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Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder. Text und Kommentar*

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Review of Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder. Text und Kommentar*. 2 vols. in 2 pts. Eds. Jan Assmann, et al. (Vols. 7(1–2) and 8(1–2) of *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe. Werke — Briefe — Tagebücher*. Eds. Heinrich Detering, et al.) Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2018. 1923 pp. (vols. 7(1)–8(1), continuously paginated) and 2091 pp. (vols. 7(2)–8(2), continuously paginated). ISBN 978–3–10–048330–0 (vol. 7) and 978–3–10–048333–1 (vol. 8).

The *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* [Large Annotated Frankfurt Edition] of Thomas Mann’s collected writings is a monumental editorial project. Having started in 2001 with the publication of *Buddenbrooks*, the complete edition is projected to encompass thirty-eight volumes of critical texts including literary works, essays, letters, and diaries. Each of these volumes also contains an extensive commentary, annotations, and selected materials. In the case of *Joseph und seine Brüder* [Joseph and His Brothers], these materials include excerpts from Thomas Mann’s work notes, the Joseph story (*Gen.* 27–50) from Mann’s family bible complete with marginalia, and a selection of letters from experts advising the author on relevant topics. The volumes are curated and edited by renowned Thomas Mann expert Dieter Borchmeyer, Egyptologist and religious study scholar Jan Assmann, and Stephan Stachorski, who previously co-edited with Hermann Kurzke the six-volume edition of Mann’s *Essays* (1993–97).

Thomas Mann’s *opus maximum*, the biblical tetralogy *Joseph und seine Brüder*, is the most recent addition to the Frankfurt annotated editorial project. The editors sensibly decided to divide the two-thousand-page novel into two volumes, with *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* [The Stories of Jacob] (1933) and *Der junge Joseph* [Young Joseph] (1934) comprising volume 7(1), while volume 8(1) includes *Joseph in Ägypten* [Joseph in Egypt] (1936) and *Joseph der Ernährer* [Joseph the Provider] (1943). This seemingly obvious distribution already constitutes a significant improvement over the *Gesammelte Werke in dreizehn Bänden* [Collected Works in Thirteen Volumes] (1974): in this earlier authoritative edition, the biblical novel is similarly split between volumes IV and V, but for some incomprehensible reason volume IV randomly ends with Part Four of *Joseph in Ägypten*.

In the Frankfurt edition of *Joseph und seine Brüder*, the critical text is based on the first printed edition of the novel rather than on the manuscripts. The textual emendations to previous editions, while numerous, are mostly inconspicuous,

if frequently amusing: in *Der junge Joseph*, for example, the editors correct the blunder of one of Thomas Mann's more infamous secretaries, who had mistakenly transcribed the phrase "Verkehrstrubel der Reisestraße" [bustling traffic on Egypt's highway (Mann 2005, 1055)] as "Reisetrubel der Verkehrsstraße" [bustling crowd on Egypt's traffic way] (Mann 2018, 7(2): 213). There are, however, two notable exceptions: for the first time since the very first edition, the *Vorspiel: Höllenfahrt* [Prelude: Descent into Hell], preceding *Die Geschichten Jaakobs*, is separately paginated in Roman numerals. Secondly, a single comma was deliberately deleted in the title of the fourth and final novel, changing it from *Joseph, der Ernährer* to *Joseph der Ernährer* — a significant difference according to the editors, since it turns a nominal attribute into a part of a proper name, following the style of rulers such as William the Conqueror (see 7(2): 211).

The overall sparseness of significant textual corrections is all the more notable if one takes into account the work's rather turbulent genesis in the years between 1926 and 1943. On a personal level, this period saw Mann's decision to not return to Germany in 1933, the loss of his German citizenship in 1936, and his life in exile, first in Switzerland and then in the U.S. Considering these circumstances, it is surprising that the first two volumes of the novel could still be published in Berlin in 1933 and 1934, while the third and fourth volume had to be published in Vienna in 1936 and Stockholm in 1943 respectively after the forced relocation of Thomas Mann's Jewish publisher Gottfried Bermann Fischer.

More complex even than the publication process was the tetralogy's reception. As the Frankfurt Edition documents it extensively, it organizes the material geographically while also considering the reviewers' socio-political or ideological backgrounds: domestic criticism is kept separate from the reactions of the German exile press, which in turn is distinguished from the reception in German-speaking countries as well as in the rest of Europe and in the U.S. Simultaneously, the editors quote bourgeois-conservative reviewers next to right-wing polemicists and Catholic critics, contrasting their opinions with the overwhelmingly positive reactions from Jewish intellectuals to *Die Geschichten Jaakobs* — reactions that, surprisingly, could still be voiced in Germany in 1933.

This edition's most important contribution to Thomas Mann scholarship, however, lies in the extensive annotations that constitute the core of the commentary in each volume: a total of almost one thousand pages of detailed explanations of words, concepts and circumstances related to (among countless other topics) the biblical source material and its variations in the Islamic tradition; Thomas Mann's archaic use of language; his eclectic research on Ancient Egypt, the religions of the Middle East, and the gnosis; as well as the influence of Richard Wagner, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Franklin D. Roosevelt on Mann's epic re-imagining of the Joseph story. The depth and variety of these elucidations are especially apparent when juxtaposed with the previously authoritative reference work, Bernd-Jürgen Fischer's *Handbuch zu Thomas Manns "Josephsromanen"* [Handbook of Thomas Mann's "Joseph Novels"] (2002). This comparison is not, in any way, intended as a criticism of Fischer's work: his compilation is a valuable

resource, at the same time clearly illustrating that no single scholar is able to do justice to all the topics, motives and interwoven references constituting the fictional world of *Joseph und seine Brüder* — a task which Assmann, Borchmeyer and Stachorski accomplish with erudition and diligence.

The new edition of Thomas Mann's biblical tetralogy upholds in every way the high editorial standards that have distinguished the *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* since its inception in 2002. With its well-structured abundance of factual knowledge, interpretative insights and selected materials, it is a treasure trove for any Thomas Mann enthusiast, and an invaluable resource for all future scholarship on *Joseph und seine Brüder*.

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