



The Tables of the Law

Thomas Mann

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"Brilliant... a little masterpiece."—*Chicago Sun-Times*

"Beautiful... one of the best short novels he has written."—*New York Times Book Review*

"Can rank with the best of Mann's writing."—*The Boston Globe*

"Magnificent... one of the greatest bits of writing which one of the world's greatest writers has ever given us."—*Chicago Herald-American*

"Brilliant... one of those splendid novelettes which in this reviewer's opinion represent the very essence of Mr. Mann's literary art."—*Saturday Review of Literature*

"Thomas Mann wrote this engaging novella in a few weeks in 1943. (The new translation by Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, which is brisk and direct, is a welcome replacement of the fussier and less accurate English version done by Helen Lowe-Porter for the original publication.)... What is especially noteworthy about *The Tables of the Law* among Mann's fictions is its playfulness." —Robert Alter, *London Review of Books*

"His senses were hot, and so he yearned for spirituality, purity, and holiness—the invisible, which seemed to him spiritual, holy, and pure."

Thus Thomas Mann introduces Moses in *The Tables of the Law*, the Nobel Prize winner's retelling of the prophet's life. Invited in 1943 to write this story as a defense of the Decalogue, Mann reveals how strange and forbidding Moses' task was. As "the Lawgiver"—endowed with the wrists and hands of a stonemason—engraves the tablets, so he hews the souls of his people:

"Into the stone of the mountain I carved the ABC of human behavior, but it shall also be carved into your flesh and blood, Israel..."

Mann's tale of the ethical founding and molding of a people sharply rebukes the Nazis for their intended destruction of the moral code set down in the Ten Commandments. But does his famous irony and authorial license mock or enhance the Biblical account of the shaping of the Jewish people? You know the Bible story. Now read Mann's version—it will grip you anew.

Newly translated from the German by Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann.

"To present the foundation of law for half the world is no simple task. *The Tables of the Law* is a historical title following Moses as he is tasked by God to present the ten commandments, providing a human and much different insight on the role of Moses as the Prophet of God. Expertly translated, *The Tables of the Law* is a solid addition to any literary fiction collection."—*Midwest Book Review*

Thomas Mann (1875–1955) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. His many works include *Buddenbrooks*, *The Magic Mountain*, and *Confessions of Felix Krull*.

Marion Faber and **Stephen Lehmann** co-authored a biography of the pianist Rudolf Serkin and have together translated Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*.

Michael Wood is the Charles Barnwell Straut Class of 1923 Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Princeton University.

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Courtney O'Donnell:

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