



The Theme of the Joseph Novels

BY

THOMAS MANN

FELLOW IN GERMANIC LITERATURE

IN THE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



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The following is the text of an address delivered by Dr. Mann in the Coolidge Auditorium in the Library of Congress on the evening of November 17, 1942.



Ladies and Gentlemen

IT IS, perhaps, not a matter of indifference to those who listen to an address to know the inner circumstances and the feelings of the speaker standing before his audience: a word of personal acknowledgement may have precedence here over all factual discourse and account. Let me begin, therefore, with the statement that this is a precious and great, a festive and stirring hour for me. To speak here, not as a stranger or outsider, but, to a degree, in an official capacity, as a member of the staff of the Library of Congress; that is a great honor, a great joy for me: it holds the charm of the improbable and adventurous; a charm to which, as you know, artists and poets have at all times been particularly susceptible. They would not be what they are, if their view of the play of life was a sober, phlegmatic view, and not, rather, a marvelling and animated, deeply entertained, a *festive* view, which knows, just through the medium of art, how to turn life into spiritually sublimated entertainment, and into a festival for others as well.

It is a good and fortunate coincidence that the topic on which I want to speak—or, am to speak—is, in itself, a festive topic, not only because all art as such has, or should have, festive character, but because a literary work is to be discussed whose very object is the idea and the nature of the festival: more than that—it is, for its own part, a sort of festive celebration, an observance and visualization, a solemn action which playingly neutralizes time and depicts the past and the future, the timelessly existing, *the myth*, as the present.

You have been told, of course, that I am to speak about the book "Joseph and His Brothers," a tetralogy of novels, or epic in prose, whose final volume, "Joseph the Provider", is just about to be completed. Let me say first, that I was quite startled and disconcerted when Archibald MacLeish suggested this book to me as my topic for tonight,—I was much rather inclined to refuse than to accept. Would it not seem terribly presumptuous, vain and egocentric, if I talked today, and here, about my own affairs, my own work, in other words: about highly personal and private matters instead of general and important ones, of the great cares and hopes of our time, of the war and its objectives? And yet, this is a time and a world where it makes almost no difference what we talk about—we always talk about one and the same thing. Categories crumble, the borderlines between the different spheres of human thought become unessential. Everything is connected with everything else—and, in truth, it has always been so: only, we were not conscious of it. Once, it was possible to distinguish between a "purely esthetic," "purely philosophic," "purely religious" sphere and the sphere of politics, of human society, of national and international community life, and to declare that we were interested in the one but not in the other. This is no longer possible. We are interested in the whole, or we are interested in nothing. "Totalitarian" is an oppressive word in its strictly political meaning; we do not like to hear it because it signifies the voracious absorption of all things human by the state. But, then, we are indeed living in a totalitarian world, a world of totality, of spiritual unity and collective responsibility, before which all sovereignties have to abdicate. Unity is the word of the historic hour. The world wants to become one, all the way, into practical

reality, down to economic matters. It is a world of infinitely mutual *implications*, and to talk about belletristic literature, about a novel, is not necessarily insipid infidelity toward the great and burning concerns of our time, and toward the plight, the struggle, the longing of humanity.—Of course, it depends a little on the novel.

I have often been asked what it actually was that made me turn to this remote and out-of-the-way subject and induced me to transform the biblical legend of the Egyptian Joseph into a broad cycle of novels, requiring many years of work. In answering this question, there is little importance in the external and anecdotal circumstances which prompted me, almost a decade and a half ago when I was still in Munich, to re-read the story in my old ancestral bible. Suffice it to say that I was delighted, and that immediately a preliminary probing and productive searching began in my mind as to what it would be like to renew and reproduce this charming story in fresh narrative and with modern means—with all modern means, the spiritual and the technical ones. Almost immediately, these inner experiments significantly associated themselves with the thought of a tradition: the thought of Goethe, in fact, who relates in his memoirs “*Dichtung und Wahrheit*” how he, as a boy, had dictated the Joseph story to a friend and, in doing so, had woven it into a broad narrative. However, it soon met the fate of destruction because, in the author’s own judgement, it still lacked too much in “substance.” As an explanation of this youthful and premature venture, the sixty year old Goethe observes: “This natural story is highly amiable: only, it seems too short, and one is tempted to carry it out in all its details.”

How strange! Immediately, these words from “*Dichtung*

und Wahrheit" came to my mind, in the midst of my reveries: they were in my memory; I did not have to re-read them,—and indeed, they seem most fitting as the motto for what I then undertook; they furnish the simplest and most plausible explanation for my venture. The temptation which the young Goethe had naively followed, namely to carry out the short legendary report of the Genesis in "all its details," repeated itself in my case at a stage of my life when the poetic execution could definitely obtain human and spiritual substance as well. But what does that mean: to carry out in detail what has been briefly reported? It is exactness, realization; it is to draw into proximity something very remote and vague, so that you believe you see it with your eyes and grasp it with your hands, and you think, that, finally, you learn the definite truth about it after having so long entertained very uncertain ideas on the subject. I still remember how amused I was, and how much of a compliment I considered it, when my copyist in Munich, a simple woman, brought me the typewritten copy of the first volume, "The Stories of Jaacob," and said: "Now we know at last how all this actually happened." That was touching—for, after all, it did not happen. The exactness, the realism are fictional, they are play and artful illusion, they are realization and visualization forcibly brought about by all the means of language, psychology, presentation and, in addition, critical comment; and humor, despite all human seriousness, is their soul. What, above all, is inspired by humor in the book is the analysis and scientific research, which are, just like the narrative and the descriptions, a means of establishing reality; and the command to the artist, to create forms and not to talk are invalid in this case.

The reasoning also is playful, it is not really the language

of the author but of the work itself, it has been incorporated in its linguistic sphere, it is indirect, a stylized and bantering language, a contribution to the pseudo-exactness, very close to persiflage and, at any rate, to irony; for scientific treatment of wholly unscientific and legendary matters is pure irony.

It is quite possible that such secret charms played their part at the time of the earliest conception of the work. But this does not answer the question as to how I came to select this archaic subject-matter from the dawn of mankind. Different circumstances, some of a personal and others of a general temporal character, contributed to it, and the personal ones were also of a temporal nature; they had something to do with those years, with a stage of life that had been attained. The readiness is all. As a man, and as an artist, I must somehow have been in *readiness* to be productively attracted by such subject-matter, and my Bible-reading was not mere chance. The various stages of life have different inclinations, claims, tendencies of taste—as well as abilities and advantages. It is probably a rule that in certain years the taste for all purely individual and particular phenomena, for the individual case, for the “bourgeois” aspect, in the widest sense of the word, fades out gradually. Instead, the typical, the eternally-human, eternally-recurring, timeless, in short: the mythical steps into the foreground of the interest. For, after all, the typical is already the mythical insofar as it is pristine pattern and pristine form of life, timeless model and formula of eld, into which life enters by reproducing its traits out of the unconscious. Definitely, the attainment of the mythical viewpoint is of decisive importance in the life of the narrator; it signifies a peculiar enhancement of his artistic mood, a new serenity in recog-

nizing and shaping which, as said before, is ordinarily reserved for the later years of life: for the mythical, it is true, represents an early and primitive stage in the life of humanity, but a late and mature one in the life of the individual.

There the word humanity has been pronounced—in connection with the ideas of the timelessly-typical and the mythical it automatically made its appearance. I had been in readiness to feel productively attracted by a subject-matter like the Joseph legend, because of the turning of my taste away from the bourgeois toward the mythical aspect. But, at the same time, I was in readiness for it because of my disposition for generally human feeling and thinking,—I mean: a feeling and thinking in human terms,—a disposition which was not only the product of my individual time and stage of life, but that of the time at large and in general, of OUR time, of the historic convulsions, adventures and tribulations, by which the question of man, the very problem of humanity was presented to us as an indivisible whole, and imposed upon our conscience as hardly ever to a generation before us.

I believe, Ladies and Gentlemen, that the sufferings and stirring adventures, through which humanity has been going now for decades, will bring forth a new, deepened feeling of humanity, indeed a new HUMANISM, remote from all shallow optimism, but full of sympathy, which will be only too necessary for the work of reconstruction that will confront us after the tremendous moral and material devastations, after the collapse of the accustomed world. In order to build up, or at least lay the foundations for the new, better, happier and more social world, freed from unnecessary suffering, which we want our children and grandchildren to

have, the City of Man, as I should like to call it, we will need a binding and all-determining basic pathos, guiding us all the way to detailed and practical matters; we will need sympathy for it, and love. And with all this the mythical novel has something to do which was conceived in 1925 and of which I am speaking to you; it is by no means an out-of-the-way, evasive, extra-timely product, but inspired by an interest in humanity transcending the individual,—a humorous, ironically-softened,—I am tempted to say: a bashful poem of man.

Rather, it turned out that way unintentionally; for the author was far from attributing it this quality in the beginning. Once again it came to pass that a work developed a much greater aspiration than was inherent in the rather skeptical and by no means ambitious nature of the one on whom it imposed itself, and from whom it exacted efforts far beyond all plans and expectations.

To begin is always terribly difficult: until one feels oneself master of a subject; until one learns the language it speaks, and can reproduce it;—much courting and laboring, a long inner familiarization is required. But what I planned was so new and unusual, that never did I beat about the bush longer than this time. There was the need of establishing contact with a strange world, the primitive and mythical world: and to “take contact,” in the poetic sense of the word, signifies something very complicated, intimate: a penetration, carried to identification and self-substitution, so that something can be created which is called “style,” and which is always a unique and complete amalgamation of the artist with the subject.

How much of an adventure I considered this mythical enterprise of mine, is indicated by the introduction to the

first volume of "Joseph and His Brothers," "The Stories of Jaacob," which forms the anthropological prelude to the whole work. Entitled "Descent into Hell" it is a fantastical essay which seems like the cumbersome preparation for a risky expedition—a journey down into the depths of the past, a trip to the 'mothers.' The overture was sixty-four pages long—that might have made me suspicious in regard to the proportions of the whole, and did so to a degree—especially as I had decided that the personal story of Joseph alone would not do, but that the primeval and original story, the history of the world demanded to be included, at least in perspective. The stories of Jaacob filled a heavy volume: in mingled order, anticipating and reverting, I recited them, strangely entertained by the novelty of dealing with human beings who did not quite know who they were, or who knew it in a more pious, deeply exact way than the modern individual; beings whose identity was open in back and included the past with which they identified themselves, in whose steps they tread and which again became present through them. "Novarum rerum cupidus"—this characteristic fits the artist better than anyone else. Nobody is more bored than he by the old and worn out, and more impatient for the new, although nobody, on the other hand, is more bound to tradition than he is. Audacity in confinement, fulfillment of tradition with exciting news, that is really his calling and his business, and the conviction that "such a thing has not been done before" is the indispensable motor of all his industry. I have always needed this spurring conviction in order to accomplish anything, indeed, even to begin anything, and it seemed to me that I had never experienced it more strongly than this time. "The Stories of Jaacob" and their successor "The Young Joseph," were com-

pleted while I was still in Germany. During my work on the third volume "Joseph in Egypt," the break in my outward existence occurred, the trip from which I could not return, the sudden loss of my life's basis: the larger part of "Joseph in Egypt" is work born in exile. My oldest daughter who dared to return to our already confiscated house in Munich, after the revolution, recovered the manuscript and brought it to me in Southern France; and slowly, after the first shock of my new, uprooted situation, I resumed the work which was continued and completed in the Swiss refuge which we enjoyed for five years, on the Lake of Zurich.

Now, then, the narrative entered into the highly developed and sophisticated cultural sphere of the Nile Empire, which, through sympathy and reading matter, had been familiar to me since the time of my boyhood, so that I knew more about it, than even the teacher who during Religion Class questioned us twelve-year-old boys as to the name of the holy steer of the ancient Egyptians. I showed that I was eager to answer, and was called upon. "Chapi," I said. That was wrong, in the opinion of the teacher. He reproached me for having raised my hand, when I knew only nonsense. "Apis" was the right name, he corrected me angrily. But "Apis" is only the latinization or hellenization of the authentic Egyption name which I had given. The people of Keme said "Chapi." I knew better than the good man, but discipline did not allow me to enlighten him about it. I kept silent—and all my life I have not forgiven myself for this silence before false authority. An American boy would certainly have spoken up.

Occasionally I thought of this early incident while I was writing "Joseph in Egypt." A work must have long roots in

my life, secret connections must lead from it to earliest childhood dreams, if I am to consider myself entitled to it, if I am to believe in the legitimacy of what I am doing. The arbitrary reaching for a subject to which one does not have traditional claims of sympathy and knowledge, seems senseless and amateurish to me.

Due to its erotic content, the third Joseph volume is the most novel-like part of this work which, as a whole, had to make of the novel something different from what is generally understood by this term. The variability of this literary genre has always been considerable. Today, however, it almost looks as though nothing counts anymore in the domain of the novel except what is no longer a novel. Perhaps it was always that way. As far as "Joseph in Egypt" is concerned, you will find, that its novel-like erotic content, too, has been turned into the mythical by stylization, despite all psychology. That holds true particularly for the sexual satire which is centered around the figures of the two dwarfs: the asexual one in his kindly nothingness, and of Dudu, the malicious and procreative midget. In a humorous spirit, a connection is shown here between the sexual and arch-evil, a connection which must help to reconcile us to Joseph's "chastity," his resistance to the desires of his unfortunate mistress, as given by the biblical model.

This third of the Joseph novels grew under the constellation of my parting from Germany—the fourth grew under that of my parting from Europe. "Joseph the Provider," the final part of the work which brings its length to over two thousand pages, came into being entirely under America's sky, in fact, largely under the serene, Egyptian-like sky of California. Now Potiphar's demoted favorite slaves as a prisoner in a Nile fortress whose commander is a good

man—so good a man, that Joseph later makes him his Major Domo, accepting him into the divine story as a helpful friend. In the fortress, Joseph is commissioned to act as a valet to the distinguished servants of the Royal Court who arrive one day as prisoners under investigation: the baker and the cup-bearer. Now the dreamer interprets dreams, and the day comes when he is taken from the prison in haste and stands before Pharaoh. He is thirty years old then, and Pharaoh is seventeen. This hypersensitive and tender youth, a searcher of God, like Joseph's forefathers, and enamoured of a dreamy religion of love, has ascended to the throne during the time of Joseph's imprisonment. He is an anticipating, a premature Christian, the mythical prototype of those, who are on the right way, but not the right ones for that way. It is a widely ramified sequence of chapters in which Joseph gains the unlimited confidence of the young ruler, and at whose end he receives the ring of power.

Now he is Viceroy, takes the well-known measures of Providence for the coming famine and enters into a matrimony of State with Asnath, daughter of the sun priest of On-Heliopolis. But here, the story returns from the Egyptian soil to the theatre of the first and second volume, to Canaan, and a complete long short-story is interpolated which gives to this volume its outstanding female character, as the first one had it in the person of the lovely Rachel, the third one in the fruitlessly desiring Mut-em-enet. It is Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Juda, a figure of grand style, the female paradigm of determination, whose spiritual ambition scorns no means that might help her, the pagan child of Baal, to get on the path of Promise and to become a forbear of the Messiah.

Now the famine assumes reality, and dramatically the

well-known action takes its course, which is nothing but a precious childhood memory, and for which the curiosity of the reader can be captivated only by the most detailed presentation and visualization of every How and Why. The arrival of the brothers, the meeting with the prescient Benjamin, the play with the silver cup, the great scene of recognition, the scene in which a musical child sings to the aged Jaacob, that his son Joseph is alive and lord over the land of Egypt;—in minute detail we learn—and some day my Munich copyist, too, will probably learn,—how all that has really happened. The novel extends to the solemn passing away of Jaacob, the father, in the land of Goshen; and with the tremendous procession which brings home the body of the patriarch, so that he may rest in the twofold cave with his fathers, ends the whole work which through one and a half decades of outer stress was my steady companion.

Ladies and Gentlemen, some people were inclined to regard "Joseph and His Brothers" as a Jewish novel, even as merely a novel for Jews. Well, the selection of the old testamental subject was certainly not mere accident; most certainly there were hidden, defiantly polemic connections between it and certain tendencies of our time which I always found repulsive from the bottom of my soul; the growing vulgar anti-semitism which is an essential part of the Fascist mob-myth, and which commits the brutish denial of the fact that Judaism and Hellenism are the two principal pillars upon which our occidental civilization rests. To write a novel of the Jewish spirit was timely, just because it seemed untimely. And, it is true: my story always follows the dates of the Genesis with semi-jocular faithfulness, and often reads like an exegesis and amplification of the Tora, like a rabbin-

ical Midrasch. And yet, all that is Jewish, throughout the work, is merely foreground, just as the Hebrew cadence of its diction is only foreground, only one style element among others, only *one* stratum of its language which strangely fuses the archaic and the modern, the epical and analytical. In the last book is a poem, the song of annunciation which the musical child sings for the aged Jaacob, and which is an odd composition of psalter recollections and little verses of the German romantic type. That is an example for the character of the whole work, which seeks to blend a great many things; and, because it conceives and imagines everything human as a unity, it borrows its motives, memories, allusions, as well as linguistic sounds from many spheres. Just as all the Jewish legends are based on other, timeless mythologies, and made transparent by them, thus Joseph, its hero, is also a transparent figure, changing with the illumination in vexatary fashion: he is, with a great deal of consciousness, an Adonis—and Tammuz figure; but then he perceptibly slides into a Hermes part, the part of the mundane and skillful businessman and the intelligent profit producer among the gods, and in his great conversation with Pharaoh the mythologies of all the world, the Hebraic, Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek are mingled so thoroughly that one will hardly be aware of holding a biblical Jewish story book in one's hands.

There is a symptom for the innate character of a work, for the category toward which it strives, the opinion it secretly has of itself: that is the reading matter which the author prefers and which he considers helpful while working on it. I am not thinking, in this connection, about factual sources and material research, but about great works of literature which in a broad sense seem related to his own effort, models

whose contemplation keeps him in the right mood, and which he seeks to emulate. All, that can be of no help, does not fit, has no reference to the subject,—is hygienically excluded,—it is not conducive at the moment and therefore disallowed. Well then, such strengthening reading during the last Joseph years was provided by two books: Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" and Goethe's "Faust"—a perplexing combination; but each of the two heterogeneous works had its particular function as a stimulant, and in this connection it was a pleasure for me to know that Goethe had held Sterne in very high esteem, and had called him one of the finest intellects who had ever lived.

Naturally, it was the humorous side of the "Joseph" which profited by this reading. Sterne's wealth of humorous expressions and inventions, his genuine, comical technique attracted me; for to refresh my work I needed something like this. And then, Goethe's "Faust," this life's work and linguistic monument developed from tender, lyrical germ-cell, this enormous mixture of magic opera and mankind's tragedy, of puppet-show and cosmic poem. Time and again I returned to this inexhaustible source,—especially to the second part, to the Helena scenes, the classical Walpurgis Night; and this fixation, this insatiable admiration indicated the secret immodesty of my own endeavors, they revealed the direction in which the ambition of the Joseph story pointed,—its own; for the author, as usual, had at the outset been quite innocent of such ambition.

✓ "Faust" is a symbol of humanity, and to become something like that in my hands was the clandestine tendency of the Joseph story. I told about beginnings, where everything came into being for the first time. That was the attractive novelty, the uncommon amusement of this kind of fable

telling, that everything was there for the first time, that one foundation took place after the other, the foundation of love, of envy, of hatred, of murder, and of much else. But this dominant originality is, at the same time, repetition, reflection, image; the result of rotation of the spheres which brings the upper, the starlike into the lower regions, carries, in turn, the worldly into the realm of the divine, so that gods become men, men in turn become gods. The worldly finds itself pre-created in the realm of the stars, and the individual character seeks its dignity by tracing itself back to the timeless, mythical pattern, giving it presence.

I dwelled on the birth of the Ego out of the mythical collective, the Abrahamitic Ego which is pretentious enough to assume that man should serve only the Highest, from which assumption the discovery of God followed. The claim of the human ego to central importance is the premise for the discovery of God, and from the very first the pathos for the dignity of the Ego is connected with that for the dignity of humanity.

At the same time, these humans remain confined in the mythical, the collective, to a large extent of their being. What they call spirit and culture, is just the conviction that their lives are the embodiment of the myth, and their ego detaches itself from the collective in much the same way as certain figures of Rodin wrest themselves out of the stone and awaken from it. Jaacob, weighty with stories, is also such a half-detached figure: his solemnness is still mythical and already individual; the cult which he devotes to his feelings, and for which he is punished by the jealousy of the Highest is the bland but proud assertion of an ego which loftily feels itself the subject and hero of its stories. It is still a patriarchal and respectable form of human indi-

vidualization and emancipation, and it grows far more bold and daring in the complicated case of his son Joseph. There is one, who has not discovered God, but knows how to "treat" Him; one who is not only the hero of his stories, but also their director, indeed the one who poetically "adorns" them; one who, it is true, still participates in the collective and mythical, but in a banteringly spiritualized and playful, purposefully conscious manner. In short, we see how the ego, in the process of its emancipation, soon becomes an artistic ego, attractive, delicate and—endangered, a tender concern for the respectable father, but with inborn possibilities of development and maturing, as have not existed before. In its youth, the artistic ego is of inexcusable egocentricity: it lives under the dangerous assumption that everybody must love it more than himself. But due to a sympathy and friendliness which nonetheless it never renounces, it finds its way into the social, while it matures, and becomes the provider and benefactor of a foreign people and of its own: in Joseph the ego flows back from arrogant absoluteness into the collective, common; and, the contrast between artistic and civic tendencies, between isolation and community, between individual and collective is fabulously neutralized,—as according to our hopes and our will, it must be dissolved in the democracy of the future, the cooperation of free and divergent nations under the equalizing sceptre of justice.

A symbol of humanity—in a certain way my work was entitled to this secret opinion of itself. After all, from the original and simple, the typical and canonical it led to the complicated, involved, late: the way from Canaan to the Egypt of the New Kingdom is the way from the piously primitive, the God-creating, God-contemplative idyl of the archfathers to a highly developed and sophisticated culture

with its luxuries and absurd snobberies, in a land of the grandchildren, a land whose atmosphere is so much to Joseph's taste because he is himself a grandchild and a late soul.]

The feeling for the way, the advancement, the change, the development is very strong in the book, its whole theology is connected with it and derived from it: namely, from its conception of the old testamental "Bond" between God and man: from the conviction that God and man are mutually dependent upon each other in common aspiration for enhancement. For God, too, is subject to development, He, too, changes and advances: from the desert-like and demoniacal to the spiritual and holy; and He can do so without the help of the human spirit as little, as the human spirit can without Him.—Were I to determine what I, personally, mean by religiousness, I should say: it is *attentiveness* and *obedience*; attentiveness to the inner changes of the world, the mutation in the aspects of truth and right; obedience which loses no time in adjusting life and reality to these changes, this mutation, and thus in doing justice to the spirit. To live in sin is to live against the spirit, to cling to the antiquated, obsolete, and to continue to live in it, due to inattentiveness and disobedience. And whenever the book speaks about the "concern with God," it speaks about the just fear of this sin and folly. "Concern with God" is not alone the creating of God in one's thoughts, and determining and recognizing Him, but principally the concern with His will, with which ours must coincide; with the demands of the present, the postulate of the aeon, of the world hour. It is the intelligent listening to what the world spirit wants, to the new truth and necessity; and a special, religious concept of stupidity follows from that: the stupidity

before God, which does not know this concern, or complies with it as clumsily as Laban who still believes that he must slaughter his little son and bury him in the foundation of his house, a custom which once was quite beneficial but is so no longer.

Must I add, Ladies and Gentlemen, that we owe the tribulations which we now have to endure, the catastrophe in which we are living, to the fact that we lacked intelligence toward God to a degree which had long become criminal? Europe, the world, was full of stale and outworn things, of evident obsolete and even sacrilegious anachronisms which had been clearly outdistanced by the world will, and which we permitted to continue, in dull mind and in disobedience to this will. It is understood, that the spirit is always ahead of reality, that reality follows it clumsily. But never, perhaps, had there existed before such pathological, such unmistakably dangerous tension, in the social, political and economic life of the peoples, between truth and reality, between things long reached and accomplished by the spirit and between things which still took the liberty of calling themselves reality; and foolish disobedience to the spirit or, religiously speaking, to God's will, is undoubtedly the true cause for the world explosion which stuns us. But explosion is equalization, and I think that here, in this hall, it is quite the right place to express the hope that after this war, we—or our children—will live in a world of happier equalization between spirit and reality, that we will "win the peace." The word peace always has a religious ring, and what it signifies is a gift of intelligence before God.

You understand, I am eager to prove, that it is not wholly vain and idle to speak about my private work at a moment like this, instead of general and important matters. I may

tell myself that there are connections between my work and general and important matters,—indeed underneath all badinage, that is its secret motor. In a discreet and unpathetic manner, the case of mankind is tried in it, and therefore the manner in which this book treats the myth is so different from a certain contemporary manner of employing it: a malevolent and anti-human manner whose political name we all know. After all, the word “myth” has a bad reputation nowadays—we only have to think of the title of the book, which the “philosopher” of German fascism, Rosenberg, the preceptor of Hitler, has given to his viscious textbook: “The Myth of the 20th Century.” So often, in the last decades, had the myth been abused as a means of obscurantic counter-revolution that a mythical novel like the Joseph, upon its first appearance, inevitably aroused the suspicion that its author was floating with the murky stream. This suspicion had to be discarded for at a second glance a process could be observed similar to what happens in a battle when a captured gun is turned around and directed against the enemy. In this book, the myth has been taken out of Fascist hands and humanized down to the last recess of its language,—if posterity finds anything remarkable about it, it will be this.

In the idea of humanity, the human idea, the sense for the past and that for the future, tradition and revolution form a strange and, to my mind, infinitely attractive mixture. The slogan of the “conservative revolution” has played a pernicious part; fascism has seized it as it seized the myth, and has pretended to be the conservative revolution. Its nature is fraud. But what better formula than just this: “conservative revolution” could be found for the spirit and meaning of that famous speech which an American op-

ponent of Fascism, Henry A. Wallace, Vice President of the United States of America, held before the members and guests of the Free World Association on the 8th of May of this year? This speech, "The Price of Free World Victory" is, I think, a beautiful example of the unification of tradition and revolution in the sphere of the Humane; the stirring proof that today the conserving and the revolutionary will are one and the same, are simply the *good* will.

May I say, that my composition is of a somewhat similar nature? It bases its concept of piety upon the idea of time, of change, of development, of advancement toward perfection, an advancement for which God and man ally themselves,—but at the same time the idea of tradition plays in it a thematic part of the first order. I related to you how a Goethe memory, a word of his about the Joseph tale, entered into my first reveries when I tried my hand at this subject; I also told you of the secret reference to Goethe's Faust which my work dared to take while it grew. That was playful boldness which sprang from the sense for tradition and succession and corresponded to the inner nature of my task, a mythical task. For what else is myth but succession and recollection, the forming and coining of the present with the past, the childlike identification with an admired idol—in short, tradition? Myth is tradition, and to live in tradition means to live in the myth.

An artist's life, Ladies and Gentlemen, is a life of *experience* in manifold ways: when it strives to follow the great, it also becomes a means of experiencing greatness,—not like the scientist, nor the historian: not objectively and from without, but in a subjective, practical, productive way. Three times, at different stages of my life, have I lived under the prolonged tension of tasks, which had a certain affinity to

greatness: at the age of twenty-five, when I tried my hand at the novel of the German bourgeoisie *Buddenbrooks*, at the age of fifty, when in the *Magic Mountain* I made a friendly alter ego pass through the adventures of European intellectual controversies, and between sixty and seventy, when I told mankind's fairy tale of Joseph and his brothers. To participate playfully in the consciousness of great creativeness and to acquire, thereby, the right to a more familiar celebration of greatness than the wholly inexperienced and uninitiated possess, that is something, that is worth a life. "That a man entertains himself and does not spend his life like dull cattle," I have my Joseph answer a critic of his mythical temerity, "is after all what matters most; and what heights of entertainment he is able to reach—that is what counts."

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me finally return to the fact which seems to me to have a certain symbolic value, after all, namely that the mythical play of Joseph and his Brothers, begun in Germany, continued in Switzerland, transplanted to America was completed here, in contact with the American myth. For there is such a thing; you, too, live in a tradition here, walk in footsteps, in paternal footsteps, which you call your "Way of Life." The pioneer-like optimism and hearty faith in man, the mental youthfulness, the benevolent and confident ideas and principles upon which the Union was founded by the fathers, amounts to the American myth, which is alive today. In his biography, Goethe speaks about an "alleviation for humanity" effected by the American war of liberation; and the European emigration to America (which finds its way into the final parts of the *Wilhelm Meister*), sprang from the constant desire to participate in this alleviation; it was the pilgrimage to a

pure fountain of health. But the measure and the significance which this flight and migration has assumed at present, are something new. The diaspora of European culture which we are witnessing, the arrival of so many of its bearers, representatives of all categories of science and art, to these shores; their more or less involuntary decision, transformed, however, into an *amor fati*, to complete their work in the American air of life,—that is something very strange and unprecedented; it opens unexampled possibilities of exchange and equalization and may be supremely helpful in creating the new feeling of humanism of which I spoke. Our emigration thus assumes an entirely different significance from that of any former emigration, the significance of the coalescence of the hemispheres, of the unification of the earth. “Europe wants to become one” that is long obsolete; the *earth* wants to become one. “Unification” is the word and command of the world hour, and the future belongs to the union of knowledge *and* hope, of profundity *and* courage, of faith and labor in the face of all doubt, and despite all doubt.



