

The Dialectics of Health and Disease in the Magic Mountain

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to concentrate on the dialectics of health and disease in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. It will be a concentrated reading of Mann's novel to argue that the dialectics of health and disease work to bring out the culmination of thought. In this peak mystical state, transformation is innate, which can bridge negotiations and collapse boundaries. Within this world of negotiations and collapsing boundaries Mann has seen a connection between art and disease. This relation between art and disease is going to be analysed in this article to understand Mann's take on the dialectics of disease and health.

KEYWORDS: Dialectics, Health, Disease, transformation, negotiation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach. To delve deep into the novel chosen for this research article a descriptive and analytical method had to be used.

Objective:

1. The primary objective of the article is to concentrate on the dialectics of health and disease as explored by Mann in his novel *The Magic Mountain*.
2. To explore Mann's understanding of life, disease and death.
3. To highlight his view on art and disease.
4. To explore this novel for understanding his take on societal change and inner peace.

INTRODUCTION

It is T.S. Eliot who said our civilisation comprehended great variety and complexity. Art thereby became a symbol that grew enigmatic, obscure, and labyrinthine, dealing with the crisis of that time and exploring the mystery of human behaviour. Thomas Mann, born in 1857 in Lübeck, is one such man of letters who has upheld the new sensibility in a very subtle manner. His first major book *Buddenbrook* came out in 1901 and his last, *The Confession of Felix Krull* in 1954. Mann's lifetime therefore covers the growth of Germany. Mann cultivated modern ideas and also witnessed what modern ideas had brought to the world. Mann, a German conservative is transformed into a spokesman of modern humanism dealing with some troubling ideas, which also run through his novel, *The Magic Mountain*. It is seen that throughout his work, Mann links the artist and the world in a very unique fashion. He explores the external and the internal world very systematically and does not hesitate to call the artist a 'diseased' person. However it is seen that here the hero of *The Magic Mountain* is not an artist, he is very much an ordinary person who ultimately penetrates into the decaying world and is engulfed by disease. He too became a part of this framework. Therefore this paper is an attempt to highlight Mann's view on art and disease while exploring the dialectics of health and disease.

Analysis:

In examining Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, one encounters a profound preoccupation with death that permeates the novel's thematic and philosophical dimensions. The intensity of this fascination can be further illuminated through a comparison with Mann's other works, particularly *Death in Venice*, where death similarly emerges as a significant motif and an object of contemplation.

Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) is one of the famous works of 20th-century literature. He tells the story of an acclaimed author Gustav Von Aschenbach who breaks away from normal life and heads towards the decadent city of Venice. Upon arriving in Venice, he becomes enamoured with a teenage Polish boy named Tadzio. Even after the outbreak of the plague, he refuses to leave Venice. Instead, he lingers on to catch another glimpse of Tadzio. He even goes for a haircut and a makeover to attract Tadzio. Finally, he accepts his death as a romantic fate. Here Mann deals with the fascination of death, the triumph of disorder over order and the conflict between art and artist. Mann's artists, as portrayed in *Death in Venice* are drawn towards death and decay not because they live in a world of historical decline but because they live amid the quarrel between romantic and classical art. And

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need to see the dark side of life to know what life is in scientific and spiritual form. Thus Mann shows the hero, an artist who lingered on, unwilling to save his life and deliberately plunged into the diseased world and sought love. This life and love existed in the face of decay and disease. And what an artist can do is to present this form of world, a world which he himself is a part of and does not or perhaps cannot escape. Similarly in the novel *The Magic Mountain*, Mann introduces us to the hero Hans Castorp, a young engineer who like Aschenbach, goes from one world to another. Hans is moving from Hamburg to Davos simply to pay a visit to his sick cousin Joachim and he never thought that his three-week visit would be prolonged to seven long years. And during his seven-year stay, Hans encountered a series of changes and came in contact with different ideas. But the readers remain unaware of Hans's decision, the idea which he finally upheld. He encountered a world which separated him from the familiar universe. This can be well seen in the chapter 'Arrival' when Joachim said - "They make pretty free with human beings' idea of time up here, you wouldn't believe it. Three weeks are just like a day to them. You'll learn all about it. One's idea gets changed" (Pg 7) - Soon Hans was introduced to the director of the sanatorium, Dr Hofrat Behren and his assistant Dr Krokowski who is a Psycho-analytic Hans at first was reluctant about Dr Krokowski but gradually he attended the lecture of this doctor who talked about love which take the shape of disease. Hans gradually finds two reliable advisors during his stay - Herr Settembrini who upheld the virtue of liberalism and bourgeois progress and another, Naptha who rejected individualism and was radical. Its Settembrini who tells him that he appears to have an instinct for disease and spirit should protest in pride against the dictates of the body. Hans struggling to understand the conflicting views of life presented by Settembrini and Naptha engages in self-destruction; this act is highlighted in the episode of Snow and we see Hans without the permission of the sanatorium authority, ski down the mountain and get trapped in the snow. With this moment of realisation, Mann has created a classical vision of harmony smeared in horror and human sacrifice. It is interesting to see how the writer has successfully created a unified vision of life and death. With situations like this, he often tries to draw the conclusion that it is necessary to keep faith in death. Death seems to be an essential part of existence and self-realisation. It is more like learning the art of detachment. A withdrawal which is essential for life. This is the reason why Pedro J cachopo said, "The Magic Mountain is anything but a celebration of serene detachment or contemplative withdrawal" (Pedro J. C.)

Mann's fascination with disease and death is deeply rooted in his concern about health and specifically in his idea of health. These ideas are interconnected which is used to create a collective whole. Disease, health and death are not explored to get a sense of urgency rather these are used to dig deep into the human capacity to renew their lives outside the darkness of impossibility. Highlighting this aspect of the novel On TML has added "Through Hans Castorp, T. Mann explores the potential for personal and societal renewal." (O TML) This renewal is expected in an atmosphere where hope and health are represented in a negative light. Thus Hans at first thought that he was healthy. However, he was surprised to see that among the disorders the inhabitants managed to have an erotic life. Hans thought himself to be someone detached from them which actually was not so. It is evident from Hans's own reply to Dr Krokowski - "Thank god, I am healthy", Krokowski smiled and said "Then you are a phenomenon worth studying" (Mann, Pg 16) Slowly Hans became one of them. He keeps having feverish reactions, troubled dreams, a serious cold and a troubling nosebleed. With the progression of the narrative, it appears that these are not external infections but an inward condition and are affecting his own feelings. He gradually becomes a patient. He approached Behren with increasing symptoms and it was Dr Behren who convinced him by saying that the mountain is not only good against disease but it also brings latent weakness to the surface and helps to break it. Through such conversations, it is reflected that, this mountain is a means for bringing out the hidden weaknesses to the surface. So the importance is given to understanding what is hidden within rather than what you see around you. To make this point vital we as readers are given a glimpse of the X-ray room where Dr Behren shows Hans the bony structure of female arms and a pulsing bag of a human heart. It appears to be a real journey inside our body. This journey inside the human body is so fascinating that Hans went for the X-ray of his own hand. This whole episode is vital in understanding the truth that the bone structure beneath the flesh is the ultimate reality. Once we are aware of this structure beneath the flesh we are aware of death. It becomes evident that everyone is progressing towards the end or death. Here Hans understood the reality that the skeleton is the real self and we are heading towards death. This is the reason why we find Hans keeping the X-ray reports of Claudia as a token of love. It is seen that Hans is accustomed to illness and death around him. During the course of his stay at the sanatorium, he absorbed the quality of a diseased person, he became one of them. Like Aschenbach, he stayed back in that unfamiliar world making no effort to escape. Staying at this centre he is always on a quest to understand the world beyond this just like a true artist. He realised that the realistic aim often quarrels with artistic desire, Order quarrels with anarchy, the intellect with passion and Vitality with disease. The idea of death has always existed but we make and remake relations with it. Death makes us look at the world in a different way. We become capable of understanding the fact that one needs to be infected to know the healthy world. One needs to have Vitality, a process of enlightenment, good days, the healthy days but at the same time there is a need for destruction, disease, to taste the forbidden. Mann has clearly shown that the substance of creation is chaos and this chaos can destroy the creation. With it goes the inner conflict of the artist between the need for order and reason and for erotic and dangerous knowledge just like Hans in the sanatorium.

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CONCLUSION

It is an age which offers no satisfying answer to many eternal questions. Time seems to put on a silence regarding many debates, ideas of life. In such a world a man who is capable of achieving over and above the average is or can be considered as super human which is rare and has exceptional vitality. But Hans Castorp does not have any of these capabilities. So he is common, a mediocre man, the representative of most of us. He represents the common man, suffering in a time of a new industrial state where old ideas and personalities disintegrate. In such a time reason wars with instincts and the past with the future. Thus Mann's work challenges the material solidity, seeking a deeper mystery.

According to Mann the idea of man, the concept of future humanity can be formulated by the one who has the deepest knowledge of sickness and death. And perhaps this is the reason why Mann always links artist and art to a diseased world, a diseased person. For him, these people can reconstruct our decayed society. Thus in the novel "The Magic Mountain" he connects an ordinary person to a diseased world and surrounds him with sickness and death while exposing him to an intellectual, philosophical and aesthetic world. Within this world fit for an artist we get to see Hans Castorp getting fascinated with questions and realities related to human existence. His prolonged exposure to the diseased world transformed him a lot while bringing closure to the existential position traditionally occupied by Mann's artist. Thus Mann's Castorp is a significant extension of his concept of an artist who is engulfed in the dialectics of health and disease.

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