



Der Untertan

Heinrich Mann

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"Hurraahhhh!!! Da kommt der Kaiser!!!" Diederich Heßling, ein ewig deutsches Thema. Kurt Tucholsky brachte es wie immer auf den Punkt, als er Heinrich Manns Roman über den Aufstieg eines Erzopportunisten als "Herbarium des deutschen Mannes" bezeichnete. "Hier ist er ganz -- in seiner Religiosität, seiner Erfolgsanbeterei und namenlosen Zivilfeigheit".

Der Untertan, die Geschichte Diederich Heßlings, in jungen Jahren von einem drakonisch strafenden Vater und einer saumseligen Mutter großgezogen, anschließend weiter zurechtgeschliffen im Schul- und Militärdress der wilhelminischen Ära, gerät bei Heinrich Mann zum Fallbeispiel deutscher Katzenbuckelei und Tyrannenmentalität, die sich Macht und Gewaltstrukturen unterwirft, um letztlich an ihnen teilhaben zu dürfen. Heßling, vordergründig als Aufsteiger gefeiert, übernimmt die väterliche Papierfabrik und wird zum mächtigsten Bürger der fiktiven Kleinstadt Netzig. In seiner Mimikri geht er dabei soweit, neben der chauvinistischen Phrasendrescherei der Deutschnationalen auch noch das äußere Erscheinungsbild des Kaisers zu imitieren. Eine "Bilderbuchkarriere", wie sie nur durch "ein Sinken der Menschenwürde unter jedes bekannte Maß" zustande kommen konnte, wie Heinrich Mann in einem Brief von 1906 festhielt.

Verkörperte in einem der gelungensten deutschen Spielfilme der Nachkriegszeit noch der grandiose Werner Peters den ölig-feisten Heßling, so übernimmt in dieser Hörspielfassung von 1971 Heinz Drache den Part. Zusammen mit ihm ist eine halbe Hundertschaft der gesamten damaligen deutschen Schauspielerelite angetreten -- Namen wie E.O. Fürbringer, Karl Lieffen, Hans Caninenberg, Hans Quest oder Lore Lorentz bürgen für die absolute Qualität dieses fast sechsstündigen Lesemarathons.

Ein hochpolitisches, hochmoralisches Lehrstück und -- beinahe ein Jahrhundert nach seinem Erscheinen -- noch immer hochgültig. Spieldauer ca. 350 min., 5 CDs. --*Ravi Unger*

Der Untertan Details

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From Reader Review Der Untertan for online ebook

Noah says

Wirklich witzig! Was Joseph Roth's Radetzkymarsch für den Österreicher ist, ist der Untertan für den deutschen nur mit deutlich beissenderem Sarkasmus.

David says

So, one of my guilty secrets is that I like the work of Heinrich Mann far better than that of his more successful, Nobel-winning brother. (OK: I'll make an exception for "Death in Venice", but doesn't it seem that everything else that Thomas Mann ever wrote - Buddenbrooks, Der Zauberberg, the dreadful "Felix Krull" - would have benefited tremendously by having its length cut in half?)

Bernd says

Der Klassiker über deb Opportunisten Diederich Heßling. Tucholski sagt über ihn: "Herbarium des deutschen Mannes". Aus dieser autoritätgläubigen servil ausgerichteten Charakterstruktur konnte im Kaiserreich eine erfolgreiche Karriere erwachsen. Ob dies nun typisch deutsch ist oder eine der typischen Charaktere, die sich auch in anderen Kulturen findet, sei dahingestellt. Lesenswert, da bewusstseinschärfend.

Armin Hennig says

53/100 Eigentlich gut zweieinhalb, alles weitere später

Elnaz says

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Anna-Lena says

I started this book to prepare for my A-levels (I'm german), because from reviews I gathered it would go very well with the revision I had to do for history (german nationalism in the 19./20. century, imperialism, WWI).

I did not finish it in time but that was not a problem, because the subject of nationalism and power structures

in the Wilhelmine era is present from the very first page to the last and characterizes Diederich (glad we do not name our children like that anymore) throughout his life.

Therefore I gained a valuable insight into the literary response to the social development up to 1914 and how Heinrich Mann saw the death of liberalism. That really helped me understand the subject better, because Mann managed to write in blunt pictures and clear metaphors (ending), but also uses an ironic, distanced style which shows Diederich's weakness and his double standards (role of the women...wow).

Sometimes it was scary how much he predicts (Nazi Germany and its ideology can be found in its beginnings, the inevitability of the oncoming wars due to the nationalistic worldview...) But also looking at the psychological perspective makes one question our relation to power and values in society and makes the book timeless.

I put the book on break several times, as it was no longer a priority after the exam and it is certainly not an easy read. There are many side characters who are scheming and are all kind of the same...weak and lying low to see who comes out on top (primary example: the mayor).

All in all I would recommend this book if you want to understand Germany and the road it took from Bismarck to Hitler. To understand what made these people follow this road, what was going on in their heads...read it! If you are into likeable protagonists...you may have a problem here.

tENTATIVELY, cONVENIENCE says

review of

Heinrich Mann's Little Superman

by tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE - January 9, 2012

I learned about this author in the course of research for my movie Robopaths. I learned that his books were burned by the Nazis so I decided to read something by him & to check out any movies that might've been based on any books by him. This led me to taking Little Superman out from the library as well as the movie The Kaiser's Lackey as well as to my buying a used copy of the novel Man of Straw. &, Lo & Behold!, they're all the same thing!

As Andrew Donson, Assistant Professor of History and German & Scandinavian Studies @ the University of Massachusetts Amherst, explains in the "Interpreting The Kaiser's Lackey" extra on the movie's DVD version:

"The English title of this film is *not* a literal translation of the German one, *Der Untertan*, which is a difficult word to translate. It literally means "The Subject", as in "The Subject of the King" - but in current & turn-of-the-century discourse, the "untertan" has also an authoritarian connotation. Various translators have rendered the title as: "The Patrioteer", "Little Superman", "Man of Straw", & "The Loyal Subject". An awkward, but perhaps more *accurate* translation of the title would be "The Servile Chauvinist Underling". The title of this film, the same title as Heinrich Mann's 1914 novel on which it's based, captures the main theme. Diederich [the story's central character] is on the one hand a tyrant who lords over other untertanen. On the other hand, he often finds *himself* in situations where *he* is the untertan, where others exercise their will over him. The essence and the humor of the film is that Diederich is happy in both situations. The narrative of the film shows how the institutions that shape Diederich's life, family, school, university, brotherhood, army, workplace, and government produce and regulate this authoritarian mentality."

[As a sidenote for bibliophiles, the Penguin edition (1984) that I have, Man of Straw gives no credit to a translator & yet it appears to be the exact same translation as the library edition that I read, Little Superman, published by Creative Age Press, Inc (1947). I suspect some shenanigans & intrigue in the omission of the translator's name in the Penguin edition, so I include it here: **Ernest Boyd**.]

As soon as I started reading this bk, I found the central character insufferable. He embodies everything that I detest: hypocrisy, social climbing, spinelessness, abusiveness, fraudulence, etc.. He is, indeed, a "Servile Chauvinist Underling", as Donson puts it. I was about 1/3rd of the way thru the bk when I watched the movie & learned that this was meant to be satire. I suppose it 'shd've' been obvious to me that it was intended to be satire all along but it seemed entirely too realistic to *really be caricature*. &, as the back-cover of Man of Straw states: "Heinrich Mann (brother of Thomas) was imprisoned for his radical and outspoken views, and spent a long exile from the country at which he aimed his bitter satire." - & that's no laughing matter.

Mann was condemned in Nazi Germany for writing Un-German works or some such but I don't think that the hypocrisy & opportunistic cowardice that he so thoroughly portrays is intrinsically German. It may've reached a particular nationalistic fervor in Germany but it was hardly confined to there. In fact, Mann's parody of upper middle class Germany isn't so far off from the lower middle class Baltimore that I grew up in. I'm reminded of a photographer that I once knew. He incessantly ridiculed me for valuing anything other than money. However, once he started realizing that my willful rejection of the 'values' that he represented was earning me some respect from others, he tried to sleaze up to me by asking me to pose for him as a photographer's model. I refused.

Mann's novel is such a thorough look at the completely unscrupulous machinations of his main character that I can only conclude that Mann, himself, must've been surrounded by such contemptible behavior. Diederich is constantly betraying & groveling, ass-kissing & terrorizing - wichever seems 'appropriate' to his 'social position' in relation to who he's dealing w/. & Mann depicts this utterly brilliantly. Diederich is constantly engaged in some sort of fraudulent dealings that he trembles at the thought of getting caught out at & blusteringly camouflages under cover of patriotic bullshit. The library copy that I read has one section underlined in ink that expresses Diederich's philosophy, in the mouth of one of his cronies, quite nicely:

""Democracy is the philosophy of the half-educated," said the apothecary. "It has been defeated by science." Some one shouted: "Hear! Hear!" It was the druggist who wished to associate with him. "There will always be masters and men," asserted Gottlieb Hornung, "for it is the same in nature. It is the one great truth, for each of us must have a superior to fear, and an inferior to frighten. What would become of us otherwise? If every nonentity believes that he is somebody, and that we are all equal! Unhappy the nation whose traditional and honorable social forms are broken up by the solvent of democracy, and which allows the disintegrating standpoint of personality to get the upper hand!"

Two pages later, the same underliner highlighted part of this passage:

"Diederich raised himself on his toes, "Gentlemen," he shouted, carried away on the tide of national emotion, "the Emperor William Monument shall be a mark of reverence for the noble grandfather whom we all, I think I may say, worship almost as a saint, and also a pledge to the noble nephew, our magnificent young Emperor, that we shall ever remain as we are, pure, liberty-loving, truthful, brave, and true!"

The underliner (*not* the undertan) emphasizes Diederich's claim of being "pure, liberty-loving, truthful, brave, and true!" w/ an exclamation mark next to it presumably b/c these are all qualities wch Diederich is completely lacking in. Earlier, I mention "Diederich's philosophy" - but that's misleading. In order to have a philosophy, one probably has to have a mind capable of formulating a justified position to adhere to.

Diederich lacks even that - he simply takes the most cowardly & dishonest path of least resistance & changes his political allegiances to kowtow to whoever he's most afraid of at the time.

In the East German film version, a scene that exemplifies the preposterous bravuro posturing that Diederich & his kind rely on for image-building & bullying is the duel. The scene is also in the bk but I found it more compelling in the movie. It's common for men in Diederich's class to initiate duels w/ each other in order to simulate bravery. Under the most ridiculous pretexts ('Sir! You were looking at me!' - that sort of thing), men challenge each other as if their honor can bear no insult. But, as w/ cowards & bullies the world over, it's all just pretense. They know they're not taking any risks whatsoever. As w/ generals who send soldiers to the slaughter, it's the soldiers who get senselessly killed, while the generals, safe elsewhere, get the medals & other social rewards.

These duels consist of nothing more than 2 men heavily padded & w/ one arm behind their back fighting w/ swords until one of them scratches the other on the face. Even their eyes are heavily protected w/ goggles. As soon as Diederich is scratched on the cheek, he gets his scar that 'proves' his bravery - even though there's no risk of serious injury. Diederich then uses the scar as a badge of 'honor'. It's all completely ridiculous.

After Diederich unsuccessfully & humiliatingly attempts to get Lieutenant von Brietzen to not leave Diederich's 'dishonored' sister in the lurch, he's walking on the streets. "Suddenly he noticed that the gardens were still full of perfume and twittering beneath the spring skies, and it became clear to him that Nature itself, whether she smiled or snarled, was powerless before Authority, the authority above us, which is quite impregnable. It was easy to threaten revolution, but what about the Emperor William Monument? Wulckow and Gausenfeld? Whoever trampled others from under foot must be prepared to be walked on, that was the iron law of might. After his attack of resistance, Diederich again felt the secret thrill of the man who is trampled upon. . . . A cab came along from behind, Herr van Brietzen and his trunk. Before he knew what he was doing Diederich faced about, ready to salute."

In one of the very rare moments where Diederich somewhat introspectively criticizes the worldview that he otherwise takes for granted, Diederich sees his now 'dishonored' sister, Emma, in a new light: "The lieutenant, who had caused all this, lost notably in comparison - and so did the Power, in whose name he had triumphed. Diederich discovered that Power could sometimes present a common and vulgar appearance. Power and everything that went with it, success, honour, loyalty. he looked at Emma and was forced to question the value of what he had attained or was still striving for: Guste and her money, the monument, the favour of the authorities, Gausenfeld, distinctions and high office." Indeed. Alas, this critical introspection doesn't last long.

I noted earlier that these characteristics were hardly confined to Germans. As Diederich bullies 'his' employees he tells them: ""But I forbid socialistic agitation! In the future you can vote as I tell you, or leave!" Diederich also said that he was determined to curb irreligion. He would note every Sunday who went to church and who did not. "So long as the world is unredeemed from sin, there will be war and hatred, envy and discord. Therefore, there must be one master!" This reminds me of Henry Ford.

There's an excellent documentary about Ford called "Demon Rum" in wch some important points about the ironies of Ford's 'moralism' are highlighted - particularly the way in wch his 'moralism' helped create a subculture of thugs that he then used to suppress unions. In the Wikipedia bio of Ford (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Ford) we find this:

"The profit-sharing was offered to employees who had worked at the company for six months or more, and, importantly, conducted their lives in a manner of which Ford's "Social Department" approved. They frowned

on heavy drinking, gambling, and what might today be called "deadbeat dads". The Social Department used 50 investigators, plus support staff, to maintain employee standards; a large percentage of workers were able to qualify for this "profit-sharing."

The Wikipedia entry qualifies this by saying that "Ford's incursion into his employees' private lives was highly controversial, and he soon backed off from the most intrusive aspects." Be that as it may, Ford's resemblance to Diederich is clear. Making it even clearer is that Ford was an anti-Semite who rc'vd the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Nazi Germany.

& despite Der Untertan's having been written in 1914 about 19th century Germany, it's very prescient about Nazi Germany. In his speeches, Hitler emphasized the unity of classes - this despite his refinement of one of the most hierarchical structures the world has ever seen - w/ himself, of course, as the supreme world dictator, the LEADER (der Führer). ""Only His Majesty," Diederich answered. "He aroused the citizen from his slumbers, his lofty example has made us what we are." As he said this he struck himself on the chest. "His personality, his unique, incomparable personality, is so powerful that we can all creep up by it, like the clinging ivy!" he shouted, although this was not in the draft he had written. "In whatever His Majesty the Emperor decides for the good of the German people, we will joyfully cooperate without distinction of creed and class[..]" Diederich's oratorical shouting is highly reminiscent of Hitler's.

Diederich is also reminiscent of the nazi SS officer responsible for transporting Jews to the death camps. On the subject of Eichmann, Hannah Arendt writes in her bk Eichmann in Jersulalem - A Report on the Banality of Evil [see my review of that here: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13...>] that:

"What he fervently believed in up to the end was success, the chief standard of "good society" as he knew it. Typical was his last word on the subject of Hitler - whom he and his comrade Sassen had agreed to "shirr out" of their story; Hitler, he said, "may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German Army to Führer of a people of almost eighty million. . . . His success alone proved to me that I should subordinate myself to this man." His conscience was indeed set at rest when he saw the zeal and eagerness with which "good society" everywhere reacted as he did. He did not need to "close his ears to the voice of conscience," as the judgment had it, not because he had none, but because his conscience spoke with a "respectable voice," with the voice of respectable society around him."

& just as the nazis partially justified their genocide against the Jews, Gypsies, Homosexuals, & Political Opponents as a cleansing of the "Volk" (the body of the Germany people) so, too, is Diederich's behavior summed up nicely in this domestic scene:

"As Diederich lived in fear of his master, so Guste had to live in the fear of hers. When they entered a room she knew that the right of precedence properly belonged to her husband. The children, in turn, had to treat her with respect, and Männe, the dachshund, had to obey every one. At meals, therefore, the children and the dog had to keep quiet. Guste's duty was to discern from the wrinkles upon her husband's brow whether it was advisable to leave him undisturbed, or to drive away his cares with chatter. Certain dishes were prepared only for the master of the house, and when he was in a good humour Diederich would throw a piece across the table and, laughing heartily, would watch to see who caught it, Gretchen, Guste or the dog. His siesta was often troubled by gastronomical disturbances and Guste's duty then commanded her to put warm poultices on his stomach. Groaning and terribly frightened he used to say that he would make his will and appoint a trustee. Guste would not be allowed to touch a penny. "I have worked for my sons, not in order that you may amuse yourself after I am gone!" Guste objected that her own fortune was the foundation of everything, but it availed her nothing. . . . Of course, when Guste had a cold, she did not expect that Diederich, in his turn,

would nurse her. Then she had to keep as far away from him as possible, for Diederich was determined not to have any germs near him. He would not go into the factory unless he had antiseptic tablets in his mouth, and one night there was a great disturbance because the cook had come down with influenza, and had a fever temperature. "Out of the house with the beastly thing at once!" Diederich commanded, and when she had gone he wandered about the house for a long time spraying it with disinfecting fluids."

Yes, as many of us are taught, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" - but what about those of us who are atheists?

Dave says

I read this as part of a course on German history through literature, and it was interesting to see how Germans lived in the late 19th century, as well as a lot of the causes of World War I, which isn't taught as well as it ought to be in schools. My one complaint is that it is a long read, and you continually have to think things over since it is not from our era or culture.

Sarah says

Diederich is Trump, basically, except for the Kaiser-worship. Interesting indeed. Diederich needs the stupid sycophancy to make the rest of his odious character work, whereas Trump doesn't. Otherwise, it's all narcissism, misogyny, greed and moral vacuity.

Sam says

Die Lebensgeschichte des Heuchlers und Opportunisten Diederich Heßling, des deutschesten Deutschen, gehört zu den wohl bekanntesten Exporten der deutschen Literatur. Heinrich Manns Satire auf den wilhelministischen Staat leitet genauestens her, wie aus verkannten Pflichten gegenüber dem Vaterland, einer zu einem Gott erhobenen Staatsgewalt und falschen Tugenden ein System entstehen konnte, das misstrauisch gegen das Liberale in jeglicher Form und selbst für die eigenen Anhänger zu eng ist, um ihnen Freiheit zu gewähren. Diese Gesellschaft stürzte sich nur wenige Monate nach Veröffentlichung des Buchs in trunkener Begeisterung in den Ersten Weltkrieg.

Warum, könnte man fragen, gräbt der Hörverlag eine 26 Jahre alte Lesung gerade jetzt wieder für eine Neuveröffentlichung aus? Warum ist die Geschichte des *Untertans* nach 100 Jahren noch wichtig? Alles Schnee von vorgestern, oder nicht?

Der wachsende rechte Flügel in der Politik mit AfD und Konsorten erzählt eine andere Geschichte. Manns Satire führt vor Augen, wie leicht wir in eine feindliche Atmosphäre geraten können, ja, sie selbst erschaffen, ein Frankenstein'sches Monster, das dann außer Kontrolle gerät.

Diederich ist schon von Kindesbeinen an feige und obrigkeitshörig, die Schläge seines Vaters lehren ihn das genauso wie das Schulsystem, in dem er Kameraden verpfeift, um dem Direktor seine Ehrerbietung zu bezeugen. Als Erbe einer Papierfabrik hat Diederich gesellschaftliche Chancen; er wird politisch aktiv und

sucht eine Frau für die Ehe, viel mehr aber zur Vergrößerung seines Vermögens und Ansehens. Dabei geht er gewissenlos und aalglatt vor, aber jeder ehrlichen, autarken Gefühlsregung unfähig.

"Diese Tragik der Großen erschütterte ihn so sehr, dass er stramm stand."

Der Untertan war keine Freude für mich. Die Lesung von Hans Korte verleiht dem Klassiker eine allzu realistische Atmosphäre von Steifheit und Militarismus, denn es wird viel gebrüllt und stramm gestanden, man fühlt sich oft auf den Fuß getreten im Kaiserreich, das nächste Duell um die Ehre ist nie fern. Korte macht das natürlich genau richtig, er schnauft und presst die Worte hervor, nur leicht anzuhören ist das eben nicht.

Diederich ist eine der widerlichsten Fieslinge der Weltliteratur. Dass Tucholsky den Roman lobend das *Herbarium des deutschen Mannes* nannte, ist bezeichnend:

"Hier ist er ganz: in seiner Sucht, zu befehlen und zu gehorchen, in seiner Roheit und in seiner Religiosität, in seiner Erfolganbeterei und in seiner namenlosen Zivilfeigheit."

Dieses Zitat stammt aus dem im Begleitheft des Hörbuchs abgedruckten Rezension von Kurt Tucholsky, die im März 1919 in *Die Weltbühne* erschien. Es ist tatsächlich die treffende Charakterisierung Diederich Heßlings, doch hoffe ich nicht, dass es eine für den deutschen Mann an sich darstellt (wenn es so etwas wie den prototypischen Deutschen überhaupt gibt oder je gegeben hat). So ist *Der Untertan* doch vor allem eine Art Zeitzeugnis für den modernen Leser, aber ein mächtiges Mahnmal deutscher Geschichte.

Dieses Hörbuch wurde mir von Random House zur Verfügung gestellt.

Kim says

Man of Straw is the best known novel of German author Heinrich Mann originally published in German under the title "*Der Untertan*" whatever that means. I'll have to go look it up, but it probably has nothing to do with the words "Man of Straw" because that seems to happen fairly often. It has been translated into English under the titles "*Man of Straw*", "*The Patrioteer*", and "*The Loyal Subject*", and obviously I got the "*Man of Straw*" copy. Heinrich Mann was a German novelist who wrote works with strong social themes. His first name was Luiz but I guess he didn't like that name and went by Heinrich, I wouldn't know how to say Luiz anyway. He criticized the growth of fascism often which forced him to flee for his life after the Nazis came to power in 1933. When he left Germany he first went to France and lived in Paris and Nice. When I first read that I thought that the way things went during World War II fleeing to France probably wasn't all that safe, but then I read that during the German occupation he escaped to Spain, Portugal, and then to America. His brother was Thomas Mann, also a writer. I was wondering as I read about him if he had another brother, it feels like he should have. His father's name was Thomas Johann Heinrich Mann, and his brother got the name Thomas, he got the name Heinrich, so it seems like they should have had another brother to take the name Johann, but I can't find one.

I also read that the Nazis burnt Heinrich Mann's books as "contrary to the German spirit" during the infamous book burning of May 10, 1933, which was instigated by the then Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. I'm wondering how infamous it was because I didn't even know there was a book burning in 1933, but there are many things I don't know and have to go look up as I read, the book burning will be one of them. But since my copy wasn't burnt I suppose I should talk about it.

When I finished the last page of *Man of Straw* and closed the book my first reaction was to celebrate, maybe bake a cake, throw a party, that kind of thing, I managed to control myself and make my strongest reaction to be go get another book, which is better than a party any day. I was so proud of myself because I made it to the last page and for a while it was very questionable that I would be able to spend that much time with the main character, Diederich Hessling. I can't stand this guy and I did not want to spend almost 300 pages of our lives together, the first 100 were bad enough, but the "I always finish a book" instinct in me was strong, so I finished it. Always finish a book except two I guess I should say.

As I've said before how I feel about a book is always how I end up rating the book, so things like how well it is written and such mean nothing to me. Somewhere in the introduction to my copy it says:

"Heinrich Mann's Man of Straw is one of the few outstanding political satires of German literature."

I wonder if there's any character worse than Diederich in less outstanding political satires of German literature. It is also the only book besides *The Brothers Karamazov* to get two entries in *"The Political Imagination in Literature"* which means nothing to me, and the only thing saving that political imagination book from sounding extremely boring would be that it has the word literature in the title. However, there is more to saving the book *Man of Straw* other than its title, which, come to think of it I don't exactly understand, I liked the book, it was interesting at parts anyway, I just hated Diederich. If Mann wanted me to hate the character when he created him he certainly succeeded, but he should have given me some character to love in his place. I didn't dislike anyone else, I just didn't care about them. I am curious enough though, now that I've read the book, to go look up the emperor of the time, Wilhelm II, who before I read this I knew nothing about, and now that I've read it I only know that he was the Emperor of Germany. One of many I would think. So far my only feeling toward the guy is I feel sorry for him having people like Diederich obsessed with him and following him around. Diederich is like an emperor stalker, or maybe an early paparazzi without a camera.

Diederich, when he isn't being a big bully, or a liar, or a chauvinist - oh, he doesn't seem to like anybody but that emperor - he's just running around acting plain crazy. Here is his first "meeting" with his emperor:

"Hurrah!" shouted Diederich, for everyone was shouting and, caught in a great surge of shouting people, he was carried along to the Brandenburger Tor. A few steps in front of him rode the Emperor. Diederich could see his face, its stony seriousness and flashing eyes, but he was shouting so loudly that his sight was blurred. An intoxication, more intense and nobler than that stimulated by beer, raised his feet off the ground and carried him into the air. He waved his hat high above all heads in enthusiastic madness, in a heaven where our finest feelings move. There on the horse rode Power, through the gateway of triumphal entries, with dazzling features, but graven as in stone. The Power which transcends us and whose hoofs we kiss, the Power which is beyond the reach of hunger, spite and mockery!"

Now I'm already thinking the guy is crazy and we're not out of the first chapter yet, then we have this happen,

"Diederich looked like a man in a very dangerous state of fanaticism (no kidding), dirty and torn, with wild eyes - from his horse the Emperor gave him a piercing glance which went through him. Diederich snatched his hat off, his mouth was wide open, but not a sound came from it. As he came to a sudden stop he slipped and sat down violently in a puddle, with his legs in the air, splashed with muddy water. Then the Emperor laughed. The fellow was a monarchist, a loyal subject! The Emperor turned to his escort, slapped his thigh and laughed. From the depths of his puddle Diederich stared after him, open-mouthed."

Now it's not his fault he fell into a puddle, anyone could, but he is so proud of this afterwards, and the way he goes around bragging to people of how he met the Emperor sounds a little crazy. Then there is his wonderful military career he is always going around telling us about, of his bravery, of how he would still be in the military if he hadn't been injured, a foot injury which he faked; he is the strongest proponent of the military but certainly went out of his way to be excused from his obligatory military service. He is often doing things that are confusing to me, for instance when he is with Agnes, the girl in love with him (for some unknown reason); she hides in his closet when one of his friends comes to visit, and this happens when the friend leaves.

"When he opened the door, however, she was leaning over a chair, her breast was heaving and with her handkerchief she was stifling her gasps. She looked at him with reddened eyes, and he saw that she had almost choked in there, and had cried - while he was sitting out here drinking and talking a lot of nonsense. His first impulse was one of immense remorse. She loved him! There she sat, loving him so much, that she bore everything! He was on the point of raising his arms and throwing himself before her, weeping and begging her pardon. He restrained himself just in time; he was afraid of the scene and the sentimental mood which would follow, and would cost him more of his working time and would give her the upper hand. He would not give her that satisfaction. For, of course, she was exaggerating on purpose."

But, back to our fascination with the Emperor, here is what happens when Diederich and his new bride, Guste are on their way to their honeymoon:

"They got into a first-class carriage. He gave the porter three marks and pulled down the blinds. Carried on the wings of happiness, his desire for action suffered no relaxation. Guste could never have expected so amorous a temperament."

'You are not like Lohengrin,' she said.

As she closed her eyes, Diederich got up again. Like a man of iron he stood before her, his order hanging on his breast; it glittered like steel.

'Before we go any farther,' he said in martial tones, 'let us think of His Majesty, our Gracious Emperor. We must keep before us the higher aim of doing honour to His Majesty, and of giving him capable soldiers.'

"Oh!" cried Guste, carried away into loftier splendours by the sparkling ornament on his breast. 'Is it...really...you...my Diederich!'

Ok, reading over that again, I can see that maybe there are two crazy people in the book. And when Diederich and Guste realize the Emperor is in town, Diederich goes on paparazzi duty:

"Meanwhile a knot of curious onlookers had formed, and then the gatekeeper stepped to one side. Behind an outrider, in an open carriage, came the blond ruler of the North, beneath his flashing eagle-helmet. Diederich's hat was in the air and he shouted in Italian, with the precision of a pistol-shot: 'Long live the Emperor!' And obligingly the knot of people shouted with him. In a jump Diederich had got into his one-horse carriage, which stood ready, and was off in pursuit, urging the coachman with hoarse cries and an ample tip. Now he stops, for the imperial carriage is only just coming up. When the Emperor gets out there is another little knot of people, and again Diederich shouts in Italian...Watch must be kept in front of the house where the Emperor lingers! With chest extended and flashing eyes: let him beware who ventures to come too near! In ten minutes the little group re-forms, the carriage drives out through the gate, and Diederich shouted: 'Long live the Emperor!'..... and on and on

and on.

Ok, I'm done and you can go and read the book if you can actually find it and actually want to. I only talked about the things that bothered me, there is a lot more to the story, the parts that make the guy a big bully, but I've talked long enough about this book and I'm ready to move on. I was somewhat distressed to read that *Man of Straw* is only the first part of a trilogy and I'm not sure I can take two more books of these people, on the other hand, maybe they all get what they deserve in the end. What I think they deserve that is. I'm going to look up the emperor. It would be three stars without Diederich, I'm not sure what it is with him.

Hadrian says

Der Untertan, variously translated as "Man of Straw" or "The Loyal Subject", was completed in 1914, but it was not published in Germany until 1919.

The story is set in Imperial Germany under the Kaiser Wilhelm II. Our protagonist is Diederich Hessling, the son of a paper-maker. He is a timorous child, who rats students out to the teachers and makes sure to bully the one Jewish child in the class. He studies chemistry in university, but is a mediocre student and throws himself into the pomp and ritual of the military-style student fraternities. After that, joining the military seems like the next honorable step, but he is overwhelmed by the drill and contrives an excuse to leave - some ailment with his feet.

After this, he returns to his hometown of Netzig, where he takes over his father's paper factory. He is a tyrant to his workers and a scraping toady to his superiors. He buys a piece of new equipment against the advice of his workers, and then convinces another to sabotage it so he can stiff the dealer. He goads a business rival into violating *lèse majesté*, and then gains more customers from his ostentatious shows of patriotism. He styles his mustache like the Kaiser and peppers his speech with war-talk and self-righteous anger.

All of this sounds dreary, but Mann has a way of making fun of this little tyrant. We of course do not have to suffer his behavior, only observe from a detached perspective, so this is all in good fun. We can poke fun at his insecurities, or how he bandies about the words 'honor' and 'glory', as if that means anything to him. We can laugh at the ridiculous jingoism and greed which allows this man to prosper. With the distance of just over a century, we know what the Kaiser has done to Germany, and we can ridicule what happens.

But at the end of the story, after Hessling dedicates a gaudy statue to the Kaiser (one of his proudest achievements), the whole town is swept up by a lightning storm, and Diederich is seized with visions of the town in ruins, as if "he has seen the devil". That was written in 1914. That devil would cut down Europe with a scythe for the next thirty years, and possibly rise again in this century.

Shimona says

Geht für mich gar nicht

Mike says

Man of Straw -- also translated as *The Loyal Subject* -- is a razor-sharp take-down of the upper middle class buffoons who fervently supported Kaiser Wilhelm --the same type of power-worshipping nativists who later embraced the Third Reich. The subject in question is Diederich Hessling, who spends his college years swilling beer with his frat brothers in their exclusive secret society, the "Neo-Teutons" (ha!), and avoiding any type of intellectual pursuits, while challenging anyone and everyone to duels of honor (but not going through with those duels, of course; just issuing the challenges!). He worships the military, but desperately tries to avoid service by pulling strings with his social connections to get a medical discharge by feigning minor health problems. (Weak bones! A flat foot!)

It's obviously a portrait of Wilhelm himself, as Mann (older brother of Thomas and uncle of Klaus) describes Diederich as looking very much like the emperor, even shaping his mustache upward in sharp right angles in imitation of the Kaiser. But it's also a portrait that has universal application, at times so accurately depicting certain modern American conservative warhawks and chickenhawks -- everyone from Donald Rumsfeld to Donald Trump, but also their lackeys, like Chris Christie and Ted Cruz -- that we begin to see Mann's brilliance in crafting this character: these politicians, like Diederich, are not great men. They are, by and large, average dolts. The fact that Diederich looks, speaks, and acts like such national leaders (Wilhelm specifically) undercuts their perceived authority. These political figures, for all their pomp, lofty rhetoric, and gilded lives, are no more than uncouth, half-educated blowhards. And on some level, they know it.

Mann is quite clear on the dangers of authoritarianism and the kind of people it attracts. His portrait of Diederich might well describe any extreme-right politician (or supporter) of this day. Deiderich isn't too bright and is physically a coward, but his wealth and status as the son of a industrial owner gives him both privilege and a superiority complex. He lacks empathy and sees women merely as objects for his temporary pleasure or social status, and so his marriage becomes a business deal (and a poor one, at that), with a constant, paranoid fear of blackmail hanging over his head, as in most of his affairs. He is a mamma's boy who talks bravely about the military and about wanting to "duel" those who dishonor him, but who cringes at any possibility of confrontation. His love of power causes him to worship anyone who wields it and to fall in line behind anyone who commands it, without question. He follows the Church not because he believe in its values, but because it gives him status and further scapegoats the "Others" who are not Christian. (In the case of Germany under Wilhelm, the Jews.) His wealth and status as a leader of industry are entirely inherited, so he knows nothing about the business he owns. As a result, he takes out his anxiety and aggression on his workers, who are brighter than him, but lower in class, so are unable to advance. He fears them, but his ego prevents him from acknowledging this fact.

This complex combination of physical weakness, willful ignorance, hyper nationalism, capitalistic exploitation of the lower classes, and worship of military power creates "the loyal subject": one who will be attracted to any powerful force upon which he can project his idealized (and unachievable) Self as a way to substitute for his own lack of will and inner fortitude. He will follow anyone who advocates crushing or eliminating the weak or "undesirable," not realizing that 1) these are his own flaws that his ego refuses to acknowledge within himself, and 2) he is supporting the very power-hungry authorities who will not think twice about crushing him as one of the weak. His own insecurity and lack of self-worth causes him to act against his own self-interest, but in the end, because of his inherited wealth, status, and privilege, he survives -- and even thrives -- safe in the bubble of his own foolish ignorance.

Lewis Weinstein says

published in English as "Man of Straw."

Liebes Buch says

Heinrich Manns "Der Untertan" erschien als Fortsetzungsroman in einer Zeitung und wurde erst nach dem Krieg als Buch veröffentlicht.

Es beschreibt auf satirische Weise einen typischen deutschen Mann der Oberschicht. Im Zentrum stehen dabei Diederichs Menschenverachtung und seine Kaiserverehrung. Da das Buch zwar sehr gut ist, der Titelheld jedoch alles andere als angenehm, war ich froh, dass es das Hörbuch gibt. Mir persönlich ist das bei schweren Texten eine Erleichterung. Und tatsächlich schafft Hans Korte es, der andauernden scheinheiligen moralischen Empörung des Ekels Spott und Witz einzuhauchen. Wenn er Diederich hysterisch zetern lässt, konnte ich teilweise sogar lachen. Zum Lachen ist an diesem Roman natürlich leider gar nichts. Heinrich Mann hat das Spiessbürgertum hervorragend beschrieben. Den Lebenslauf eines Widerlings zu lesen, ist trotzdem eine Qual. Also, kennen sollte man das Buch schon. Aber eine Freude ist es halt nicht. Ein auf erschreckende Art geniales Meisterwerk. Die Scheinheiligkeit bleibt unausrottbar... Igitt!

(Die CDs sind in Abschnitte unterteilt. Auf CD 8 oder 9 werden ein paar Sätze doppelt gespielt. Das Booklet enthält eine damalige Buchkritik von Tucholsky.)

FotisK says

"Ο νομοταγής πολίτης" στα Ελληνικά?, εκδ?σεις Οδυσσ?ας

Broadsnark says

I would have given this book three and a half stars if I could of. It was a bit slow at times. It was written in 1918. It is the profile of a bougie german who managed to justify doing all sorts of horrible things. And it is a profile of Germany before the wars. Its amazing how little has changed. Still plagued with materialism, militarism, classism, religion, sexism, and reverence for authority. Its like only the fashions have changed in a century.

Lucy Barnhouse says

Wickedly funny, unflinchingly dark satire. Mann's gift for the telling detail is unerring, and his eye for the tragically absurd is sharp. Among other things, Der Untertan is a delicious parody of the "Bildungsroman," as we follow the protagonist from childhood to maturity and see him become increasingly determined, and increasingly powerful, without becoming less narrow-minded, cowardly, or unconsciously hypocritical. The near-explosive unease of a rigidly structured and rapidly changing society is brilliantly evoked.

Franziska says

Ein bewusstseinsschärfendes Zeitzeugnis und ein Mahnmal deutscher Geschichte.
