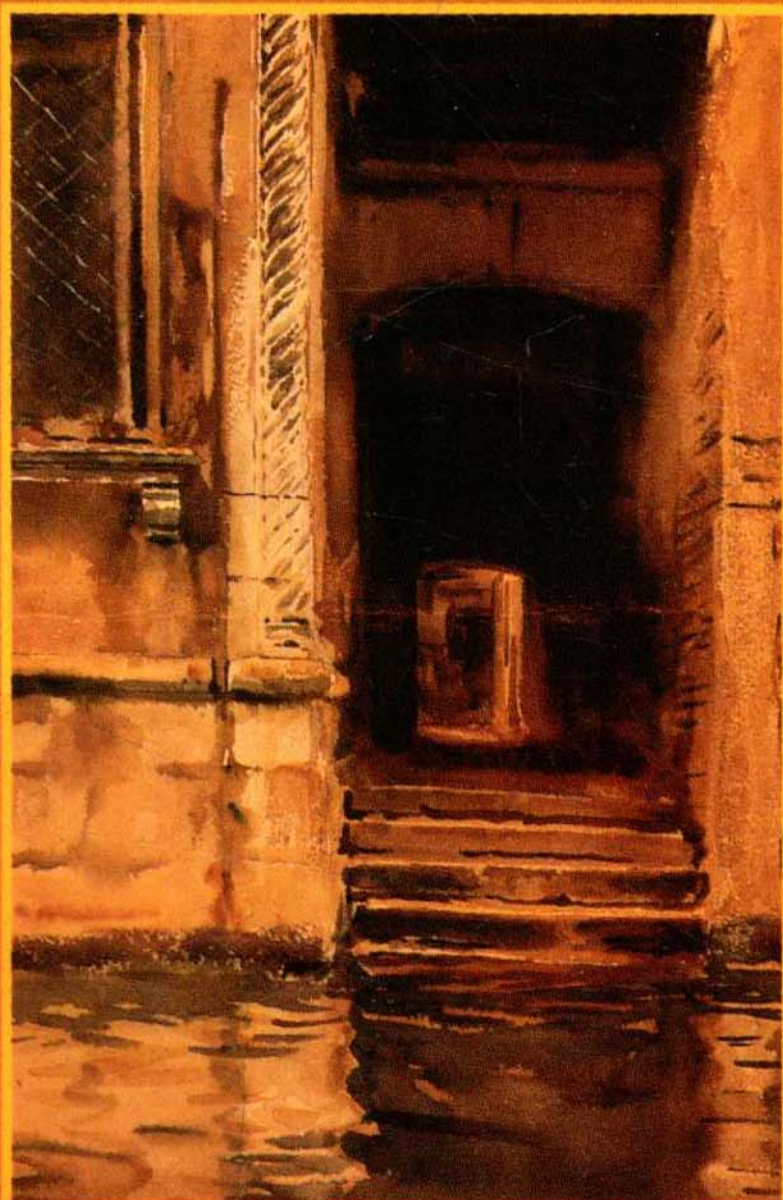


Signet Classic

THOMAS
MANN



DEATH IN VENICE
AND OTHER STORIES

Translated and with an Introduction by Jefferson S. Chase

THOMAS MANN



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and Other Stories

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A SIGNET CLASSIC

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that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and
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THOMAS MANN (1875–1955) was born in Lübeck, Germany. His first novel, *The Buddenbrooks*, appeared in 1901, winning critical acclaim. He followed this success with the novellas “Tonio Kröger” (1903) and “Death in Venice” (1912), as well as the novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924). The works established him as the leading writer of his generation and as the first twentieth-century representative of the great German literary tradition. After winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929, he left Hitler’s Germany in 1933, eventually settling in the United States in 1938, where he was an outspoken supporter of the Allied war effort. His most important late work was *Dr. Faustus* (1947), a novel exploring the cultural and psychological reasons for the rise of Nazism in civilized, bourgeois Germany. He eventually returned to Europe. He died in Switzerland.

JEFFERSON S. CHASE holds a doctorate in German Literature from the University of Virginia, where he was also a President’s Fellow. From 1994 to 1996, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Berlin Institute for German and European Studies. He collaborated on the English version of Gregor von Rezzori’s *Oedipus at Stalingrad*, and his translations of Heine, Börne, and Saphir appear in his book *Inciting Laughter: The Rise of Jewish Humor in German Culture*. He is currently Lecturer in German at the University of Nottingham.

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Thomas Mann: An Introduction

“For an imaginative work of any significance to make an on-the-spot impact that is both broad and deep,” writes Thomas Mann in “Death in Venice,” “there must be some unspoken affinity, indeed basic agreement between the individual destiny of the author and the general one of his contemporaries and fellow citizens.” Mann might well have been writing of himself. Together with Franz Kafka, Mann overshadows all other twentieth-century German authors in world fame and importance. He sold millions of books during his lifetime, exerted a literary influence to rival that of Faulkner or Joyce, functioned in American exile during World War II as the premier voice of Germany’s humanist tradition, and is still read today throughout the world by both popular and academic audiences. Yet he remains a difficult, problematic figure. Unlike Kafka, whose works take place in a singular alternative nightmare world and whose name spawned an English adjective, Mann wrote in a variety of modes ranging from the everyday-realistic to the surreal, and his authorial presence always seems to hover outside his fictional creations, apart and separate from them. There is no adjective *Mannian* except among Mann scholars. Instead, there is a continuing fascination with him as a person and with the circumstances surrounding the composition of his works. No fewer than three Mann biographies appeared in 1995.

Paul Thomas Mann was born on June 6, 1875, in Lubeck, the second child of Senator Thomas Johann Hein-

rich Mann. The Manns had been citizens first-class of the Hanseatic trading city for over a hundred years before Thomas's birth, possessing a large import-export firm and holding office in the autonomous city-state's government. Thomas's mother, Julia da Silva-Bruhns, was of Brazilian descent: his mixed parentage would later become a subject he would explore in his semi-autobiographical "Tonio Kröger" and "Death in Venice." Success for Thomas came early, despite the swift demise of the family business after his father's death in 1892. After his father died, Thomas's family moved to Munich, where he was educated and worked as a clerk in an insurance office and served on the staff of the Munich journal *Simplicissimus* before taking up writing as a career. He published his first novella at the age of nineteen. By 1904 he had completed *The Buddenbrooks*, the novel that was to bring him international fame. In the years to follow, despite occasional financial crises brought on by the vicissitudes in Germany's political fortunes, Mann never seriously questioned his calling as an author and a public figure. Indeed, he saw his career as following in the great tradition of the twin idols of German literature, Goethe and Schiller. After he completed *The Buddenbrooks*, Mann married into a wealthy Jewish family, composed the short stories collected in this edition, and experienced his second novelistic triumph with the epic *The Magic Mountain* (1924). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1929.

Thomas Mann was an enthusiastic, indeed chauvinistic supporter of the German cause in World War I, which led to a prolonged estrangement from his older brother Heinrich, a successful and important novelist in his own right, with whom Thomas had worked closely in the incipient days of his career. The experience of German defeat, however, converted Mann from an adherent of Imperial monarchism to a committed, if culturally snobbish proponent of democracy. His opposition to the politics of the National Socialists, together with his wife Katia's Jewish background, led to his emigration shortly after Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, first to Switzer-

land, then to the United States (1938). He became a U.S. citizen in 1944, took up various academic posts, and worked closely with the U.S. State Department on scores of anti-Hitlerian essays and radio addresses. In 1947, while he was living in Los Angeles, he completed his last great novel, *Doctor Faustus*, a fictional reckoning with what the historian Friedrich Meineke was to term "the German catastrophe." He returned to Europe in 1953 and settled near Zurich, Switzerland, where he died on August 12, 1955. He was the father of the author Klaus Mann (1906–49) and the historian Golo Mann (1909–94).

Mann's works are remarkably philosophical, very much the product of the intellectual environment of their time. Though a poor student, Mann was an avid reader and absorbed a great deal of the philosophical views that were popular during his formative years, chiefly those of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. From Schopenhauer, he incorporated the idea of an irrational, destructive will—a natural force of life described as present alternately in the world itself and deep within the human psyche—which was fundamentally opposed to the stabilizing, constructive efforts of the rational mind. From Nietzsche, he took insights concerning human psychology, especially the psychology of the artist as outsider vis-à-vis Western civilization. This view ran contrary to the popular nineteenth-century idea of the artist as a heroic representative of bourgeois society. For Mann, as well as for Nietzsche, the artist was a dubious figure, a creature of sickness and longing for death, motivated by resentment of society's stronger self-perpetuating impulses. As such, however, the artist was emblematic of a basic conflict between individual desire and civilized behavior.

Mann was also influenced by his contemporary Freud, who likewise focused on sexual desire as a nexus of frustrated individual will and likewise came to perceive a death-wish, or *thanatos*, embedded within the human subconscious. Still another, less frequently noted influ-

ence was the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, with its methodological emphasis on descriptive perception as a means of insight into the human condition. Some of Mann's maddeningly detailed, at times seemingly hair-splitting prose can be understood as an attempt to do in fiction what the phenomenologists of his day pursued in philosophy.

Surprisingly, Mann's thematic interests are rather narrow—although he did often quote from outside sources, he was not the writer to be inspired by newspaper curiosities or second-hand anecdotes. First and foremost among his favorite themes is the relationship between the artist and bourgeois society. This topic had long been a literary preoccupation before Mann, but no writer had ever depicted the entwined impulses toward integration and rebellion characteristic of the artist with quite the complexity that Mann did. The artists in Mann's works are not Romantic bohemians who sacrifice themselves in struggle against bourgeois constraints. More often than not, they are profoundly bourgeois souls who long for complete integration into the everyday world of the warm-hearted and the banal. Their central dilemma, which Mann treats both tragically and comically, is that the very artistic talent that earns them social acclaim also makes them creatures of anti-emotional irony, musical frenzy, or destructive passion. Mann challenges traditional conceptions of the artist as a heroic figure by portraying the creative impulse as a compensatory mechanism for individual weakness, for the artist or art-lover's inability to fit into a "normal," healthy world. Mann pursues this theme most satirically in "Tristan," whereas the writer-protagonists of "Tonio Kröger" and "Man and Dog" (two directly autobiographical works) reconcile their social and destructive impulses in much the same fashion as Mann did in real life. In "Death in Venice," it is debatable as to whether Gustav Aschenbach's fatal lapse into forbidden passion represents ridiculous foible or tragic triumph.

Mann is not a "political" writer in the typical sense of the word. He largely eschews depictions of class conflict,

political events, and technological transformations of society in his works. Yet his treatment of the individual-versus-society theme does have broad relevance. For Mann, the destructive, antisocial impulses at work within the artistic psyche reveal the potential for violence and warfare latent in civilized society, of which art is a major institution. Public attitudes toward war during Mann's time differed markedly from our own. World War I was greeted by some as a positive development that would cleanse Europe of the torpor and malaise into which it was perceived to have fallen at the turn of the century. Mann lived through both of the great European wars and witnessed the near destruction of the culture with which he identified most. It is not surprising, then, that references to war are scattered throughout his late works: the evocation of the politically explosive atmosphere of the early 1910's in the beginning of "Death in Venice," for example, or allusions to war-time privation in "Man and Dog." In these and other passages, Mann suggests that individual "artistic" antipathy toward civilization is indicative of a self-destructive impulse at work within European culture at large. He would develop this view with unambiguous reference to fascism in later works such as "Mario and the Magician" (not included here because of copyright constraints) and *Doctor Faustus*. For Mann, European society, like the artist, was sick.

A third major theme in Mann's work is homoeroticism. As his recent biographer Anthony Heilbutt points out, Mann repeatedly developed crushes on attractive young men of the sort depicted in the first chapter of "Tonio Kröger." Aschenbach's obsession with Tadzio in "Death in Venice," too, had its origins in a real-life fascination to which Mann succumbed while on vacation with his brother and wife. However, there is no reliable evidence to suggest that Mann consummated any of these relationships sexually. What seems more probable is that, like Tonio Kröger, Mann restricted his homosexual leanings to fiction and led a life of heterosexual "normality." In any case, his exploration of homosexuality enabled him to develop a unique understanding of the

situation of the social outsider. In drawing the connection between artists and homosexuality, Mann directly confronted an issue that had been lurking scandalously within German literature at least since the Heine-Platen feud of 1828. Mann does not take up a clear moral position in regard to homosexuality in his works. Aschenbach's feelings for Tadzio are described in sympathetic detail, but at the same time Mann's overall depiction of his protagonist is ironic and therefore calls Aschenbach's sensibilities—artistic as well as erotic—into question. It was thanks to this ironic distance from his subject matter that Thomas Mann—who otherwise placed enormous value on respectability—could create one of the most frank depictions of homosexual desire the world has ever known.

Mann's distanced perspective as author is reinforced by the style in which he writes. The first and perhaps most obvious feature of his style is parataxis—long-windedness. Owing to its syntactic structure, German is a “long” language, but even so Mann constructs mammoth sentences. Contrary to initial impressions, though, Mann's long-windedness is motivated by a desire to be as precise as possible. True to the phenomenological belief in the intrinsic worth of descriptive perception, Mann leaves no impression about his subject matter unrecorded. It is a signature move of Mann's, for instance, to juxtapose two or more seemingly synonymous adjectives or verbs in order to point out the subtle differences in meaning and perception they entail. He also exploits syntactic vagaries to create revealing ambiguity: this occurs most prominently in “Death in Venice,” in which ambiguously referring relative pronouns are employed to depict Aschenbach's own confused and conflict-ridden thought process. Even when its sense does eventually emerge without ambiguity, the typical Mann sentence is not necessarily immediately comprehensible. It is a puzzle that one has to put together, and this putting together is an important part of the pleasure and the profit of reading Mann.

A second major aspect of Mann's style is the protean

quality of his narrative voice. Much like his contemporary Alfred Döblin, the author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, Mann was a great lover of found material, and his writing often takes on the character of quoted pastiche. "Death in Venice," for example, contains strategically altered citations from Plato, Cicero, Homer, Xenophon, Plutarch, and August von Platen, as well as an encyclopedia entry on Asiatic cholera. This penchant for quotation feeds into two other stylistic idiosyncrasies: an inscrutable authorial perspective and periodic ruptures of hermetic fictionality. Because Mann's narrators so often speak through the voice of a quoted source, authorial opinion is placed at double remove, filtered through narration that is itself filtered through the material on which it is based. It is thus very difficult to determine, in any definitive way, what Mann may have thought about his characters—readers are left to judge them for themselves. Moreover, Mann's quotations also direct readers' attention outside the fictional universe of the actual story at hand. His stories are set in real places and at real times. They occasionally even modulate into the present tense, as in the graveyard scene in the first chapter of "Death in Venice," to emphasize that the fictional events are taking place in actual locations that readers can, if they choose, go and see for themselves. Both in its intertextuality and its willful rupturing of fictional illusion, Mann's work anticipates the postmodern impulses characteristic of contemporary fiction.

It is a tribute to Mann's compositional talent that his works are anything but postmodern exercises in the arbitrary and the contingent. On the contrary, they are structured to a remarkable degree, with motifs recurring and connecting in a way that has often been described as symphonic. Thinking of music is appropriate when reading Mann: he was a great admirer of Richard Wagner and Gustav Mahler, and he used Mahler as the physical model for Gustav Aschenbach. As in a symphony, scarcely a phrase goes by in Mann's writing without echoing, or being echoed by, another phrase. There are other echoes as well. The list of citations from "Death

in Venice" reveals the extent of Mann's familiarity with Greek literature and myth, and the complex network of allusions in that novella rivals that in *Faust* by Goethe. Any assertions about Mann's classicism must be tempered, however, by an appreciation of ironic context. The classical allusions in "Death in Venice," after all, reflect the decidedly ambiguous consciousness of Aschenbach. Even in his greatest creative triumph, Mann remains impossible to pin down.

Mann's ironic, disengaged but precise treatment of the most personal and explosive subject matter is the basis of his literary achievement. His importance to both German and world literature—as well as the status of the former within the latter—can hardly be overestimated. Unlike its English, French, Russian, and American counterparts, nineteenth-century German literature, with its emphasis on poetry and ornate novellas, produced no monumental novels of lasting international reputation. In fact, if we ignore the existence of several excellent and innovative writers (Heinrich Heine, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Theodor Fontane), Mann can be said to have rescued German literature from a relatively fallow period. In scope and stylistic mastery, though not in content, *The Buddenbrooks* can be compared to the great novels of Balzac and Flaubert, Dickens and Eliot, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Yet in *The Buddenbrooks* and in his remarkable series of short stories, Mann progresses beyond the bourgeois concerns and mimetic techniques of Realism to expose the precarious psychological foundations of Western civilization, uncovering in the process the often dubious aspects of literary creativity itself. In doing so, he was perfectly attuned to what the social theorist E. J. Hobsbawm calls "The Age of Extremes," the twentieth century—a century of rupture between the individual and society, a century of unprecedented improvement in Western standards of living and almost unthinkable bureaucratized destruction.

The present edition has been selected and translated with this connection between author and society in mind. "Death in Venice" is, of course, a natural selection and

among Germans "Tonio Kröger" and "Tristan" also have the status of classics in their own right. "Man and Dog," one of Mann's most everyday, realistic works, is also one of his most underrated—valuable for its mastery of parataxis and as a companion piece to "Death in Venice," its immediate predecessor. The remaining three short stories have been included because they contain themes also found in Mann's longer works. "The Child Prodigy" is a quasi-clinical case study of the conflict between commercialism and art in twentieth-century cultural production. "Hour of Hardship," narrated from Schiller's point of view, reveals Mann's fascination with the role of sickness and self-transcendence in artistic genius. Finally, "Tobias Mindernickel" introduces Mann's strange preoccupation with house pets (specifically dogs) as mirrors of mankind's ambiguous attitudes toward the unthinking, amoral vitality of the Schopenhauerian will. All three reflect and interact with Mann's "major" works and shed considerable light on his creative development.

My translations focus not only on content but also seek to render the complexity of Mann's style into contemporary American English. For all his stylistic elegance, Mann writes anything but standard German literary prose and is therefore among the most difficult writers to translate. Because Mann's long, complex sentences are written to be puzzled out, I have retained his paratactic syntax, rather than broken up the German into easily digestible units. I have also tried to preserve Mann's often idiosyncratic emphasis within sentences, which is crucial to our ability to follow their sense. This is not just a question of following original word order. Owing to the differences between English and German, reproduction of emphasis often involves reformulation, the insertion of introductory, emphatic phrases, for instance, or the use of dashes to capture the interjectory character of the German relative clause. At the same time, the syntactic differences between German and English occasionally require the shortening, even elision of phrases to avoid overloading individual sentences—

Mann's prose is ponderous, but rarely clumsy. Rhetorical techniques such as assonance, alliteration and rhyme are also crucial to reproducing the literary quality of Mann's work. In order to compensate for inevitable translation loss in this regard, I have not shied away from pursuing occasional felicitous opportunities in English for typically Mannian effects. In terms of word choice, I have sought to compensate for the drift caused by inexact vocabulary equivalents by striking a balance between the particularizing and the general. Moreover, I have made a distinction between those multipurpose German words like *Geist* (mind, spirit, imagination) which need to be rendered by various English equivalents and recurring terms like *Zügellosigkeit* (abandon) in "Death in Venice," which function as quasi-symphonic motifs and therefore must be signaled with one and the same English word. In general, I have opted for a temporally neutral vocabulary, avoiding words not in currency during Mann's day but resisting deliberate archaism, which inevitably rings precious and false. Temporal neutrality of course itself entails distortion, but it is, I believe, the most acceptable approach to a work foreign to its audience not only in language but in time.

All these strategic decisions have been made with one ultimate goal: to allow the contemporary American reader to experience Mann much as a contemporary German reader would. The reader should not approach Mann—in translation, or in German for that matter—expecting to experience anything immediately obvious. Puzzling out Mann is an intrinsic part of reading his work. I hope the present edition is one that helps the reader to do this and contributes in some way to a deeper appreciation of Mann's uniquely enigmatic work.

—Jefferson S. Chase
Nottingham, 1998

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Tobias Mindernickel

1

Among the streets that head up the rather steep hill from the quayside to the middle of town, there is one called *Grauer Weg*. About halfway along on the right, if one is walking from the river, comes number 47, a narrow, drab-gray building utterly indistinguishable from its neighbors. The ground floor is home to a small shop, where, along with the usual, one can find galoshes and castor oil. Past the main hall, which looks out on a small courtyard populated by cats, a narrow wooden staircase with footworn treads and an unspeakably dank, seedy smell leads to the upper floors. On the second-floor left is a cabinetmaker; second-floor right, a midwife. On the third-floor left is a cobbler; third-floor right, a lady who immediately starts up a loud singing whenever she hears footsteps on the stairs. The fourth-floor left is empty, but on the fourth-floor right lives a man by the name of Mindernickel, who, on top of that, is called Tobias. An intriguing story is connected to this man that just has to be told, for it is both intriguing and scandalous beyond measure.

Mindernickel's appearance is eye-catching, quite odd, indeed ridiculous. If you see him, for example, out on a walk, hauling his gaunt frame up the hill with the help of a cane, he will invariably be dressed in black, from head to toe. He always wears an old-fashioned coarse top hat with a curved brim, a threadbare overcoat that fits too tightly and an equally shabby pair of trousers,