

Thomas Mann, Three meetings discussion group—May

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?

From “Operationes Spirituales” through “A Good Soldier”

1. The section entitled “Operationes Spirituales” consists primarily of lengthy debates between Settembrini and Naphta. Since both men are suffering from advanced tuberculosis, it is not altogether surprising that they share an intense interest in questions of sickness and health, the body and the spirit—interests which, however, diverge into fierce debates about corporal punishment, the death penalty, cremation, and even torture.
 - In relation to these themes, what is each man’s view of the body in relation to spirit? How does each define “spirit”? Why does Naphta contemptuously accuse Settembrini of being “bourgeois”? What does that term mean to Naphta?
 - Settembrini’s grandfather was a revolutionary during the Italian Risorgimento, while Naphta’s father was a *shochet*, a Kosher Jewish butcher; Settembrini became a mason, while Naphta became a Jesuit novice. How does each man’s background influence his ideological position? Are their positions internally consistent? What do their debates suggest about European intellectual thought on the eve of World War I?
 - Why do both men seek out an audience for their intellectual duels? Hans knows that Settembrini has taken him on as one of nature’s “problem children,” whom he wants to educate. Also, Settembrini told Hans that he seeks out Naphta to sharpen his wits in the absence of other intellectual company. But what does Naphta want—both in seeking out Hans and in sparring publicly with Settembrini?
 - Spiritual operations are understood to be the conscious work that a devout person undertakes in order to bring him/her closer to the divine. Through prayer, meditation, reading of sacred texts, and ritual, the devout person seeks spiritual transformation. Who in this section is engaged in “Operationes Spirituales”? Who is capable of spiritual transformation?
2. Why does Hans decide to learn to ski and then, against doctors’ orders, go off alone into the snow?

- Having been so content with his “horizontal life” at the sanatorium, why does he embark on such a demanding physical adventure, alone? What is he seeking?
 - How does his decision to defy the rules, to “let go,” relate to his relations with Joachim, the disciplined soldier, and with Madame Chauchat, the careless Siren?
 - How does Hans’s harrowing experience in the snow embody the abstract debates between Settembrini and Naphta that have so bewildered him?
 - What is the significance of Hans’s delirious dream of a paradise of health and happiness, undergirded by the horrific cannibalism of children? How might such a nightmare arise from echoes of the debates between Settembrini and Naphta?
 - Does Hans’s skiing adventure represent a turning point in his development? If so, what has he learned? How might he be changed? If not, what has getting lost in the snow, going around in a circle, nearly freezing to death, having a brilliant realization, then forgetting it—what has this experience meant to him?
3. What is the significance of the title, “A Good Soldier,” for the section that narrates Joachim’s return to die at the sanatorium?
- Joachim yearned to remain in the “flatlands” to participate in his regiment’s planned war games. Given the Prologue’s claim that this novel is old-fashioned because it tells of a world before the great transformation of history, why is this detail about Joachim’s aborted plans ominous?
 - How has Hans’s relation to Joachim changed? What does Hans feel when his cousin returns? How does Joachim’s presence affect Hans’s experience of Settembrini’s and Naphta’s continued sparring (now over freemasonry, Virgil, public education, etc.)?
 - Earlier Hans had rebelled against the sanatorium’s measures for concealing the evidence of ever-present death. In his conversations with Dr. Behrens about Joachim’s illness and with Joachim himself, how does Hans now deal with the decline and death of his cousin?
 - Why do Marusya and Madame Chauchat reappear at this point in the novel? What effects do Marusya’s actual presence and Madame Chauchat’s possible return have on Joachim and Hans?
 - The concept of “a good death” was important in the Christian tradition. In fact, the death bed was sometimes seen as a stage on which the dying demonstrated that s/he was prepared to end this life (by saying good-byes and resolving earthly affairs), and that s/he was assured of the soul’s salvation despite the body’s decline (by suffering without complaint). How would you characterize the representation of Joachim’s death? Is Mann here imagining a modern “good death,” or does he emphasize needless waste and loss, or . . . ?

The Magic Mountain, chapter 7: from “A Stroll by the Shore” through “Mynheer Peeperkorn (conclusion)”

1. Whereas earlier in the novel, the narrator marked the passage of time by seasons (despite the variability of the weather), by holidays, by Dr. Behrens’s projections of the duration of treatment—in “A Stroll by the Shore” the narrator instead declares his “foolish” intent “to narrate time.”
 - Addressing the reader directly as the author, he explains how a novelist must manage two forms of time—the time that passes within the created fiction and the time required to

narrate the fiction. He even goes further to contrast the management of time in his own art to the way in which music “measures and divides time, making it suddenly diverting and precious,” and the way in which a work of visual art is “suddenly, brilliantly present.” Why, at this point in the story, does Mann meditate on the aesthetics of time, then announce that he is writing a “time novel”?

- Between Joachim’s death and Madame Chauchat’s return to the sanatorium with Peeperkorn, how much time has elapsed? Does Hans know? What has happened to his sense of time?
- Why does Mann liken this period to “A Stroll by the Shore”? Does Hans’s changing experience of time clarify the significance of the novel’s title, “The Magic Mountain”?

2. At the beginning of the novel’s final chapter, Mann brings a new, larger-than-life patient, Pieter (Mynheer) Peeperkorn, to the sanatorium. What makes Peeperkorn such a “personality,” capable of dominating any room that he enters? What descriptive motifs does Mann employ to create Peeperkorn’s aura of dominance?
 - How does this new figure in Hans’s life contrast to Settembrini and Naphta, who have been vying to influence Hans, one of “life’s problem children”? In each of these father figures, in addition to his cousin Joachim, Mann presents to Hans and the reader opposing definitions of “humanity” and of appropriate action in the world. How does Peeperkorn’s “personality” and philosophy of life differ from Settembrini’s, Naphta’s, and Joachim’s? What, to him, is the greatest sin? Why is Hans so taken with him?
 - At times the narrator describes Peeperkorn as “a dancing heathen priest” or as Silenus, the fat, intoxicated tutor of Dionysus, the god of wine (cf. the Silenus figure in “Death in Venice”). At other times, the narrator emphasizes the terror in his countenance, describing him as the “Man of Sorrows” from Isaiah, whom Christians read as a prefiguration of the Christ. Moreover, Peeperkorn compares himself (albeit ironically) to the suffering Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his arrest. How does Mann incorporate both these pagan and Christian elements into Peeperkorn’s “personality” and philosophy of life?
 - During the excursion to the waterfall, Peeperkorn insists that everyone enjoy the lavish picnic he has provided while sitting beside the torrent, whose din of rushing water prevents anyone from hearing his speech and toast. How is this party a fitting end for a man with his philosophy of life? Why does he commit suicide the night following this excursion?
3. What do we learn about the character of the mysterious Madame Chauchat in this section of the novel?
 - Why has she become Peeperkorn’s “traveling companion”? Does she love him?
 - Why does she return to the sanatorium, bringing Peeperkorn, who is suffering from a tropical fever, not tuberculosis, with her?
 - How does she feel when Hans puts aside his jealousy and befriends Peeperkorn?
 - How are we to understand the bonds that are forged between Hans and Madame Chauchat in relation to Peeperkorn, then between Peeperkorn and Hans in relation to Madame Chauchat? How does Mann define the “love” on which these bonds are based?

- Does Hans (or the reader, for that matter) ever comprehend the motivations of Madame Chauchat?
4. Peeperkorn is a fantastically wealthy Dutch coffee planter from Java. Even his name conjures up the history of the Dutch spice islands in the East Indies. We have discussed how Settembrini's and Naphta's debates bring into the novel the ferment of European intellectual life on the verge of World War I. How does Pieter Peeperkorn further contextualize the novel?
- How did the colonial aspirations of European nations contribute to the outbreak of World War I?
 - How does Mann describe Peeperkorn's Malay servant? How is the reader to understand the stereotypical descriptions of his appearance, mannerisms, and devotion to his master? In creating this character does Mann exhibit the typical European "orientalism," or is Mann satirizing the "orientalism" of the other characters? (*"Orientalism, a term popularized by Edward Said in 1978, describes a deeply rooted Eurocentric, stereotypical, and often prejudiced Western depiction of Eastern cultures—particularly the Middle East and Asia—as inferior, exotic, 'other,' or dangerous. It functions as an ideological tool to bolster Western superiority, serving colonialism"*—Wikipedia.)

The Magic Mountain, chapter 7: from "The Great Stupor" to the end

1. Why does Hans not leave the sanatorium after Peeperkorn's suicide and Clavdia's departure?
 - Does the status of his health require further treatment?
 - After having educated himself in human physiology, biology, botany, astronomy, etc.; after having listened to Settembrini's and Naphta's interminable philosophical debates; and after having dedicated hours to "playing king"—what is the significance of Hans's obsession with solitaire?
 - Among the pastimes of the other denizens of the sanatorium, the narrator lists modern technological advances (e.g. photography) and plans for social progress (e.g. recycling paper), along with pursuits of dubious value (e.g. attempts learn Esperanto and to solve the ancient mathematical puzzle of "squaring the circle"). How do these pastimes illustrate "The Great Stupor," into which the sanatorium (and perhaps Europe?) has fallen in the years immediately preceding World War I?
2. Hans is not only freed from his obsession with solitaire by the installation of a gramophone, but he now becomes enthralled by the power of music. How does the narrator represent this enchantment? As a sublime emotional experience? As potentially dangerous to the psyche? As both?
 - How does each of Hans's favorite pieces, which the narrator describes in detail, resonate with key experiences and/or relationships in Hans's life? Below you will find links to performances of each:
 - Verdi, Aida, Act 4, tomb scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzD5mafrHZo>
 - Debussy, Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_7loz-HWUM
 - Bizet, Carmen, Act 2,

- Duet, Carmen and José: https://www.google.com/search?scv=ffb1a34a2d49d962&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS957US958&udm=7&xsrf=ANbL-n5itF83_DCIXoNh4dFos3O0aa4DpQ:1777155381683&q=Carmen+act+2+duet&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjipfHZg4qUAXVWoisGHVxIMDQQ8ccDKAJ6BAghEAQ&biw=2188&bih=1109&dpr=2 - fpstate=ive&ip=1&vld=cid:7c5b47a1,vid:9KtOo-4_Tb0,st:0
- José's aria: [https://www.opera-arias.com/bizet/carmen/la-fleur-que-tu-m'avais-jetee-\(flower-song\)/#google_vignette](https://www.opera-arias.com/bizet/carmen/la-fleur-que-tu-m'avais-jetee-(flower-song)/#google_vignette)
- Gounod, *Faust*, Act 2, Valentin's prayer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7WOg6D9kH4>
- Schubert, "Der Lindenbaum": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V14UkfMyPkU>

The Linden Tree

English translation © Richard Wigmore

By the well, before the gate,
stands a linden tree;
in its shade I dreamt
many a sweet dream.

In its bark I carved
many a word of love;
in joy and sorrow
I was ever drawn to it.

Today, too, I had to walk
past it at dead of night;
even in the darkness
I closed my eyes.

And its branches rustled
as if they were calling to me:
'Come to me, friend,
here you will find rest.'

The cold wind blew
straight into my face,
my hat flew from my head;
I did not turn back.

Now I am many hours' journey
from that place;
yet I still hear the rustling:
'There you would find rest.'

- How do these pieces continue to resonate with Hans's future life and experiences, even beyond the safe confines of the sanatorium?
3. How does Krakowski, the proponent of psychoanalysis, reconcile his belief in the medium Elly Brand, his organization of séances, and even his efforts to summon a spirit from the dead with his scientific world view?

- Does this eruption of the supernatural into the orderly world of the sanatorium, which is dedicated to the latest medical treatment of tuberculosis, call into question the European valorization of human Reason as an adequate instrument for understanding Reality? Are both Reason and Reality insufficient terms for analyzing what occurs in Krakowski's sessions with Elly Brand?
 - Or are these strange goings-on just a "cunning fraud," as Settembrini believes? Do they have anything in common with Cipolla's performance in "Mario and the Magician"?
 - Why does Hans agree to participate in a séance to summon Joachim from the dead? How are we to understand his vision of his dead cousin? Are we to believe that Elly, as a medium ("an individual held to be a channel of communication between the earthly world and a world of spirits") actually summoned him from the dead? Or perhaps has Valentin's prayer from Gounod's *Faust* conjured Hans's vision of his beloved cousin?
 - Does Joachim's odd physical appearance have any significance?
 - Why does Hans whisper a plea for forgiveness, abruptly terminate the séance by turning on the light, and exit, menacing Krakowski?
4. Most historians see the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand by a young Serbian nationalist in 1914 as merely the spark that set off the powder keg that Europe had become. Nations had polarized into alliances, rivals spent vast sums of national treasure to build and arm their militaries, and "the great powers" were all scrambling to acquire colonies in Africa and Asia. If, as we have discussed, the Davos-Dorf sanatorium is a microcosm of Europe between 1907 and 1914, how should we read the outbreak among the patients of "A love of quarrels. Acute petulance. Nameless impatience. A universal penchant for nasty verbal exchanges and outbursts of rage, even for fisticuffs"?
- How does this eruption of the irrational in the chapter entitled "The Great Petulance" parallel the eruption of the supernatural in the previous chapter entitled "Highly Questionable"? How do both these developments call into question the illusion of a stable, orderly, rational world?
 - Mann's narrator characterizes some of the patients' quarrels as comical (e.g. "the Polish affair of honor"), but others as horrific (e.g. the fist fight between Wiedemann, the anti-Semite, and Sonnenschein, the Jew). How might these characterizations reflect aspects of a cultural crisis that explodes into World War I?
 - Was it inevitable that Settembrini's and Naptha's philosophical sparring would result in an actual duel? What is the spark that ignites the duel? Why can't Hans stop this insanity? How does the way each philosopher conducts himself at the duel reflect his philosophical position? How does Naptha's suicide differ from Peeperkorn's?
5. The last chapter titled "Thunderbolt" clarifies the enigma of the novel's title: the outbreak of World War I "is the thunderbolt that bursts open the magic mountain and rudely sets its entranced sleeper outside the gates." From a life of five lavish meals a day, a daily rest cure in the "horizontal position," and interludes of "playing king," Hans is thrust onto a World War I battlefield. Why is it a great irony of destiny that, in the end, it is "ordinary," "mediocre" Hans who leaves the sanatorium to become a soldier?
- Where does the narrator position himself and the reader in relation to the horrific scenes of battle that he describes? Why are we so positioned?
 - What is the significance of Hans's singing "Der Lindenbaum" as he dodges bombs and staggers across a battlefield littered with bodies?

- In the final sentences of the novel, the narrator reminds us that Hans, while “he ‘played king,’ . . . saw the intimation of a dream of love rising up out of death and this carnal body.” What gave Hans this intimation and other “Adventures in flesh and spirit, which enhanced and heightened [his] ordinariness”?