light, the sphere of the mind, the reason, the intellect, the regulating judgment. Just so does art become the pattern and model for human feelings in general. For no true humanity can exist without this double blessing. The physical and the spiritual, power and mortality must be balanced in equal scales in order to be kneaded into one whole substance, that substance which we call culture, and which includes yet many more opposites of the same kind, such as respect and liberty, believing and thinking, sense of tradition and love of the future . . .

[The article concludes:] I believe that today the best hearts and minds in the whole world are occupied with forming a new concept of man. This concept must make fuller and better room for all parts of which culture consists. A new feeling for humanity is developing which does not blind itself to nor deny the demon in man, those powers of the soul which spring from the dark, but which attempt to pierce and illumine these powers through reason and make them serve both life and culture.

In connection with the gift of the manuscript, other subjects were discussed in our correspondence. One was the 1944 presidential election. On November 13, 1944, Mann answered some questions I had put to him on October 31 as to whether one should vote for a fourth term for Franklin Delano Roosevelt or a first term for Thomas Dewey. He wrote: “If you have cast your ballot according to the statement I made in a quite intimate circle of people here, I can assure you with a good conscience that you did the right thing. The victory of the rival candidate would, indeed, have been an international
disaster and would have caused greatest confusion. But I have always felt confident that the political intelligence of the American people would not fail in this case.” (The statement had been in favor of the re-election of FDR.)

A further aside, but one appropriate at this point, is a brief description of two copies of Mann’s The Holy Sinner which are not yet a part of the Colby Collection. Dr. Mann inscribed and sent them to Mrs. Eastman and me when he learned of my engagement in October 1951 to Laura Franklin Delano Adams, a cousin of the late President. In the volume for me, he wrote: “To Jack Eastman for whom a new life — perhaps life itself — now begins. With sincere congratulations. Thomas Mann. Oct. 28, 1951.” In the copy for Mrs. Eastman: “To Laura Delano Adams — beautiful and learned like Joseph — with heartfelt wishes for her future — may she be happy and give happiness — Thomas Mann. Oct. 28, 1951.”

My collecting the works of Thomas Mann continued, as before his gift of the manuscript, but the collection had by then reached a size I had never anticipated. There was almost no problem in obtaining first editions, in both languages, of everything published subsequent to 1940. Other editions, including first editions in German, published in Europe — Germany, Austria, and Sweden — as well as certain special limited editions, were located as a result of growing interest among booksellers and friends, who kept me informed of any and every book they thought I might wish to have.

Of all I collected there was only one I gave away, other than to Colby College, and that went to Dr. Mann. The name of the book escapes me. I only remember that it was a very special limited edition of a short story and that it was published in London. At the time Dr. Mann returned it to me (November 1950) with his inscription, he told me, either by letter or possibly via the inscription itself, what a great pleasure it had been for him to see the book — he had never known of its existence! Learning this, I could not retain the book. I felt it must become a part of his own collection of his works. Therefore, I remanded it to him, having added, after his inscription to me, a few words of mine and my signature. In his turn, he wrote: “It was really nice of you to send me the little book back as a gift. Thank you so much. It would have
been enough for me to see this so far unknown edition, but of course, it's still better to have it.”

In *The Permanent Goethe; A Collection of Goethe’s Great Poems, Dramas, Ballads, Essays, Short Stories, Maxims and Reflections*, edited, selected and with an introduction by Thomas Mann, he wrote for me: “This is not my best homage to Goethe, but it is one of them after all and I enjoy it more than any Philologist ever did to see my mortal name connected with his Immortality.” I include this inscription here because I suspect that as much as I enjoyed giving the book to Dr. Mann, I enjoyed equally seeing “my mortal name connected with his Immortality.”

It becomes more difficult, every time I reread the approximately one hundred inscriptions, to decide which is my favorite, which I find most amusing, personal, etc., but what Mann wrote in the first German edition of *Joseph, Der Ernährer* I cherish as particularly charming and revealing. “This is the gayest volume of the four, gayer in German than in English, though English is gayer than German. To Jack Eastman. December 7, 1947. Thomas Mann.”

In view of the complete listing of inscriptions published in this issue, I will restrict myself to quoting five others that have meant most to me.

1) In 1947 a photocopy edition of a typewritten "manuscript" of *Dr. Faustus* in German, limited to fifty copies, was published in the United States. This special edition was necessary under a provision of the U. S. copyright law which states that an author who writes in a foreign language must publish his book in the foreign language in the U. S. before publication of the English translation. Dr. Mann, highly aware that, unfortunately for me, I neither read nor spoke German, wrote: “You are quite a frivolous prodigal, my dear Jacky, to spend so much money for this cross-breed of a book and of a manuscript which you even cannot read. But I like this sort of squandering, I find it very moving and am sincerely proud of it. Thank you for your faithfulness.”

2) In the 1947 Stockholm edition of *Deutschland und Die Deutschen*: “This is a layer of Dr. Faustus whom you do not know, poor fellow! Hasten to become a member of the Book of the Month Club who made it its choice for one of the next
months! (I like this sort of correspondence in the form of informal dedications.) To Jack Eastman. Thomas Mann.”

3) In Walter H. Perl’s *Thomas Mann 1933 bis 1945*: “This is quite good, not very good, but pretty good. To Jack Eastman, the hero of this nice booklet. T. M.”

4) Mann knew about my love of Dostoevsky’s works. In *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky* for which he did the Introduction, he wrote: “To Jack Eastman with heartiest greetings from Fjodor and Thomas.”

5) In the first (1948) American edition of *Dr. Faustus* in English: “To Jack Eastman, hoping that he may not yawn so much as the American reviewers.” Of all that Dr. Mann wrote there has been only one book, I must confess, that I was able to put down and not finish with all possible speed. That was *Dr. Faustus*. Even to this date I have not been able to “get into it.” Thus, I am afraid that his wish that I “may not yawn” did not come to pass.

Despite general consensus, the opinion was not unanimous. After his discharge from the army in Europe, Klaus went to Pacific Palisades to visit his family. In August 1946 Klaus wrote me in part: “I was happy to find my father in surprisingly good shape. Considering his age, it is really quite remarkable how quickly he has recovered from what he calls ‘that clinical incident.’ He is working on his *Dr. Faustus*, the ready parts of which I am just reading with absorbing interest. An extraordinary artistic tour de force and spiritual adventure! Alarmingly burdened at times with philosophical ballast, but always exciting, indeed, thrilling, in virtue of an inherent intellectual and emotional tension. Quite the most curious thing I have read in years.”

I am very fond of the truly beautiful edition of *Oekkute Erlebnisse [An Experience in the Occult]*. It is as handsomely bound and printed as any of his books, and it contains a magnificent pen-and-ink portrait of Dr. Mann by Karl Dannemann. My copy, number 49 of 75, was signed by both Dr. Mann and Dannemann. The foremost reason I like this book is my deep belief in such happenings, extrasensory perception, and other manifestations of contact “out of this world.” Thomas Mann would never have written of this experience unless it had happened to him; and what happened could not have been trickery.
For me, there has always been a tremendous amount of honesty and inspiration in what Mann wrote—as he did in his own hand in the German edition of Lotte in Weimar: “This is an unusually German book, but it may not be read in Germany. That a young American, in the midst of the war with a Germany become terrible, wanted a German edition of Lotte in Weimar is a beautiful sign of spiritual freedom. To Jack Eastman, Thomas Mann, Pacific Palisades, New Year, 1945.”

When I was asked to write an essay for this Quarterly, I said I would be happy to do two or three pages. Professor Richard Cary, the editor, responded: “Please don’t stint on space or detail, for any personal reflections on Thomas Mann become invaluable.” I have done as requested, and I hope I may have passed along some of the quality of this literary giant and his effect upon me. In the course of his life Thomas Mann came to believe and to convey to others—including me—a substantial philosophy of self and self-respect. “Compare yourself, recognize what you are, for no one remains quite the same when he recognizes himself.” How many times he said to me: “Jack, do not be afraid to experiment, try things, be Jack, not what someone else tells you to be! Be a dissenter, a questioner! So many, many things we are told are wrong, are wrong only in the minds of people who are afraid of life—afraid to live—afraid to admit they are human.” I do not know a more authentic guide than this, and I shall always be proud to have been a member of what he called his “circle of friends.”