



The Letters of Heinrich and Thomas Mann, 1900-1949 (Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, No 12)

By Thomas Mann

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Fortunately for us, brothers Heinrich and Thomas Mann remained devoted and eloquent correspondents even while disagreeing passionately on matters literary, political, philosophical, and personal. In their correspondence, set against a shifting backdrop of locations in Europe and America, mundane concerns blend easily with astonishing artistic and critical insights. That these irrepressible siblings were among the giants of twentieth-century letters gives their exchanges unique literary and historical fascination.

Beginning in Germany and Italy at the turn of the century, the letters document with disarming immediacy the brothers' views on aesthetics, politics, and the social responsibility of the writer, as well as their mutual jealousy, admiration, rivalry, and loyalty. The devastating rift caused by Thomas's support of Germany during World War I and his brother's utter opposition to the war took many years to mend, but they found their way back to friendship in the 1920s. After Hitler rose to power, both writers ultimately sought refuge in the United States. The letters offer a moving portrayal of their struggle, as novelists and socially engaged intellectuals, to bear witness to the cataclysmic historical changes around them and to their experience of exile, in Europe and then in America. This first complete English translation of their correspondence is a dramatic human dialogue and a major literary event.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This collection of all extant letters between authors and brothers Thomas (Buddenbrooks, The Magic Mountain) and Heinrich Mann (The Blue Angel) is a welcome addition to the Mann canon. Most of these letters have never appeared in English before. The brothers had a fascinating if often strained relationship, owing partly to a difference in literary ideals (in 1903 Thomas slammed Heinrich's literary sensationalism), but the brothers' most serious clash concerned Germany's role in World War I. The letters present a sometimes sickly, often querulous Thomas and a more evenhanded and forgiving Heinrich, though their correspondence is rather one-sided at the beginning since few of Heinrich's early letters have survived. Besides an introduction and a documents section, the book contains more than 100 pages of notes. A fascinating and useful collection of interest to scholars and general Mann readers. *?Bruce Scheuneman, Texas A&M Univ., Kingsville*

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From Kirkus Reviews

The brothers Mann, both articulate witnesses of this century's European upheaval, give lively testimony to their usually competing perceptions. Thomas Mann and his older brother, Heinrich, were both prominent novelists in Germany before the First World War. Though they had much in common, they fell out politically and philosophically with each other over their competing visions of Germany. Thomas was a deeply conservative, anti-Western nationalist; Heinrich was a francophile advocate of Western democracy, an avowed opponent of Germany's prevailing romantic nationalism. The war brought their rivalry to a head and provides this fine volume with its most compelling, bitter, and revealing letters--revealing about Germany at the time, about the sibling rivalry of two novelists, about myriad fascinating details of their private and writing lives. The underlying love-hate relationship that defines all their exchanges to one degree or another lends this book the character of an epistolary novel: Thomas's internationally rising star vs. his older brother's decline into obscurity. Thomas, of course, is best known in the US for his cosmopolitan commitment to Western democracy during the Nazi era. The letters to and from his brother clarify just how gradually the shift in his thinking occurred and what its limits were. It took the great novelist a good long while under considerable pressure from Heinrich and his children to break with Nazi Germany entirely. Happily, this beautifully edited and translated volume contains copiously informative notes and explanations. Anthony Heilbut's (Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature, 1996) foreword helps to situate the renewed interest in the brothers Mann. Edited by Hans Wysling, longtime director of the Thomas Mann Archive in Zurich, this first complete English translation of the correspondence is an exemplary edition. The letters of the brothers Mann constitute a crucial document of 20th-century German culture and politics, and they are by any standard fine reading. -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Language Notes

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