

Thomas Mann, Monthly discussion groups—December

The Magic Mountain, chapter 4

1. Hans Castorp meets a wide panorama of characters during his stay at the sanatorium, and the reader needs to keep everyone straight. What forms of speech, gestures, details of appearance, preoccupations, etc. does Mann's narrator repeat in describing the following denizens of the sanatorium?
 - Joachim Ziemssen
 - Dr. Behrens
 - Dr. Krokowski
 - Herr Settembrini
 - Marusya
 - Clavdia Chauchat

Critics often claim that Mann was influenced by Richard Wagner's use of *leitmotif* ("a short, recurring musical phrase associated with a particular person, place, or idea"—Wikipedia). Besides helping the reader keep the characters straight, what functions might Mann's repetitive descriptions serve in his narrative?

2. Withing days of his arrival at the Alpine sanatorium in Davos-Dorf, Switzerland, Hans begins to feel ill.
 - What are his symptoms? Does the trajectory of the narrative lead the reader to ask: Are his symptoms caused by overwork? by the change in altitude between Hamburg, Germany (a port city) and the Swiss Alps? by anemia?
 - Is the reader led to ask if his symptoms are caused by psychological shock?
 - What sights, sounds, smells, and stories of sickness and death assault Hans's sensibilities? How does he react?
 - How has the sanatorium routine altered his sense of time? (e.g. See the section entitled "The Thermometer.")
 - What troubles him about Joachim? What does he find shocking about Madame Chauchat? Why does he find the "bad Russians" so scandalous?
 - When does the reader begin to realize that, along with all these other provocations to illness, Hans suffers from tuberculosis?
3. Hans becomes obsessed with Clavdia Chauchat ("hot cat").
 - How does this obsession erupt from the powerful emotions that Hans experienced as an adolescent?
 - How does the story of Hans's obsession reimagine themes Mann had broached in "Tonio Krüger"? in "Death in Venice"?
 - What conflicts does Hans experience in his obsessive observations of Madame Chauchat's body? What kind of relationship does he want with her?
 - Do Hans's experiences enact the theories Dr. Krokowski propounds in his shocking lecture on "love," which is really a lecture on Freud's theories of the Id, the Superego,

and the processes by which sexual repression produces physical symptoms? Is Hans sick, in part, because he is sexually repressed?

- What do Hans's meditations on "honor" and "disgrace" have to do with his obsession with Madame Chauchat? Which does he prefer—honor or disgrace?
4. While Hans is assaulted by these new bodily and emotional sensations and experiences, his mind is challenged to rethink old assumptions and confront startling, new ideas.
- Herr Settembrini confesses to being a humanist and a "pedagogue," that is a teacher (with the connotation of being "pedantic").
 - What political views does the Italian espouse? How do the views he shares with his revolutionary forebearers contrast to the views of Hans's German forebearers?
 - Who are Settembrini's cultural enemies?
 - What views of literature does he espouse, in contrast to the brewer who had dismissed literature as mere "beautiful characters"?
 - Why is Herr Settembrini suspicious of the powers of music?
 - How does he expand Hans's vision of European history and culture as it has developed from the Enlightenment to the eve of World War I?
 - What does Hans think of this critical pedagogue: his thread-bare clothes, his extravagant manner of speech, his love of gossip, his suspicion of Drs. Behrens and Krokowsky?
5. What does Hans learn about the business side of the sanatorium in his conversations with Joachim and Herr Settembrini? Is there any suggestion that the sanatorium personnel have other interests besides curing tuberculosis patients? What interests?