
 THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD IN MANN'S *THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN*

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC of 2020, readers of modernist literature have often been reminded of the flu epidemic of 1918-1920, which killed tens of millions exactly one century ago.¹ Modern fiction is full of dead bodies, more often associated with the First World War than with communicable disease. One of the great authors of the period, Thomas Mann, wrote a pair of works, however, that used disease as a metaphor for the state of European society on the eve of the war. *Death in Venice* (1912) sets the decline of an aristocratic German writer and his love for a young Polish boy against the backdrop of the last major cholera epidemic to affect Italy, in 1911. Mann's masterpiece *The Magic Mountain*, originally intended as a "humorous companion-piece" (qtd. in Beddow 137) to the earlier novella, was begun in 1912 but not completed until 1924, and it grew along the way into a 700-page epic, spanning seven years of ill health. Intermittently funny and lugubrious, it anatomizes pre-war bourgeois society as represented by the inmates of a tuberculosis asylum in Davos, Switzerland.² Although the current pandemic has not caused nearly as much disruption to upper-middle-class life as Mann's contemporaries experienced in a decade of cholera, tuberculosis, influenza, and war, *The Magic Mountain* has taken on a renewed relevance for those of us experiencing enforced immobility and social distancing amidst widespread political paralysis.³

Shortly after Hans Castorp arrives at the Berghof Sanatorium in the opening pages of the novel, his cousin Joachim Ziemssen explains that, at the Schatzalp Sanatorium, even higher in the Alps, "They have to transport the bodies down by bobsled in the winter, because the roads are impassable." Castorp is shocked at what he calls his cousin's "cynicism": "The bodies? Oh, I see. You don't say! On bobsleds! And you can sit there and tell me that so calm and cool" (Mann 9). This discussion of how to dispose of the bodies of tuberculosis patients sets the uneasy tone for Castorp's first day at the sanatorium. It also typifies a concern in modernist fiction with the proper rites for the burial of the dead. Modernist novels are full of dead bodies and debates regarding the best ways to dispose of them, debates that came to mind this year as many overwhelmed medical systems faced the problem of how to preserve the bodies of the dead as they awaited burial.

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In this essay, I would like to investigate in some detail the burial of the dead in *The Magic Mountain* with reference to an earlier study of works by James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and several other “high” modernist authors. I will argue that Mann sees the novel, as a genre, as having a particular ability to represent the process of mourning because of its powers of ironic distancing: it can represent both the public ritual of the funeral service and the private thoughts of the mourner, which may or may not accord with official sentiment.⁴ The modern novel shows how we project our own desires and fears onto the dead. The modernists often draw on classical models — especially Homer — in trying to imagine what happens to people after they die, in part because they seem to be seeking a model of relation to the dead that is not dependent on what Woolf called “Christianity and its consolations” (*Collected Essays* 13). After reviewing the role of burial in *The Magic Mountain* and the works of some of Mann’s contemporaries, I will suggest some of the ways that this novel can help us understand recent critical debates about the role of religion or spirituality in modernist literature. The dialectics of Mann’s greatest novel remain relevant a century later in a still only partially secular age, in which we struggle to reconcile reverence for the dead with a sometimes forlorn faith in historical progress.

HANS CASTORP spends a long seven years at Davos, but Mann spent even longer writing the book — twelve years spanning the First World War — and when it came out in 1924 the novel was among the most important of several major works of modern fiction that explored the prewar years, which had already taken on a ghostly, nostalgic sepia tint. The author makes both heavy and playful use of irony right from the novel’s foreword in which he points out that the story “took place before the war” and speaks of the “before” much as today we (sometimes jokingly) speak of the time before COVID as the “before time” (Mann xi). The novel ends with a mock burial in the mud of battle; the fascination with corpses in the literature of the 1920s can certainly be traced in part to the trenches of the First World War.

The war seems to me, however, to be too limited a framework for this fascination, which results also from a broader search for new forms of ritual to replace the rituals of the church. After all, Mann began the novel before the war and many of its themes were already present in *Death in Venice*. Like Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922), Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and Proust in the later volumes of *Remembrance of*

Things Past (which he was still revising when he died in 1922), Mann recreates a world before the war that by the time of writing seems already to belong to a mythic past. As he asks in the foreword, “But is not the pastness of a story that much more profound, more complete, more like a fairy tale, the tighter it fits up against the ‘before’?” (xii). None of these great novels would have been the same without the war, but perhaps we could say that these particular authors became the great novelists of the interwar period partly because their prewar experiences (especially of the deaths of close family members) had prepared them to write the great postwar novels. Nor perhaps is it accidental that Joyce was a spectacularly lapsed Catholic, Proust was the product of a mixed marriage, and Woolf and Mann, though raised Protestants, both married Jews. None belonged firmly to a church, and the church service and such rituals as the burial of the dead spoke to them only indirectly.

The modernists’ interest in dead bodies is often quite literal, and the focus is indeed on the body rather than the soul. In the second section of *The Magic Mountain*, the narrator relates Hans Castorp’s prior experiences with death: the deaths of his mother and father when Hans was between five and seven, and then the death of his paternal grandfather. At his grandfather’s funeral, Hans notes without exactly “admitting it to himself in so many words” that “the masses of flowers and more especially the very well represented tuberose were there for a more sobering reason [than to celebrate his grandfather’s passing into eternity] — and that was to gloss over the other side of death, the one that is neither beautiful nor sad, but almost indecent in its base physicality, to make people forget it or at least not be reminded of it” (26). Mann shows by the indirection of his own prose the fact that Hans cannot bring himself to refer specifically to the smell of his grandfather’s rotting corpse, but as the servant old Fiete tries to shoo away a fly that persistently lands on Grandfather’s forehead and fingers, Mann states the point more directly: “Hans Castorp thought he could smell more clearly than before those faint, but very peculiar and persistent fumes that he knew from before, and which, to his shame, always reminded him of a school chum who suffered from an offensive affliction that made everyone avoid him, the same odor that the tube-rose scent was supposed to cover up on the sly, but was unable to do, for all its lovely, austere richness” (27). Yet, after this memorable funeral, most of the burials in *The Magic Mountain* take place off stage, as it were. Director Behrens and his staff prefer to keep the dying, the *moribundi*, as they are referred to in Latin, out of sight, and the only

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sign of a death at the sanatorium is the open door to a room that is being fumigated.

Castorp and his cousin Ziemssen go to great lengths to visit with the *moribundi* and display a morbid interest in their physical fates. When they finally manage to see the corpse of a fellow inmate, the Austrian horseman, Castorp meditates, as many modern novelists will do, on the power of language, lapsing into the Church's language although he is still standing in the sanatorium: "'Requiescat in pace,' he said. 'Sit tibi terra levis. Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine.'" Castorp is here repeating fragments of Latin prayers. "You see, when it comes to death, when one speaks to the dead or about them, Latin comes into its own. It's the official language in such cases, which only points up how special death is" (288). Castorp's rather weak Latin, a running joke throughout the novel, epitomizes his unease with discussion of "higher" matters but perhaps also the inadequacy of the consolations provided by authorized religion.

The 1920s saw a number of explicitly religious efforts to re-imagine the burial of the dead, ranging from the official to the marginal. Among these were a renewed interest in spiritualism and efforts to contact the departed, a failed attempt to update the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer, including the rite for the Burial of the Dead, for the first time since the seventeenth century, and the introduction of such alternative liturgies as the scholar and traveler William Evans-Wentz's compilation the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁵ All these cases demonstrate a particular concern with the correct language of ritual, apparent also in scenes of burial in many novels of the period. Throughout the day on June 16, 1904, Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, murmurs to himself the Latin prayer for the dead that he had refused to recite at the side of his mother's deathbed: "Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet" (9). At Paddy Dignam's funeral in the "Hades" episode, Leopold Bloom listens to Father Coffey's prayers: "Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo, Domine." Bloom has even less Latin than Hans Castorp, but his reflections resemble those of his younger Lutheran contemporary: "Makes them feel more important to be prayed over in Latin." As the service concludes, the freemason Mr. Kernan comments to Bloom that the service of the Anglican Church of Ireland is "simpler, more impressive," and then quotes the English service: "— *I am the resurrection and the life*. That touches a man's inmost heart, [says Mr. Kernan]." Bloom politely agrees: "it does," but then thinks to himself, "Your heart perhaps but what price the fellow in the six feet by two with his toes to the daisies? No touching that" (87).

One of Virginia Woolf's last and most popular novels, though little studied now, is *The Years* (1937), which features the burial of the protagonist's mother in 1880. Delia Pargiter responds positively to the first line of the service, "I am the Resurrection and the Life": "Pent up as she had been all these days in the half-lit house which smelt of flowers, the outspoken words filled her with glory. This she could feel genuinely; this was something that she said herself." As the service progresses, however, the priest, her cousin James, begins to sound "as if he did not believe what he was saying" (*The Years* 85). He continues, nearing the end of the service, "'We give thee hearty thanks,' said the voice, 'for that it has pleased thee to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world —'; "What a lie! she cried to herself. What a damnable lie! He had robbed her of the one feeling that was genuine; he had spoilt her one moment of understanding" (87). Woolf's is the most outspoken and direct rejection of the service; Mann's and Joyce's characters assume a more ironic, distanced attitude to what they hear, but in any case the main theme is of a mourner listening to the official service and seeing it as, at best, a bit of trickery, and at worst, a lie. Proust, although he spends a lot of time and energy on death, has relatively little to say about funerals. We may recall the social comedy as well as pathos of Proust's description of the narrator's grandmother's death or the considerations of art and immortality that accompany Bergotte's death at the Vermeer exhibition, which he had attended in order to admire the painter's "little patch of yellow wall" (186). One of Proust's typical observations is about how quickly the dead are forgotten; this is exemplified by Mme. Verdurin who will not allow any of her guests to speak about the dead lest they spoil her parties; she prefers to act as if her recently deceased friends have simply gone on vacation.

Apart from Proust, the examples cited here suggest some of the inadequacies of Philippe Ariès's influential account of the difference between modern and medieval death, which he summarizes in this statement: "The old attitude in which death was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or awe, offers too marked a contrast to ours, where death is so frightful that we dare not utter its name" (13). Ariès's account is of course in part a form of the oft-disputed secularization thesis, and it echoes on a much grander scale some observations of Walter Benjamin in "The Storyteller," to the effect that "It has been observable for a number of centuries how in the general consciousness the thought of death has declined in omnipresence and vividness" (38). The account of Benjamin and Ariès seems to me inadequate because it underestimates the fear and awe that attended death in earlier times and overestimates the extent to which modern culture avoids death. It

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is clear, however, that Ariès's narrative of the inadequacies of modern culture, or what Ernest Becker described in the 1970s as "The Denial of Death," shares something with the views of the modernists and perhaps particularly of Mann, who objects to the solitary, sequestered, hygienic nature of death at the sanatorium. These historians also gesture towards important questions raised by Sandra M. Gilbert in her recent *Death's Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*, which movingly treats the modern elegy in relation to a very detailed and updated account of Ariès's analysis of modern death, and by Robert Pogue Harrison's remarkable *Dominion of the Dead*, in which he writes that "to be human means above all to bury" (xi). These scholars of the history and anthropology of death and dying allow us to see that the modernists themselves were engaged in a sort of literary anthropology, trying to understand the rituals of death and their role in human society as it recovered from untold disasters in the absence of traditional faith.

The novelists were also, perhaps, making a claim on behalf of their art form. None of the typical rituals, either ancient like the funeral service or modern like the séance, seems as true to the experience of mourning as does the novel, and what is particularly true about the novelist's representation of the funeral is his or her ability to represent the disjunction between the public rituals of mourning and the private thoughts of the mourner, whether these are Delia Pargiter's agonies over her mother's death or Leopold Bloom's and Hans Castorp's rather down-to-earth considerations of the process of decay. In one sense, these ambitions on the part of modern novelists are indeed the product of secularization: it is because the traditional rites of the church no longer seem adequate that the modern novelist feels called to offer an alternative. In another sense, though, the modernists are seeking through their art to perform many of the traditional functions of religion and especially the function of ritual: to provide the language for understanding such major forms of human experience as, in Philip Larkin's words, "marriage, and birth, / And death, and thoughts of these" (97-98).

PAGAN REFERENCES are common in these high modernist novels. One frequent theme, again owing something to the experience of trench warfare, is the descent into the underworld, or *katabasis*, especially as imagined by Homer in Book Eleven of the *Odyssey* and subsequently reimagined by Virgil and Dante. This literary tradition bespeaks the

difficulty of communication with the dead. *The Magic Mountain* ends with Hans Castorp at war, performing a grotesque sort of inadvertent burial of a comrade: “He is soaked through, his face is flushed, like all the others. He runs with feet weighed down by mud. . . . Look, he is stepping on the hand of a fallen comrade — stepping on it with his hobnailed boots, pressing it deep into the soggy, branch-strewn earth” (705). The branch-strewn earth recalls the Homeric simile according to which the generations of men are like leaves (*Iliad* 6.146-49) and more specifically perhaps the golden bough that Aeneas plucks as he descends into the underworld (*Aeneid* 6.125-44). Hans’s stepping on the hand of his comrade may also recall Dante’s stepping on the face of the traitor Bocca Degli Abbati in the deepest circle of hell (*Inferno* 32). Again, a general concern with mass death occasioned by the war is often accompanied by a more personal, but also more universal, fascination with the relationship of the living to the dead.

The Magic Mountain depends on a topographical inversion of the descent into the underworld, as Hans Castorp journeys up into the mountains and leaves behind his career as an engineer in the “flatlands.” In his first conversation with Castorp, the liberal humanist Herr Settembrini asks him how long the sanatorium doctors want him to stay: “How many months have our Minos and Rhadamanthus saddled you with?” (55). As Castorp tries to recall who exactly Minos and Rhadamanthus were (judges in Hades), he haltingly explains that he is only in Davos for a visit, to which Settembrini responds, “Great Scott! You are not one of us? You are healthy, you are merely stopping over, as it were, like Odysseus in the realm of the shades? How bold of you to descend into the depths, where the futile dead live on without their wits — ” (56). Castorp points out the reversal here: he has climbed five thousand feet, hardly the typical *katabasis*. Yet Settembrini insists that he has in fact descended into Hades; the residents of the sanatorium are already like the shades in the underworld, living in a sort of suspended animation. After Castorp’s liaison with the “oriental” Mme. Chauchat, Settembrini asks him, “Well, my good engineer, how did you like the pomegranate?” — recalling the seeds of pomegranate that Persephone ate and that prevented her from escaping Hades (349).

The Magic Mountain is, in part, a novel of ideas, and Mann personifies the struggle of ideas about disease, secularization, and historical progress in memorable pairs of characters. The Minos and Rhadamanthus of the sanatorium are the doctors Krokowski and Behrens. Rhadamanthus, the famously upright king of Crete, becomes Behrens, a matter-of-fact materialist, who flirts with the female patients, teases Castorp about his love life, and sees death as a simple and inevitable

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physical process. When one patient makes “a dreadful scene right at the end and absolutely refuses to die,” Behrens talks to him man-to-man and tells him not to “make such a fuss” (53). The patient obediently quiets down and peaceably dies. The mythical king Minos, brother and usurper of Rhadamanthus, directed the bestial offspring of his wife’s love for a bull, the Minotaur, to devour the children of Athens in his labyrinth. The Minos of the Berghof Sanatorium is the second-in-command, Dr. Krokowski. Likewise a master of a hidden and bestial labyrinth — the unconscious — Krokowski is a mixture of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. In the chapter “Analysis,” he lectures the inmates on the notion of disease as an expression of repressed erotic desire. Elsewhere, Krokowski tells Castorp that he has never met a perfectly healthy person and, when Castorp himself eventually develops tuberculosis, explains that it must be a symptom of a deeper mental or spiritual disease: “organic factors are always secondary” (188). The novel might seem to resemble a journey into the unconscious, as if Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* were set in the heart of a different continent, but Hans Castorp does not really resemble Conrad’s Marlow or Kurtz in that he prefers to stay near the surface of things, so we get glimpses of deeper forces, for example in his relationship with Mme. Chauchat on Walpurgisnacht, but never quite feel that we have grasped his soul.

Mann shows a certain disdain for the two medical professionals Behrens and Krokowski, but he restates their differences on a higher philosophical plane in the persons of Settembrini and his arch-rival the Jewish revolutionary and misanthropic failed Jesuit priest Naphta, said by Mann to have been based on a young Georg Lukács. Their debates dominate the second half of the novel, only briefly interrupted by Castorp’s dalliances and the comings and goings of inmates in the sanatorium. Settembrini, an heir of classical Athens and liberal Italy, seems to suffer from writer’s block as he prepares a volume analyzing all the masterpieces of world literature for *The Sociology of Suffering*, a volume of an encyclopaedia to be published by the International League for the Organization of Progress. The unachievable goal of this unending task of literary criticism is to eradicate suffering. Mann underlines his misguided idealism by having him frequently express his faith in “ideas of peace and plans for disarmament,” which seems about as likely to bring about European harmony as the patients’ efforts to learn Esperanto (373). The pessimist Naphta proclaims the “world-conquering cosmopolitanism of the Church” and combines his Christianity with communism but foresees the onset of war unleashed by the forces of nationalism (377). Far from wishing to eradicate suffering, he esteems it and praises Gothic art for its “radical proclama-

tion of suffering and the weakness of the flesh” (387). Hans Castorp thinks, “There is something of the occult about Naphta” (379). Although the Jewish Jesuit’s misanthropy and depression undercut many of his observations, Mann frequently suggests the essential accuracy of his tragic worldview.

Hans Castorp himself, “one of life’s problem children” of limited intellectual depth, cannot resolve the conflicts between Behrens and Krokowski or between Settembrini and Naphta, and arguably neither can the reader (303). In the case of the dueling philosophers (as also in the death of the charismatic Pieter Peeperkorn), Castorp is perhaps even criminally negligent in the ultimate crisis. But it is perhaps not entirely his fault that he finds it hard to resolve these contradictions. Mann himself is drawn to a vision of human life, and perhaps especially modern life, as a struggle between the rational, optimistic, and progressive forces represented by Behrens and Settembrini and the atavistic forces tapped by Krokowski and Naphta. He seems to take delight in Naphta’s revelation to Castorp that Settembrini’s vaunted freemasonry is just a substitute for religion, complete with hierarchies, rites, and superstitions, which has subsequently degenerated into “bourgeois misery organized as a club” (503). In this regard as in many others, Mann’s novel prefigures the arguments of the cultural Marxists Horkheimer and Adorno in their classic *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), heavily influenced by Lukács, though Mann’s own cosmopolitan political liberalism (at least during the period of writing the novel) more closely resembled that of Settembrini than the revolutionary pessimism of the fictional Naphta or the real Lukács, Horkheimer, and Adorno.⁶

In a book published a decade ago, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, I argued that a group of agnostic or atheistic novelists sought, in the early twentieth century, “to make the novel more capable of describing transcendent experiences” (20) and that modernist novels, far from being the “secular product of a secular age,” were “peculiarly God-haunted” (179). A great deal of recent criticism, especially since Charles Taylor’s magisterial *A Secular Age* (2007), has explored the persistence of religious themes in modern literature. Particularly notable for the topic of burial is the fine study of corpses in English-language fiction by David Sherman, *In a Strange Room*. What strikes me today, in reviewing some of the work of the past decade, is that the polarity of the struggles between Settembrini and Naphta has been somewhat reversed. Among at least some recent critics, those who see modernism as a secular revolt against Christianity tend to profess the more culturally pessimistic views of the Krokowski-Naph-

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ta type, while those who perceive in modern fiction an effort at some kind of mystical re-enchantment of the world seem to hold out more hope for authentic forms of community in our post-modern world, à la Settembrini or Behrens.

To take two distinguished recent examples, Stephen Kern writes in *Modernism After the Death of God* of the modernists' rejection of oppressive Christian sexual morality. He focuses for the most part on the role of fragmentation and cultural rebellion in six male modernists, but he does find moments of unification in the fiction of Virginia Woolf. Nonetheless, his analysis shares with Freud (one of his seven subjects) and the fictional Krokowski a view of Victorian religiosity as an oppressive dogma from which modernism sought to liberate the individual. By contrast, Stephanie Paulsell in *Religion Around Virginia Woolf* emphasizes the continuities between Woolf and her Victorian forebears, especially her Quaker Aunt Caroline Stephen. Paulsell's account finds in Woolf's modernism a mystical openness to others that preserves some sacred notion of community in a secular age, sharing perhaps some of the liberal optimism of Mann's freemason Settembrini. Like other important new work by Elizabeth Anderson, Anthony Domestico, Suzanne Hobson, Matthew Mutter, Justin Neuman, Erik Tønning, and Craig Woelfel, these recent studies show that no matter how powerful the forces of secularization in the early twentieth century, the major writers of the period remained actively engaged with their religious heritage, whether in search of a substitute for religion, a new form of aesthetic experience freed from Christian dogmas, or a renewed version of a traditional faith.⁷

THE DISJUNCTURE between public ritual and private grief finds moving expression in one of the final scenes of *The Magic Mountain*. After his cousin Joachim Ziemssen's death, in the atmosphere of exhaustion and anxiety that precedes the First World War, and to which the narrator refers as "The Great Stupor" and "The Great Petulance," Castorp attends a séance where the other residents of the sanatorium try to contact his cousin Ziemssen, now long dead. One of the last scenes in *The Magic Mountain*, from the chapter "Highly Questionable," was also the last passage I analyzed in my book *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*. I quote those paragraphs of my earlier study here:

As in *Ulysses*, the idea of spiritual resurrection in the machine-run and modern world is ironized by the assistance of

technology, here a gramophone that plays “light favorites” and an air from Gounod’s *Faust*. After a harrowing and hysterical scene in which the virginal Danish medium Elly Brand seems to be giving birth, the assembled inmates claim to see Ziemsen appear in the visitor’s chair of the doctor’s office where the séance takes place. Hans Castorp seems to see him as well, and Mann gives a lengthy description of Joachim’s appearance, in an old-fashioned military uniform: “Two deep creases were engraved on his brow between the eyes, which had sunk deep into their bony sockets, although that did not distract from the tenderness of the gaze that came from those beautiful, large, dark eyes, directed in friendly silence at Hans Castorp, at him alone.” Has the medium actually conjured the dead cousin to life? Is Hans the victim of a collective hallucination? Like Ajax in Book XI of the *Odyssey*, Joachim does not speak. Hans tries to concentrate on the vision: “Bending forward and leaning out to see past the hands and head on his knees, he stared into red darkness at the visitor in the chair. For a moment he thought he would throw up. His throat contracted and cramped in four or five fervent sobs. ‘Forgive me!’ he whispered to himself, and then the tears came to his eyes and he saw nothing more” (671-72). Disobeying the psychoanalyst’s command to speak to the ghost, Hans stands up, turns on the electric light, and leaves the room.

Hans Castorp is here rejecting the mystical attitude that Mann associates not only with spiritualism but also with psychoanalysis: the tendency to indulge unconscious desires and to believe in the magical power of collective identities. Yet he is also criticizing the way that the living put the dead to their own use. To do so seems to trivialize the dead by relegating them below our own (usually fairly petty) goals; it also falsifies the experience of death by allowing us to imagine that the afterlife is not ultimately so different from our own life. A few pages before Joachim’s ghostly apparition, Mann provides a strikingly cynical account of our attitude regarding the resurrection of the dead: “And yet, the return of those who have died — or better, the desirability of such a return — is always a complicated, ticklish matter. Ultimately, to put it plainly, it does not exist, this desirability. It is a miscalculation; by the light of cold day, it is as impossible as the thing itself, which would be immediately evident if nature rescinded that impossibility even once; and what we call mourning is perhaps not so much the pain of the impossibility of ever seeing the dead return to life, as the pain of not being able to wish it” (666).

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In these final pages of his epic novel, Mann seems to tip his hand in favor of rationality, modernity, and enlightenment (the electric light) and against the mysticism he associates with psychoanalysis. One could say that he comes out on the side of the liberal humanist Settembrini, whom Hans Castorp has imagined on an earlier evening “suddenly bursting in and turning on the light so that reason and social order might hold sway” (603). Yet in the final chapters of the novel Settembrini, like Castorp himself, becomes consumed by patriotic fervor for the war. Unlike the optimist Settembrini, Mann himself does not imagine a world without suffering. He is a critic of any moralizing of illness or celebration of suffering, but he recognizes that suffering and death are our lot.⁸ Literature cannot save us from our fate, but it can offer some modern consolations, not the least of which is a deeper aesthetic and ethical understanding of the human condition.

The novelists discussed here imagined desire as a force that would guarantee our continuation after death, but they all undoubtedly knew what Mann reveals in the episode of the séance: the desire truly in question is that of the survivors. And yet, despite the dubious power of Latin prayers and other special languages for remembering or even resurrecting the dead, many modernist novels are devoted to their own form of resurrection. Joyce called it metempsychosis, a task he shares with Proust, Woolf, and Mann.⁹ Indeed, as I concluded in my book, it is the modernists’ extreme awareness of our uneasy and often forgetful relationship with those who have gone before us that prompted them to make their own immense monuments to the dead and to life, their novels.

NOTES

1 A timely new work on this topic in Anglophone literature is Elizabeth Outka’s *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature*. I am grateful to Sam Alexander, Amy Hungerford, Elizabeth Krontiris, Sean McCann, John Paul Riquelme, and Caleb Smith for their comments on earlier versions of this paper and to Tobias Boes for more general conversations about Mann.

2 Although westerners today may think of tuberculosis as a particularly literary disease of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it remains the world’s most deadly communicable disease, killing almost as many people in the developing world every year (1.4 million in 2019) as COVID-19 has killed worldwide at the time of writing this essay (November 2020).

3 See “Time to Climb *The Magic Mountain*.”

4 Some of these ideas are reworked from my *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* 170-86.

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5 See J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*; and Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*.

6 See Boes; and Beddow, 139.

7 Elizabeth Anderson, *H.D. and Modernist Religious Imagination: Mysticism and Writing*; Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period*; Suzanne Hobson, *Angels of Modernism*; Matthew Mutter, *Restless Secularism: Modernism and the Religious Inheritance*; Justin Neuman, *Fiction Beyond Secularism*; Steven Pinkerton, *Blasphemous Modernism*; Erik Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity*; Craig Bradshaw Woelfel, *Varieties of Aesthetic Experience: Literary Modernism and the Dissociation of Belief*.

8 For a classic critique of the literary moralizing of suffering, see Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*. She discusses *The Magic Mountain* briefly at 34-35.

9 The pathetic lover Wehsal briefly mentions metempsychosis (608), a favorite modernist trope of the persistence of the dead.

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