

*Wo der Wille zur Macht fehlt, gibt es Niedergang:  
An Examination of Ascent and Descent in Nietzsche  
and Thomas Mann*

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In *Also Sprach Zarathustra* the parable titled “Der Genesende” sees Zarathustra awoken by a most abysmal thought and as a result falls into a kind of sleepy stupor. He remains on his bed of repose a duration of seven days due to a shame and disgust he feels for humanity, one which may only be overcome once man finds the strength to come to a self-conscious affirmation of both the most joyous and most terrible elements of one’s life. As Zarathustra later states in “Das trunkne Lied” “[s]agtet ihr jemals ja zu einer Lust? Oh, meine Freunde, so sagtet ihr ja auch zu allem Wehe. Alle Dinge sind verkettet, verfädelte, verliebt” (831). In both parables Nietzsche is advocating the notion of the eternal recurrence as the essential principle behind a being that is *not* supported or sanctioned by a transcendent power outside of man that provides purpose, meaning, moral integrity or a life beyond in which humans can place their faith and find sanctuary. Zarathustra asks in “Der Genesende”, “wie gäbe es ein Außer mir? Es gibt kein Außen! Aber das vergessen wir bei allen Tönen; wie lieblich ist es, daß wir vergessen!” (737). The lack of a beyond or an outside-of-oneself challenges our conception of existence in that we are forced to come to a “vision of a non-teleological experience of life” (Spinks 129); there is neither an unquestioned aim nor purposeful goal behind the ultimate finale to having been. This realization might not only be profoundly disconcerting but utterly deflating, for if there is no beginning, middle, ending, no meaning, purpose and no beyond to endorse our beliefs, then what in fact is the point of living? For Nietzsche life is only meaningless if we posit meaning in an illusory transcendental power that is based on weak, reactive values, such as those located in religion, especially Christianity. Mankind clings to a faith in a higher power that judges, condemns and represses human will because it is no longer capable of creating its own sense of values and mode of living, and when man is unable to affirm his own values and express himself in action, a weakened spirit emerges. Nietzsche singles out Christianity in particular for representing the development of ‘slave morality’ because it so effectively denies “allem, was die aufsteigende Bewegung des Lebens, die Wohlgeratenheit, die Macht, die Schönheit, die Selbst-bejahung auf Erden darstellt” in order to create “eine andre Welt . . . von wo aus jene Lebens-bejahung als das Böse, als das Verwerfliche an sich erschien” (*Der Antichrist* 630).

Certainly Nietzsche was not the first to criticize Christianity, for especially since the Enlightenment, Christianity and religion have come under attack as man-made inventions composed to deceive people into a fictitious happiness. Nietzsche’s thought however goes further in that it examines the weakened will and desire of

a people who come to look to an external source for their sense of belief and value in life, and goes on to show “wo der Wille zur Macht fehlt, gibt es Niedergang” (613-14). Decline suggests decay, descent, decadence and moribundity, yet it does not necessarily signify absolute hopelessness, for in fact the predominant theme throughout Nietzsche’s writing is a fundamental optimism and positivity that promotes an overcoming of the weakened, slavish, and nihilistic decline through a total reevaluation of values and morals and an ultimate self-conscious affirmation of the interconnected positive and negative forces that comprise existence. Developing an understanding based on a tragic perspective does not mean that we submit to an inimical fate, but rather it gives us the strength to furnish a dynamic interpretation of life that understands and affirms cruelty and suffering as lying at the heart of life. Perhaps this essential component of Nietzsche’s thought is best understood if we consider it not in terms of the Apollonian and Dionysian antithesis that he promotes in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, but rather in his reformulation of this antithesis as the Dionysian versus the Crucified:

. . . Dionysos der Griechen: die religiöse Bejahung des Lebens, des ganzen, nicht verleugneten und halbirtten Lebens . . .

Dionysos gegen den “Gekreuzigten”: da habt ihr den Gegensatz. Es ist nicht eine Differenz hinsichtlich des Martyriums, - nur hat dasselbe einen anderen Sinn... Der tragische Mensch bejaht noch das herbste Leiden: er ist stark, voll, vergöttlichend genug dazu. Der christliche verneint noch das glücklichste Los auf Erden . . . “der Gott am Kreuz” ist ein Fluch auf Leben, ein Fingerzeig, sich von ihm zu erlösen. [D]er in Stücke geschnittene Dionysos ist eine Verheißung ins Leben: es wird ewig wieder geboren und aus der Zerstörung heimkommen. (*Nachlaß* vol. 13:266-67)

Like Zarathustra in “Der Genesende” parable, the hero of Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*, Hans Castorp, emerges from a lengthy slumber and comes to a self-conscious awareness that affirms the concomitance of destruction and love as inseparable parts in the totality of existence. While Zarathustra emerges from his gloomy grotto after only seven days, Hans Castorp requires seven years at *Sanatorium Berghof* in order to obtain an intimate audience with the death, destruction and annihilation that coexist with the love, joy and happiness he comes to experience. The eventual Dionysian affirmation does not happen suddenly in this novel, nor does it remain long in his mind after his initial insight in the “Schnee” chapter. Yet it does occur eventually, once he has taken in all that Settembrini and Naphta have to offer, once he has absorbed Chauchat and Peeperkorn, once he has experienced his ‘dream poem of humanity’ and the song of the “Lindenbaum,” and once he has fully severed his familial ties and abandoned the innumerable customs and values he brought with him to Haus Berghof. It is a necessary descent Hans Castorp undertakes into the nihilism that permeates the air at those vast heights in Davos, yet

it is only partially true to map out the protagonist's journey as on a declined plane. Herr Settembrini likens Castorp to Odysseus, stating “[w]elche Kühnheit, hinab in die Tiefe zu steigen, wo Tote nichtig und sinnlos wohnen” (Mann 83), but that is indicative of the half-truth that marks Settembrini's entire intellectual program. While Castorp does fall victim to the decay and decadence of Berghof society, it is ultimately only through this categorical collapse that an eventual ascent out of the tired, exhausted, and untenable value and moral structure that comprises Haus Berghof and European, Christian society can be fulfilled. It is important to recognize that this novel represents a transitional stage between the decline of a society that based its entire sense of morality and belief in a phantom superterrestrial power, ultimately leading to a provisional period of valuelessness, and the future prospect of a society that no longer aims to impose a singular perspective on life that finds its premise in reactive values and *ressentiment*. By building upon Nietzsche's ideas previously mentioned, I will analyze not only how *Der Zauberberg* represents the decay and decadence of European society but also how this decline points toward a reevaluation of values and a subsequent affirmation of existence that propels the novel's protagonist into accepting the ascending forces of his own life and to dismiss the self-pity, nihilism and *ressentiment* that threatened his seven-year stay. More specifically I will address Berghof society as an emblem of decadence, outline the numerous examples of flatland customs and values that Hans Castorp eventually renounces, analyze the influence or lack thereof that Settembrini and Naphta have on the novel's hero, and finally propose Castorp's Dionysian affirmation of life not as a synthesis of the multiple forces and intellectual positions exposed in the text, but rather as an understanding that these forces and positions need to exist together *as they are*.

When Nietzsche exclaims “Gott [ist] tot, . . . der Glaube an den christlichen Gott ist unglaublich geworden” (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 479), we can understand this to mean the advent of a historical movement whereby the centre and sanctioning power of the entire “Western” or “European” moral and value structure is being recognized as a constructed fallacy. We can understand it further to imply that the Christian God also “stands for the ‘transcendent’ in general in its various meanings—for ideals and norms, principles and rules, ends and values, which are set above the being, in order to give being as a whole a purpose” (Heidegger 850). Removing the justification and legitimacy from these fundamental elements of human existence shakes humanity to its very core. Without recourse to a transcendent power morality and value appear to be uprooted and essentially devalued. As Nietzsche indicates in *Ecce Homo*, we need to look back to his text *Morgenröte* in order to locate where his “Feldzug gegen die Moral [beginnt]” (*Ecce Homo* 570). However, it is not until *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* and *Zur Genealogie der Moral* appear that we witness a thorough axiology of the origin and history of value and moral ideas. It is necessary to understand the premise of these texts in order to gain

a more fruitful insight into the decadent moral situation at Haus Berghof in *Der Zauberberg*.

In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Nietzsche proposes that “wir haben eine Kritik der moralischen Werte nötig, der Wert dieser Werte ist selbst erst einmal in Frage zu stellen—und dazu tut eine Kenntnis der Bedingungen und Umstände not, aus denen sie gewachsen” (214). This text builds on the point I previously made that Christian morality has been established through a vision that believes in transcendent values that exist above life. This vision, according to Nietzsche, is the product of a “descending” or decadent interpretation of existence, because it is a slavish and weak premise that believes man is incapable of affirming and giving value to his own life and therefore requires an external source to impose moral and value judgments on his existence. Nietzsche juxtaposes the slave morality and reactive values of Christianity against the master morality and noble and aristocratic values of the strong subject who is compelled by a will to power and does not require the veil of illusion provided in the lie of a supernatural power to give meaning to his life. The slave morality of Christianity represents man’s weakened spirit and ultimately leads to the distinction in value judgments that arose between good and bad. The strong human being is thereby punished in the norms and mores of Christian teaching for not succumbing to the requisite self-abasement meted out in the Christian program. In *Der Antichrist*, Nietzsche rails against Christianity’s suppression of the ascending life:

Man soll das Christentum nicht schmücken und herausputzen: es hat einen Todkrieg gegen diesen höheren Typus Mensch gemacht, es hat alle Grundinstinkte dieses Typus in Bann getan, es hat aus diesen Instinkten das Böse, den Bösen herausdestilliert [. . .] Das Christentum hat die Partei alles Schwachen, Niedrigen, Mißratnen genommen, es hat ein Ideal aus dem Widerspruch gegen die Erhaltungs-Instinkte des starken Lebens gemacht; es hat die Vernunft selbst der geistig stärksten Naturen verdorben, indem es die obersten Werte der Geistigkeit als sündhaft, als irreführend, als Versuchungen empfinden lehrte. (613)

The Christian moral and value system has led man into error, for he is taught to fight against his instincts and conform to an externally prescribed design for life. Nietzsche recognizes this self-deception that corrupted humanity as having a direct psychological *and* physiological effect on the modern human subject. He sees the morality and values of the Christian religion as damaging both to the psyche *and* body of European society; this morality is what therefore led to the decadence and degeneration of this society in the late nineteenth century. Thomas Mann has taken up where Nietzsche left off, depicting an ailing European body in the form of Haus Berghof in *Der Zauberberg*. This sanatorium is a microcosm of a greater Europe, inhabited as it is by men and women from Germany, Italy, Poland, England, Holland, Russia, and even China and Mexico. More importantly though, it

is emblematic of a larger moral decline and pervasive decadence that rents the pestiferous air of Berghof and beyond. Even from Hans Castorp's first night at the establishment, before he is *officially* declared ill, there are indications of the prevailing debauchery and sexual profligacy that exist behind the cloak of bourgeois decorum and propriety on the mountain. Hans Castorp's upright breeding and conventional sense of decency are offended by the sounds that enter into his room from an unseemly Russian pair next to him. It is clear to him, despite his fervent attempts to put a harmless spin on it all, that the pair is unabashedly engaging in sexual intercourse, heedless that they might be heard by other guests. This encounter with the underlying sexual temperament of Berghof society that Hans Castorp and the establishment ostensibly seek to repress, yet furtively support and take part in, is but the first of numerous examples of a predominant sexual tenor that runs through the heart of this institution. The married women and men on the mountain frequently are given to indulge in adulterous affairs (571, 685, 599-600) that often lead to public altercations and hurt feelings. Hofrat Behrens, head doctor and overseer of the sanatorium, aware as he is of the numerous extramarital encounters taking place at Berghof, and which he sees as rooted in illness, asks the question: "[k]ann ich dafür, daß die Phthise nun mal mit besonderer Konkupiszenz verbunden ist? . . . Wir haben die Analyse, wir haben die Aussprache . . . Je mehr die Rasselbande sich ausspricht, desto lüsterner wird sie" (571). Hofrat Behrens plays the moral authority on the mountain, as it is ultimately incumbent upon him to enforce the rule of moral law and take action against those suspected of transgressing the conventional code. His position is genuinely compromised, however, both by the fact that he too is suspected of engaging in moral dereliction in the form of an affair with one of his married patients, Frau Chauchat, and by the fact that he is not the proprietor of the establishment, but merely the head doctor. It is his duty to maintain as many patients in the institution as possible and that means they must be kept content. At one point, piqued into a towering passion, Hofrat Behrens cries: "Ich bin ein Angestellter hier! Ich bin Arzt! . . . Ich bin kein Kuppelonkel! . . . Ich bin ein Diener der leidenden Menschheit!" (574) Humanity in this novel is suffering, yet it is not entirely clear what is causing it to suffer; is the moral decadence the result of the ailing body or is the body suffering from the death of cosmological values?

Hans Castorp provides his own thoughts on the question whether the soul affects the body or the body the soul when he learns that cousin Joachim is returning to the sanatorium. Castorp remarks:

Es liegt eine hübsche Portion Gemeinheit darin, höhnische Gemeinheit, es ist ein gegen-idealisiertes Faktum. Der Körper triumphiert, er will es anders als die Seele, und setzt sich durch, zur Blamage der Hochfliegenden, die lehren, er sei der Seele untertan. (684)

This last comment he directs at Herr Settembrini, who advocates the power of reason and spirit over the corporeality of the body, citing Plotinus as having renounced his

body, and Voltaire's refusal to accept the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 in the name of reason and intellect against the dereliction of nature (346).

Hans Castorp's sickness itself is depicted in a rather equivocal light, as we can never really be certain whether his sickness is the effect of a repressed love that first manifested itself when the protagonist was a schoolboy and the object of his affection was another young man by the name of Prbislav Hippe (167-72). Or perhaps his sickness is a symptom of a general malaise and languor that seems to afflict him from an early age. The author takes great pains to portray the hero as physically weak and predisposed to ennui from early on in the text. During a discussion as to which profession the young man will take in his life, the author notes that "vor der Arbeit hatte [Hans Castorp] den aller größten Respekt, obwohl ihn persönlich die Arbeit ja leicht ermüdete" (52). This is just a slight indication as to the potential for inactivity that threatens the engineer, and it is of course Herr Settembrini, the novel's counterweight to inaction, who calls him out on this point. Not long after their first meeting Settembrini recognizes a proclivity towards slumber, both mental and physical:

[d]a der Aufenthalt Ihnen nicht zuträglich zu sein scheint, da Sie sich körperlich und, wenn mich nicht alles täuscht, auch seelisch nicht wohl bei uns befinden,- wie wäre es denn da, wenn Sie darauf verzichteten, hier älter zu werden, kurz, wenn Sie noch heute Nacht wieder aufpackten und sich morgen mit den fahrplanmäßigen Schnellzügen auf- und davonmachten? (123)

Herr Settembrini sees in the protagonist the latency of a seven-sleeper, as Castorp is later labelled, and attempts to prevent this seed of inaction from blossoming by imploring the young man to take to his heels and head back to the flatland as soon as possible. Yet despite Herr Settembrini's seemingly worthy intentions, his position too is undermined by the fact that he, like the others at the sanatorium, is stuck in the magnetic listlessness of Berghof society. The humanistic and bourgeois values that the Italian so convincingly and plastically espouses are as thread-bare as the suit he wears with such dignity. This suit itself is quite telling of a more pervasive decline and decay into nihilism that marks the Berghof as a whole, as "auch zeigte sein rund umgebogener Stehkragen sich von häufiger Wäsche an den Kanten schon etwas aufgerauht" (82); its abuse over the years has made it frail and exhausted to the extent that it can barely hold together any longer. Herr Settembrini is undoubtedly a sympathetic character in the novel and the comment is not so much directed at his underprivileged financial status, but rather that his entire composition of form, reason, intellect and classical human values is too narrow in its scope and is ultimately falling on deaf ears. In fact, it is made explicit on several occasions that when Herr Settembrini speaks, Hans Castorp is only partially listening: "Aber mir scheint, Sie hören mich nicht, Ingenieur? Es kostet Sie Mühe, sich auf den Beinen zu halten . . ." (124):

. . . Hans Castorp hörte auch zu, vermochte aber so recht nicht zu folgen, erstens seiner Müdigkeit wegen, und dann auch, weil er abgelenkt war durch die geselligen Vorgänge unter der leichten Jugend dort auf den Stufen. (160)

Hans Castorp schien nur mit halbem Ohre zugehört zu haben. Noch immer schaute er in die Glühlichtklarheit des weißen Zimmers . . . (276-77)

and finally during one of Settembrini's impassioned orations: "aber Hans Castorp hörte nicht länger zu, da Joachim zwischendurch geäußert hatte, er glaube bestimmt, Erkältungsfieber zu haben" (719). It is clear from these descriptions of his waning attention span that we can recognize Hans Castorp's scepticism of Settembrini's senescent program and, though he keeps Settembrini in his life longer than he does any other character on the mountain, he never fully subscribes to the Italian's views.

To further this point we need only to look to Hans Castorp's inaugural encounter with Ludovico to witness a clear scepticism of the pedagogue's values and beliefs by the suggestion that the entire bearing of the Latinist reminds him of a hand-organ man (82). The image of the hand-organ is hardly incidental as it typifies Settembrini bellowing out the same old exhausted tune of human progress and bourgeois values for all and sundry, but to little avail. In *Der Zauberberg* emerging technologies like the X-Ray, the motion picture and the gramophone render old technologies, represented in the hand organ, obsolete. Settembrini, as contributing author to *Soziologie der Leiden*, as the ploughshare of human progress and the man of action who aims to consecrate his burgher's pike on the alter of humanity, is in fact indicative of the general decline and decay that typifies Berghof society as the whole. The prevailing illness that infects the sanatorium is but a symptom of a larger affliction, one that has resulted in the moral decline and ultimate scepticism of the morals and values that have stood at the heart of European civilization for centuries. It is apparent in this novel that the Christian moral hypothesis:

1 verlieh dem Menschen einen absoluten Werth, im Gegensatz zu seiner Kleinheit und Zufälligkeit im Strom des Werdens und Vergehens...  
3 setzt eine Wissen um absolute Werthe beim Menschen an und gab ihm somit gerade für das Wichtigste adäquate Erkenntniß...  
4 verhütete, daß der Mensch sich als Menschen verachtete, daß er gegen das Leben Partei nahm, daß er am Erkennen verzweifelte: sie war ein Erhaltungsmittel (*Nachlaß* vol. 12: 211)

has lost its place as the justifying and legitimating power behind belief and faith; thus the consequence is a sense of valuelessness and meaninglessness that is embodied in the torpidity and moral decadence represented throughout the novel. There are indications in the text that replacements have been sought to fill the temporary void left by the disbelief in the Christian religion. The psychoanalyst Dr. Krokowski, for example, is portrayed as a kind of demagogic proselytizer and seeker of souls through his lectures on "Die Liebe als krankheitbildende Macht" (Mann

163). These seraphic yet sinister sermons smack of the irreligious nature of Haus Berghof and the dubiously papist practices of Dr. Krokowski himself. He is a man who always dresses in a black smock to suggest his association with the darkness of his profession. His attire is also comprised of *Mönchssandalen* (179) and, perhaps more importantly than his dress, it is noted that when he draws his service to a close “er stand da mit ausgebreiteten Armen und schräg geneigtem Kopf hinter seinem Tischchen und sah trotz seines Gehrockes beinahe aus wie der Herr Jesus am Kreuz!” (181). Afterwards it is noted that the attending guests appear to have been utterly hypnotized by Dr. Krokowski’s speech, for they are characterized as leaving the room “willenlos und in benommener Einhelligkeit, wie das Gewimmel hinter dem Rattenfänger” (181).

Dr. Krokowski has such a profound influence on the guests of Haus Berghof because, with the loss of a sense of belief and faith in Christian morals and values, they seek alternative sources for finding meaning and purpose in life, for “lieber will noch der Mensch das Nichts wollen, als nicht wollen . . .” (*Zur Genealogie der Moral* 346). This descent into nihilism is a necessary state in that humans must devalue their values in order to formulate a revaluation of values that are not rooted and dependent upon a mythical power infinitely superior to man himself. This nihilism is only a transitional movement towards a new era of noble values, the sense of which man will actively determine on his own, depending on his perspective of the world. This kind of devaluation of values is a necessary part of a self-overcoming that does not see the world as comprised of one essential truth but rather allows man his own part in actively constituting the many truths of the world. In *Der Zauberberg* the initial decline into nihilism is represented partly in the inaction and moral decadence already mentioned in this paper, but also in the protagonist’s abandonment of the values and goals he brings with him to the mountain and his severing of all familial relations over the course of the seven years. For example, Hans Castorp’s professional calling in life is to be a naval engineer, but even from the first page we witness a fracture in the hero’s connection with this estimable occupation. He has brought with him on his long rail journey from Hamburg to Davos a book titled *Ocean Steamships*, yet this representation of his station in the working world now sits “vernachlässigt da, indes der hereinstreichende Atem der schwer keuchenden Lokomotive seinen Umschlag mit Kohlenpartikeln verunreinigte” (Mann 12). Already abandoned and buried in the train compartment on the first page, *Ocean Steamships*, and in turn Hans’ previous goals and values, ebb further out of sight, as Hans Castorp signs over his life to a new fate. The book is the last and least important item he passes to Joachim upon his arrival (14). He “ließ *Ocean Steamships* auf der Decke liegen und lauschte mit herzlicher Teilnahme auf die Musik” (229) as he lay in his lounge chair during the rest cure, and later, also during the cure, “da *Ocean Steamships* ihm nichts mehr zu sagen hatte,” it again lay neglected and was replaced by books on “Anatomie, Physiologie und Lebenskunde, abgefaßt in verschiedenen Sprachen” (378).

As the novel progresses, Hans Castorp eventually comes to refer to his profession as an engineer in the past tense, but this is but one sign of several that indicate that this young man is aiming towards a complete reevaluation of his previously held values and goals. We learn that when Hans first arrives at Haus Berghof he notices Joachim is hatless, as is the prevailing custom up there, yet Hans obstinately refuses to join their ranks, for “er war seiner Lebensform und Gesittung allzu gewiß, um sich so leicht und auf bloße drei Wochen fremden und neuen Gebräuchen zu fügen” (62). He shows a similar reluctance when it comes to buying the fur sacks that will keep him warm on those cold nights he spends outside during the rest cure. Hans Castorp even goes so far as to reprimand Joachim when the soldier tells Hans about the experience of having a Catholic priest pass by him and not knowing how to react, having no hat to remove in the customary fashion. Hans declares: “[s]iehst du wohl, daß man einen Hut aufhaben soll! . . . Man soll aber einen aufsetzen, damit man ihn abnehmen kann, bei Gelegenheiten, wo es sich schickt“ (78). However, these customs and their implied values are rendered obsolete the longer the protagonist remains on the mountain, acutely accentuated when Uncle James Tienappel comes to visit and Hans greets him *Zinnoberrot* (the colour of his outward expression of inward love/illness), *ohne Hut* (a sign of resignation from the cool civility of the flatland to the shoulder shrugging indifference of the Berghof), *im bloßen Anzug* (a sign of finally getting used to not getting used to)” (587 commentary mine).

The novel’s final chapter expresses Hans Castorp’s complete rejection of all which had only seven years before represented his surety of the value and meaning of his privileged bourgeois existence. It is noted that he has traded in the “Maria Mancini” cigars he had brought with him and faithfully ordered from Bremen a local brand labelled “Light of Asia.” Secondly, in the dining hall we find him sitting at the “bad” Russian table, which at the novel’s beginning he had so abhorred due to its lack of tact and refinement, now having come to the realization that “[e]s gab keine irgendwie greifbaren Vor- und Nachteile, unter den sieben Tischen. Es war eine Demokratie von Ehrentischen, kühn gesagt” (972). Moreover, the novel’s hero, who had so fastidiously groomed and washed himself to a near obsessive degree, can now be found “dort mit einem kleinen Bärtchen, das er sich mittlerweile hatte stehen lassen, einem strohblonden Kinnbärtchen ziemlich unbestimmbarer Gestalt, das wir als Zeugnis einer gewissen philosophischen Gleichgültigkeit gegen sein Äußeres aufzufassen gezwungen sind” (971). Finally, the young man, who no longer carries a time piece, upon learning of the death of his great uncle and foster father, Consul Tienappel, is hardly moved at all and views the news as the sundering of yet another bond with the life below, and “gab dem, was Hans Castorp mit Recht die Freiheit nannte, letzte Vollständigkeit” (974). Hans Castorp’s break with his profession, with the customs, beliefs and values in which he had once so firmly believed, and with all familial relations, including mother, father, grandfather,

cousin and now foster father, are all indications of a more significant “Verlust des Mythos . . . Verlust der mythischen Heimat, des mythischen Mutterschoßes” (125) that Nietzsche points to in *Die Geburt der Tragödie*. Without a mythical rooting in a transcendent beyond, a moral decline and physical decay take place within the novel’s hero and in those around him. The antidote against practical and theoretical nihilism has proven itself to be only a placebo, and the result is a realization that the highest values of truth, meaning, and purpose in life are absolutely not self-evident. As Nietzsche asserted in *Götzen-Dämmerung*:

Das Christentum ist ein System, eine zusammengedachte und ganze Ansicht der Dinge. Bricht man aus ihm einen Hauptbegriff, den Glauben an Gott, heraus, so zerbricht man damit auch das Ganze . . . Das Christentum setzt voraus, daß der Mensch nicht wisse, nicht wissen könne, was für ihn gut, was böse ist: er glaubt an Gott, der allein es weiß. Die christliche Moral ist ein Befehl; . . . sie steht und fällt mit dem Glauben an Gott. (439)

The freedom afforded Hans Castorp from his eventual disavowal of his former sense of values and goals, a freedom representative of a greater “pathos of nihilism—the feeling that there is no truth and no morality” that became “public fact in Germany during the early years of the pre-century” (Hollingdale 18). It was a continual process of descent for the protagonist. This descent is aptly highlighted in the chapter “Der große Stumpfsinn,” especially in the lines: “[e]r sah durchaus Unheimliches, Bösertiges, und er wußte, was er sah: Das Leben ohne Zeit, das sorg- und hoffnungslose Leben, das Leben als stagnierende betriebsame Liederlichkeit, das tote Leben” (Mann 863). Yet this novel, like Nietzsche’s works, is far from being a depiction of life as an utterly meaningless and purposeless existence, but rather is really a very positive account of one man’s self-overcoming that is a categorical devaluation of Christian bourgeois morality in order to reformulate a perspective on life according to the hero’s will. The passive nihilism that sees Hans Castorp descend into moral decadence and physical decline is replaced by an active nihilism that ultimately allows the hero to transform a vision of a meaningless world into a productive vision of a world that is composed of a plurality of forces, both “good” and “evil.” Twice in this novel Hans Castorp comes to a profound realization that though he must not give death mastery over his thoughts, death, cruelty, misery and suffering must not be denied in his ultimate affirmation of existence. In the “Schnee” chapter, Castorp declares:

Auch Form ist nur aus Liebe und Güte: Form und Gesittung verständig-freundlicher Gemeinschaft und schönen Menschenstaats—in stillem Hinblick auf das Blutmahl [. . .] Ich will dem Tode Treue halten in meinem Herzen, doch mich hell erinnern, daß Treue zum Tode und Gewesenen nur Bosheit und finstere Wollust und Menschenfeindschaft ist, bestimmt sie unser Denken und Regieren. Der Mensch soll um der Güte und Liebe willen dem Tode keine Herrschaft einräumen über seine

This pivotal epiphany does not remain long in the hero's mind however, as at this point in his life he is still too deeply attached to the weak and reactive morals and values that he brought with him to Haus Berghof, and thus requires several more years of decline in order to come to an ascending vision of life.

Towards the end of the novel Hans Castorp again comes to a monumental insight as to the meaning of his existence, very much like a revelation Nietzsche comes to in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* when he notes: “[j]etzt öffnet sich uns gleichsam der olympische Zauberberg und zeigt uns seine Wurzeln” (30), referring to a vision of life that included both the Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Upon listening to Schubert's *Der Lindenbaum* something profound takes place in the protagonist, to which the author asks: “Welches war diese dahinter stehende Welt, die seiner Gewissensahnung zufolge eine Welt verbotener Liebe sein sollte? Es war der Tod” (Mann 896-97). This crucial moment in the novel points to a future vision of self-conquest for Hans Castorp that will move beyond the nihilism into which he has sunk, beyond the self-denying morality and values that have been imposed upon him throughout his life, beyond the weakened will of the Christian program, and allow him to proclaim “[d]as Jasagen zum Leben selbst noch in seinen fremdesten und härtesten Problemen . . . um, über Schrecken und Mitleiden hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein—jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schließt . . .” (*Ecce Homo* 556). Hans Castorp's Dionysian vision of life allows both Settembrini and Naphta's perspectives equal value without categorizing one as superior to the other. This vision embraces the protagonist's approach of *placet experiri* that he so devotedly follows throughout the text, highlighting his profound desire to experiment and view sceptically all the “truths” and “values” he is provided without actually having experienced them himself.

Perhaps the most telling indication of Hans Castorp's ascent out of the pathos of nihilism which had led him into such decay can be found in the work's final chapter, aptly titled “Der Donnerschlag.” The title brings to mind Nietzsche's notion of the “Blitzschlag,” as he notes: “[d]er Blitz der Wahrheit traf gerade das, was bisher am höchsten stand [. . .] Alles, was bisher ‘Wahrheit’ hieß, ist als die schädlichste, rücksichstste, unterirdischste Form der Lüge erkannt” (*Ecce Homo* 604). In the final chapter of *Der Zauberberg* we see a similar ‘thunderbolt’ that ultimately frees Hans Castorp from his seven-year slumber. In reality this slumber was comprised of much more than the seven years he spent on the mountain, for it was really a daze that had lasted his whole life. The process of self-overcoming and self-conquest was not a quick one for the novel's hero, as even in the final chapter his protracted awakening is underscored with:

Es waren jene Sekunden, wo der Siebenschläfer im Grase, nicht wissend, wie ihm geschah, sich langsam aufrichtete, bevor er saß und sich die Augen rieb . . . Er zog die Beine unter sich, stand auf, blickte um sich. Er sah sich entzaubert, erlöst, befreit [. . .] (Mann 978)

After seven years of moral decline and decay, after devaluing life's highest values through a slow process of abandoning the customs and values he had once held in high esteem, after severing all ties to his family down below, and after coming to a realization that "im Jasagen ist Verneinen und Vernichten Bedingung" (*Ecce Homo* 600), Hans Castorp eventually undergoes an *Entzauberung* on the magic mountain. He enters World War I with a new perspective on life, a perspective that exists beyond nihilism, *ressentiment* and the reactive values of a slavish religion, and instead is the product of his own vision, one that points toward the potential for a mounting love, yet always "in stillem Hinblick auf das Blutmahl" (Mann 679).

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