

Thomas Mann, “German Listeners!” (July 1942)

Abstract

Thomas Mann (1875–1955), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929, was one of the most influential German authors of the twentieth century; he was also a resolute and articulate opponent of the Hitler regime. His own works escaped the Nazi book burnings of 1933, but those of his brother Heinrich (1871–1950) and son Klaus (1906–1949) did not. In 1938, after several stays abroad, Mann and his family emigrated to the United States, where, beginning in 1940, he began recording monthly radio broadcasts under the title “German Listeners!” [“Deutsche Hörer!”]. These broadcasts, which were five to eight minutes in length, were transferred to records and sent to the BBC in London. From there, they were broadcast to Germany via long-wave radio. Mann’s addresses became an essential part of Allied demoralization tactics. The number of regular listeners in Germany is estimated to have been small, since tuning in to foreign stations was considered a “radio crime”: anyone caught was subject to severe punishment. Nonetheless, Mann’s attacks still prompted a response from Hitler, who agitated against his famous critic in his own speeches.

Delivered in July 1942, the radio address reproduced below dates from a phase in which Mann still regarded the Germans as victims of Hitler’s dictatorship—a fact that he used to explain the country’s limited resistance movement. Additionally, Mann still assumed that Germans longed for Hitler’s defeat as much as he did. At the end of the war, however, Mann revised his opinion and viewed the situation in terms of collective responsibility. This new insight made it impossible for him to fully reconcile himself with the Germans in the postwar period.

Source

I know well that I don’t have to warn you against exuberance now that Hitler is once again winning and has conquered Rostov, the city on the Don, which he had conquered once before. It is well known that such things do not plunge you into exuberance, that the blare of radio trumpets which accompanies the announcement is odious to you, that you are by no means overjoyed. It is not necessary to dampen your enthusiasm; rather, you have to be consoled. Not we, out here, are in need of consolation when the war looks as it does at present. If you only knew how sure we are of our cause, which to begin with, and as premise for all that is to come, is the cause of destroying Hitler! His destruction is sealed, believe me and don’t be afraid! It is a world necessity, wholly inevitable, and will be accomplished one way or another; and because it is decided, the victories of that wretch are merely bloody nonsense. You are bewildered and depressed. You are thinking: “Will he triumph after all? And shall we never get rid of him? And will the world be German, in that desperate fashion in which we are now German?” Be of good cheer! Hitler’s victory is an empty word: there is no such thing—it is not within the realm of the acceptable, permissible, thinkable. It will be prevented; rather, he himself will always prevent it, the sorry scoundrel, because of himself, simply because of his nature, because of his impossible and hopelessly deranged disposition, which does not permit him to think, want, or do anything which is not false, mendacious, condemned beforehand. One speaks of the betrayed devil. But nobody betrays the devil; he *is* betrayed, because of himself and to begin with. Not with Faust’s soul, the soul of humanity, will this stupid Satan go down to hell, but *alone*.

I say: Be of good cheer! Do you think that he will get even as much as the Caucasus to lubricate anew his steamroller of world conquest? And if he gets it, and the Russians stand behind the Urals, what more? Well, just more. It can only be more, night, madness, and death; there is no end for *him*, there is only *his*

end. The Russians will not make peace. None of you can believe that. The sham revolution of Nazism has met with a real and genuine revolution, one whose thoroughness in purging ought to be a lesson to you, you Germans, when your hour comes. And this Russian Revolution is bound by long-term, clear-cut, and historic treaties to the Anglo-Saxon democracy, which has awakened to its social obligations and is undergoing an equally revolutionary rejuvenation—bound to it for a struggle which Hitler, with the diabolical filth of his “New Order,” cannot survive. It is to this treaty that the subjugated, pillaged, tortured, half-exterminated peoples of Europe look. In these nations the hatred against the shameless oppressor, still impotent, yet exploding again and again in violent individual acts, rages and grows, and they wait only for the moment when in terrible revolt they can throw off the most repulsive yoke which has ever been imposed upon nations—they wait for it, Germans, *as you do*.

One should not ask you to revolt, should not ask: When will you finally throw out the infernal good-for-nothing who does all this to you and who has made the German face look like a Gorgon’s grimace? When will you give it up and capitulate before reason? There is no sense in pressing and asking you thus, we all understand that, for you cannot. It is not as it was in 1918 when Germany collapsed. A body of people harnessed and splinted in the iron of terror like yours does not collapse but stands eerily erect even if under the iron everything is already rotted. Must I tell you how rotten it looks already under the armour which keeps you on your feet? You know it better than we do, and I believe that nobody can feel as much horror of you as you must, after all, feel of yourselves. But the iron-splinted phantom, which you will soon be, must fall someday, despite all, and that will be the moment of your rebirth as a human people. Were there not, even last winter, mass shootings of mutinous troops? Soon there will be more of it, and still more. The strike of the senselessly bled people’s army—that is the shape which, in all likelihood, your collapse and your resurrection will take.

The end is near, Germans, believe me, and be of good cheer! Just at this moment I tell it to you when once again it looks like success and victory and conquest for you. The end is near—not yours, not Germany’s. The so-called destruction of Germany is as empty a word, as non-existent a thing, as the victory of Hitler. But the end is approaching; in fact, it will come soon—the end of the repulsive system, the robber, murder, and liar state of National Socialism. An end will be put to its trashy and disgraceful philosophy and all the acts of trash and disgrace which have sprung from it. Accounts will be settled, disastrously settled, with its bigwigs, its leaders and helpers, servants and beneficiaries, its generals, diplomats, and Gestapo hyenas. Accounts will also be settled with its intellectual trailblazers and shield-bearers, the journalists and pseudo-philosophers who licked its boots, the geopoliticians, war geographers, teachers of “Wehrwissenschaft” and race professors. Germany will be cleansed of all that ever had anything to do with the filth of Hitlerism and all that made it *possible*. And a freedom will be established in Germany and in the world which believes in itself, respects itself, knows how to defend itself, and which takes not only the deed but, before that, the thoughts into the control of those ideas which connect man with God.

Source: Thomas Mann, *Listen Germany! Twenty-five Radio Messages to the German People Over BBC* by Thomas Mann. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1943, pp. 102–07.

Recommended Citation: Thomas Mann, “German Listeners!” (July 1942), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-2341>> [May 18, 2024].