

An Interpretation of the Musical Themes in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*

By George Coffin

In a symphonic literary work such as Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, the individual themes which interweave to produce the complex counterpoint of the whole unit can hardly be sufficiently treated in one essay. To avoid such confusion we shall, then, consider only the musical themes and references as they parallel the personality development of Hans Castorp. Through this chronological presentation of references we may observe the evolution of character in musical symbols carefully chosen to express the first simplicity and final complexity of the novel's central character.

Upon Hans' arrival at the Berghof we find the first musical reference of the book in a hymn and a march (neither named) which are played at the first Sunday concert. Hans, at the time of his arrival, is marked by a simplicity and naivete exhibited in his response to the selections played by the visiting band. Both selections are in themselves uncomplicated, and our hero enjoys them on the level of the purely physical in that they produce a pleasantly narcotic effect. Here we learn that he has always enjoyed music, although he has no great insight into its meaning. During the same early period of his initiation into the mystic atmosphere, the hermetic entombment of the sanatorium, there is a further and more powerful association on the physical level of interpretation when the playing of a waltz is linked with the vulgarity of the Russian couple in the next room.

It is Settembrini who first points out the relationship of music with evil in his conversational mention of a hymn to the Devil (although the hymn is probably in poetic form alone) and later attacks all music which does not lead to action as being "suspect." The enjoyment of such music, the Italian declares, is devoid of reason, and, like the spiritual life presented later, leads to lassitude and chaos.

The band concerts are a regular occurrence of the Berghof and constitute a part of Hans' indoctrination. During this era of development, the low level of his receptivity parallels his simplicity in philosophic views. The introduction of the piano rendition of the "Wedding March" from "Mid-Summer-Night's Dream," by none too expert a pianist and the same narcotic effect upon Hans re-enforces our awareness of the physical level. The songs that Hans sings while walking alone are simple folk songs appropriate at this stage.

At this particular point in the novel, the sub-plot of Hans' love affair with Clavdia is introduced. Although this affair is quite important to his development in that it introduces the influence of the orient, and later develops into a spiritualized relationship, at this particular time it is on the physical level of the sentimental ditties he sings when thinking of Clavdia. The first spark of the intellectual level is presented in a concert scene when, for the first time elevated and almost beatified, Hans is happy to enjoy the music without the distraction of Clavdia's presence. There is a realization in this attitude that music is universal, and by his desire to reject the physical from his enjoyment, he identifies himself with the universal. Both the elements of meditation (spiritual) and reason (the intellectual approach) emerge in his action.

By the time Hans undergoes his mystical experience in the snow, the music in his vision has become almost entirely the subject of intellectual enjoyment of tone symbols which, although they represent pleasure of the senses, are not enjoyed through sensual reaction.

The total personality of Castorp is present in his selection of phonograph records from the Berghof collection. His identification of self with Radames in Aida ("Tu—In questa tomba") represents his own rejection of duty for love and the preference for death over life. In this aria he sees the vulgar horror of actual fact veiled by music, art, and the human spirit. The power of consolation in the concept of the beauty of death indicates his clinging to the irrational.

The selection of "*L'Après-midi d'un faun*" is a reverting to the physical in a desire for narcotic forgetfulness. It is interesting to note that the narrative of this symphonic poem (the faun waking in the forest at dawn, who fails to recall in any clarity the visit of the nymphs on the previous afternoon) parallels Hans' actual state in regard to his own mystical experience which he now retains as only a vague memory.

Valentine's Prayer Intermezzo from "Faust" indicates Hans' devotion to duty and religion. It is this aria, a soldier's prayer upon entering the field of honor, which forces his entrance into the supernatural because it recalls his soldierly cousin and produces the vision of that cousin from which Hans withdraws in intellectual fear—the triumph of reason over irrationality.

In the "Lindenbaum" Hans forshadows his final triumph in development. In the lovely lines which begin, "Am Brunnen vor dem Tore . . ." Hans recalls the world he has loved so deeply, the sense of duty he has neglected, and his national pride. Singing the lines of this lied Hans, his emotions now tempered by reason and his faith (now of the intellect in union with the supernatural)

strengthened by insight, makes his triumphant exit to the flat lands below—his exit from the hermetic experience into the realms of reason, duty, and the normal life.

THE RADIO "GIVE AWAY" PROGRAM

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Radio "give away" programs are those productions which offer some type of reward to a participant for his efforts on the program. This person may or may not be present at the actual broadcast. This type of program is of recent origin, but it is rapidly becoming one of the more outstanding forms of radio entertainment.

The "give away" program is greeted differently by various individuals. It is obvious that these programs are popular with the majority of the listening audience. The programs are toned so as to appeal to the various levels of intelligence. All of these programs do not reach the listener in the same way. Some of the programs like "Information Please" and "Can You Top This" are characteristic of the type which require the participant to send in questions. He is then rewarded if his question is not correctly answered.

Most of these programs, however, fall under the classification of those requiring active participation. In this type of program the participant gains by answering questions correctly. Some examples of this type are "Doctor I. Q.," "Break the Bank," and "Take It or Leave It."

The most lavish among these programs are those like "Stop the Music," "Sing It Again," and "Truth or Consequences" which reach their listeners via the telephone. These programs give huge rewards to the participant who gives the correct answer to the question asked.

Their very popularity with the listening audience makes these programs unpopular with the actors in other radio programs. Some radio stars like Fred Allen have taken some sort of legal action against these programs. Nearly all other radio productions have lost listeners to the "give away" shows, and therefore their popularity has decreased. If only to protect themselves the other shows must take some action against the "give away" program.

The "give away" programs are a valuable means of advertisement for the sponsors. They make the audience thoroughly conscious of the sponsor's product by giving that product as a prize to the winning contestant. Some programs even force the participant to buy