

The Moral Eclipse of a Great Writer

THE CASE AGAINST THOMAS MANN

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ONE of the absurdities of our time is the depiction of Thomas Mann, internationally famous novelist and Nobel prizewinner, as a true liberal, and a great humanitarian, as a fighter for freedom and democracy, as a defender of moral integrity and decency. The myth is widespread, and it is therefore of some importance that Thomas Mann's real political record become known in this country.

Very few Americans are familiar, for example, with his deification of Prussian militarism and Pan-Germanism during World War I. Sample: In his essay *Friedrich und die grosse Koalition* (1915) he wrote, "War! It is purification, liberation, an enormous hope. . . . The vic-

tory of Germany will be a paradox, nay, a wonder: a victory of the soul over numbers. The German soul is opposed to the pacifist ideal of civilization, for is not peace the element of civil corruption?"

But if this phase of Mann's political career is barely known to Americans, his early encounter with Nazism is almost entirely unknown in the United States. Here are some details: In the Fall of 1933, when Mann's name was identified with an anti-Nazi magazine, *Die Sammlung* (launched by his late son Klaus with the help of André Gide and Aldous Huxley), the Goebbels Propaganda Ministry threatened to put Mann's books on the *verboten* list. Whereupon Mann wired from his abode

in Switzerland to Goebbels' *Reichsstelle* asserting that he had been misled as to the character of the publication. Mann's books continued to be sold freely in Nazi Germany for some time. In 1934, Mann addressed a letter to Hitler's Minister of the Interior asking for an extension of his German passport. To support his application he recalled how he had "started the fight against the democratization of the German spirit." On the subject of Hitler's rise to power Mann was most eloquent: "Since history has spoken, I have kept silent. This is my decision — to live in complete seclusion devoted to my personal tasks." Later, of course, he was anti-Nazi, and this is the Mann with which the world is much more familiar.

But we do not intend to rake the past — although the biographer has no right to ignore what he finds in his explorations. Our concern is with today, and with the Thomas Mann of today. The dark force that threatens the peace and security of the world today emanates from the Soviet Union. What is the record of Thomas Mann, celebrated humanist, on Stalin's terrorist state?

It is a record that will astonish, and repel, most Americans.

THOMAS MANN DID NOT hesitate to denounce Tsarist Russia as a "depraved police state," and it is to his credit that he expressed this denunciation. But he has been much

more "liberal" in his stated views on Stalin's police state, which is infinitely more grotesque than ever was the state of the Romanovs. He has glibly praised Soviet achievements in the areas of economic justice and social responsibility and has left no doubt concerning his "high respect for the historic event of the Russian revolution," by which he did not refer to the democratic, national revolution of March 1917, which toppled the Tsar, but Lenin's *coup d'état* of November of that year which put to death the young Russian democracy. In 1944, Ilya Ehrenburg, the savage Soviet propagandist, noted Mann's compliments. "Thomas Mann," wrote Ehrenburg, "has expressed his admiration for the integrity and justice of our cause." (*Novy Mir*, 1-2, Moscow 1944.) What higher authority could the Soviet dictatorship possibly quote?

Both the House Un-American Activities Committee (for whose abolition Mann has repeatedly agitated) and a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee have published long lists of his pro-Communist affiliations and activities. According to these government sources, Mann has sponsored such important Communist front organizations as the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee, the League of American Writers, the National Council of American-Soviet friendship, the Independent

Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the American Council for a Democratic Greece, the Win-the-Peace Conference. All of these groups have been cited as subversive by the Attorney General of the United States or by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Nor is this, by any means, the complete list of his activities of this kind. He has rallied to the defense of Soviet agent Gerhart Eisler, has protested the deportation of Gerhart's brother Hanns Eisler, served on the welcoming committee for Hewlett Johnson, the Red Dean of Canterbury, has written for *Soviet Russia Today*, a magazine devoted to the glorification of the Stalintern.

In 1948, when Henry Wallace became the Progressive Party's presidential candidate, Mann endorsed him as "America's most faithful son . . . [who] doesn't let himself be intimidated by those idiots who insult him." On November 7, 1948, the *German American*, a New York Communist publication, quoted Mann as stating, "Because I am not a capitalist, I don't have enough fear of the Russian threat to the capitalist-bourgeois way of life. But as far as I can see, Russia doesn't threaten the thing that matters most: Peace."

In March 1949 the Communists held an internationally-publicized "Cultural and Scientific Conference

for World Peace" at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. By then the Soviet myth was threadbare. Prominent intellectuals — including those who had previously been taken in by Stalin's cohorts with ease — were no longer willing to lend an ear to the siren who mouthed slogans of decency in the cause of a dictatorship. They refused to attend. The conference was exposed nationally. In addition, a group of true, anti-Communist liberals, led by Professor Sidney Hook, an outstanding scholar and indefatigable opponent of totalitarianism, held a counter-conference. Simultaneously, intellectuals who had accepted the Communist invitations without knowing their originating source cancelled their scheduled appearances. Left — with the exception of a few genuine innocents — were those who knew everything about Stalin's dictatorship that the anti-Communists knew, but who didn't care. Thomas Mann, of course, was quick to furnish his name as a sponsor of this meeting — and he didn't withdraw it later.

On March 14, 1949, Professor Hook, chairman of the Philosophy Department at New York University, sent a registered letter to Thomas Mann. Professor Hook wrote:

I am confident that although you are listed as a sponsor of the Conference that your name was procured under false pretenses. . . . It seems to me that the cause of peace would

be better served if independent persons like yourself made the sharpest disassociation from any individuals or groups whose main interest is in furthering the interests of Soviet foreign policy. . . .

It is difficult to imagine a more decent way to broach the matter, or a more discourteous response than Thomas Mann saw fit to make. He did not acknowledge or answer the letter! Instead, he sent a personal message to the Communist-controlled Conference describing it as "one ray of hope and reason," in a world no doubt filled with terrible democrats like Sidney Hook. In this message he included his regret at "the machinations aimed at discrediting" the Conference — a crude slap at the United States State Department which had performed a public service by publicizing the bogus nature of the affair. Mann denounced the "assiduous enemies of peace" who had announced their hostility to the meeting, a Communist-cheered poke at some of the best-known and respected leaders in American thought and literature.

Thomas Mann threatened to hit rock-bottom when he put in a personal appearance at the "Conference on Peace," held by the Hollywood branch of the Council of Arts, Sciences and Professions, in Los Angeles in June 1949. The *Daily Worker* jubilantly reported that he "called the Marshall Plan a bribe to European countries to abandon so-

cialism and fight Russia." He also brought exclusive news with him to the meeting. The United States, he said, is "dangerously close to a police state."

HE REVEALED himself fully, however, during his first postwar trip to his native Germany in the summer of 1949. In Frankfurt-am-Main in Western Germany, where he received the Goethe Prize, Mann was asked at a press conference whether, in his opinion, there was a difference between Nazism and Communism. According to Berlin's *Der Kurier* of July 26, 1949 he declared that there is a "moral difference" between the two monster states, and added: "Communism has a certain relation to the ideal of humanity and the ideal of a better future for mankind. National Socialism resembled nihilism. It was diabolical." The second part of the statement is irrefutable.

When it was learned that the city of Weimar in the Russian zone had invited Mann to receive its own Goethe Prize, the novelist was urged by German democrats to refuse as a moral protest. Mann did refuse — but it was the German democrats he refused. He was then asked by newspapermen if, while in Weimar, he would request permission to visit the infamous Nazi concentration camp of Buchenwald, now an infamous Soviet concentration camp. This dismal slaughter-house is only

a few miles from Weimar. Mann's answer is memorable. To make such a request, he said, was not "according to the wishes of the group which invited me," namely Stalin's chieftains in Russian-controlled Germany.

Mann was also deluged with requests by former inmates of Buchenwald that he visit the camp. He turned the same morally deaf ear to these requests that he had to those that had preceded them. Then he made his glorious trip to Soviet-controlled Weimar. The Communists responded magnificently. Red youth groups were ordered to surround his car and sing for him. Delegations of miners and other workers were marched to his hotel. Not a technique in the Soviet science of planned glorification was omitted. The 74-year-old novelist was placed on a throne of concocted acclaim.

In presenting the Goethe prize to Mann in the Weimar National Theater, Johannes R. Becher, the gang boss of German Stalinist intellectuals, said: "We thank you, Thomas Mann, that you, the proven fighting humanist, when the time has come, have risen openly against the fundamental folly of our era, as you defined anti-Bolshevism, and that you have recognized the need for a just and unbiased evaluation of the historical phenomenon of the great Soviet Union."

Instead of being sickened by this spectacle, as were German demo-

crats, Mann was overjoyed. At a farewell banquet he left behind him some not-to-be-forgotten words. Here they are, as recorded by the official press of his hosts, and as they appeared in the *Taegliche Rundschau*, organ of the Soviet military:

Thomas Mann declared that during his visit to Weimar, he had noticed a remarkable difference between the Western and Eastern zones of Germany. In Western Germany he had been honored . . . as, so to speak, the last representative of the bourgeois era. [but] here [in Eastern Germany] a new era had confronted him, a vision of the future. He was not greeted here as an old fogey, but as one who could help to build a new world. "If that should happen," said Thomas Mann, "if actually I could, through my work, contribute something to the New, I would be most happy in this environment."

After Mann's visit to the Soviet zone, Paul Olberg, a Swedish journalist, took him to task — in an Open Letter that stirred Europe — for having praised Goethe's humanitarianism before "the Russian officials in Weimar — before ruthless men who trample upon the human dignity of people who think differently from themselves."

Wrote Paul Olberg: "These men will certainly not fail to make the greatest propaganda use of the undeserved honor which you have bestowed upon them. But for the martyrs of liberty and human rights

in the concentration camp your acceptance of homage from their torturers came as a staggering moral blow.”

Thomas Mann’s answer to Paul Olberg unleashed a wave of indignation and revulsion among freedom-loving intellectuals in Europe. Wrote Mann:

“. . . The fact that I reserve the right to make a distinction between the attitude of Communism toward the idea of humanity, and the absolute baseness of fascism; that I refuse to participate in the hysteria of persecuting Communists and in warmongering; and that I speak for peace in a world whose future can no longer be imagined without Communist elements — this alone is sufficient to gain for me a certain confidence in the sphere of that social religion, which I have not sought [and] which, however, I will never be able to consider as a bad sign for my intellectual and moral health.”

A more sanctimonious — or evasive — answer would be difficult to compose. The charge against him was that he had given comfort and aid to the hirelings of the largest, and most terroristic, Empire in human history. It is characteristic of Thomas Mann that, in his reply, he had turned the tables so that, if one did not know the details of the incident, it would seem as if Mann were being injured. Despite his elevated creative orientation, Mann’s judgment of living cultures apparently

depends on whether they heap unadulterated flattery on him or not. Mann himself, in his reply to Olberg, almost stated the matter explicitly. Here is what Mann said:

You speak a great deal of political freedom and civil rights, which are granted the people in the Western zone of Germany. . . . The authoritarian people’s state has its horrible aspects. *The benefit it brings is that stupidity and insolence at last have been forced to keep their mouths shut.* In the Eastern zone I did not see mudslinging letters and insulting articles, as happened in the West. . . . Do I owe that only to the fear of Buchenwald — or to the education of the people, which, more successfully than that in the West, fosters respect for creative achievements like mine? As far back as 1945, lectures were held in Weimar about my books, in particular about my Goethe novel, and prominent Communist literary historians and critics devoted important essays to my works. . . . (Our italics.)

At last Mann had publicly pronounced the virtues of dictatorship: the stupid and the insolent are “forced to keep their mouths shut.” He neglected to state how the Soviets manage to achieve this silence. In a dictatorial state Mann did not see mudslinging letters or articles — such as this one. What Mann was saying was that he did not see a free press and the spectacle filled him with joy. In a dictatorial state, Mann was saying, when you are world

famous and are on the side of the dictators, a big fuss is made over you. Respect is fostered "for creative achievements like mine." This is the man about whom the press and the colleges and the critics speak of axiomatically as the great democrat and humanist!

THE FRENCH WEEKLY *Les Lettres Francaises*, on May 18, 1950, published an exclusive interview with Thomas Mann on its front page. A screaming three column headline ran over it. *Les Lettres Francaises*, we should add, is the official organ in the cultural field of the French Communist Party. Its publisher, Claude Morgan, is one of the foremost French Stalinist intellectual leaders. Morgan requested an interview with Mann, and Mann granted it.

Morgan arrived bearing him greetings from the Stalinern's World Committee of the Partisans of Peace. The conversation they held was interesting. "Why did you sign the Stockholm Appeal," Morgan asked, referring to the fraudulent Stalinist call for "peace," a petition-signing campaign denounced by the United States Government.

Answered Thomas Mann: "I signed the Stockholm Appeal because I support every movement whose goal is to further peace. In an atomic war, I am convinced, there will be neither victor nor loser, but the world will suffer general destruction. For that

reason I have signed. I think I have acted in the interest of my new fatherland, America. . . ." Mann was serving America by enlisting in a campaign denounced by the Government of his "new fatherland!"

Another interview — in the French Communist-front publication, *Droit et Liberte* of May 25, 1950 — quotes Mann as saying: "We must save the peace; this today is the most important thing. Therefore the movement for peace that started in Stockholm should be heartily welcomed." This article stresses the fact that "the night before this interview was granted, Thomas Mann had signed the Stockholm Appeal."

Subsequently, the Communist press of Europe, inside and outside of the Iron Curtain, featured excerpts from Mann's interview with Claude Morgan. The Berlin Communist *Bz am Abend*, for example, reprinted the entire interview on May 23, 1951. Then the Communists came up with an even more impressive eye-catcher. Their press reproduced a photostatic copy of Thomas Mann's original signature on the official sheet of the "World Committee for Partisans of Peace for the Absolute Prohibition of Atomic Weapons." Special leaflets bearing Mann's signature were circulated in France in order to obtain, with this bait, other signatures for the Stockholm Appeal.

In New York the *Daily Worker*, on May 30, 1950, reproduced this

same photostat bearing Mann's signature. The American branch of the Stockholm Appeal, the so-called Peace Information Center, distributed leaflets with Thomas Mann's statement prominently featured ("I have signed the Stockholm Appeal . . ."). On July 22, 1950 the *New York Times* reproduced this leaflet on page four with Mann's name clearly visible. On August 14 the *Times* ran a story reporting that Mann's name was included in the most recent list of signers of the Stockholm Appeal.

Months passed. Then, on October 31, Mann issued a vague denial. A UP dispatch from Los Angeles quoted him as saying, "I have never signed the Stockholm Appeal, even if this is erroneously so often stated." He added: "I heard about this assertion only comparatively late, because I traveled around the whole summer. Then, *when I learned about it, I didn't deny it because it was too late and because I have always been for peace.*" (Our italics.)

What about the signature that the Communists reproduced and distributed as part of their propaganda literature? Mann, in the spring of 1951, declared the reproduction to be a fake. Said he: "This 'document' was not new to me. Months after its publication and weeks after my return from Europe I became aware of it. How it came about is neither discoverable nor interesting to me."

Let us draw the conclusion. Thomas Mann thus conceded that the "document" was known to him for a considerable period of time, but he didn't think the matter sufficiently interesting to investigate it! In other words, well aware of the fact that the Communists had "forged" his signature under a highly important political document, he considered the matter too trivial to bother about. He did not care much, that through his inaction, he had furnished the Communists with an opportunity to utilize his name and reputation in a high-pressure campaign throughout Europe and the United States! One inevitably wonders whether Mann would have acted similarly if, for example, Goebbels had forged his signature to a letter endorsing a Hitler propaganda statement and published it in the Nazi and Nazi satellite press.

Regarding the Stockholm Appeal, however, there still remained one relevant matter. What about the famous interview with the publisher of *Les Lettres Francaises*, in which Mann is directly quoted as saying that he *did* sign?

Said Mann, now: "True, when a French journalist, Mr. Claude Morgan of *Les Lettres Francaises* asked me 'why' I had endorsed a peace appeal drawn up in Stockholm and hence unlikely to have been made in Moscow, I naturally assumed that I had done so . . ."

LET US JOURNEY further on the road that Thomas Mann has chosen to travel. On November 15, 1950, *L'Humanité*, official daily of the French Communists, published excerpts from a letter Thomas Mann had written to Frederick Joliot-Curie, president of the World Peace Congress. *L'Humanité* quoted Mann as follows:

"I received your letter as well as the motion addressed to the Security Council of the Office of the World Committee of the Partisans of Peace and I cannot but express to you and to your co-workers my sympathy and my respect for your noble efforts to save the peace. In this undertaking you have allies throughout the world . . ."

When on November 18, 1950, the German Communist paper *Neues Deutschland* reported that Mann had been elected to the presidium of the Second World Peace Congress, the novelist issued a statement to the effect that he had nothing whatsoever to do with this Communist Peace Congress. He did not realize at that time that *L'Humanité* had already carried part of his letter of praise to Joliot-Curie!

If Thomas Mann had really intended to refute "any relation" with the World Peace Congress, he could have so notified Joliot-Curie. Instead, he preferred to express his "sympathy" and "respect" for an undisputed instrument of Stalinist propaganda, a network whose activi-

ties were branded by the State Department as the "most concentrated and farflung propaganda effort of the Communist movement in the post-war period."

It is rather amusing, or sad, to note that Mann, when he learned that *L'Humanité* had made public a portion of his letter to Joliot-Curie, called it an "unauthorized attempt . . . wholly inexcusable."

When I first felt an obligation to publicize Thomas Mann's pro-Communist activities some time ago, the novelist, infuriated, declared that he had become the innocent victim of a "witch hunt." And the apologists for Mann attacked what they called the "undignified way of dragging men of literature into the political arena and inquiring into their political views." No one, according to these people, seems to have the right to take Thomas Mann seriously, although they do not seem to realize that that is what they are saying.

As the details of Mann's record continue to come to light, the heated outbursts of uncritical supporters of Mann become less and less impressive.

On May 22, 1951, for example, Johannes R. Becher, president of the Red Cultural League for German Democratic Renewal, chairman of innumerable Stalinist organizations, and one of the most fanatic Kremlin mouthpieces in Soviet-controlled Germany, celebrated his

sixtieth birthday. This was indeed a world shaking event, and Thomas Mann responded in a manner he felt was appropriate. He wrote to Becher:

. . . Let me say this: Even more, or almost more than the poet and writer, I love and honor Johannes R. Becher the man — this deeply stirred heart, moved by sincere impulses, that I have felt beating on so many occasions, particularly during our meeting when I visited Weimar in 1949 — a personal experience which has left behind a lasting impression of his nature and his being. The essence of his being I felt to be an unselfishness, pure and absorbing as a flame; a readiness to serve, fervent to the point of suffering, which totally penetrates his poetry and his writings; an *ethos* of community which predestines him emotionally to be a Communist, and which politically has become a Communist creed.

His Communism has positively patriotic color; as a matter of fact it fulfills itself in patriotism. One has only to read his poems to know that his impetus toward service to the community, to the people, is first and last the fervent wish to serve his people, the German people, and to be its loving and faithful adviser, to the best of his knowledge and conscience. *I think the day will come when the German people in its entirety will thank him for his love.* (Our italics.)

This, the reader must remember, was written — in 1951! — to one of Stalin's cultural bosses in Germany!

It will suffice to note that *Neues*

Deutschland of May 22 carried this text under the prophetic heading, "The Day Will Come . . . by Thomas Mann." This line, taken from the most significant sentence of this bewildering letter, reveals the true nature of Thomas Mann. Since he writes that "the day will come, when the German people in its entirety" will thank Becher, one can only assume that Herr Mann hopefully means the day when all Germany has been taken by the Communists!

But perhaps we are being unfair to Mann. Perhaps Becher, Communist "cultural whip" that he is, is also a great man. Perhaps Mann has discovered a poet worthy of this incredible panegyric. Alas, Becher is the man who did not blush when he once wrote, "How happy must be the letter 'i' as it is permitted to form a letter in the name of Stalin." To eulogize so debased a character is an index to the depths to which Thomas Mann has fallen. He, Mann, does not blush when he praises a Stalinist lackey (his "unselfishness, pure and absorbing as a flame") who some time ago publicly declared that Soviet concentration camps in Eastern Germany are "a necessary establishment."

"One has only to read his poems," writes Mann, to understand Becher fully. And Mann is quite right. Here is a typical poem by Becher that ought to enable anyone to understand him. It is entitled Hymn to

the Soviet Union, and is taken from the *Neue Deutsche Volkslieder*, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin, 1950:

*You are the citadel of humanity
In the storm of barbarism!
You are the world's best,
For your people became free. . . .
To read Stalin's look,
We seek his face,
As if it were a being
That daily speaks to us.
You are in our midst,
And your spirit breathes through us.
It is your steps that announce
The road toward which Lenin points.
You gave battle, the holy battle of
freedom
To the hordes of the enemy
The world is newly arisen
In the victory of the Soviet power.*

NO ONE WILL deny or minimize, or should deny or minimize, Thomas Mann's stature as a novelist, but his political record on Commu-

nism is sorry testimony, at best, to the "irresponsibility" of a world famous writer whose bizarre behavior in these troubled times is of great propaganda value to the dictators in the Kremlin. In the case against Thomas Mann two qualities of the man dominate: an alarming moral insensitivity and a fantastic egotism.

Nothing perhaps better characterizes the moral eclipse of Thomas Mann than does a statement from an editorial published in the *Neue Zeitung* of Munich, the official organ of the United States High Commission in Germany, on October 12, 1949:

. . . Thomas Mann presents us with the spectacle of a man who can no longer see reality, who abandons the truth, because he has become the prisoner of his *ego*. We agree with Thomas Mann: he is not a fellow traveler, he already belongs in a more dangerous category.

THE DAY MENCKEN BROKE THE LAW

The Place was Boston

The Year 1926

And a Crime was Committed

HERBERT ASBURY

AT TWO O'CLOCK on the afternoon of April 5, 1926, a taxicab stopped at the curb on Boston Common, opposite Brimstone Corner at Park and Tremont Streets, and H. L. Mencken, editor of THE AMERICAN MERCURY, stepped out, a broad grin on his face, several copies of the April 1926 issue of THE MERCURY tucked under his arm, and in his pocket a Boston city license to "peddle and hawk" any commodity except bones, grease, fish, fruit, vegetables, and refuse matter. After him came two lawyers, Arthur Garfield Hays of New York and Herbert E. Ehrmann of Boston. The fact that Mencken would be there had been announced in the newspapers, and a crowd of more than five thousand was on hand, composed mostly of students from Harvard, Boston University, and other colleges. These young men surged boisterously about Mencken, shouting encouragement and snatching at the magazines which he now held firmly clutched in both hands. One enthusiast

grabbed Mencken's hat, but the editor retrieved it and jammed it down over his ears.

Some fifteen minutes after Mencken's arrival, the Rev. J. Frank Chase, secretary of the Massachusetts Watch and Ward Society, appeared on the outskirts of the crowd, accompanied by an imposing police escort which included Superintendent Michael Crowley, Captain George W. Patterson, Sergeant Thomas O'Donnell, detectives of the Vice Squad, and agents of the Society. Mencken waved his arms and yelled, "Over here, Mr. Chase!" and the college boys took up the cry, but it was some time before the police could force a passage through the crowd. Finally, however, Mencken and Chase faced each other. Mencken was still grinning, but Chase wore his habitual expression of gloomy determination. From his point of view he was dealing with a low criminal, and it was no time for levity. He pointed to the bundle of magazines in Mencken's hand.