Thomas Mann, Every other month discussion groups—June

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 Peepperkorn 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.)*

<u>The Magic Mountain</u>, chapter 7: from "The Great Stupor" to the end

1. Why does Hans not leave the sanitorium 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 Naptha'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?sca_esv=ffb1a34a2d49d962&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS957US958&udm=7&sxsrf=ANbL-n5itF83_DCIXoNh4dFos3O0aa4DpQ:1777155381683&q=Carmen+act+2+duet&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjipfHZg4qUAxVWoisGHVxlMDQQ8ccDKAJ6BAghEAQ&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
    - Gounod, Faust, Act 2, Valentin's prayer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7WOg6D9kH4
    - Schubert, "Der Lindenbaum": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vl4UkfMyPkU

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 sanitorium 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 sanitorium 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"?