

# The Artist and the Historian. Thomas Mann's Letters to Otto Seeck

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ABSTRACT. Thomas Mann and the historian of the Late Empire, Otto Seeck, corresponded with each other from 1911 until at least 1917. While all of Seeck's letters to Mann appear to have been lost, there are five remaining letters from Mann to Seeck; four of which being published here for the first time. In between 1911 and 1917 Mann generally showed a conservative attitude, and during the First World War he enthusiastically supported his country's war efforts. A similar conservative and nationalistic trait can be found in Seeck's popular works. Thus, before Mann turned to the Republic, he had an affinity with Seeck, and mentioned his own composition of his conservative essay *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* in two different letters to him. On 24 January 1911 Mann thanked Seeck for his hospitality during a visit to Münster and sent an autograph to his daughter. In a letter dated 9 April 1916 Mann outlined the qualities and weaknesses of his own essay on Frederick the Great and mentioned its reception among scholars and the public, then he gave his opinion on historical fiction. On 16 February 1917 he thanked Seeck for sending him one of his essays, and just over a month later (24 March 1917) he thanked him for sending him a new essay, and mentioned his own forthcoming book, *Aufzeichnungen eines Unpolitischen* (not yet entitled *Betrachtungen*).

KEYWORDS. Otto Seeck, Thomas Mann, Correspondence, Conservatism, First World War.

## a) Mann and Seeck: Some Affinities

The German historian Otto Seeck (1850-1921) is especially renowned for his work *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* in six volumes (Stuttgart-Berlin 1895-1920)<sup>1</sup>. He was one of the leading and pioneering German scholars on the late Roman Empire in modern times. However, some of his ideas (such as the *Ausrottung der Besten*, i.e. the extinction of the best individuals during the late Roman Empire, which he asserted in *Geschichte*) and his style of argumentation have often been criticised<sup>2</sup>. Seeck also commented on contemporary German culture

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I (Simone Rendina) would like to thank Irene Dänzer-Vanotti for giving me permission to publish letters 1, 3, and 5 (NB: Letter 3 turned out to have already been published in MANN 1962, 126-7; MANN 2004, 135-6; cf. MANN 1963, 176-7); the staff of the Archive of the University of Münster for giving me permission to publish letters 2 and 4; Sascha Schäfer for reconstructing and transcribing the letters, and for giving me some very pertinent advice regarding the introduction and commentary; and Prof. Dr. Johannes Hahn for showing me the content of the Archive of the University of Münster, especially as far as Otto Seeck is concerned.

<sup>1</sup> For Otto Seeck, see the following articles and books. Obituaries: MÜNZER 1922; RADERMACHER 1926. Research on his life and works: HOLTZMANN 1949; FURLANI 1953; GONZÁLEZ BLANCO 1988 (a partial bibliography of Seeck's works); LEPPIN 1998; REBENICH 1998; ID. 2000a; ID. 2000b; BUONOCORE 2005; LORENZ 2006; BRANDT 2010; SCHULLER 2010; SIRKS 2010; LEPPIN 2012; TRAINA 2013; REBENICH forthcoming. Studies of modern classical scholarship with occasional references to Seeck: GELZER 1927, 173-4; MAZZARINO 1951, 9-10, 26; ID. 1954, 44-6; MARROU 1964, 50-1; MAZZA 1973, 57-71; MOMIGLIANO 1978, 441-2; CHRIST 1979, 258; CANFORA 1980, 41; CHRIST 1982, 69, 144, 188; DEMANDT 1984, 375-6; CROKE 1990, 169-70; BROWN 1997, 7; REBENICH 2002, 159-60, 162-3; LEPPIN 2004, 205-7; MAZZARINO 2008, 123-38; DEMANDT 2008, XVI; MARCONE 2012, 46-7; PELLIZZARI 2014, 220-31; RODA 2014, 287-8.

<sup>2</sup> He often came into conflict with his mentor, Theodor Mommsen, due to their scientific disagreements: see SEECK 1904; BUONOCORE 2005. MOMIGLIANO 1955, 159 deemed Seeck's *Geschichte* to be «altrettanto dotta e preziosa, quanto

and politics, as some of his publications demonstrate, e.g. *Die Entwicklung der antiken Geschichtschreibung und andere populäre Schriften* (Berlin 1898)<sup>3</sup>, *Katechismus des Weltkrieges. 39 zeitgemäße Fragen nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen beantwortet* (Münster 1917); *Russen und Balten. Drei Vorträge* (Bielefeld-Leipzig 1917).

One generally overlooked aspect of Seeck's biography is that he was in correspondence with the author Thomas Mann. While one of Thomas Mann's letters to Otto Seeck has already been published<sup>4</sup>, four other letters from Mann to Seeck are published in this article for the first time. Copies of the letters numbered 2 and 4 are archived at the University of Münster; letters 1, 3, and 5 belong to Irene Dänzer-Vanotti, Otto Seeck's great-granddaughter. Unfortunately, Seeck's letters to Mann have not been found. It is highly unlikely that these letters will ever be found, for five reasons: 1) Generally speaking, a large part of Mann's papers and materials were lost. This happened both because of the many moves the Mann family was forced to make after Hitler's *Machtergreifung* in 1933 and during the Second World War, and because Mann destroyed the papers that he was no longer interested in, or that he deemed to be dangerous for his image<sup>5</sup>. 2) Irene Dänzer-Vanotti does not own any copies of Seeck's letters to Mann, as Seeck generally did not keep copies of his own letters. 3) The Archive of the University of Münster, i.e. the university where Seeck was teaching during his contact with Mann, has no copies of Seeck's letters to Mann (although it does have a copy of a letter sent by Seeck to a colleague)<sup>6</sup>. 4) The database of the Thomas Mann Archives in Zürich contains no trace of them. This database shows a clear pattern: the number of letters sent by Mann to several individuals and that are archived there is far higher than that of the letters sent to Mann by these same individuals and that are also archived there. This suggests that many letters Mann received were lost or destroyed, and that the letters sent to him by individuals such as Seeck, who was never a celebrity, were not considered especially important and were lost or destroyed during Mann's lifetime or later. 5) Letters sent by or to Mann have been in the process of being collected and archived in the TMA since 1956: it is unlikely that any further letters by Seeck are still in the hands of individuals or institutions<sup>7</sup>.

Mann wrote a vast number of letters and notes during his lifetime, but not all of them have survived. He wrote an average of three to four letters a day, sometimes even ten, and left almost no letter unanswered<sup>8</sup>. He was generally very kind to his correspondents. His tone, however, was basically formal and distant, especially when he wrote letters to his more occasional correspondents<sup>9</sup>. It would make sense to include Seeck among these, if we consider that we only have five letters from Mann to Seeck, and Mann is generally neutral towards him, except for letter 4, in which he jokingly comments on Seeck's new style of beard.

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sconnessa»; ID. 1960, 106, 113 considered Seeck a «great but erratic scholar» who «never believed anything to be authentic if he could help it».

<sup>3</sup> Especially the final section of the book, called *Zeitphrasen* (on pages 243-331). See also GONZÁLEZ BLANCO 1988, 12; REBENICH 1998, 601-3.

<sup>4</sup> In MANN 1962, 126-7; MANN 2004, 135-6. Italian translation in MANN 1963, 176-7. This letter is not republished in this article, but only summarised (No. 3). A few additions have been made to the commentary on it that can be read in the *Große kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe* (hereafter *GKFA*).

<sup>5</sup> See KURZKE 2009, 78-9 for the materials that were lost or destroyed by Mann, or that disappeared during the Second World War. KURZKE 2001, 76, 116: As Mann left Munich in 1933, many of his papers disappeared, among which were several letters; only about 70 of his letters remain from the years 1894 to 1901. KURZKE 2009, 58: Only a small part of his library has survived. The story of his personal notes (*Tagebücher*) is complicated. KURZKE 2001, 21: In 1896 he burnt all of his previous notes. KURZKE 2001, 179, 270, 399; ID. 2009, 9, 79: He kept his notes from September 1918 to December 1921, but he burnt the notes of the years 1904/05 and of the period of the First World War when he was in California. KURZKE 2001, 396-8: In April 1933 Mann lost track of a case containing personal papers, such as the *Tagebücher* 1896-1933, most of which he destroyed some years after he recovered them. KURZKE 2001, 592: He kept his notes from 1933 to 1951.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Archiv.Findbuecher/Bestand007>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.online.tma.ethz.ch/home/#/content/fa056eee2c5946e795cc25e1ae079568>.

<sup>8</sup> KURZKE 2001, 185.

<sup>9</sup> KURZKE 2001, 151, 185: Few of his letters are intimate; «Briefe, das war seine Art, die Menschen aus der Ferne zu lieben, aus der Einsamkeit auszubrechen und sich doch vor Zudringlichkeit zu schützen».

However, the relations between Mann and Seeck are deeper and more complex than most of the letters Mann wrote to his correspondents. Their relationship probably lasted six years, from 1911 until at least 1917. As the commentary by Th. Sprecher, H.R. Vaget and C. Bernini shows, they first met in January 1911 in Münster, where Seeck had been teaching Roman history since 1907. The occasion of Mann's visit to Münster was a *Lesereise*. In the morning of 21 January 1911 Mann and Seeck took a walk together through Münster; later in the same day, Mann was a guest at Seeck's home in Gertrudenstraße 43<sup>10</sup>. After Seeck had died (29 June 1921), Mann sent Seeck's widow a letter of condolence on 22 July 1921, in which he assured her that her husband would not be forgotten in the world of scholarship, to which Seeck had made so many contributions, as well as by those who had known him personally<sup>11</sup>.

It appears that Seeck and Mann had several ideas in common: ideologically they were both conservatives<sup>12</sup>. Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (written between autumn 1915 and early 1918, and published at the end of September 1918, about one month before the end of the Great War) is a complex, apparently unbridled testimony to his political creed<sup>13</sup>. The book condemned literature along with democracy, which Mann considered to be the same thing as politics<sup>14</sup>. According to Mann, Germany had no vocation to politics and democracy; on the other hand, "democratic" countries were hostile to Germany's affirmation of its own identity<sup>15</sup>.

In his essay *Friedrich und die große Koalition. Ein Abriß für den Tag und die Stunde* (1915), which will be analysed later, Mann also criticised democracy, which at the time he considered to be the opposite of bourgeoisie, humanity, and freedom. However, in a preface to a new edition of this essay in 1953, he criticised himself for not having understood the value of democracy when he had originally written the essay<sup>16</sup>. While writing *Betrachtungen* and *Friedrich*, Mann frequently changed his mind about democracy: in a passage of *Betrachtungen* he claimed that he was not hostile to it, a few lines after defining himself as anti-democratic<sup>17</sup>. He seems to have finally abandoned his previous conservative stance by early 1922, and he made his change of mind public through his speech *Von deutscher Republik* (October 1922)<sup>18</sup>. However, as H. Kurzke has demonstrated, the idea of Mann's full conversion to Republic in 1922 is a simplification<sup>19</sup>. After the First World War, Mann made many assertions that he later contradicted. He anxiously searched for

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas Mann's letter to his brother Heinrich in MANN 2002b, 472-3 (26 January 1911) and HEINE, SCHOMMER 2004, 58: «20. Januar: Münster. Im Saal des Städtischen Realgymnasiums liest TM, eingeladen von der Literarischen Gesellschaft, aus *Königliche Hoheit* und *Schwere Stunde*. Er logiert im Hotel König von England. Eine Besprechung der Lesung kritisiert, dass die gelesenen Stücke nicht gleichmäßig glücklich und fein ausgewählt gewesen seien. Die Ballepisode aus *Königliche Hoheit* hätte, trotz aller aufgebotenen komischen Mittel, keinen echten Humor gezeigt und keine humorvoll angeregte Stimmung zu wecken vermocht. Mit der Novelle *Schwere Stunde* habe der Dichter ein ergreifendes, wiedererlebtes Bild gebracht (*Auf Roter Erde*, Heimatbeilage der *Westfälische Nachrichten*, 7.11.1989). 21. Januar: Münster. In Begleitung von Prof. Otto Seeck, Ordinarius für Alte Geschichte an der Universität Münster, macht TM einen Vormittagsspaziergang durch Münster und ist in seinem Hause, Gertrudenstraße 43 zu Gast (An Otto Seeck, R 11/3)». There is a novel describing Mann and Seeck's encounter and the former's visit to Münster: ENGELS 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Referenced in MANN 1976, Reg. 26/121 (mistakenly under the year 1926); MANN 2004, 630. There is a scan of this letter in the TMA (B-I-SEEC-1).

<sup>12</sup> Mann's political stance can be defined as "conservative", at least for the years of his correspondence with Seeck. See *infra*.

<sup>13</sup> For the dates of composition and publication of *Betrachtungen*, see MARIANELLI 1997, 20-1; KURZKE 2001, 236; MANN 2004, 13; MANN 2009, 12; KURZKE 2009, 9, 43, 55; ALESSIATO 2011, 23. Its oldest sections were written at the beginning of the war, while the most recent ones between late 1917 and early 1918.

<sup>14</sup> MANN 2009, 32-3; KURZKE 2001, 265. MANN 2009, 286: "Conservative" is also considered to be the same thing as "national", while "democratic" is seen as the same thing as "international". MANN 2009, 388: Democracy equals politics, civilisation and Europeanism. MANN 2009, 290-3, 295-6: Mann is also hostile to universal suffrage, although in the end he admits that it must be accepted.

<sup>15</sup> MANN 2009, 33-4, 286-7.

<sup>16</sup> CARLI 1986, X; MANN 1986, 3.

<sup>17</sup> MANN 2009, 357, 359; KURZKE 2009, 14. KURZKE 2001, 190: Mann said in 1910 that he was not a democrat.

<sup>18</sup> KURZKE 2001, 346; ID. 2009, 106.

<sup>19</sup> KURZKE 2001, 272; ID. 2009, 101.

his own political identity, by experimenting with monarchy, social democracy, the *Räterepublik*, communism, and radical conservative positions<sup>20</sup>. Ultimately, in 1922 he thought that finding a middle ground among conservatives, liberals, and social democrats was the only solution to the political crisis originating from the First World War<sup>21</sup>.

However, when Mann wrote *Betrachtungen, Friedrich*, and the letters to Seeck, he was still basically showing himself as a conservative. As he argued in *Betrachtungen*, conservatism did not indicate the will to maintain everything as it was, as conservatives were ready to accept reforms as well. Being conservative meant wanting Germany to stay German<sup>22</sup>. In one passage in *Betrachtungen*, Mann also declared that he was not a conservative, as this kind of political position was far from his nature, although he did have conservative inclinations<sup>23</sup>. On 22 June 1920 Mann affirmed that he was a conservative, without endorsing any conservative party<sup>24</sup>. According to a critic (Kurt Hiller, 1925), Mann was always a conservative<sup>25</sup>. In *Von deutscher Republik* (1922), Mann claimed that he was not a fervent Republican, but rather a conservative<sup>26</sup>.

H. Kurzke has shown that Mann never was fully convinced of his own conservative ideology of that time, and that he never was intimately a conservative: «Was die konkreten Handlungen und Ereignisse betrifft, so zeigt sowohl die Entstehungs- als auch die Wirkungsgeschichte des Kriegsbuches, dass Thomas Mann mit der rechten oder gar rechtsradikalen Bewegung nichts zu schaffen hat»<sup>27</sup>. His political opinions at the time of the First World War were not realistic and concrete<sup>28</sup>. Although Mann inserted himself in the tradition of the conservative thought, he was not very familiar with the classic conservative books<sup>29</sup>. His *Betrachtungen*, although nationalist and conservative in the opinions they showed, were internationalist, democratic, intellectualist, and *zivilisationsliterarisch* in their form and style<sup>30</sup>. Ultimately, his conservative attitude was only a way to provoke and defy his brother and rival Heinrich<sup>31</sup>. Despite all his political fantasies, ranging from national conservative to Bolshevik ideology, immediately after the end of the war he became a loyal Republican<sup>32</sup>. However, considering the numerous conservative opinions that Mann expressed at the time of the First World War, it is clear that he publicly presented himself as a conservative in those years, and it is likely that in his relations to individuals with whom he was not intimate, such as Seeck, he showed that outward image of himself.

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<sup>20</sup> KURZKE 2001, 273; ID. 2009, 102.

<sup>21</sup> MANN 2009, 106-7.

<sup>22</sup> MANN 2009, 286.

<sup>23</sup> MANN 2009, 635-6; KURZKE 2001, 255; ID. 2009, 16.

<sup>24</sup> KURZKE 2009, 111-2.

<sup>25</sup> KURZKE 2009, 115.

<sup>26</sup> KURZKE 2009, 122.

<sup>27</sup> KURZKE 2009, 683. His opposition to radical right-wing positions became evident during Hitler's rise to power: Mann «scelse al momento giusto di non seguire la strada della collaborazione fra conservatori e nazisti» (JESI 2011, 41); in 1921 he began to fight fascism with great constancy (KURZKE 2001, 354).

<sup>28</sup> KURZKE 2001, 274; ID. 2009, 103. ID. 2001, 97-8: He was not sincerely national conservative. KURZKE 2009, 103-4: As for his actual political choices, on 12 January 1919 he voted for the *Nationalliberale Deutsche Volkspartei*, and he did not vote in the election of the *Reichstag* of 6 June 1920. KURZKE 2009, 105-6: He quickly changed his mind regarding the *Bayerische Räterepublik*. For a certain amount of time, he had been a supporter of monarchy. See KURZKE 2001, 95-6, 190, 255: *Königliche Hoheit* (1909) was not an exaltation of democracy, but rather a book supporting the idea of monarchy; at the time of the First World War, Mann was a monarchist, as demonstrated by MANN 2009, 285. KURZKE 2001, 96: Until 1914, his support for monarchy prevailed over his interest in liberalism, communism and social democracy. From 1895 to 1896 Mann had worked for a national conservative journal. KURZKE 2001, 356: In around 1930 he was decidedly a social democrat.

<sup>29</sup> KURZKE 2009, 69.

<sup>30</sup> KURZKE 2001, 255; ID. 2009, 139.

<sup>31</sup> KURZKE 2001, 116.

<sup>32</sup> KURZKE 2001, 348.

Otto Seeck, for his part, expressed his conservative beliefs on several occasions, especially in *Katechismus des Weltkrieges* and *Russen und Balten*<sup>33</sup>. He was a conservative member of the German bourgeoisie, with a veneration towards Bismarck, to whom he paid a visit along with his own family in around 1891<sup>34</sup>. In addition to these two pamphlets, there are Seeck's comments on the political thought and activity of Theodor Mommsen, who had been his *Meister*. While praising Mommsen's greatness as a scholar of Roman history, Seeck considered Mommsen as a failed politician. His liberal opposition to Bismarck had been pointless, and he had not understood the times he lived in. This was due to the fact that his political ideas had remained firmly rooted in 1848 («... der schon Gealterte [besaß] nicht mehr die Biagsamkeit [...], daß er hätte aufhören können, ein Achtundvierziger zu sein»)<sup>35</sup>.

Mann also subtly criticised his correspondent's liberal mentor – Mommsen – in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. In 1875, Mommsen had expressed his opposition to the possibility that Germany would be involved in any unnecessary wars. According to Mommsen, Germany should avoid any war, if possible, and should not shed the blood of its own young citizens<sup>36</sup>. This stance was a far cry from Mann's militant position during the First World War. In another passage of *Betrachtungen*, Mann expresses disapproval of Mommsen's denunciation of German imperialism (which was heavily criticised in a letter Mommsen wrote in 1898). Mommsen (here defined as a *Zivilisationsliterat*), as Mann highlights, while attacking Germany's bellicosity, neglected to condemn Italian, French, and English imperialism<sup>37</sup>.

Another, more controversial, intellectual figure that connects Seeck and Mann, though more indirectly than Mommsen, was Oswald Spengler, the author of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (two volumes, 1918 and 1922). As far as the title of his masterpiece was concerned, Spengler was inspired by the title of Seeck's *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*<sup>38</sup>. However, it is doubtful that Spengler actually read Seeck's *Geschichte*<sup>39</sup>. As far as we know, Spengler only saw one of Seeck's volumes in a bookshop window in 1912, which was the moment when he decided on the title of his work<sup>40</sup>. On the other hand, Spengler exerted a strong influence on Mann after the first volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* appeared. Mann read it in June-July 1919. In December

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<sup>33</sup> Significantly, CANFORA 1980, 41 mentions both the works written by Mann during the Great War and Seeck's *Katechismus des Weltkrieges*. These are both samples of the «guerra degli spiriti» that took place during that war. Seeck's pamphlet is presented as one of the most uncompromising essays of those years («testi sconcertanti»); Mann's writings are described as almost fanatical («i testi più allarmanti»).

<sup>34</sup> This fact is attested by an unpublished text: the memoirs of Lilli, Otto's eldest daughter, written by herself in 1920 on her father's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. This text belongs to Irene Dänzer-Vanotti, who kindly allowed me to read it.

<sup>35</sup> Comments on Mommsen as a politician are contained in the obituary Seeck wrote for Mommsen (1817-1903): SEECK 1904, 102-4. The quotation is from page 104. See REBENICH 1997, 235-6 note 89. See also an earlier essay, SEECK 1898, 305-6: Although Mommsen is an outstanding scholar, he has committed many mistakes as a politician. Criticising Bismarck was one of these mistakes.

<sup>36</sup> MANN 2009, 372-3. The speech quoted by Mann is Theodor Mommsen's *Rede zur Gedächtnisfeier der Universität am 3. August 1875 (Reden und Aufsätze, Berlin 1905, 29-30)*.

<sup>37</sup> MANN 2009, 386-8. For Mommsen's political views, see, in addition to SEECK 1904, 102-4, HARTMANN 1908, 112-131; WICKERT 1959-80; REBENICH 2002, 14, 68, 157, 165-93; DEMANDT, GOLTZ, SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN 2005; WIESEHÖFER 2005.

<sup>38</sup> For the relations between Spengler and Seeck, see REBENICH forthcoming.

<sup>39</sup> According to KOKTANEK 1968, 141, «Merkwürdigerweise bezieht sich Spengler nirgends auf Seeck».

<sup>40</sup> The testimony to Spengler being inspired by the title of Seeck's work came from Spengler's sister. See KOKTANEK 1968, 140. Another document relating this moment is referenced by BOTERMAN 1992, 26 note 95. This is an interview with Spengler, from *Leipziger neueste Nachrichten* of 22 October 1922 (*non vidi*). As for Seeck's knowledge of Spengler's work, we only have a very thin piece of evidence. GONZÁLEZ BLANCO 1988, 13, mentions a work by Seeck titled *Oswald Spengler und der Geist der Geschichte*, dated to 1920. However, it is not specified where it was published – thus, we can assume it was a conference. Unfortunately, it is not possible to gather more information on *Oswald Spengler und der Geist der Geschichte* and its content. In any case, Seeck died in 1921, thus may have read the first volume of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918).

1919 he read Spengler's *Preußentum und Sozialismus* with enthusiasm. However, Mann soon after in 1922 negatively re-evaluated Spengler and his main work<sup>41</sup>.

A common interest for both Seeck and Mann was Russia. In his tract *Russen und Balten* (1917), Seeck analysed the history of Russia and various problems regarding contemporary Russia, in three chapters: *Die Entwicklung des russischen Volkscharakters*, *Die Russen unter dem Einfluß des Westens*, and *Die Deutschen im russischen Reiche*. Seeck's judgement of the Russians was far from positive. Their national character had been conditioned negatively by centuries of servitude, as Seeck insists in chapter one<sup>42</sup>. Servitude had made the Russians fatalist and dependent on their despots. The exact month of publication of *Russen und Balten* is unknown. It was certainly published before the October Revolution, but Seeck was clearly informed about the build up to the insurgence. A more precise *terminus ante quem* for the publication is 24 March 1917, the date on which Mann wrote to Seeck (in the letter that is numbered as 5 here) mentioning that he had received a copy of the book from the publishing house.

In contrast, Mann held the Russians in high esteem. He expressed his respect for them in *Betrachtungen*, where Germans and Russians were presented as two peoples joined by the same fate. Both were enemies of Western *Zivilisation*, and of France in particular. In addition, Mann showed his admiration for Russian literature<sup>43</sup>. Mann finished composing his *Betrachtungen* on the day in which negotiations were announced for the armistice between Germany and Russia. From then on, Germany's war would continue only against the West, the *trois pays libres*, *Zivilisation*, *Literatur*, *Politik*, and *der rhetorische Bourgeois*<sup>44</sup>. For some time, Mann even showed sympathy for communism<sup>45</sup>. After he perceived the dangers of fascism, it was fascism, not communism, that became the real enemy of society for him<sup>46</sup>. He also maintained relations with Russia during the Second World War and during the Cold War<sup>47</sup>.

An important aspect of Mann's letters to Seeck is that four out of five were sent during the Great War, more precisely in 1916/17<sup>48</sup>. They do not mention the War directly; however, both Mann and Seeck reflected on it intensely during those years. In these letters, Mann discussed his essay *Friedrich und die große Koalition. Ein Abriss für den Tag und die Stunde* (1915), which presented Frederick II of Prussia as a model of tenacity for the Germans in the Great War, with Seeck twice<sup>49</sup>. Seeck, for his part, expressed his appreciation to Mann for his essay on Frederick II<sup>50</sup> – which, however, generally produced negative reactions among scholars and experts on the history

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<sup>41</sup> MARIANELLI 1997, 599-600; KURZKE 2001, 273, 286, 358; HEINE, SCHOMMER 2004, 93, 96, 270; KURZKE 2009, 103, 113. See also HELLMANN 1968, 336-7 for Mann's eventual opposition to Spengler and his fatalism. For his part, Spengler read Mann's *Betrachtungen*: see KURZKE 2009, 127-8. For Spengler's opinion of Mann, see HEINE, SCHOMMER 2004, 68.

<sup>42</sup> SEECK 1917b, 1-31. The biological process that made this situation possible was a *verkehrte Auslese*, i.e. an "inverted selection", as Seeck maintains on pages 16-7 and 79. This is what Seeck defines as *Ausrottung der Besten* in his *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*. This was, according to Seeck, the main cause of the end of the ancient world. However, modern Germany was not involved in this negative process. See SEECK 1898, 254-64.

<sup>43</sup> MANN 2009, 325-7, 476-80, 638, cf. 53. See MARIANELLI 1997, 23-4; KURZKE 2001, 280-5. Cf. ALESSIATO 2011, 70.

<sup>44</sup> MANN 2009, 638. KURZKE 2001, 282: «Der Verstörung durch die Revolution zum Trotz ist der Schluß des Buches wieder russophil»; 284: Germany and Russia were destined to walk into the future hand in hand.

<sup>45</sup> KURZKE 2001, 283: In his notes, on 22 March 1919, Mann claimed that he appreciated everything healthy, human, national, hostile to the *Entente*, and anti-political in *Spartacismus*, communism, and Bolshevism.

<sup>46</sup> KURZKE 2001, 285.

<sup>47</sup> KURZKE 2001, 481-7. During his stay in the USA, he was suspected of being a communist by the FBI: see *ivi*, 481.

<sup>48</sup> Letters 2 to 5 were sent in 1916/17. See the study of these letters in the second part of this article. The years in which these letters were sent were not exciting times for Mann. See KURZKE 2001, 260: «er verarmte sogar ein kleines bißchen und errang von 1914 bis 1918 weder öffentliche Ehrungen noch literarische Erfolge. Es waren die schwersten Jahre seines Lebens».

<sup>49</sup> *Friedrich* was written in September-December 1914 and was published in «Der Neue Merkur» of January-February 1915, pp. 353-99. It was later published as a separate booklet in Berlin in 1915. See CARLI 1986, XI; MARIANELLI 1997, 18 note 2; ALESSIATO 2011, 20 note 3. For the general aspects of this essay, see HELLMANN 1968; WILLIAMS 1969; KURZKE 2001, 180-1, 244-7. The reference edition is MANN 2002a, 55-122.

<sup>50</sup> See Mann's letters 2 and 3, where the author reacts to Seeck's approval of his writing.

of Prussia<sup>51</sup>. Mann had always been fascinated by Frederick, about whom he had planned to write a novel in around 1906; however, the novel was never written<sup>52</sup>. The composition of the essay on Frederick, on the other hand, was prompted by the current war, as Mann narrated in *Betrachtungen*<sup>53</sup>. In letter No. 2 (published *infra*) Mann confirms this idea: «Der Aufsatz ist eine Improvisation, zu der die Zeitereignisse und das bei aller Erschütterung fast erheitende historische Wiedererkennen mich mächtig aufforderten». In *Betrachtungen*, he also explained that the essay on Frederick dealt with the relations between defensive and offensive military strategies, and mentioned the negative reception it received in some German environments<sup>54</sup>. There he also explained the connection between the essay on Frederick and the historical situation in which it was written<sup>55</sup>. This connection, however, had already been made clear in the pages of *Friedrich*: the First World War was just a repetition or a continuation («Wiederholung oder Fortsetzung») of the Seven Years' War. The invasion of neutral Saxony by Frederick II recalled (and justified) the invasion of neutral Belgium by the Germans in the First World War<sup>56</sup>.

In addition, in two letters, Mann mentioned to Seeck that he was writing the essay that eventually was to become *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* – in which the current war was one of the primary themes<sup>57</sup>. Mann also dedicated other minor essays to the First World War (in addition to *Friedrich* and *Betrachtungen*)<sup>58</sup>. Seeck, on the other hand, published his *Katechismus des Weltkrieges* in 1917, in the same period as the correspondence<sup>59</sup>.

In Mann's and Seeck's essays on the First World War, they both showed a favourable attitude towards the war, and fully justified the motives for which Germans were fighting in it. Later, they had to deal with Germany's defeat. Mann distanced himself from conservative and warmongering movements in the following decades<sup>60</sup>. However, he never totally rejected his own *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. Mann thought that his works did not show any violent break with his conservative past. He did not regret writing *Betrachtungen*. In a letter to Ida Boy-Ed of 5 December 1922 he wrote: «Ich verleugne nichts. Dieser Aufsatz (*scil. Von deutscher Republik*) ist die gerade Fortsetzung der wesentlichen Linie der *Betrachtungen*»<sup>61</sup>. He had confirmed his own political position in his own notes: «Ich bereue kein Wort» (16 September 1918). However, he also willingly accepted corrections on *Betrachtungen* (1 December 1921)<sup>62</sup>. In 1927, he wrote that his *Betrachtungen*, «ästhetisch, als Dichtung genommen» were more valid and important than «jene

<sup>51</sup> WILLIAMS 1969, 151; CARLI 1986, XII. See also the case of Professor Otto Hintze in letter 2.

<sup>52</sup> KURZKE 2001, 180-1.

<sup>53</sup> MANN 2009, 83.

<sup>54</sup> MANN 2009, 205-7. See KURZKE 2009, 310-4.

<sup>55</sup> MANN 2009, 221-3.

<sup>56</sup> MANN 2002a, 55, 100-1. For Mann's idea that the First World War was a repetition or a continuation of the Seven Years' War, and for the similarity of the invasion of Belgium to that of Saxony, see also HELLMANN 1968, 324, 327, 329, 339-40: The First World War represented an attempt by the European powers to eliminate Germany from the political and military arena; however, Mann claimed that Germany would win the war again, as it had already done under Frederick – therefore, Mann's essay was «Kriegs- und Durchhaltepropaganda». The propagandistic value of the essay, especially with regards to the invasion of neutral Belgium, is also highlighted by WILLIAMS 1969, 150-1; CARLI 1986, XI; KURZKE 2001, 246. For the meaning of this essay see also JESI 2018, 267-8, 271, who focuses on Frederick's vocation to war, which was imposed upon him by a higher will. According to HELLMANN 1968, 342, Mann's *Friedrich* represented the ideology of the German conservative bourgeoisie of the end of the Wilhelmine era. Cf. Seeck's defence of the German invasion of Belgium in SEECK 1917a, 108-11.

<sup>57</sup> Letters 3 and 5.

<sup>58</sup> These essays are *Gute Feldpost* (published in October 1914); *Gedanken im Kriege* (November 1914); a letter to «Svenska Dagbladet» (published in a German translation in June 1915); *Gedanken zum Kriege* (published in the «Frankfurter Zeitung» on 1 August 1915); and *An die Armeezeitung A.O.K. 10* (early 1916). See WILLIAMS 1969, 147; CARLI 1986, XI-XII; KURZKE 2001, 236; ID. 2009, 9; MANN 2009, 51-2, 176-8; ALESSIATO 2011, 20 note 3. See also KURZKE 2009, 113 note 70 for the reception of these works.

<sup>59</sup> In that same year, he also published *Russen und Balten*, which, however, does not primarily deal with the First World War.

<sup>60</sup> See above.

<sup>61</sup> MANN 2004, 454-5; KURZKE 2009, 122.

<sup>62</sup> KURZKE 2001, 272-3.

väterliche Ermunterung zur Republik (*scil. Von deutscher Republik*)»<sup>63</sup>. Although he distanced himself from the ideal of the *Unpolitisch* in the following years<sup>64</sup>, as M. Marianelli highlighted, he never disavowed *Betrachtungen*, even in the final years of his life: «Mann (...) poco prima di morire, aveva considerato l'ipotesi di ripresentare l'opera nella stesura originale, preceduta da una sua rimediazione. Con l'edizione del 1956, la prima di tutta una serie, Erika Mann realizzò quel progetto»<sup>65</sup>.

Seeck lost his son Fritz in the Great War, in 1914<sup>66</sup>, and dedicated the sixth and last volume of the *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* (Stuttgart 1920) to him<sup>67</sup>. Some of Seeck's colleagues also died in the First World War, including, amongst others, Kurt Fitzler, who was writing the entry on Augustus for the *Pauly-Wissowa* encyclopedia of Classical Antiquity before he lost his life in battle (1914). Fitzler had gathered material on Augustus, which Seeck later used to complete this work. At the end of the entry, Seeck acknowledged Fitzler's scientific contribution and celebrated his *Heldentod*<sup>68</sup>. These two deaths were depicted by Seeck as heroic sacrifices. It is possible that Seeck was thinking about his personal loss as in *Katechismus des Weltkrieges* (1917) he claimed that the Germans who had lost their relatives in the war were proud of their sacrifice<sup>69</sup>.

The last surviving letter that Mann sent to Seeck is dated 24 March 1917 (No. 5). Unless some later letters were lost, we may suppose that the urgency of their mutual exchange of opinions was exhausted after that date. However, we cannot be sure that Mann had decided to interrupt their correspondence forever. In any case, Seeck's death on 29 June 1921 means that we cannot know whether they would have sent any more letters to each other. We also cannot know whether Mann's dismissal of his own earlier conservative ideas and his turn to Republicanism (made public by his *Republikrede* in October 1922) would have impacted on Mann and Seeck's relations. It is probable that Mann and Seeck were still on good terms when the latter died, and that it was not political or cultural disagreements that led their correspondence to being discontinued. In fact, as we have seen, Mann sent Seeck's widow a letter of condolence (although this is admittedly just a formulaic text). In addition, the absence of letters from 24 March 1917 to 29 June 1921 (four years) is not striking, since five years passed from letter No. 1 (24 January 1911) to No. 2 (9 April 1916)<sup>70</sup>.

In letter No. 3, Mann promised Seeck to read the already published volumes of Seeck's *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* as soon as he could. We do not know whether this ever happened. To the best of our knowledge, Seeck and Mann never discussed Roman history in their correspondence. Indeed, as the first two chapters of Mann's *Betrachtungen* (*Der Protest* and *Das unliterarische Land*) show, Mann had somewhat of an aversion against ancient Rome, which he considered as the archetype of *Zivilisation*. He knew Latin only as far as necessary, and no Greek<sup>71</sup>. In his teenage years he wrote a lost romance on a Roman character, Arria, the wife of Aulus Caecina Paetus, who famously committed suicide with her husband under the rule of emperor Claudius<sup>72</sup>. Leo Naphta, a character of *Der Zauberberg* (1924), polemically presents Virgil as a

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<sup>63</sup> KURZKE 2009, 122-3.

<sup>64</sup> KURZKE 2009, 122-4.

<sup>65</sup> MARIANELLI 1997, 24-5. See also JESI 2018, 268, who argues that there was no clear-cut discontinuity in Mann's mindset from 1914 to 1940.

<sup>66</sup> We owe this piece of information (Fritz's exact year of death) to Irene Dänzer-Vanotti.

<sup>67</sup> SEECK 1920, dedication (no page number): «Meinem Sohne Fritz, der zur Rettung des überfallenen Deutschlands vergebens sein junges, freudenreiches Leben hingeopfert hat, zum dauernden Gedächtnis».

<sup>68</sup> FITZLER, SEECK 1918, 381. The word *Heldentod* is also used in reference to the Germans who died in the First World War in SEECK 1917a, 36.

<sup>69</sup> SEECK 1917a, 35: «Wie anders die Mütter und Väter, die Frauen und Bräute, die ihr Liebstes verloren haben und in der Größe ihres Vaterlandes Trost zu finden wissen, ja stolz darauf sind, daß Gott sie gewürdigt hat, ein so großes Opfer, wenn auch mit bittrem Schmerz, für Deutschlands Rettung darzubringen».

<sup>70</sup> In his second letter to Seeck, Mann refers to the encounter with Seeck in Münster. This suggests that there was no other, more recent noteworthy encounter between the two. If they had been corresponding continuously, it would have been peculiar to refer to this event from five years earlier.

<sup>71</sup> KURZKE 2001, 38.

<sup>72</sup> KURZKE 2001, 58.



symbol of the western classical, medieval and Christian heritage, but we must bear in mind that the opinions of Naphta do not necessarily correspond to those of Mann<sup>73</sup>. In the novel, Naphta is a Jewish and communist Jesuit, while his antagonist, Settembrini, is a *Zivilisationsliterat*<sup>74</sup>. Did Mann fully agree with Settembrini, who, on the other hand, admired Virgil? In 1934, Mann expressed his own opinion that «das Christentum, diese Blüte des Judentums, bleibt einer der beiden Grundpfeiler, auf denen die abendländische Gesittung ruht und von denen der andere die mediterrane Antike ist»<sup>75</sup>. However, this change of opinion took place many years after the period of Mann's life in which he was in touch with Seeck. What united Seeck and Mann for some years was their common interest in contemporary issues, literature, and historical theory, in addition to their conservative views of these matters.

## b) The Letters

All of the letters are handwritten. The total number of letters and the page order within the letters had to be reconstructed from a collection of individual pages before transcription. The transcriptions are true to the original; line breaks were kept; and page breaks were indicated. The letters appear in chronological order.

- 1) 24 January 1911 (Property of Irene Dänzer-Vanotti). Referenced in MANN 1976, *Reg.* 11/3<sup>76</sup>.

On his return to Munich from Münster, Mann sends Seeck some autograph lines from his own play *Fiorenza*, as a gift for one of Seeck's daughters. Mann also thanks Seeck for the great kindness and care that he showed him in Münster and for a pleasant morning walk they had in that city.

München, den 24. Jan. 1911  
Mauerkircherstr. 13.

Sehr verehrter Herr Geheimrat:

In den heimatlichen Hafen  
wieder eingelaufen, erinnere  
ich mich vor Allem (sic!) mei-  
nes Versprechens ein „Auto-  
gramm“ für Ihr Fräulein  
Tochter betreffend. Hoffentlich  
ist ihr mit dem Beifolgen-  
den gedient. Es sind ein  
paar mir liebe und wichtige

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Zeilen aus „Fiorenza“.

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<sup>73</sup> CANFORA 2017, 4-5. See *Der Zauberberg*, chapter 6, *Als Soldat und brav*.

<sup>74</sup> KURZKE 2001, 329, 518.

<sup>75</sup> KURZKE 2001, 442.

<sup>76</sup> There is a scan of this letter in the TMA (B-I-SEECK-1). A fraction of this letter is quoted *verbatim* in MANN 2004, 630.

Diese Gelegenheit, Ihnen  
nochmals für die große Güte  
und Aufmerksamkeit zu  
danken, mit der Sie sich  
in Münster meiner annah-  
men, lasse ich mir nicht  
entgehen. Ich werde den  
schönen Vormittagsgang unter  
Ihrer kundigen Führung stets  
in dankbarer Erinnerung  
bewahren.

Mit den verbindlichsten

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Grüßen und Empfehlungen bin  
ich, sehr verehrter Herr Pr.  
Geheimrat,  
Ihr ergebener  
Thomas Mann.

Fiore Ich will nur einem Helden gehören, Piero  
de' Medici.

Piero Einem Helden? Ich bin ein Held. Italien  
weiß es.

Fiore Du bist kein Held; du bist nur stark. Und  
du langweilst mich.

Piero Nur stark? Nur stark? Ist denn, wer  
stark ist, kein Held?

Fiore Nein. Sondern wer schwach ist, aber so

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glühenden Geistes, daß er sich dennoch den Kranz ge-  
winnt, - der ist ein Held.

(„Fiorenza“ II. Akt)  
Thomas Mann

*München, den 24. Jan. 1911*] Sent from Munich shortly after Mann and Seeck's first encounter, which took place in Münster on 21 January 1911 (see above). Mann's letter is probably his initiative, as he does not mention any letter sent by Seeck between their encounter and 24 January 1911.

*Mauerkircherstr. 13*] Mann lived in Mauerkircherstraße 13 with his family from 1 October 1910 to 5 January 1914, when he moved to Poschingerstraße 1. See KURZKE 2001, 176; HEINE, SCHOMMER 2004, 56, 68.

*Geheimrat*] Honorific title for high-ranking German officials, including professors.

*Ihr Fräulein Tochter*] Seeck had three daughters: Lilli (Louise Ottilie), Mali (Amalie), and Hedda (Hedwig). Lilli, the eldest daughter, was born in 1885 and had been married to the classical

philologist Ludwig Radermacher since 1904. Mali, born in 1891, got married on 25 September 1911. Hedda, born in 1894, got married in 1920. Thus, the *Fräulein* mentioned by Mann on 24 January 1911 was either Mali or Hedda<sup>77</sup>.

*Fiorenza*] A play by Thomas Mann, first published in 1905, set in Florence in 1492. The main characters of the play are Lorenzo de' Medici, Girolamo Savonarola, and the courtesan Fiore, who is the object of amorous attention by both Lorenzo and Girolamo. Its main theme is the relations between spirit, art, and life. See MANN 2009, 101-5, 415-6; see also KURZKE 2001, 89, 118-20, 176-80; JESI 2018, 105-6. Exactly why Mann chose to send these very lines to Seeck's daughter is not clear. He was probably fond of them; as an alternative, we may suppose that he had discussed his play *Fiorenza* with Seeck's daughter while at Seeck's home.

*Ihrer kundigen Führung*] This presumably refers to Seeck's knowledge of the features of Münster. Seeck had been living in Münster since 1907. In that year, he had left the University of Greifswald and had moved to the recently established University of Münster. For Seeck and Mann's encounter in Münster, see HEINE, SCHOMMER 2004, 58 (already quoted above, note 10).

2) 9 April 1916 (Copy in the Universitätsarchiv Münster, Bestand 7, Nummer 48).

Mann thanks Seeck for a letter he has received from him. This letter (now lost) contained Seeck's congratulations to Mann for his essay *Friedrich und die große Koalition*. Mann, on the other hand, admits that this was nothing more than a "historical bungling" («historische Pfuscherei»), in which enthusiasm prevailed over the knowledge of the facts; in fact, the historian O. Hintze had been very dismissive of the booklet. Mann, however, does not think very highly of Hintze. After recalling his own visit to Münster, during which he first met Seeck, Mann confesses that the essay on Frederick is only a "sketch" (*Abriß*), and expresses his own hopes of putting his full strength to the test once more by tackling that theme again and developing it further. The essay on Frederick is an improvisation, prompted by the similarity of the current events of the First World War to those of the Seven Years' War. Mann, however, praises the literary quality of his own essay, which has won him praise and success, in spite of some criticism "from Cologne": 25,000 copies the booklet are already circulating.

Mann agrees with Seeck with regards to the idea (that Seeck had expressed in his now lost letter) that the "Ulenspiegel" by Charles De Coster is not history, but rather folk literature, lyrically transformed history, mythologised history. All modern historical fiction, according to Mann, is turning into such a mythologised history. The more ancient literary genre of the "historical novel", on the other hand, was neither art nor science, but rather a bourgeois compromise, or, as Nietzsche would have said, a form of Cultural Philistinism.

Bad Tölz den 9.IV.16

Sehr verehrter Herr Professor:

Für Ihren überaus liebenswürdigen und geistvollen Brief nehmen Sie meinen allerherzlichsten Dank. Er hat mich hoch erfreut, gerührt und beschämt; denn ich habe mir nie träumen lassen, daß ich mit meiner historischen Pfuscherei, bei der

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<sup>77</sup> We owe part of this information to Irene Dänzer-Vanotti. Details on Seeck's children can be found in Lilli's unpublished memoirs (see above, note 34). Some information on Lilli can be found in SCHWABL 2003. For Mali, see <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd1169405150.html>.

Begeisterung ordentliches Wissen ersetzen  
mußte, einem Manne wie Ihnen  
würde Genüge thun können, -  
besonders, da man mir erzählte, daß  
Ihr Kollege Hinze (sic!) in Berlin sich

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höchst wegwerfend über das Schriftchen  
geäußert habe. Freilich halte ich ihn  
aus guten Gründen für kein gro-  
ßes Licht.

Wie gut ich mich an unsere  
Unterhaltung in Münster erinnere, -  
dem schönen, mir unvergeßlichen Münster!  
Nein, dieses Friedrich- Portrait soll  
wirklich nichts weiter sein, als ein  
„Abriß für den Tag und die Stunde“,  
und ich gebe die Hoffnung nicht  
auf, noch einmal meine volle  
Kraft – sei sie nun zureichend  
oder nicht – an dem herrlichen Ge-  
genstand zu erproben. Der Aufsatz ist

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eine Improvisation, zu der die Zeitereig-  
nisse und das bei aller Erschütterung  
fast erheiternde historische Wiedererkennen  
mich mächtig aufforderten. Daß ich von  
langer Hand her gut vorbereitet war,  
hat der kleinen Arbeit, die mir hur-  
tiger von der Hand ging, als jede  
frühere, freie<sup>78</sup> Leichtigkeit und innere  
Luftigkeit<sup>79</sup> gegeben, die ihr wohl haupt-  
sächlich die Sympathien gewinnt. Wollen  
Sie glauben, daß sie schon in 25000  
Exemplaren verbreitet ist? Und selbst  
die Kritiken sind nicht durchweg im  
Geiste der „kölnischen“ gehalten.

Sie haben vollkommen recht: Der

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<sup>78</sup> The word most likely reads “freie”. The last two letters are clearly legible, whereas the beginning of the word is obscured by some additional lines, which is most likely the result of an overwritten mistake in writing.

<sup>79</sup> Also possible: “Lustigkeit”. Mann’s handwriting is a form of *Kurrent* and distinguishes different forms of the small letter “s”. One of these forms, the so called “long s”, is not always distinguishable from lowercase “f” in Mann’s particular handwriting. While in most cases a distinction can be made based on the context, the word in question could plausibly read “Luftigkeit” or “Lustigkeit”. A decision in favour of “Luftigkeit” was made because the word meaning corresponds to the preceding noun “Leichtigkeit”.

Ulenspiegel ist nicht Geschichte, er ist volkstümlich - dichterisch verarbeitete Geschichte, mythisierte Geschichte, und als ich de Coster vorbildlich nannte, wollte ich nur ausdrücken, daß meiner Meinung nach alle moderne geschichtliche Dichtung in diesen Bahnen wandelt, d.h. den historischen Stoff und die historische Gestalt mythisch machen müßte, – ja, daß auf dem Gebiete historisierender Kunst das Dichterische mit dem Mythischen fast zusammenfällt. Der ältere „historische Roman“ war weder Kunst noch Wissenschaft, sondern ein recht bürgerliches Mittelding oder, wie Nietzsche sagen würde, Bildungsphilisterei.

Nochmals verehrter Herr Professor,  
Ihr Brief hat mich sehr stolz gemacht.  
Ich wiederhole meinen Dank und begrüße Sie herzlich als

Ihr sehr ergebener  
Thomas Mann.

*Bad Tölz*] Spa town in Bavaria, where the Mann family owned a summer house from 1908 to 1917, when they were forced to sell it due to the economic issues caused by the war. See KURZKE 2001, 176, 236.

*mit meiner historischen Pfuscherer] Friedrich und die große Koalition* (1915).

*Ihr Kollege Hinze* (sic!)] Otto Hintze (1861-1940), German professor of History at the University of Berlin. He was an expert on Brandenburg and Prussia.

*höchst wegwerfend über das Schriftchen geäußert habe*] Mann often mentions the reception of his own works in his letters. See MANN 2002b, 862. In this letter, he seems particularly enthusiastic about the praise he received from a professional historian, Seeck, with regards to his *Friedrich*. Seeck's approval seems to reassure Mann about the high quality of his essay, which had been questioned by Hintze.

*Friedrich- Portrait*] The essay *Friedrich und die große Koalition*, which dealt with Frederick II of Prussia.

*„Abriß für den Tag und die Stunde“*] Subtitle of Mann's essay on Frederick II.

*herrlichen Gegenstand*] Frederick II's life.

*im Geiste der „kölnischen“*] Not perspicuous. Maybe Hintze published a negative review of *Friedrich und die große Koalition* in a journal or newspaper from Cologne, such as the “Kölnische Zeitung” or the “Kölnische Volkszeitung”.

*Ulenspiegel*] Reference to the novel *La Légende et les Aventures héroïques, joyeuses et glorieuses d'Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flandres*, published in 1867 by the Belgian author Charles De Coster.

*wie Nietzsche sagen würde, Bildungsphilisterei*] *Bildungsphilister* is an epithet Nietzsche used to attack David Strauß (theologian and philosopher, 1808-74) in *David Strauß, der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller* (1873). This essay is the first of his *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*. Mann, who often uses the epithet *Philister* in *Betrachtungen*, defines the *Philister* as the opposite of bourgeois: while German bourgeoisie is Romantic, the *Philister* is essentially anti-Romantic. See MANN 2009, 148-51.

3) 27 April 1916 (Property of Irene Dänzer-Vanotti).

From Bad Tölz. Letter referenced in MANN 1976, *Reg.* 16/37 and already published and commented upon in MANN 1962, 126-7 (text) and 471 (comments); MANN 2004, 135-6 (text) and 630 (comments). Italian translation in MANN 1963, 176-7<sup>80</sup>.

In this letter, Thomas Mann thanks Otto Seeck for sending him a letter and a booklet<sup>81</sup>. Mann expresses his appreciation of Seeck's treatise, especially in terms of its style. He promises that he will also read Seeck's *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* as soon as possible<sup>82</sup>.

Mann also discusses the theme of literary "suspense" (*Spannung*), as Seeck has asked for his opinion on it. However, Mann admits he has never given it deep reflection. He suggests that if his own *Friedrich und die große Koalition* is compelling, it is just because the theme it analyses (Frederick II's life) is interesting<sup>83</sup>. On the other hand, Mann asks himself how suspense can be created around historical events everyone knows about.

Mann closes this letter abruptly but gently, saying that he is very busy writing – inspired by current events – an essay on "art and spirit, art and politics" («Kunst und Geist, Kunst und Politik»): Although he has not yet decided on the final title, Mann is referring to his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*<sup>84</sup>.

4) 16 February 1917 (Copy in the Universitätsarchiv Münster, Bestand 7, Nummer 48). Referenced in MANN 1976, *Reg.* 17/9<sup>85</sup>.

Mann thanks Seeck for sending him one of his essays and for the photograph of Seeck attached to it, where Seeck sports a new style of beard.

München den 16.II.17

Hochgeehrter Herr Geheimrat!

für Ihre bedeutende Gabe sage  
ich Ihnen vielen Dank. Der  
Aufsatz ist mir eine außerordentlich  
wertvolle Ergänzung und Erläuterung  
gewisser Briefstellen, die mir erst  
durch ihn vollkommen zugänglich  
werden.

Das Portrait ist eine will-  
kommene Beigabe – allen Lesern,  
gewiß. Aber tragen Sie den Bart

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<sup>80</sup> There is a scan of this letter in the TMA (B-I-SEECK-2).

<sup>81</sup> The authors of the commentary in the *GKFA* do not suggest identifying this booklet with any work by Seeck. However, given the common interests of Mann and Seeck in contemporary issues, and since *Katechismus des Weltkrieges* (Münster 1917) and *Russen und Balten* (Bielefeld-Leipzig 1917) were published just a year after this letter, Seeck may have sent Mann the proofs of either of these two pamphlets. In addition, since it is a *Vortrag* Mann is talking about, it may well be one of the *drei Vorträge* that make up Seeck's *Russen und Balten*. Mann, who was very fond of Russia (see the introduction) may have found this text very interesting.

<sup>82</sup> Referenced in the letter as *Ihr Hauptwerk*. By 1916, the first five of the planned six volumes of the *Geschichte* had been published.

<sup>83</sup> Mann only refers to this as *mein historischer Versuch*, but it is obviously *Friedrich und die große Koalition*, as Erika Mann (in MANN 1962, 471) and, later, the authors of the commentary in the *GKFA* rightly observed (MANN 2004, 630).

<sup>84</sup> See KURZKE 2009, 48.

<sup>85</sup> There is a scan of this letter in the TMA (B-I-SEECK-3).

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nicht bedeutend kürzer, als früher?  
Mein Gedächtnis (sic!) müßte mich sehr  
trügen, wenn es nicht ein veri-  
tabler Rauschebart war, und fast  
möchte ich sein Abhandenkommen  
bedauern.

Mit den besten Empfehlungen  
Ihr sehr ergebener  
Thomas Mann

*Der Aufsatz ist mir eine außerordentlich wertvolle Ergänzung und Erläuterung gewisser Briefstellen]* Unfortunately, this article by Seeck cannot be identified with certainty. Since this letter is dated to 1917, it may be one of the three lectures from *Russen und Balten*, or *Katechismus des Weltkrieges* (or their proofs). However, as far as we know from the surviving letters, Mann and Seeck only discuss modern and contemporary issues and literature, and Mann defines this article as a «supplement and explanation of certain passages of your letters to me, which have now become fully clear to me». We can thus rule out that Seeck sent Mann one of his studies on ancient history. *Russen und Balten* is less probable than *Katechismus*, as Mann writes to Seeck that he has received the former in the following letter (No. 5). Of course, Seeck might have sent Mann the proofs of *Russen und Balten* before Mann sent him letter 4.

5) 24 March 1917 (Property of Irene Dänzer-Vanotti).

Mann thanks Seeck for sending him a copy of his book *Russen und Balten* through the publishing house Velhagen & Klasing and affirms that he found the reading exciting and instructive. Mann, on the other hand, is still composing his *Aufzeichnungen eines Unpolitischen* (sic!), a book that will appear strange to the readers and is almost impossible to write. He felt obliged to write it due to the current historical situation. This book will be fruitless, and will be full of doubts – honest doubts, in Mann’s opinion. It will also cause distress to its author.

München den 24.III.17.

Sehr verehrter Herr Geheimrat:

Von der Firma Velhagen & Klasing  
bekam ich Ihr Buch „Russen und Balten“  
zugesandt, mit dem Vermerk, daß  
dies in Ihrem Auftrage geschah. So  
bin ich Ihnen abermals für eine  
überaus anregende und lehrreiche  
Lektüre zu Dank verpflichtet, - den  
ich hiermit ergebenst abstatte.

Ich schreibe noch immer an meinen  
„Aufzeichnungen eines Unpolitischen“,  
einem wunderlichen und vielleicht unmöglichen

- page break -

Buch, das abzufassen die Zeit mir auf-  
erlegte. Es ist ein Buch ohne Resultate,  
ein Buch des Zweifels, aber eines  
anständigen Zweifels, wie mir scheint.  
Ich werde mich damit zwischen zwei  
Stühle setzen, - hoffentlich auf leidlich  
anmutige Weise.

Ihr sehr ergebener  
Thomas Mann.

*Velhagen & Klasing*] This publishing house, based in Bielefeld and in Leipzig, had already published Seeck's book *Kaiser Augustus* in 1902: see GONZÁLEZ BLANCO 1988, 13.

*noch immer an meinen „Aufzeichnungen eines Unpolitischen“*] This is not yet the final title of the book (*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*). However, Mann's information is more complete here than in letter 3 (27 April 1916)<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> See KURZKE 2009, 48 for the evolution of the title of this work, which shows that the final title had already appeared in a letter to Ernst Bertram dated 8 June 1916 (published in MANN 2004, 138-40, see esp. 139).



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