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## Klaus Mann: Letztes Gespräch

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Gefängnismauern, hinter denen sich das Individuum tummelt, sind auch selbstgezogen, bzw. völlig system-unabhängig.

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Mann, Klaus. Letztes Gespräch. Berlin: Aufbau, 1988. 379 pp.

Though Klaus Mann (1906-49) is primarily known for his novels Mephisto, Der Vulkan, and his autobiographies, he gained prompt celebrity at a surprisingly early age for the considerable amount of short prose he wrote before his exile in 1933. As an adolescent Mann struggled to establish himself as a writer with a large number of short stories, several dramas, and a short novel (Der fromme Tanz, 1925), and these swiftly earned him the reputation of a literary enfant terrible of his generation. Mann shamelessly used his father's name and connections to launch his career, yet insisted that his works not be judged against his father's. The comparison was, however, too enticing for Mann's critics, and the young writer increasingly felt both the competition and insecurity that accompanied his new métier.

Many of the short stories collected in Letztes Gespräch date from Mann's early period (1924-32), and they document the young writer's childhood and internal struggle to break from a father who viewed his son's ambitions and nascent talent with skepticism. This edition rounds out the collection of short stories first published in the West German Werkausgabe edition, Abenteuer des Brautpaars (1976), as it includes nine short stories which previously had appeared either in pre-war German newspapers or volumes long since out of print.

Friedrich Albrecht's epilogue summarizes the motifs, thematic concerns, and political development of Mann's short prose in succinct, perceptive fashion. He explains the importance of Mann's fascination with the irrational, with Todessehnsucht, narcotics, the relationship of death and Eros, and documents the autobiographical character of many of the stories. Albrecht highlights

the manner in which Klaus Mann combined the contradictory elements of his melancholy, sentimental Weltanschauung with his critical intelligence and need for self-identification, and stresses this fusion as the enduring basis for much of Mann's writing. The year 1933 was not as stark a division for Mann's literary production as some critics have asserted, Albrecht explains. Though his writing took on a distinct political character, Mann continued to deal with highly personal concerns in his novels and short stories, as the story Vergittertes Fenster (a tale of König Ludwig II's loneliness and madness) illustrates.

Letztes Gespräch deserves praise for its extended selection and fine commentary, and provides a useful service by bringing Klaus Mann's early short stories, which might have passed unnoticed, to the fore.

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Strittmatter, Erwin. Nachtigallgeschichten. Leipzig: Reclam, 1987. 322 pp.

Pankoke, Helga, ed. Erwin Strittmatter Lebenszeit: Ein Brevier. Berlin-Weimar: Aufbau, 1987. 191 pp.

Nachtigallgeschichten unites three separately published texts: Die blaue Nachtigall oder der Anfang von Etwas (1972); Meine Freundin Tina Babe. Drei Nachtigallgeschichten (1977); and Grüner Juni. Eine Nachtigallgeschichte (1985). The first two texts are a collection of short stories, and the third one is one lengthy story. Although the stories of these three texts are chronological, Strittmatter moves freely back and forth in time to relate his various experiences and recollections. In this respect, Strittmatter demonstrates his close bond with his Sorbian ancestors, because he is a natural storyteller who deftly weaves many seemingly disparate strands together into one main plot. Strittmatter's style is informal, and he pokes fun at the various people, events, himself, and the readers.

The turbulent period of Germany's history (1912-1945), however, recedes into the background. More-