

Classical references and their significance in *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann¹

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For M. Jufresa, C. García Gual, C. Miralles and to the memory of J. Alsina

Abstract:

Although Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* has been the object of innumerable studies, this paper suggests that so far none of these has given truly close attention to the significance of the classical references in this novel with regard to the search for a true humanism. This is probably owing to the generally held belief that the influence of the classical tradition is relatively inconsequential in relation to the ample conjunction of philosophical ideas on which the novel is based. This article takes a differing view and, through a close analysis and comment of the explicit and implicit classical notions in the text, concludes that these ideas are also a valuable key to a greater comprehension of the ideological design of the main character, Hans Castorp, and to a certain degree they also help to continue to reflect on the most enigmatic and controversial episode of the novel: the young protagonist's descent to the plain from the magical mountain (Zauberberg) in order to take part in the great tragedy of World War I, alien as is any war to the prevalent but ultimately futile desire that love (*Liebe*) should in the end prevail in the life of humans.

Key words: classical tradition, humanism, *The Magic Mountain*, Thomas Mann, Greek philosophy

In view of the extensive bibliography devoted to the analysis of the classic of contemporary literature that is Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*³, it would be logical to consider that there is scant room for further contributions. Or, to put it more strongly, a critic or scholar should be firmly convinced of the value of what he or she nonetheless ventures to write, if the readers are not to be disappointed. Indeed, any analysis entails segmenting a unity to attain a better understanding of it, yet the unity does not disappear, so that, in spite of calling attention to the classical notions present throughout the novel⁴, readers, exercising their inalienable right, will decide whether these pages enable a deeper reading of this long philosophical novel or not⁵.

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³ From different perspectives, see, e.g.: Symington 2011; Kontje 2010; Kovaloski 2009; Vaget 2008; Bauer 2008; Linése 2006; Robertson 2002; Beddow 2002; Herwig 1999; Dowden 1999; Nenno 1996; Ridley 1994; Kurzke 1987; Stock 1986, and as a general introduction: Schöll 2013.

⁴ However, I should like to emphasize that the aim of this article is not to look for or to identify the translations used by Mann. In this sense, see, e.g. the essay by Lukács 1911, *Die Seele und die Formen*, with the quotations in his works from Platonic dialogues in the translation by Rudolf Kassner, or Reed 1974, *Thomas Mann: the Uses of Tradition* regarding *Tod in Venedig*. On the other hand and by and large, as far as the translations are concerned, by no means we should expect in my opinion to find them reproduced word after word in his works -referring to Epicurus, for instance, we shall read later on: «denn ob wir es nun zu zitieren wissen oder nicht, so hat das Wort des witzigen Weisen jedenfalls volle seelische Gültigkeit...». My aim is above all to analyse and comment the significance of the explicit and

The Magic Mountain is a formative novel, a *Bildungsroman*, in the course of which we witness the strengthening of the intellectual and above all human edification of its main protagonist, the young engineer Hans Castorp. Just after his graduation, still free of professional commitments, he embarks on a trip in order to visit a cousin of his, Joachim, who hopes to recover from his tuberculosis in a high mountain sanatorium that will also become a decisive place for our protagonist after an unexpected seven years' stay. For the sake of achieving the intellectual development just referred to, Mann designs a repeated and ardent confrontation of theses between two highly intellectual patients of the sanatorium, Naphta and Settembrini, worthy masters who will provide the dual theoretical basis upon which will eventually stand the young man's unique personal criterion⁶. In effect, given his deep sense of duty and fairness, with the intention of hearing both sides, «Hans Castorp listened to Herr Settembrini... And all the while he was finding it more and more permissible to give his thoughts and dreams free rein in another and quite opposite direction (in entgegengesetzter Richtung)» (158)⁷. Settembrini, for his part, respects Naphta's «discursive nature (diskursive Natur)» and likes «to cross swords with an antagonist who is after all my equal». Very often they quarrel till they draw blood, but «the contrariness and mischievousness (die Gegensätzlichkeit und Feindseligkeit) of his ideas but render our acquaintance the more attractive. I need the friction (Friktion). Opinions cannot survive if one has no chance to fight for them (zu kämpfen)» (407). Throughout the novel there will certainly be many quarrels, but let us say right now that, in the Western world—and very soon T. Mann will confirm it—the basis of this sort of intellectual exercise, which entails considering at the same time the argument and the counter-argument, that is, the *lógos* and the *antilogía*, is a typical practice in the Athenian schools of the Sophists—fifth century BC—leaders of the so called Greek enlightenment.

One of the radical oppositions between the Jesuitical theses of Naphta and those of the freemason and humanist Settembrini is the former's defence of faith as the basis and vehicle of knowledge, i.e. of Saint Anselm's phrase: «I believe, in order that I may understand (Ich glaube, damit ich erkenne⁸)» (396), which relegates the intellect to a secondary position. According to Naphta, the great schoolmen of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries firmly believed that what is false in theology cannot be true in philosophy and, in their turn, the theological texts conceived man as the centre of the divine creation, as the creature for whom the whole of nature had been designed. «He is the measure of all things, and his welfare and salvation is the sole and single criterion of truth (Er ist das Mass der Dinge und sein Heil das Kriterium der Wahrheit)», he says and, therefore, the target of every true theory about men's and women's destiny must be their salvation and not knowledge of natural sciences: «Why have we given the Platonic philosophy the preference over every other, if not because it has to do with knowledge of God, and not knowledge of nature?». It is essential, then, to define what is ethically harmful, to indicate the measure and, if we fulfil this duty, we shall realise that: «It is a

implicit classical references in the novel, although, needless to say, with regard to the latter ones, I should substantiate their credibility.

⁵ On Thomas Mann's intellectual and philosophical world, see, e.g.: Ramis 2010; Koopmann 2003; Marx 2003; Bishop 2002.

⁶ On the pedagogic aspects of the novel, see, e.g.: Schoepf 2001.

⁷ All the quotations in English correspond to the following edition: Mann 1999, and the numbers in brackets refer to it. The quotations in German correspond to Mann 2002.

⁸ Anselm of Canterbury: *Credo ut intelligam* (*Proslogion*, 1). Based on a saying of Augustine of Hippo *Crede ut intelligas* (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 29.6).

childish to accuse the Church of having defended darkness rather than light (die Finsternis gegen das Licht)... it is this unconditioned, this a-philosophical natural science that always has led and ever will lead men into darkness» (397). This last assertion obliges me to consider that Plato and probably the role played by his image of the cave in order to visualise the philosophical salvation of souls—their reaching the intelligible region—must be added to the list of classical sources—we shall see it very soon—, although I must first mention the unquestionable previous reference to Protagoras, who has been adapted by Naphta’s words in a skilful and Christian way. Indeed, what do we read in the texts we have got?:

- . The Greeks say, and Protagoras was the first, that a reasoning can be opposed to any other⁹.
- . Protagoras declares that one can take either side on many questions and debate it with equal success –even on this very question, whether every subject can be debated from either point of view¹⁰.
- . Protagoras asserts that “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not”; and by “measure” he means the criterion of truth, and by “things” (physical objects), so what he is really claiming is that “Man is the criterion of all objects, of those which are, that they are, and those which are not, that they are not. And in consequence of this he postulates only what appears (*ta phainomena*) to each individual, and thus he introduces relativity (*to pros ti*)”¹¹.

Needless to say, Naphta’s skilfulness is that of Mann, who has had Settembrini’s metaphysical opponent pronounce not just any sentence—such as one that is alien to the freemason’s ideology—but the most humanistic, the one which would in principle suit the Italian master’s beliefs, thus demonstrating that Naphta also knows how to take advantage of Protagoras’s wisdom, that is, considering man as the ‘measure and criterion’. This is in the end an intelligent strategy because, later on, Settembrini admonishes Hans Castorp, claiming the support of the same Greek sophist: «Have respect... for your humanity, Engineer! Confide in your God-given power of clear thought, and hold in abhorrence these luxations of the brain, these miasmas of the spirit!». Man, he went on to say, «was the measure of things (Der Mensch sei das Mass der Dinge)» and, being aware that, in a similarly partial manner, Naphta strives to shape the young man’s mind, he will allude to the book of *Genesis* in order to defend the inalienable human right «to distinguish between good and evil (Gut und Böse)», to distinguish «reality and counterfeit (Wahrheit und Lügenschein)». Plain and simple: Settembrini also knows how to take advantage of biblical wisdom, thus making the ‘creature’—who has now become ‘measure and criterion’—share with God His prerogative: the knowledge of good and evil, as it is quite clear from his new

⁹ The translation is mine following the edition by Stählin et alii, 1970: Ἑλληνές φασι Πρωταγόρου προκατάρξαντος παντὶ λόγῳ λόγον ἀντικείσθαι –Clem. Al. *Strom.* 6, 65.

¹⁰ *Protagoras ait de omni re in utrumquam partem disputari posse ex aequo et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit* –Sen. *Ep.* 88, 43 (Gummere 1963).

¹¹ Καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας δὲ βούλεται πάντων χρημάτων εἶναι μέτρον τὸν ἀνθρώπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ἄμετρον μὲν λέγων τὸ κριτήριον, ἄχρημάτων δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων, ὡς δυνάμει φάσκειν πάντων πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἀνθρώπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τίθησι τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκάστῳ μόνον, καὶ οὕτως εἰσάγει τὸ πρὸς τι –S. E. *P.* 1, 216-219 (Mutschmann 1912; translated by Dillon & Gergel 2003). See also: Pl. *Cra.* 385e, 6-386a, 2: “(Socrates): ... as Protagoras told: man is the measure of all things; things are to me as they appear to me and are to you as they appear to you” (ὥσπερ Πρωταγόρας ἔλεγεν λέγων “πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον” εἶναι ἀνθρώπον ὡς ἄρ’ οἷα μὲν ἂν ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τὰ πράγματα (εἶναι) τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί· οἷα δ’ ἂν σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ σοί (Burnet 1900, rpr. 1977, the translation is mine).

admonition: «woe to them who dared to lead him astray in his belief in this creative right. Better for them that a millstone be hanged about their necks and that they be drowned in the depth of the sea» (667).

As is well-known, there are many Platonic texts that encourage men and women to prefer the knowledge of God to that of natural sciences, thus urging them to both abandon the physical world and to ascend towards the intelligible one. Let us read, for instance, the following reflection of Socrates' in the *Theaetetus* (176a, 5-8, 176b, 1), which has the additional advantage of dealing with the quarrel between good and evil:

But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore, we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can¹².

The opposition of 'darkness and light' is constant in the Bible, but Naphta associated it with Plato's philosophy, which—as I mentioned and expect to be able to prove later on—leads me to the Platonic image of the cave. In this respect, we should remember that, in accordance with the great Athenian philosopher, the epistemological condition of those who have always lived in it as prisoners is certainly shocking, for the constant mere contemplation of shadows prevents them from seeing Reality¹³. However, the degree of knowledge of other human beings', in principle free as a result of not having lived in a cave-prison, is not higher; on the contrary, when a truly surprised Glaucon points out to Socrates: «A strange image you speak of... and strange prisoners», the Athenian master hastens to correct him: «Like to us» (*Republic* 515a, 4-5). This is indeed a strange and shocking image but:

This image (εἰκόνα)... we must apply... likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above (τὴν δὲ ἄνω ἀνάβασιν καὶ θέαν τῶν ἄνω) is the soul's ascension to the intelligible (τὴν εἰς τὸν νοητὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνοδὸν τιθεῖς), you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire... my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good (ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὀρᾶσθαι), and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this (517a, 8-517c, 5)¹⁴.

Consequently, unlike what we might logically think, from a Platonic point of view we certainly live in a prison, our souls should leave it behind as soon as possible, and

¹² ΑΛΛ' οὐτ' ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν... -ύπεναντίον γὰρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ αἰεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη -οὐτ' ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι, τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περὶ πολεῖ ἐξ ἀναγκῆς. διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθ' ἐνδεῖ ἐκείσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα -Fowler 1967. I repeat that I present this text only as an example.

¹³ R. 515 a, 5-8: "... for, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?" (τοὺς γὰρ τοιοῦτους πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ ἀλλήλων οἶε ἂν τι ἑωρακέναι ἄλλο πλὴν τὰς σκιὰς τὰς ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς εἰς τὸ καταντικρὺ αὐτῶν τοῦ σπηλαίου προσπιπτούσας; -Shorey 1970).

¹⁴ Shorey 1970.

the knowledge of the Idea of Good demands from us a constant and supreme effort. Nevertheless, the goal of the 'ideocentric' ascent of a Platonic man is the summit of the unchangeable and everlasting Ideas, i.e., the Idea of the Beauty-Good or, so to speak, the summit of the Magic Mountain *par excellence*, whereas the end of the Hans Castorp's unexpected experience in the mountain of wonders, Zauberberg, will be his descent to the physical or visible world, which, moreover, is engaged at that time in a terrible world war. The young engineer is supposed to have good reasons to make such a final decision but, for the time being and in a clear reference to Plato's text that Mann clearly has in mind, I hasten to point out that, when the novel is about to end and the news on the historic thunder of the First World War arrives at the sanatorium, Hans Castorp still remains quite absent, dreaming and ruling¹⁵ doomed to confuse *platonico more*—that is, like the prisoners in the cave—the shadows they see with the reality: «preoccupied... but the things themselves he had heeded not at all (Hans Castorp), having a wilful tendency to take the shadow for the substance, and in the substance to see only shadow (709) (die Schatten für dir Dinge zu nehmen, in diesen aber nur Schatten zu sehen)».

I will now examine the dual view (*lógos* and *antilogía*) of humanism in *The Magic Mountain*, in which the classical notions also play a significant role. Settembrini chooses to give the young engineer an exhaustive and categorical definition: humanism is «love of human kind»; «political activity»; «rebellion against all that tended to defile or degrade our conception of humanity»; defence of the «right of the human being to his earthly interests, to liberty of thought and joy of life»¹⁶ (156) in striking contrast to «the superstitious hostility to the human spirit» and the «shameful formlessness» of the Middle Ages¹⁷, etc. From his point of view, Prometheus, «the earliest humanist (*der erste Humanist*)» (156), embodies all these values, inasmuch as he modelled with clay the first human beings and, above all, gave them the seeds of fire they needed, although later on he was severely punished by Zeus until Hercules interceded for him. With regard to this subject, then, Mann has just searched for the suitable tale (*mythos*) within the great mythical patrimony of the Greeks in order to allow us to understand his humanistic programme¹⁸.

At any rate, Settembrini asserts that humanism, human dignity and politics are always associated with beautiful words, «for the beautiful word begets the beautiful deed (das schöne Wort erzeuge die schöne Tat)... a good style would lead to good deeds... writing well was almost the same as thinking well, and thinking well was the next thing to acting well» (157). Here is the process that, in accordance with the Italian master, goes from beautiful words to good deeds and, everything seems to point that, in

¹⁵ Which is already a usual habit: «This first visit of the cousins to Naphta... was followed by two or three others... All of them afforded young Hans Castorp much food for thought, when, in his blue-blossoming retreat, with the image of the human form divine, called Homo Dei, hovering before his mind's eye, he sat and 'took stock'» (412).

¹⁶ On humanism and political philosophy in Thomas Mann's works, see, e.g.: Pikulik 2013; Richard 2006; Mehring 2003; Mádl 1980.

¹⁷ About this, see, e.g.: Classen 2003.

¹⁸ He also uses the Greek mythology in order to compare Hans Castorp's personal situation when he arrives at the sanatorium: (Settembrini) «Then you are not one of us? You are well, you are but a guest here, like Odysseus in the kingdom of the shades (wie Odysseus im Schattenreich)? You are bold indeed, thus to descend into these depths peopled by the vacant and idle dead» (56); or also to describe Mrs Stör's health: «... two steps forward and three back. When you have been sitting here five months, along comes the old man and tucks on another six. It is like the torment of Tantalus: you shove and shove, and think you are getting to the top (Ach, es sind Tantalusquallen. Man schiebt und schiebt, und glaubt man, oben zu sein)» (148).

order to describe it, Mann comes back once again to philosophical sources such as Plato's *Symposium*. In effect, the German novelist substantially reproduces the abstraction process that Diotima explains to Socrates, thanks to which the lover of one body realises that all individual beauties refer to a single archetypal Beauty; «he prefers then his beloved's soul to his body, is truly interested in him and gives voice to the words that will make him better, thus being constrained to contemplate the beautiful as appearing in our observances and laws (τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλὸν -210c, 3-4)». However, the process has not yet ended but, after the observances and laws, the lover must lead his beloved to the beauty of sciences (ἐπί τὰς ἐπιστήμας ἀγαγεῖν -210c, 6-7), so that he will no longer be a worthless man but, «turning rather towards the main ocean of the beautiful may by contemplation of this bring forth in all their splendours fair fruits of discourse and meditation in a plenteous crop of philosophy... until... he descries a certain single knowledge... (τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην -210d, 4-7 –Lamb, 1983, in all the cases)»¹⁹.

There must be few passages like this in the *Symposium* that emphasize in such a clear way both Socrates and Plato's conviction that any noble deed is the result of a beautiful word—itself resulting from the contemplation of beauty—when it gives rise to a discourse or *lógos* that, due to its aetiology, cannot but respect the forms, the forms of beauty, true guarantee of a like result regarding the deeds, that is to say, a guarantee of honesty and moral perfection.

Hans Castorp very soon espouses this ardent admiration of the word and beautiful forms. Having a talk with the Hofrat Behrens, he states that all the humanistic professions, whether they deal with the care of the human body or the soul: medicine, jurisprudence, philology, pedagogy, theology, etc. cannot be conceived without the support of the word and, moreover, «if you go in for them you have to study the ancient languages (die alten Sprachen) by way of foundation... and I find wonderful... that the formal, the idea of beautiful form... It gives such nobility... and courtliness» (258). Mann seems to pay homage here to the Greek and Latin roots of both the grammar and the humanistic and scientific lexicon of Western culture, but the true praise is reserved for the restorers of the classical world, the Renaissance humanists, who practiced «a certain lordly luxuriance, the *generosità* which displayed itself in ascribing to form a human value independent of its content – the cult of speech as an art for art's sake (der Kultus der Rede als einer Kunst um der Kunst willen)». This was indeed the heritage of the Greek and Latin civilization that the humanists, «the *uomini letterati*, had restored... to the Romance nations, and which was the source of every later significant idealism, even political» (522). And from these assertions Mann turns directly—always through Settembrini—to the sanctification of literature²⁰, i.e., «the miraculous conjunction of analysis and form»:

... literature... its spirit... This it was that awakened the understanding of all things human, that operated to weaken and dissolve silly prejudices and convictions, that brought about the civilizing, elevating, and betterment of the human race... it preached honest doubt, fairness, tolerance. The purifying, healing influence of literature (Die

¹⁹ We can read the sum of the process in 211b, 7-211d (Lamb 1983): «Such is the right approach or induction to love-matters. Beginning from obvious beauties he must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty».

²⁰ About this, see, e.g.: Campillo 1995.

reinigende, heiligende Wirkung der Literatur), the dissipating of passions by knowledge and the written word, literature as the path to understanding, forgiveness and love... the writer as perfected type, as saint (524).

Nevertheless, being loyal both to himself and his sophistic design, Mann had taken care before to balance the two perspectives by making Naphta strongly protest against «the rhetorical and literary spirit (den rhetorisch-literarischen Geist) of the European educational system, and its splenetic partisanship of the formal and grammatical (seinen grammatisch-formalen Spleen), which was nothing else than an accessory to the interests of bourgeois class supremacy» (521)²¹. Naphta refers here to the unfortunate erudition peculiar to the popular training activities, whereas better results could be achieved by means of lectures, exhibitions, films, etc.²² However, regarding Naphta's protest, many contemporary Western citizens would undoubtedly recall the classical languages, Greek and Latin, that they studied, whose teaching always emphasized grammar, form and the skilful use of erudite quotations, becoming in fact, as we have just read, a cult of speech as an art for art's sake, independent of its content. And, needless to say, Naphta denies the sanctity of both literature and writers, because a man who like Settembrini does not accept the Absolute, that is, God or what is positive and certain, devotes himself to progress, to pure nihilism, and is «a traitor to life, before whose stern inquisition and Vehmgericht he deserved to be put to the question – and so forth (524-25)».

Naphta and Settembrini's opposite visions of humanism would necessarily become quite clear from the latter's logical claim regarding the dignity of the body in contrast to the former's foreseeable condemnation, but Settembrini's previous defence of intellect against that Saint Anselm's phrase «I believe, in order that I may understand», proclaimed by Naphta, forces him now to undertake an exercise of coherence. Indeed, Settembrini states that he is more ill than Hans Castorp, that he hardly expects to recover and that he no longer travels in order to not prematurely weaken his body. However, he does so: «with the most stringent reservations; my spirit protested in pride and anguish against the dictates of my wretched body (meines armseligen Körpers)» (246). For his part, the young engineer thinks that being a humanist and despising the body at the same time is quite a contradiction, but the Italian master replies that he honours and loves the body as he honours the world and the interests of this life against «a sentimental withdrawal and negation—that is, classicism against romanticism—», but there is one higher and more powerful principle: the intellect. «... within the antithesis of body and mind, the body is evil, the devilish principle (das böse, das teuflische Prinzip), for the body is nature, and nature – within the sphere... of her antagonism to the mind... is evil» (247). Besides, one day «humanistic pride» will have to learn to feel as «a debasement and disgrace the fact that the intellect is bound up with

²¹ An assertion that is obviously replied by Settembrini: «“You studied them”, Settembrini cried out... Your crude immaturity must go to school to the power which you would like to persuade yourself and others to despise; for without discipline you could not endure in the sight of man, and there is but one kind, that which you call the bourgeois, but which is in reality he human» (520).

²² Naphta even tells Settembrini that in Germany in the Middle Ages: «It had been thought blameworthy, in the Germany of that time, to send a boy to school unless he was to be a priest; and this popular-aristocratic scorn of the literary arts was always the sign of fundamental nobility of soul... whereas the noble, the soldier, and the people never could, or barely – but he could do and understand nothing else in all the wide world, being nothing but a Latinistic windbag, who had power over language, but left life to people who were fit for it. Which was the reason why the literary person always conceived of politics as an empty bag of wind» (522).

the body and with nature», although he, unlike Christians, does not think that the body is evil: «Do you know that the great Plotinus is said to have made the remark that he was ashamed to have a body?»²³ (247), he asks him, and adds that Voltaire rebelled against the brutal power of Nature, which by means of a terrible earthquake sacrificed thousands of human lives in Lisbon in the year 1775:

We are to honour and uphold the body when it is a question of emancipation (Emanzipation), of beauty (Schönheit), of freedom of thought (Freiheit), of joy (Glück), of desire (Lust). We must despise it in so far as it sets itself up as the principle of gravity and inertia (Schwere / Schwere), when it obstructs the movement toward light (Bewegung zum Lichte); we must despise it in so far as it represents the principle of disease and death (Krankheit / Todes) (248-49).

If at the beginning of this analysis we observed that Settembrini substantially reproduced Plato's texts and used them both intelligently and advantageously, now I would dare to say that, with regard to the central part of the previous paragraph, the spirit of the palinode in the *Phaedrus* (243e- 257b) might be certainly in its base—in fact, Mann explicitly quotes the *Phaedrus* in *Death in Venice*. Indeed, the fact that Settembrini does not consider the body as the principle of evil does not mean that he might not see himself as one of those souls that, after losing their wings, got hold of something solid (στερεοῦ τινος), settled down and become living creatures (ζῶον) with an earthly body (σῶμα γήϊνον), doomed to the mortal condition (θνητόν) (246c, 2-5). Therefore, we are all endowed with souls which, long time ago, could contemplate face to face the everlasting Ideas, «being ourselves pure and not entombed (ἀσήμαντοι < σῆμα) in this which we carry about with us and call the body (σῶμα)²⁴...», in which we are imprisoned like an oyster in its shell» (250c 4-6). But being now prisoners in a cave of a shadowy ignorance—as we read above—and being also heavy creatures as a consequence of the material nature of our body, we must become winged again, for «the natural function of the wing is to soar upwards and carry that which is heavy (τὸ ἐμβριθεῖς)» (246d, 6). If not, as Settembrini states, overwhelmed by «the principle of the gravity and inertia», we shall hardly move towards the light. Anyway, we shall be rescued by the *anamnesis* (ἀνάμνησις), that is, by the fact of remembering, for «every soul of man has by the law of nature beheld the realities (τὰ ὄντα), otherwise it would not have entered into a human being» (249e, 5-250). To sum up, the human intellect, a sort of skilful charioteer because of a memory that elevates it (*aná*), with the help of the wings that will grow up again as a result of a philosophical life, will never return to the darkness (εἰς... σκότον) but will experience a shining life (φάνον βίον)²⁵ (256d, 6-8 - Fowler, 1913, in all the cases).

However, regarding the sources referred to concerning the primacy of the intellect, Mann makes Settembrini explicitly mention Plotinus, more Platonic than Plato—so to speak—father of that pyramidal system which places the Absolute indetermination or One—otherwise, it could not be named—at the summit of all the existing things, being totally alien to the physical world—though the latter depends on the former—and also

²³ See Porph. *Plot*, chapter I. (Henry-Schwyzler -1964-1977). See also: Clark 1996.

²⁴ Cf. Pl. *Cra*. 400c.

²⁵ A shining life thanks to the contemplation of the Beauty-Good; about this, see also Pl. *Smp*. 211d-212b. On the other hand and for obvious reasons, we must also bear in mind the *Phaedo*, where Socrates recites all the disadvantages caused by the union soul-body and the advantages of being purified from the latter; see, e.g.: 65b, 9-67d, 10.

an inexhaustible source from which everything comes. In other words, it is the highest Principle or the Light, towards which we must ascend, as Plotinus did, for the sake of a mystical union²⁶. Needless to say, Hans Castorp will not imitate the father of Neoplatonism but he has received the extreme model, the most opposite pole to the material world²⁷.

Settembrini had solemnly stated that the intellect is worthier than the body but, in the previous quotation also included a defence of the latter based upon the «freedom of thought, of joy, of desire». This last assertion is too vague to dare to bring to mind specific classical sources but, on the other hand, we cannot help remembering—very soon we shall see why—Epicurean texts such as the *Letter to Menoeceus*. Here are, for instance, two brief passages: the first compares the urge to philosophise throughout our lives with the ease with which we defend our constant search for happiness:

Let no one either delay philosophizing when young, or weary of philosophizing when old. For no one is under-age or over-age for health on the soul. To say either that the time is not yet ripe for philosophizing, or that the time for philosophizing has gone by, is like saying that the time for happiness either has not arrived or is no more²⁸.

In the second quotation advises us to be always ruled by pleasure and sensations: «We recognize pleasure as the good which is primary and congenital; from it we begin every choice and avoidance, and we come back to it, using the feeling as the yardstick for judging every good thing»²⁹. My earlier attribution to this letter by Epicurus may have seemed hasty but, later on, when the novel focuses on Joachim's serene attitude before death, we read the following reflections:

It is a fact that a man's dying is more the survivors' affair than his own. Whether we quoted it well or not, the adage of the funny wise man has in any case full spiritual validity: So long as we are, death is not; and when death is present, we are not (solange wir sind, der Tod nicht ist, und dass, wenn der Tod ist, wir nicht sind). In other words, between death and us there is no rapport; it is something with which we have nothing to do – and only incidentally the world and nature (531).

²⁶ On the metaphysics of the One, see, e.g.: Bussanich 1996; and on the nature of the physical reality in Plotinus: Wagner 1996.

²⁷ In effect, the One is totally undetermined (ἀοριστίαν παντελή –III 4,1, 5-17), incorporeal (μη σῶμα – II 4,8,2), privation and lack of form (στέρησις, οὐ μορφή –II 4, 14, 14-15). The matter it is still not (μη ὄν –II 5,4, 10-14), it is only a mirror which captures images (κάτοπτρον –IV 3,11, 7-8) but it takes no part in what it captures; even worse, it is an ornamented corpse (νεκρὸν κεκοσμημένον –II 4,5,18); it is an appearance (εἶδολον –II 5,5, 21-25). Given that it is privation and total lack (πενία παντελής –I 8,3, 16), it does not possess any good (μηδὲν παρ' αὐτῆς ἀγαθὸν ἔχουσιν –I 8,3,36-37); it is absolute evil (αἰσχρὸν –II 4, 16, 24), the essential evil (τὸ ὄντως κακὸν –I 8,5,9); it lacks any sort of form (ἄμορφον – I 6,2,13-16) and becomes constantly (γιγνόμενα αἰεὶ –II 4,5,27). For the soul, therefore, the arrival of matter means death. Human beings have no other option but to leave the material world or, at least, “this is the life which is peculiar to... happy and divine men: separation (ἀπαλλαγὴ) from the rest of things, escape (φυγὴ) of the one who is alone towards the One (VI 9,11,51)... in order to receive the One (VI 7,34, 7-8)... and see the One (I 6,7,9. This is the true objective of the soul, that is, to possess that light, contemplate the one who is light in itself... leave it all (ἄφελε πάντα –V 3,17,38) –Armstrong 1966.

²⁸ 122: ὁ δὲ λέγων μήπω τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ὑπάρχειν ὥραν ἢ παρεληλυθέναι τὴν ὥραν ὁμοίως ἐστὶ τῷ λέγοντι πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἢ μὴ παρεῖναι τὴν ὥραν ἢ μηκέτι εἶναι –Usener 1887, rpr. 1963, 1966; translations by Long & Sedley 1990.

²⁹ 128-129: ταύτην (τὴν ἡδονὴν) γὰρ ἀγαθὸν πρῶτον καὶ συγγενικὸν ἔγνωμεν, καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης καταρχόμεθα πάσης αἰρέσεως καὶ φυγῆς καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτην καταντῶμεν ὡς κανόνι τῷ πάθει πᾶν ἀγαθὸν κρίνοντες.

Here, then, are the words of Epicurus, the ancient adage in his *Letter to Menoeceus*:

Therefore, that most frightful of evils, death, is nothing to us, seeing that when we exist death is not present, and when death is present we do not exist³⁰.

The final theme of the previous quotation, which we have yet to analyze, is the defence of bodily emancipation and beauty, which leads to a new dialectical quarrel between Naphta and Settembrini. The former asks the young engineer to learn to appraise the artistic excellence of works such as the suffering Christ—XIV century—in his room. They are «works of art whose function it is to express the soul and the emotions... are always so ugly as to be beautiful, and so beautiful as to be ugly (hässlich vor Schönheit und schön vor Hässlichkeit)... Their beauty is not fleshly beauty, which is merely insipid – but the beauty of the spirit». They show both an inner and abstract beauty. Of his Christ, he comments: «It is very advanced Middle Ages—Gothic, *signum mortificationis*... It is the most utter and radical declaration of submission to suffering and the weakness of the flesh. Pessimistic and ascetic», and for further information he refers him to *De miseria humanae conditionis* by Innocent III—end of XII century (392-93).

In my opinion, it would be vain to recall that classical spirituality, even the most ascetic, which also despised the flesh, never discovered any sort of beauty in bodily ugliness, which certainly exists although it is rather unworthy of man³¹. Diotima, in Plato's *Symposium*, explains to Socrates that it is the 'contemplation of' and the 'contact with' physical beauty, in addition to the beloved's nobleness of character, that makes the good lover to bring forth the virtue with which he feels imbued³². And the stoics, two centuries later, still defined *éros* as «an impulse to make friendship caused by the appearance of beauty (ἐπιβολή φιλοποίας διὰ κάλλος ἐμφαινόμενον)»³³, although Plutarch³⁴ gives us enough information to understand the real extent of this statement, thus bringing to our attention that physical beauty is by no means a *conditio sine qua non*. In fact, Hans Castorp, with regard to his room decoration, thinks that «a Greek Venus or athlete (eine griechische Venus oder so ein Athlet)... is probably at bottom the

³⁰ 125: τὸ φορικοδέστατον οὖν τῶν κακῶν ὁ θάνατος οὐθὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἐπειδὴ περὶ ὅταν μὲν ἡμεῖς ὦμεν, ὁ θάνατος οὐ πάρεστιν· ὅταν δ' ὁ θάνατος παρῆ, τότε ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἔσμεν. Οὔτε οὖν πρὸς τοὺς ζῶντας ἔστιν οὔτε πρὸς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας, ἐπειδὴ περὶ οὓς μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, οἱ δ' οὐκέτι εἰσίν.

³¹ Certainly from another perspective, Socrates asks Alcibiades to compare his bodily beauty with the superior beauty of his knowledge but, in any case, there is no room for any exaltation of the physical ugliness: «For then what a stupendous beauty you must see in me, vastly superior to your comeliness!» (ἀμήχανόν τοι κάλλος ὁρώης ἂν ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ τῆς παρὰ σοὶ εὐμορφίας πάμπολυ διαφέρων –*Smp.*, 218e, 2-3 –Lamb 1983).

³² «So when a man's soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget, he too... goes about seeking the beautiful object whereon he may do his begetting, since he will never beget upon the ugly. Hence it is the beautiful rather than the ugly bodies that he welcomes in his pregnancy, and if he chances also on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one; and straightway in addressing such a person he is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be the good man's character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other's education. For I hold that by contact with the fair one (τοῦ καλοῦ), and by consorting with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception (ἅ πάλαι ἐκύει τίκτει καὶ γεννᾷ)» (209a, 8-c, 3 –Lamb 1983).

³³ Stob. *Ecl.* II, 91, 10. *SVF* III, 935.

³⁴ *Moralia* 1073 B-C. See, e.g., the introduction, chapter VII of Gilbert 1999.

most humanistic of all the arts» (259)³⁵. And Settembrini—referring now to a *Pietà* in Naphta's room—also compares it with the classical artistic sensibility. «He characterized as absurd the formlessness to which the Middle Ages and all periods like them had been a prey»; he exalted, on the contrary, «the Graeco-Roman heritage, classicism (das griechisch-römische Erbe, den Klassizismus), form, and beauty, reason, the pagan joy of life. To these things and these alone... was it given to ameliorate man's lot on earth» (394).

Humanism, therefore, has meant and still means the restoration of classicism, above all with regard to one of its essential features: the treatment of the forms that we have already seen materialised in beautiful words, whose beneficial consequence in their turn were good deeds. In accordance with this notion, Settembrini now asks Hans Castorp to be aware that exaltation of ugliness and formlessness inevitably leads to bad deeds or dehumanization, as is clearly seen from that murderous intolerance of the Inquisition—that is to say, the infamous zeal in the persecution of everything threatening «supernatural domination» —and also the use of the sword and the stake «as instruments of human benevolence»³⁶. Naphta, however, immediately recalls the appropriate counter-speech or *antilogía* and replies that the French National Convention «freed the world of undesirable citizens», thus evidencing the Jacobins' mania for destruction», which, unlike all the pains of the Church—even the stake and the excommunication— was not meant to save “the soul from everlasting damnation”. In effect, the degradation of humanity is a consequence of «the bourgeois spirit», which is peculiar to the «Renaissance, age of enlightenment» and to «the natural sciences» like modern astronomy that shifted man from the centre of the universe and put «an end to the majestic cosmic position of man—upon which, moreover, all astrology bases itself» (395).

The classical basis of this speech—as cited above—is the adapted wisdom of Protagoras, father of man «as measure of all things», but thinking of his soul's salvation as the true sole criterion. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the classical tradition, it is the classicism of the Scholastic philosophy that truly endows Naphta with the intellectual weapons he needs. Let us keep in mind, for instance, that both Platonism and Aristotelianism presume the antithesis of «God and world» and, as a consequence, that man's being is dual. «The problem of his soul consists in the conflict between the spiritual and the material, to which all social problems are entirely secondary». Man was thus well protected against the infinite cosmos conceived by the Renaissance astronomers and also against the end of the antithesis of «God and nature», for in the bosom of the human personality there cannot be a struggle between two hostile principles—between the two horses of the chariot in the palinode of the *Phaedrus*, if we think of it *Platonico modo*—but man becomes «harmonious and unitary, the conflict subsists merely between his individual and his collective interests; and the will of the State becomes... the law of morality». Needless to say, Settembrini firmly disagrees

³⁵ Let us remember, for instance, how Hans Castorp appraises Joachim's beautiful body: «Hans Castorp... absorbed in contemplation of his cousin's torso. The ribs... rose under the taut skin as he took deep inhalations... studies that youthful figure, slender, yellowish-bronze, with a black fell along the breastbone and the powerful arms... 'Those are the arms of an athlete'... look how he is developed, like a picture in a book, a regular Apollo Belvedere (Sieh an, er ist gewachsen, wie es im Buche steht, der reine Apollo von Belvedere)» (176).

³⁶ «Herr Settembrini was afraid of 'Absolute Spirit,' and would like to see it everywhere wedded to democratic progress; he was simply outraged at the religious license of his militant opponent, which would jumble up together God and the Devil, sanctification and bad behavior, genius and disease, and which knew no standards of value, no rational judgment, no exercise of the will» (467).

and, against the false logic of his opponent, he asserts that «the achievements wrung from the past... by the renaissance and the intellectual revival are personality, freedom, and the rights of man» (398).

For the freemason, the terrible consequence of the «supernatural domination» mentioned above is the rejection of the *amor carnalis* and *commodorum corporis* (448), the love of the flesh and the dependence upon bodily comfort, just those things that demand that we pay due honour to health. For Naphta, on the contrary, this respect and reverence for the body could only be justified if it had remained in the «original sinlessness» and not in the actual state of degradation, *statu degradationis*. The reverse being the case, the body is mortal and corruptible, it is «the prison-house and torture-chamber of the soul, or as the fit instrument for rousing the conscience to a sense of shame and confusion (*pudoris et confusionis sensum*), as Saint Ignatius had it»³⁷. Hans Castorp, for his part, brings up now the information given by his master, that is, the fact that Plotinus was ashamed of his body, so that Settembrini does not know how to face up to his challenge and, taking an attitude unworthy of a good master, disqualifies his pupil warning him not to confuse what he is actually not confusing: «(He) ordered the young man not to confuse two different points of view – and, for the rest, to be advised and maintain an attitude of receptivity (*rezeptiv*)» (453).

Naphta is certainly not a pupil but a skilful opponent and polemicist who, therefore, dares to question Settembrini's intellectual capacity. He reproaches him, for instance, for not wanting to understand «that ironic humanity which made constant concession to the world and the flesh», nor does he understand «the ecclesiastical conception of indulgence, under which was to be classified one of the sacraments of the Church—namely, marriage». In any case, the concession was «only a protection against sin, countenanced in order to set bounds to sensual desire». The question is, then: «the ascetic principle, the ideal of complete chastity, might be upheld, without at the same time opposing an unpolitic harshness to the flesh?» (589). Settembrini's *antilogia* is full of angry passion now:

...no need of the pernicious indulgence it proffered, against the accused dualism of a conception which bedeviled the universe – that is to say, life – as well as life's dark opposite, the Spirit – for if life was evil, the Spirit, as pure negation, must be so too. And he broke a lance in defence of the blamelessness of sensual gratification (*die Unschuld der Wollust*) (589).

Once more from the perspective of the classical tradition, it is worth underlining the ironic fact—and Mann is well aware of it—that a lover of classicism and apologist for the sensual gratification as is his Settembrini not only must face up to the centuries-old Christian ascetic tradition but also to the ascetic side of the classical sensibility. He took

³⁷ Naphta's guidelines are: «Absolute authority, iron discipline, coercion, submission, the Terror!... It was the army regulations of the Prussian Frederick, the Exercise-book of the Spanish Loyola all over again; it was rigid, it was devout, to the very marrow» (466-67). The members of the Company of Jesus: «For theirs was a work of supererogation (*ex supererogatione*) in that they not only combated the rebellion of the flesh (*rebellio carnis*), which after all was incumbent upon any average healthy human reason to do, but were hostile to even an inclination toward the things of the sense, toward love of self and love of worldly things, even where these had not been directly forbidden. For it was better and more honourable to assail the foe (*agere contra*), that is, to attack, than merely to defend oneself (*resistere*). To weaken and break the foe – those were the instructions in the service-book; and here again its author, the Spanish Loyola, was of one mind with Joachim's *captain general*, the Prussian Frederick, with his motto of 'Attack, attack! Keep on their heels! *Attaquez donc toujours!*' » (447).

Plotinus as an example but the implicit echo of Platonic texts, of which—as seen above—he often and skilfully takes advantage, is certainly plausible. The palinode in the *Phaedrus*, is full of arguments against the bad lover who does not avoid the sensible world in order to reach the intelligible one. On the contrary, surrendered to the sensual gratification that derives from the contemplation of the earthly beauty, «like a beast he proceeds to lust and begetting (τετράποδος νόμον βαίνειν ἐπιχειρεῖ καὶ παιδοσπορεῖν), he makes licence his companion and is not afraid or ashamed to pursue pleasure in violation of nature (οὐ δέδοικεν οὐδ' αἰσχύνεται παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκων)» (250e, 3-4, 251). The contrast to this attitude is provided by those men who, as Aristophanes states in the *Symposium*, come from an ancient dual masculine genre and, after becoming pederasts as a consequence (παιδεραστοῦσι), «have no natural (φύσει) interest in wiving and getting children (πρὸς γάμους καὶ παιδοποιίας), but only do these things under stress of custom (ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου); they are quite contented to live together unwedded» (ἀγάμοις -191e, 6-192b, 2). At any rate, the great master of the Platonic erotic asceticism is Diotima, who explains to Socrates (211d-212a) what we could call the fine concept of intellectual begetting in contrast to the biological act, precisely the final stop of those who have rightly ascended towards the intelligible world and can already contemplate «the very essence of beauty (αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν)». This can be compared with nothing, not even with «your beautiful boys... whose aspect now so astounds you» (211d, 2-5)³⁸.

Consequently, it is quite obvious that, in accordance with Mann's design, the ugly pole of the confrontation between those who rightly consider themselves humanists and those who in fact must prove they really are is assigned to Naphta. He thinks that disease is very human and that saints have always lived off its fruits. Settembrini states that it is stupid to exalt this and considers it «*criminoso*» to abjure health and life. Naphta is not for abolishing bodily punishments and defends holy cruelty to enforce obedience; with regard to the Inquisition, he is for the torture: «The torture was recommended to reason (vernunftgeboten)» to look into the heart and the brain of those who do not tell the truth. Settembrini thinks it a «*porcheria*» and «a madness of asceticism (Asketischer Irrwahn)». Naphta is for the capital punishment because he does not believe in the scientific determinism, based upon which the freemason rejects the conception of guilt and also because: «It is absurd for the murderer to outlive the murdered». Settembrini, on the contrary, is for abolishing it, thinking of the «ever-present possibility that justice might err and judicial murder be committed» and of the urge not to repay evil with evil. Naphta is not for the «destruction of the body by fire». Settembrini is. To sum up, Naphta attacks «the liberal-individualism of our bourgeois, humanitarian age (Liberal-Individualismus der bürgerlichen Humanitätsepoche)»; the «enlightened absolutism of the ego (Absolutismus des Ich)»; the reluctance to go

³⁸ Platonic references to be taken into account in my opinion because, when Clavdia Chauchat leaves the sanatorium, Hans Castorp realizes, as tradition prescribes –also the classical one- that he had forgotten everything but her. Let us compare, then, Mann and Plato's texts and we shall see that *mutatis mutandis* they assert almost the same: «I no longer know precisely how long. I have forgotten, broken with, everything, my relatives, my calling, all my ideas of life. When Clavdia went away, I waited here for her return, so that now I am wholly lost to life down below, and dead in the eyes of my friends» (611). *Phdr.* 252a 1-7 (Burnet 1901, rpr. 1991): «Therefore the soul will not, if it can help it, be left alone by the beautiful one, but esteems him above all others, forgets for him mother and brothers and all friends, neglects properly and cares not for its loss, and despising all the customs and proprieties in which it formerly took pride, it is ready to be a slave and to sleep wherever it is allowed, as near as possible to the beloved».

“beyond considerations of personal safety and well being” in order to accept «something beyond personal or individual interests (etwas Überpersönliches, Überindividuelles)», and finally he deplores the lack of heroism of the utilitarian morality, whose «end and aim was to make men grow old and happy, rich and comfortable—and that was all there was to it (dass man alt und glücklich, reich und gesund damit werde und damit Punktum)» (456-68).

It would be impossible indeed to capture the beauty of this pure and ultimate ugliness, but we should not forget that opposition to the bourgeois style of life—above all artists’ life—is a recurrent topic in Mann’s works, and that the young engineer will finally descend to the plain to take part in a war, an act which is truly alien to personal or individual interests. We might somehow assert, then, that the beautiful pole will have to approach towards the ugly one. In other words, our analysis of the use of the sophist technique of considering the *lógos* / *antilogía* throughout the novel reasonably takes us to the opposition itself, although, regarding this theme, I clearly enter the ground of hypotheses, that is to say, the maybe implicit but not explicit reference that, however, I shall approach forcing me to substantiate its credibility as far as possible.

The tuberculosis sanatorium, where the protagonists of the novel reside, is by definition a place of suffering people³⁹, who necessarily witness their companions’ death and try to accept it as positively as they can. According to Settembrini’s thesis: «the only sane, noble... the only religious way to think of death is as part and parcel of life; to regard it... as the inviolable condition of life (als heilige Bedingung des Lebens)». He appeals to the wisdom of the ancients: «The ancients adorned their sarcophagi with the emblems of life and procreation... These men knew how to pay homage to death. For death is worthy of homage, as the cradle of life, as the womb of palingenesis (Der Tod ist ehrwürdig als Wiege des Lebens, als Mutterschoss der Erneuerung)» (198). He even remembers that the first time he and the young engineer approached serious themes: «We spoke, I believe, of life and death (von Tod und Leben)... and the grotesqueness into which it declines so soon as the mind erects it into an independent principle» (411). In effect: «Either the experience of death must be the last experience of life, or else it must be a bugaboo, pure and simple (Das Erlebnis des Todes muss zuletzt das Erlebnis des Lebens sein)» (457). These reflections are wise and convincing enough to be assumed by his pupil and, later on, Hans Castorp remembers them walking through the mountain and facing up to a terrible snowstorm: «...he who knows the body, life, knows death (Wer aber den Körper, das Leben erkennt, erkennt den Tod)... And that is... only the beginning. One must have... the other side (das Gegenteil). For all interest in disease and death is only another expression of interest in life» (495). He is so convinced of such an undeniable truth that he hastens to share it with Clavdia Chauchat: «...love of it (death) leads to love of life and love of humanity... and I am enchanted... to tell you all about it. There are two paths to life: one is the regular one... The other is bad, it leads through death – that is the *spirituel* way»⁴⁰ (596-97).

Indeed, it was Heraclitus who, among the Presocratic philosophers, proposed to understand the Nature in terms of a cosmos or universal order and harmony⁴¹ paradoxically made of a permanent opposition of contraries. The philosopher’s

³⁹ About this, see, e.g.: Max 2013; Engelhardt 2003.

⁴⁰ On death in Thomas Mann’s works, see, e.g.: La Vergata 2003; Meredith 1999; Heftrich 1993; Scholdt 1980.

⁴¹ «Heraclitus says that what is opposite agrees and from what does not agree comes the most beautiful harmony, and everything happens according to discord» (H. τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἀρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ’ ἔριν γίνεσθαι (Arist. *EN*. Θ 2. 1155 b 4. B 8 DK).

fragments that we could take into account simply as a general reference –hypothetical, I insist– of the reflections we have just read⁴² are the following: first, the one asserting the ‘life / death’ opposition and the transformation of the former into the latter and vice versa: «As only one thing there is life and death, to be awake and to be asleep, youth and age, for these become those and those again these»⁴³; secondly, the one that points out that we need disease to understand health: «Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest»⁴⁴. It is quite obvious that, only by remembering all that has been analyzed so far, one should recognize that Mann has a good knowledge of the Greek philosophy. And, with regard to Heraclitus, we could even remember that in 1901—Mann began to write *The Magic Mountain* in 1913—Hermann Diels published *Herakleitos von Ephesos*, with a German translation of the fragments but, in any case, we cannot affirm that this title was one of the books in Mann’s personal library⁴⁵. On the contrary, there are some studies that do relate Heraclitus to Mann’s works, although his influence would arrive at him indirectly, that is, through the presence of Heraclitus’s thoughts in the works by Jung or Nietzsche, to whom Mann is intellectually much indebted⁴⁶.

At any rate, the opposites—having Heraclitus in mind or not⁴⁷—are poles creating permanent tension, movement and change, and regarding the Greek philosopher the key words are “war” and “flow”⁴⁸. In fact Naphta reproaches Settembrini for urging Hans Castorp to move, to rebel: «...Herr Settembrini spoke... with great enthusiasm, of the revolutionary principle (Bewegung) and about rebellion and reform (Rebellion,

⁴² That is to say, the fragments which, in addition to others, serve to form the general thought of a philosopher as he/she is explained in any history of Greek philosophy.

⁴³ ταῦτό τ’ἔνι ζῶν καὶ τεθηγκός καὶ τὸ ἐργηγορός καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκείνα ἐστὶ κάκεινα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα (Plu. *Consol. ad. Apoll.* 106e. B 88 DK – the translations are mine).

⁴⁴ νοῦσος ὑγιείην ἤδὲ καὶ ἀγαθόν, λιμός κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν (Stob. *Flor.* III, 177. B 111 DK).

⁴⁵ Nor can it be categorically denied; in fact, after contacting with ETHBIB Thomas-Man-Archive in Zürich the answer was: «it is not existing in Thomas Mann’s own library as she is standing here today. This did not say that he never owned the book, it could be lost during the exile».

⁴⁶ Nolte 1996, p. 30, for instance, writes with regard to *Thomas Mann’s Joseph Novels*: «The novel contains numerous symbols, motifs and themes, of which the central ones appear in pairs of opposites... Through this dialectic structure is constituted the central and all-embracing theme of *being* and *meaning*, which informs this whole range of opposed symbols. Heraclitus speaks in his philosophy of the dialectical law of *enantiodromia*... ‘the process by which something becomes its opposite, and the subsequent interaction of the two’. Jung uses the term for the emergence of the unconscious opposite in the course of time’ », and she adds the following reference: C. G. Jung. *Collected Works*, 6, translated by H. G. Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, p.246). Or regarding other Heraclitus’s notions in *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*, Montiel 2013, proposing to read the novel from the new conception of the human *psyché* opened by Jung and continued by the *Imaginal Psychology* of James Hillman, writes the following: «From the first moment the self is a problem for Felix Krull and more than this the result of an erroneous idea about what human life is. It is not difficult to see here the mark of “everything flows” in the words of Heraclitus, undoubtedly the pre-Socratic philosopher most admired by Hillman and also by Nietzsche». Finally and regarding Nietzsche’s admiration of Heraclitus, here are, for instance, two excerpts of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche 2000, pp. 107 and 129): «... It is precisely music which is the sole unadulterated, pure, and purifying fire-spirit, out of which and into which, as in the doctrine of the great Heraclitus of Ephesus, all things move in a double cycle»; «...a Dionysian phenomenon, which reveals to us again and again the playful construction and destruction of the individual world as the overflow of an original joy, in a similar way to that in which Heraclitus the Obscure compares the world-forming force to a child at play, arranging and scattering stone here and there, building and then trampling sand-hills».

⁴⁷ Needless to say, I cannot discard Hegel’s system of contraries. However, it is highly significant that, when “das Gegenteil” and all Hegel’s related terms are examined, Heraclitus is immediately quoted; see, e.g.: Inwood 1992, 205-206.

⁴⁸ «War is father of everything» (πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστὶ -Hippol. *Haer.* IX, 9, 4. B 53 DK).

Weltverbesserung), which is no very peaceful principle (kein... friedliches Prinzip)». Besides: «You see... life developing from infusorium up to man (Sie sehen in ungemessenen Zeiträumen das Leben)... man has yet before him endless possibilities of development?» (380-81).

Having Heraclitus in mind or not, one can acknowledge that the young protagonist's humanistic education has largely consisted of witnessing a constant war between opposites, and that everything seems to point towards Mann wanting him to save them from mutual destruction, thus becoming in his turn the harmonic and unifying element: «They forced everything to an issue... and wrangled bitterly over extremes, whereas it seemed to him... as though somewhere between two intolerable positions (irgendwo inmitten zwischen den strittigen Unleidlichkeiten)... must lie something (conciliatory – versöhnlich), which one might personally call the human» (523). Therefore, the role to play by the engineer, the role to play by any human being finally endowed with a personal criterion is to become the sole and unifying Reason— *Lógos*—, thanks to which the permanent war between pairs of opposites becomes a true salvation and not a tragic step towards the abyss of mutual destruction. Thomas Mann, then, presents here the most humanistic version not only of the war between opposing forces but also of the nuclear concept or *Lógos* that conciliates them. In other words, man's kingdom is full of contradictions but they are the subjects of the higher King's dignity, intelligence and piety:

I have learned much from those up here, I have been driven up from the valley, so that the breath almost left my poor body. Yet now from the base of my column I have no meager view. I have dreamed of man's state... I will hold with them and not with Naphta, neither with Settembrini. They are both talkers... Pedagogues both!⁴⁹ Their quarrels and counter-positions are just a *guazzabuglio* too, and a confused noise of battle, which need trouble nobody who keeps a little clear in his head and pious in his heart... Disease, health! Spirit, nature! (Tod oder Leben – Krankheit, Gesundheit – Geist und Natur). Are those contradictions?... The recklessness of death is in life, it would not be life without it – and in the centre (in der Mitte) is the position of the *Homo Dei*... I, from my column, perceive all this. In this state he must live gallantly, associate in friendly reverence with himself, for only he is aristocratic, and the counter-positions are not at all. Man is the lord of counter-positions (Der Mensch ist Herr der Gegensätze), they can be only through him, and thus he is more aristocratic than they (ist er vornehmer als sie). More so than death, too aristocratic for death – that is the freedom of his mind. More aristocratic than life, too aristocratic for life, and that is the piety in his heart (495-96).

Here is the final conviction of a young man who has learnt that life is movement, change, tension and war, and who is intellectually powerful enough to rule his life and, yet, he has not transformed this power into an excuse to remain protected in a sort of ivory tower. On the contrary, long ago he had already felt overwhelmed by the peace and comfort of the sanatorium to the extent of foreseeing the paralysis of his spirit: «He had sat there and looked abroad, at those mist-wreathed summits, at the carnival of snow, and blushed to be gaping thus from the breast-work of material well-being (und sich seines Gaffens über die Brustwehr des Komforts hin in seiner Seele geschämt)»

⁴⁹ Pedagogues with no connexion with the world: «... when the scene changed from the sphere of the intellectual to the strictly earthly and practical, and dealt with questions, and in fields, where commanding natures prove their worth – then there were no two views possible. For then the others were undone, then they were cast in the shade, then they drew in their horns, and Peeperkorn came out, grasped the sceptre, arranged, decided, 'settled'» (591).

(477). He had felt the lack of something and because of this lack caused his «(desire) was a lively craving to come into close and freer touch with the mountains... in their snowy desolation... Yet how could he, all unprovided and foot bound as he was, hope to gratify such a desire?». It was not any desire but «the fascination of venturing just so far into the monstrous unknown... that the adventure grazed the perilous, that it was just barely possible to put limits to it». He faced up, then, to the mountain: «... powdered in snow to the waist, up a succession of snow-shrouded terraces, up and up... higher and higher toward the sky». And danger made its appearance: «...not remarking an intervening depression of the ground... everything swam before his eyes in the white mist... if he were overtaken unawares by the storm, he would probably... not find his way home». Prudence counselled him to return to the sanatorium but «he refused to take premature flight... what went on in Hans Castorp's soul can only be described by the one word challenge (Herausforderung)... a repudiation of all caution whatsoever» (481). His heart «was stormly beating»; he did not want to let himself «be snowed under by this idiotically symmetrical crystallometry», so that he fought and resisted the temptation to lie down but «he did his part, and moved on despite the weight the cold more and more laid upon his limbs» (472-85).

Therefore, there is no doubt that the absolute bourgeois idolatry of the ego, which was censured by Naphta and leads man to avoid any risk, has not taken root in the young engineer. We have seen him overcoming the opposite elements and becoming the reason or *lógos* that conciliates them. Anyway, in his present circumstances, reason might counsel him to give finally way to death, so that Thomas Mann provides him with the first pole of a constant opposition in his works: 'Liebe / Tod', '*éros / thánatos*', the instinct to preserve life and the instinct to search for death, just as Freud puts it, for example, in *The Ego and the Id (Das Ich und das Es, 1923)*⁵⁰: «I will be good. I will let death have no mastery over my thoughts. For therein lies goodness and love of humankind». He does not reject Death's authority but: «Death and love... Love (die Liebe: love, affection, esteem) stands opposed to death. It is love, not reason (Vernunft: reason, sanity, common sense), that is stronger than death». And, if we have seen above that the beauty of form, materialised in the beauty of the word, led to good deeds, it is quite logical now to see form being equated to love and goodness, thus accomplishing a noble humanistic project: «And from love and sweetness alone can form come: form and civilization, friendly, enlightened, beautiful human intercourse». To sum up, Hans Castorp's formative period, that is, his ability of thinking and ruling accordingly has finally and happily concluded:

... yes it is well and truly dreamed... I will keep faith with death in my heart, yet well remember that faith with death and the dead is evil, is hostile to humankind, so soon as we give it power over thought and action. *For the sake of goodness and love, man shall let death have no sovereignty over his thoughts (Der Mensch soll um der Güte und Liebe willen dem Tode keine Herrschaft einräumen über seine Gedanken)*... .. Long, long have I sought after this word... Now I have it fast... I am in simple raptures, my body is warm, my heart beats high... humanly, on grounds of my joyful spirits... Up, up! Open your eyes! These are your limbs, your legs here in the snow! Pull yourself together, and up!... He had a hard struggle to free himself – but the inner compulsion proved stronger. With a jerk he raised himself on his elbows, briskly drew up his knees, shoved, rolled, wrestled to his feet (496).

⁵⁰ About this, see e.g.: Berlin 1992; Northcote-Bade 1984; Wysling 1983.

The *lógos* that had conciliated the poles, still too cold, has now become love injecting courage, power, happiness and passion. Love provides Hans Castorp—in fact, all human beings—with what they need to face up to their constant war or life. ‘Liebe’ does not mean here ‘the *éros* or desire of what we lack’ of Plato’s *Symposium*⁵¹—the young engineer has reached the end, so to speak, of the *scala amoris*—neither does it mean the healthy madness that lovers and beloveds receive from gods, as we read in the palinode of his *Phaedrus*⁵² but it is certainly enthusiasm and passion (erwärmt: enthusiastic, passionate).

Those hazards deriving from the snowstorm made him choose life and this is a well-learned lesson but, once again in the sanatorium and deprived of the demonic power that his love for Clavdia Chauchat injected in him, «all these events had put the young man in a frame of mind to find life itself not precisely canny... everything appeared... permanently and increasingly awry». The winner is now «a demonic power (Dämon)... the name was Dumps (Stumpfsinn)», that is, a dead life with no sensations and hardships that takes him back to an earlier state he had been ashamed of: «He saw on every side the uncanny and the malign... life without time, life without care or hope, life as... assiduous stagnation (das Leben als stagnierende betriebsame Liederlichkeit), life as dead (das tote Leben)» (627). And, after seven years, the thunderbolt of the Great War reaches the sanatorium. «He saw himself released, freed (Er sah sich entzaubert... befreit) from enchantment... by the operation of exterior powers (elementaren Aussenmächten)» (711). As usual, he is comfortably lying on the grass but he must get up again and get out of his golden cave, well aware of having committed once more a sin of omission:

Yet though his tiny destiny fainted to nothing in the face of the general, was there not some hint of a personal mercy and grace for him, a manifestation of divine goodness and justice? Would Life receive again her erring and ‘delicate’ child (Nahm das Leben sein sündiges Sorgenkind noch einmal an) – not by a cheap and easy slipping back to her arms, but sternly, solemnly, penitentially... He sank on his knees, raising face and hands to a heaven that howsoever dark and sulphurous was no longer the gloomy grotto of his state of sin (die Grottendecke des Sündenberges) (711-12).

We have reached, then, the most controversial episode of the novel, i.e., Hans Castorp’s final decision, after his formative period, to abandon his refuge and descend to the plain at such a tragic moment. The enchantment of his personal Zauberberg has definitively disappeared because, after seven years, the most severe version or pole of life, that is to say, the worldly tension turned into a war seems now to be strong enough to drag him. Having Heraclitus in mind or not, life is movement and flow and, consequently, is in a permanent tension with death; otherwise, it would become a *contradictio in terminis: das tote Leben*. The living life has faced Hans Castorp up to an inescapable dilemma: to surrender to the danger of stagnation and death while he is still alive, a real danger that besieges him again, or to let himself be dragged by the flow of the events towards an uncertain destiny after having been unduly driven up from the

⁵¹ 200e, 8-9: «First, is not Love directed to certain things; of which, in the second place, he has a want?» Socrates asks Agathon (ἔστιν ὁ Ἔρως πρῶτον μὲν τινῶν, ἔπειτα τούτων ὧν ἂν ἔνδεια παρῆ αὐτῶ; - Lamb 1983).

⁵² 245b, 2-6: «... let us not be afraid on that point, and let no one disturb and frighten us by saying that the reasonable friend should be preferred to him who is in a frenzy (ὡς πρὸ τοῦ κεκλινημένου τὸν σώφρονα δεῖ προαιρεῖσθαι φίλον). Let him show in addition that love is not sent from heaven for the advantage of lover and beloved alike, and we will grant him the prize of victory» (ἐπ’ ὠφελίᾳ ὁ ἔρως τῶ ἔρῳντι καὶ τῶ ἔρωμένῳ ἐκ θεῶν ἐπιπέμπεται - Fowler 1913).

valley. Between an assiduous stagnation and a tragic but dynamic disorder—as life very often is—the sinless choice clearly seems to be the second one⁵³, although Mann does not give up his hope that the sublime pole of Love eventually triumphs, a general human hope with which he puts an end to *The Magic Mountain*:

Farewell – and if thou livest or diest! Thy prospects are poor. The desperate dance, in which thy fortunes are caught up, will last yet many a sinful year; we should not care to set a high stake on thy life by the time it ends. We even confess that it is without great concern we leave the question open. Adventures of the flesh and in the spirit, while enhancing the simplicity, granted thee to know in the spirit what in the flesh thou scarcely couldst have done. Moments there were, when out of death, and the rebellion of the flesh, there came to thee, as thou tookest stock of thyself, a dream of love. Out of this universal feast of death, out of this extremity of fever, kindling the rain-washed evening sky to a fiery glow, may it be that Love one day shall mount? (Wird auch aus diesem Weltfest des Todes, auch aus der schlimmen Fieberbrunst, die rings den regnerischen Abendhimmel entzündet, einmal die Liebe steigen?) (716).

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⁵³ A view which is opposed, for instance, to what Marguerite Yourcenar, also an idolatress of literature, thinks: «Mais rien n'est simple chez Mann: dans les dernières pages de *La Montagne magique*, c'est presque joyeusement que Hans Castorp se jette dans l'aventure de la guerre, avec l'espoir d'y retrouver la réalité et la camaraderie humaine. Sentiment point normal chez une recrue de 1914, mais c'est, semble-t-il, sans réserves mentales aucunes qu'un Mann encore imbu des disciplines militaristes de son temps et de son peuple fait prendre à Hans, au bout de son libre périple, la place laissée vide par l'obtus et intransigeant Joachim. Même dans l'oeuvre la plus classique du grand écrivain, l'exercice de l'intelligence demeure une occupation suspecte, et la guerre est, pour "l'enfant gâté de la vie", l'exorcisme qui l'arrache à "la montagne des péchés"... Mais le thème de ce qu'on pourrait appeler le péché originel de l'intelligence est trop constant chez Mann pour qu'on puisse se permettre d'esquiver cet épilogue: c'est délibérément qu'à la fin d'un long ouvrage consacré aux progrès d'un esprit qui se forme les investigations intellectuelles de Hans sont dénoncées comme une dangereuse excursion dans le Mal.» (1978, 276-77). However, regarding this, see: Becker 1994.

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