

Thomas Mann, Every other month discussion groups—April

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 . . . ?