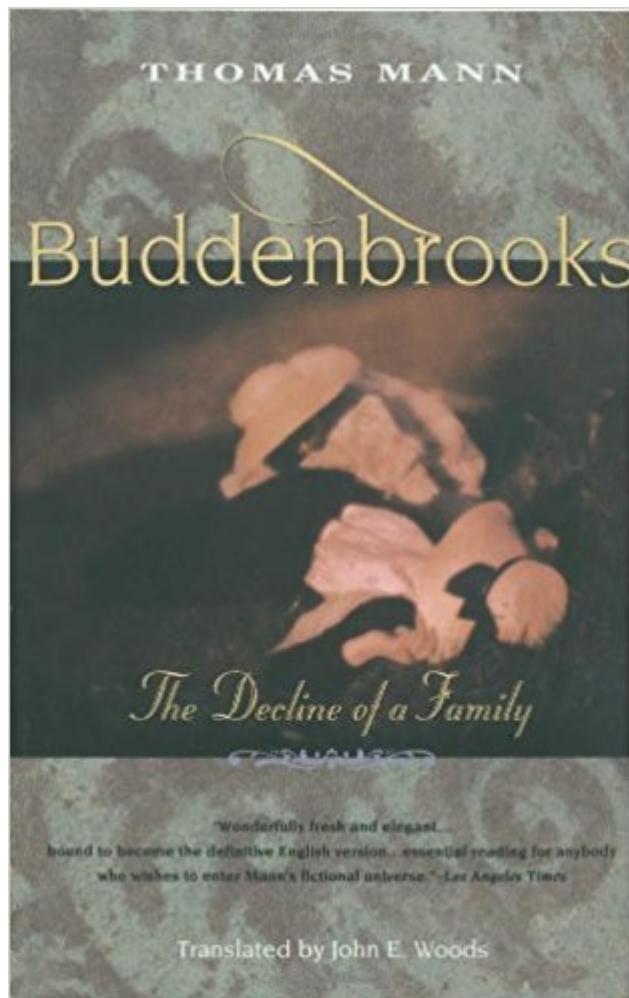


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Buddenbrooks: The Decline Of A Family



Translated by John E. Woods



Synopsis

A Major Literary Event: a brilliant new translation of Thomas Mann's first great novel, one of the two for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1929. *Buddenbrooks*, first published in Germany in 1900, when Mann was only twenty-five, has become a classic of modern literature -- the story of four generations of a wealthy bourgeois family in northern Germany. With consummate skill, Mann draws a rounded picture of middle-class life: births and christenings; marriages, divorces, and deaths; successes and failures. These commonplace occurrences, intrinsically the same, vary slightly as they recur in each succeeding generation. Yet as the Buddenbrooks family eventually succumbs to the seductions of modernity -- seductions that are at variance with its own traditions -- its downfall becomes certain. In immensity of scope, richness of detail, and fullness of humanity, *Buddenbrooks* surpasses all other modern family chronicles; it has, indeed, proved a model for most of them. Judged as the greatest of Mann's novels by some critics, it is ranked as among the greatest by all. Thomas Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Buddenbrooks is the most autobiographical of Mann's works--and the one that most of all, earned Mann the Nobel Prize for Literature. Mann grew up in a prosperous Luebeck family, son of a merchant father who died in 1891. The dissolution of the family firm, the artistic, Southern Creole background of Mann's mother and the struggle between the materialistic merchant side and the wild, artistic side are the backdrop for a deep regret, maybe even self-recrimination, for the family's

ultimate decline. The family line ends, in Buddenbrooks with Hanno, son of successful and foppish Senator Thomas Buddenbrooks. When Thomas dies, the family firm is broken up and the family starts the deep decline already in process. Hanno's red-haired, violin-playing mother couldn't care less. ("I live for Art" would seem to have been written with her in mind.) Hanno's aunt Toni is left to mourn the family's end--though Toni's own earnest efforts to hold up family honor also ended in disaster. Some declines, apparently, are natural and cannot be prevented. Interestingly, Mann puts a bit of himself in Toni as well as Hanno; he worked for a fire insurance company as did Toni's luckless son-in-law, he moved to Munich as Toni did in Buddenbrooks. The other characters, Thomas's ne'er-do-well brother Christian, and especially the grandparents are beautifully drawn and developed. This is one of the best family chronicles written, and even if you don't love "great literature" you will enjoy this book. It's been filmed as well as a mini-series, but frankly, nothing comes up to reading this for yourself. I couldn't put this novel down once I started it. And it is a hefty book, though not the longest by Mann.

This is a beautiful narrative, which will stay with you forever, if not in detail then in the musical arc of its composition. The book is about a family, the Buddenbrooks, who are wealthy but not aristocrats, who have as their solid moral foundation the maintenance of the family business. The degree to which each member of the family supports and conforms to this moral code, and the degree to which their personal motives and the turns of fate conflict with them, determines the level of tension at any given point in the narrative. The narrative moves through the first third of the book in a series of sometimes startlingly short chapters, introducing the characters and the musical threads that will repeat and vary throughout the rest of the novel. It's actually quite refreshing to read, not heavy at all. But the psychological depth is also not there, except in the reader's probable discomfort with the moral code being expressed. In the second third, after the death of the pious and morally-firm Jean, the first son Thomas assumes control of the family, and the narrative begins to reflect the deep dissatisfaction with the family values that Thomas suppresses for the rest of his life. Thomas's sister, Tony, and his brother, Christian, provide the extremes of adaptation to un-felt values. Tony begins her theme in a Romeo and Juliet story where Juliet accepts her fate and marries Paris, finding in this surrender the beauty of piety, as exemplified by her father. With great exuberance she literally writes her theme in the family history (a journal/scrapbook). Anyone who does not conform to the moral code of the family is evil (sometimes real, sometimes not), and she finds redemption and purity in expressing her hatred of this evil.

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