Johannes Evelein

**Mann, Klaus (Heinrich Thomas)(1906—1949)**

Klaus Mann was born in 1906 into Germany's most famous family of writers in which, he would later write, "everything has already been formulated". Precocious and bent on making his own mark as a writer, his name—a trademark with both Thomas and Heinrich Mann ranking among the most celebrated writers of their time—granted him early access to publication venues but also proved burdensome. His early short stories and plays, as well as his first novel DER FROMME TANZ (1925), were overshadowed by Thomas Mann's literary prowess as evinced in DIE BUDDENBROOKS and DER ZAUBERBERG. In 1920s Berlin, Mann built a reputation as a theater critic while proving himself a prolific—albeit still searching—writer of short stories and essays that reflected a growing interest in politics. He frequently presented himself as a spokesperson for his generation (HEUTE UND MORGEN. ZUR SITUATION DES JUNGEN GEISTIGEN EUROPAS, 1927). Mann built an extensive network among modernist artists and writers in Germany and throughout Europe. Together with his sister, Erika Mann, with whom he began to collaborate in the mid-1920s, he traveled to the Soviet-Union, Asia, and the United States. To further eke out his own identity as a writer, Mann published his autobiography, KIND DIESER ZEIT (1932), at the age of 25, for which he was widely ridiculed. Mann's early work—at times experimental, at times melodramatic—centered on several main themes to which he returned throughout his life: the utopian dream of a united Europe beyond nationalism; the exploration of sexuality, in particular homoeroticism; experimentation with hallucinatory drugs; and the tension between creative vitality and self-destructiveness, including suicide. Mann's opposition to National-Socialism was unambiguous and deepened as the movement gained strength in the early 1930s.

Mann's novelistic output in the 1930s was considerable and earned him critical acclaim, though he found himself severed from his German audience following his exile from Nazi Germany in 1933. Whereas FLUCHT IN DEN NORDEN (1934) and SYMPHONIE PATHETIQUE (1935) remained conventional in their narrative structure, Mann's 1936 MEPHISTO and in particular his 1939 DER VULKAN were characterized by considerable formal experimentation, multi-perspectival storytelling, growing psychological depth despite the novels' sizeable character cast, and a blurring of reality and dream-world, time and space, through the introduction of angelic figures and ghost-like apparitions. At the same time, Mann's work gained political and moral urgency as he documented life in exile and the battle of the "Other Germany" against the dehumanizing forces unleashed by the National-Socialists. For his exile journal DIE SAMMLUNG (1933-1935), a literary but unmistakably anti-fascist magazine, Mann turned to his international network and secured contributions from authors such as André Gide, Lion Feuchtwanger, Jean Cocteau, Aldous Huxley, and Ernest Hemingway.

Having lived an itinerant life in Amsterdam, Prague, and Paris during his first years in exile, Mann spent the war years in the United States. Writing consistently in English, he published the short-lived journal DECISION, an expanded English version of his autobiography, THE TURNING POINT, as well as a study on André Gide, with whom he remained in contact. He joined the U.S Army in 1944, worked in the Psychological Warfare Branch, and returned to Austria and Germany 1945 as an army reporter.

The final years of his life where fraught with depression, as Mann was unable to build on his earlier literary successes. He died in 1949, the result of an overdose.

References and Further Reading

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Paratextual material