**Thomas Mann (Paul Thomas Mann, 1875-1955)** was one of the most important novelists of the first half of the twentieth century, known especially for his innovative treatment of narrative time, his fusion of mythical themes with psychological realism, and his incorporation of philosophical reflection into literature. A successful author in his native Germany at an early age, he achieved worldwide acclaim after winning the Nobel Prize in 1929. Mann began his career as a conservative nationalist, but became an outspoken liberal democrat shortly after the First World War and had to flee Germany after the Nazis came to power. He spent the next two decades in exile and used his considerable influence to mobilize popular opinion against Hitler. Thomas Mann was the brother of Heinrich Mann, as well as the father of Erika Mann, and Klaus Mann.

**Timeline of Life**

**1875 1894 1905 1906 1909 1910**

| | | | | |

Born Moves to Munich Marries Katia Pringsheim Birth of son Klaus Birth of son Golo Birth of daughter

Birth of daughter Erika Monika

**1918 1919 1929 1933 1936**

| | | | | Birth of daughter Birth of son Michael Wins Nobel Prize Exile in Switzerland & France Becomes Czech citizen

Elisabeth German citizenship revoked

**1938 1941 1944 1952 1955**

| | | | |

Moves to Moves from Princeton Becomes US Moves to Switzerland Dies

Princeton to Pacific Palisades, CA citizen

**Selective Timeline of Works Published During Lifetime**

**1898 1901 1903 1906 1912 1918 1924**

| | | | | | |

*Little Herr Buddenbrooks Tonio Kröger Royal Highness Death in Venice Reflections of a The Magic*

*Friedemann Tristan* *Nonpolitical Man Mountain*

(short fiction) (short fiction)

**1933 1934 1936 1939 1943 1947 1951**

| | | | | | |

*The Stories Young Joseph Joseph in Egypt Lotte in Joseph the Provider Doctor Faustus The Holy*

*of Jacob Weimar Sinner*

**1954**

|

*Confessions of*

*Felix Krull*

Born in the small North German town of Lübeck, Thomas Mann was the son of a wealthy local senator and his Portuguese-Brazilian wife. The perceived contrast between the protestant, Hanseatic side of Mann’s heritage and his putatively ‘southern’ blood became a lifelong theme of his fiction, as did his early consciousness of homosexual desires, on which he apparently never acted since he regarded them a threat to his artistic creativity. Mann felt a strong calling to be a writer even while he was still a student, and moved to Munich, then the artistic center of Germany shortly after finishing high school. His first collection of stories, *Little Herr Friedemann* earned him considerable praise and marked the start of a life-long collaboration with the publishing house S. Fischer, but it was the runaway success of the novel *Buddenbrooks* that vaulted Mann into the status of Germany’s foremost young writer.

Two years later, Mann followed up on this with the novella *Tonio Kröger* and a volume of short fiction, *Tristan*. Collectively, these works demonstrate Mann’s debt to the artistic movements of the fin-de-siècle, such as naturalism, symbolism and aestheticism. At the same time, they announce his first forays into the themes that would make him famous, such as the struggles of the modern artist to keep his distance from bourgeois society without lapsing into decadence, or the tensions that arise from repressed erotic desire. These early works also impressed reviewers through their stylistic maturity, especially their attempts to adapt the leitmotif and other Wagnerian compositional techniques to literature. Along with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, Wagner formed part of an intellectual troika that exerted profound influence on Mann’s fiction throughout his life.

Over the course of the next ten years, Mann struggled to match the achievements of his early work. During this period, he married and started what would become a large family, thereby achieving the bourgeois solidity for which he always strove, even as he regarded it as a possible threat to his art. Mann’s comparative dry spell ended when he published the novella *Death in Venice*, which remains his most popular work in the English-speaking world. It adds a complex engagement with mythological sources and a moving investigation of homoerotic desire to Mann’s earlier interest in the fate of the modern artist.

The First World War and its aftermath saw Mann enter politics, first with the conservative treatise *Confessions of a Nonpolitical Man*, and then, in a move that stunned his earlier admirers, with the ‘Lecture on the German Republic’, a strong defense of the new German state. Throughout these years, Mann also worked on *The Magic Mountain*, a novel that, in its innovative treatment of narrative time and its grand synthetic vision of pre-war European society, is rivaled in the modernist canon only by Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.

After winning the Nobel Prize in 1929, Mann became one of the most famous authors in the world, and foreign royalties helped him maintain a luxurious life even after the Nazis drove him out of Germany. After extended stays in Switerzland and in the south of France, Mann was offered a teaching position at Princeton University. After several years on the East Coast of the United States, he moved his family to Pacific Palisades, the suburb of Los Angeles that became known as “Weimar on the Pacific” because of its large population of German refugee intelletuals. During these years, Mann’s *Joseph* tetralogy, a retelling of an episode from the Book of Genesis influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis, anthropology, Egyptology and Biblical philology, became a fixture on the American bestseller list.

Initially reluctant to speak out against Hitler, Mann eventually became a leading voice in the exile community, publishing essays, lecturing to sold-out audiences, and broadcasting messages to the German people via the BBC. His late masterpiece *Doctor Faustus* represents the artistic culmination of this period, and uses the age-old story of a pact with the devil to allegorize Germany’s descent into fascism and madness.

After 1945, Mann’s outspoken support of the American war effort earned him an ambivalent reception in a Germany only beginning to come to terms with its own past. He consequently lived out his final years in Switzerland, where he published the *Confessions of Felix Krull*, a comical novel that he had begun over forty years earlier.

**Chronology of Major Works:**

Novels

\* *Buddenbrooks* (1901)

\* *Royal Highness* (1906)

\* *The Magic Mountain* (1924)

\* *The Stories of Jacob* (1933)

\* *Young Joseph* (1934)

\* *Joseph in Egypt* (1936)

\* *Lotte in Weimar* (1939)

\* *Joseph the Provider* (1943)

\* *Doctor Faustus* (1947)

\* *The Holy Sinner* (1951)

\* *Confessions of Felix Krull* (1954)

Selected Short Fiction

\* *Little Herr Friedemann* (1898)

\* *Tonio Kröger* (1903)

\* *Tristan* (1903)

\* *Death in Venice* (1912)

\* *Mario and the Magician* (1930)

\* *The Transposed Heads* (1940)

\* *The Black Swan* (1953)

Selected Non-Fiction

\* *Reflections of a Non-Political Man* (1918)

\* *Goethe and Tolstoi* (1921)

\* *On the German Republic* (1922)

\* *Brother Hitler* (1938)

\* *Germany and the Germans* (1945)

**Further Reading**

Hatfield, Henry (1951) *Thomas Mann,* New York: Spectrum.

Heilbut, Anthony (1995) *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Kontje, Todd (2010) *Thomas Mann’s World: Empire, Race, and the Jewish Question* (2010), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kurzke, Hermann (2002) *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art: A Biography*, Princeton: Princeton UP.

Reed, T. J. (1974, revised ed. 1996) *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition*, New York: Oxford UP.

<Image 1: Thomas Mann (seated) with his older brother Heinrich in 1900. Source: Wikimedia Commons http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heinrich\_Thomas\_Mann.jpg>

<Image 2: Mann in 1929, the year he won the Nobel Prize. Source: Wikimedia Commons. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Thomas_Mann_1929.jpg>

<Image 3: Manuscript page from “Tristan,” 1903. Source: Wikimedia Commons. http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1903\_Thomas\_Mann\_Tristan\_Manuskript.jpg>

<Audio Clip 1: Thomas Mann responds to the revocation of his honorary doctorate by the Nazi-controlled University of Bonn in 1936. Source: http://www.thomasmann.de/sixcms/media.php/481/Thomas\_Mann\_Hoerprobe\_Aberkennung\_der\_Ehrendoktorwuerde%20.mp3 (Maintained by the S. Fischer Verlag publishing house>