

Thomas Mann, Monthly discussion groups—February

The Magic Mountain, chapter 6: from “Changes” through “An Attack Repulsed”

1. Central to this section of the novel are the questions of who stays and who leaves the sanatorium.
 - Why does Joachim decide to leave the sanatorium without the approval of Dr. Behrens?
 - Why does Hans decide to stay at the sanatorium despite Dr. Behrens’s permission to leave?
2. Also central to this section is the clash between the ideological positions of Settembrini and his Jesuit neighbor, Naphta.
 - Can you identify the most important ideological differences between these two intellectual sparring partners? What does each represent?
 - How do their arguments bring the current political climate of Europe (in 1908) to bear on the events of the novel: the turmoil inside the Ottoman Empire, the ambitions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the 1905 Russian Revolution, etc.?
 - What does Hans know about the state of European politics?
 - What does Joachim know? How might these currents and clashes affect his return to life as a German soldier?
3. Does Hans’s new-found proclivity for “playing king,” for thinking things over during his solitary walks or rest cure, have anything to do with his decision to stay at the sanatorium?
 - How is Hans continuing to develop his scientific and philosophical education in this section?
 - Why did Settembrini not want to introduce him to Naphta?
 - What happens when Hans tries to participate in Settembrini’s and Naphta’s debates?
 - Why does Hans show such indifference to the news and gossip that his visiting uncle, Consul Tienappel, brings from “the flatlands”?
4. What actually happened between Hans and Clavdia Chauchat on Mardi Gras night?
 - Why does the narrator occlude the hour(s?) between Clavdia’s good-bye at the end of chapter 5 and Joachim’s hearing Hans’s late arrival in his neighboring room? Amid the euphemistic and indirect references, what clues does the narrator offer to the nature of Hans’s and Clavdia’s encounter? What does this brief encounter have to do with Hans’s decision to stay at the sanatorium?
 - Why does Joachim feel betrayed by Hans after hearing his late return on Mardi Gras night and later seeing Hans’s enter Dr. Krokowski’s office? How does Hans’s behavior with Clavdia contrast to Joachim’s behavior with Marusya?
 - What is the significance of Clavdia’s gift of her x-ray to Hans? How does this object relate to Hans’s earlier scientific research on the body as the locus of passion that leads to both life and death? What might the gift signify for Clavdia?
 - How is the reader to understand the description of the love-sick man from Mannheim? In what way is he a foil for Hans? (“A foil is a character who contrasts with another character, typically, a character who contrasts with the protagonist, in order to better

highlight or differentiate certain qualities of the protagonist.” -- Wikipedia) Is Mann highlighting the contrast between Hans and the Mannheimer, or their similarity? To what effect?

5. Is Hans sick? Has he ever been sick?

- Why does Dr. Behrens give him permission to leave, despite his temperature? What seems to be the cause of his persistent, fluctuating high temperature?
- The visit of Consul Tienappel, Hans’s uncle, is prompted by the family’s suspicions about Hans’s sickness. How might the uncle’s own experiences at the sanatorium cast doubt on the extent and nature of Hans’s sickness?
- Is the humor in the uncle’s visit directed at the “self-assurance” and “social community” created by the sanatorium patients, at the clueless uncle from “the flatlands,” at Hans as a malingerer, at . . . ?
- Why does the uncle’s sudden departure make Hans feel that he has finally won his freedom? Freedom from what? Freedom to do what?