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The Artist in Exile And Action.

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The Artist In Exile And Action

By ENKA MANN

For a number of years before Hitler's ascension to power, during the period of the Republic in Germany, the cultural level of the arts was extremely high. In spite of the post-war depression in all creative work the spirit of defeatism was rapidly fading. When Hitler did finally take power, the whole savage revenge neurosis, which had existed shortly after the war, was turned by the Nazi anti-culturists against a certain group of people racially, and against the whole world of humane culture, without racial distinction.

An almost miraculous thing happened, as a result. Writers, who generally are considered to be almost clownish in their demand for freedom, split sharply and quickly. Aryan and non-Aryan writers alike, such men as Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Leonhard Frank, Ernst Toller, Bernhardt von Brentano, Ernest Glaser, Heinrich and Klaus Mann knew what they felt, what they wanted, and what they had to do. Gerhardt Hauptmann, the Hindenburg of German letters, and Gottfried Benn, among others, knew where their bread was buttered, and did not flee. Mediocrities remained to denounce their fellow-craftsmen as traitors, cowards. In the field of learning, in the universities, amongst the philosophers, scientists and pedagogues, the betrayal was even greater. Through their cunning rationalizations they found themselves justifying acts and practices which a few months before would have shamed them into justifiable obscurity. The somewhat ironic aftermath of this almost wholesale betrayal was the fact that many of these people wound up in concentration camps and inevitably lost their jobs; it would almost seem that a quota existed for those academicians who would acquiesce and still be accepted into the warm graces of the National Socialist state.

How confusing, how unbelievable all this was, is best illustrated by what happened to my father, Thomas Mann.

At the beginning of February, 1933, when Hitler was already Chancellor, but before his party took full power (the elections did not take place in Bavaria until March 5), my father left for a short vacation to Arosa, Switzerland, the scene of *The Magic Mountain*, after a long, exhausting lecture tour. On March 5, Hitler carried the elections; on March 10 the ruthless General von Epp was sent to Munich. It was not long before the swastika was flying over all the buildings. On this same day I returned from a short excursion to Switzerland. On the twelfth I had a fair idea which way the wind was blowing. On that day I telephoned my father at Arosa, and knowing that the wires were tapped, I tried to engage him in a very symbolic conversation. I told him that the weather was bad in Munich, that the weather was clear and good in high-up Arosa, and that it would be nice for him to extend his furlough from the *Joseph novel*. He could not understand me, but my mother caught on immediately. When the situation was explained to my father he would and could not believe what he heard. He was prevailed upon to remain in Switzerland, however, and only by a stroke of good fortune was I able to leave Munich, and Germany, with his *Joseph* manuscript, which he had been working on for seven years, in fact. This, incidentally, was my own as well as my parent's exit from Germany. His house, library, property, automobile, moneys, including the Nobel Prize award, were later confiscated.

While all this was nightmarish to my father, he could still not accept the facts and significance of what was happening. When finally the Nazis realized that my father was not returning to Germany—this was before confiscation—they attacked him as a traitor for a speech he had given months earlier on Wagner, in which he had praised the greatness of this artist, whom he loves

very deeply. In this speech my father had also stressed the littleness of the man, a criticism to which Hitler took personal exception because Wagner had not been played up to the heroic greatness which Hitler had officially proclaimed existed in the man. For this my father was proclaimed a traitor to his country. This was the beginning of a persecution which was later to become almost monstrous in its severity. The final straw was when my father, exercising his privilege as a Nobel Prize winner, wrote a long letter to the Nobel Prize Nominating Committee nominating von Ossietzky for the Peace award. When von Ossietzky did finally win the award, Hitler took this as another personal affront, and the revocation of the Mann's family citizenship was announced, despite the fact that both Goebbels and Frick had earlier said that as long as they were in power such a thing would not happen.

The story of Thomas Mann's exile is but one of thousand like cases. The inevitable conclusion that one must then draw is that Naziism, Fascism, signifies the death of free and honest creativity. The very fact that students, professional people, artists, writers and others are flocking to the anti-fascist colors in Spain, where one finds one's father, husband, brother or friend, is evidence of the immediacy of the Fascist danger and the necessity for immediate counter action. That my husband, W. H. Auden, who is a very sensitive artist, and who may arbitrarily be called a "bourgeois" publishing success, has the need to be in Spain (not content to be in the Propaganda Ministry in Valencia he wants to drive an ambulance) is again typical of the creator's need for action to insure his freedom.

Only with an awareness of this situation can the young creator today, in all fields, see his way clear. Creative people, especially, have to see clearly the situation in Europe, and learn what must be avoided in the United States. There is no fight greater, more valiant, and more necessary than the fight for democratic freedom and the preservation of civil liberties, against the bloody menace of Fascism wherever and whenever it rears its ugly, degenerate head. In this battle, the universities, its students and faculty, especially the creative members of this group, will play decisive roles.