

**A PSYCHO-PHYSICAL STUDY OF CONSTRUCTING DISEASE IN *THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN***

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**Abstract**

Medical humanities are an interdisciplinary field which deals within the humanities. It addresses the themes such as disease, illness and death which are majorly focused on medicine. Literature is especially important in medicine and health care. It provides a wealth of experience and knowledge while also providing critical understandings of the narrative nature of human lives. This study is an analysis of *The Magic Mountain* of Thomas Mann to understand the idea of constructing disease. It investigates the impact of disease on Individual's physical function and dysfunction of the human body and mind. Further, it aims to look the cultural and social values; ideas and images associated with illness and disease within the society. The main objective of this paper understands the nature of narrative and how we understand our lives through narrative can be crucial for effective communication and understanding the diseased.

**Key words-** Medical Sociology, Humanities, Constructing disease, Psycho-Physical Narratives, Empathy and Illness

The sociology of health and disease is the study of the relationships between society and health. As Debra and Montez correctly point out, "social ties, both in terms of quantity and quality, have an impact on mortality risk, health-related behaviours, mental health, and physical health" (Social relationships...55). The function of a society is to determine the significance of physical and mental health of a sick person. Pharmaceutical firms, governments, third-party payers, religious organisations, patients, doctors, and other social groups are all distinct societal groups with their own demands and opinions. Doctors and scientists cannot discover the illness on their own; it is the result of various competing social groups. Social factors that lead to diseases or illnesses have become a subject of medical sociology research over the past 50 years. It broadens our understanding of illness and disease's social aspects by contrast to the medical paradigm, which believes that diseases are global and invariant to time and place. Medicine is the study of disease, illness, health, and relationships, as revealed by patients, their loved ones, and medical professionals, as well as medical charts and lab reports. Simply acknowledging medicine both science and fiction is insufficient; we must understand a person's life story; illness alone doesn't affect our lives. There has been a growing understanding in clinical medicine, according to R. Puustinen, M. Leiman, and A.M. Viljanen, that "the biological approach alone cannot address the range of human phenomena that doctors deal with on a daily basis" ("Medicine and the Humanities"). *The Magic Mountain*, one such text that helps us to understand Constructing Disease and develops arguments from this novel.

When viewed through a social constructionist perspective, the idea of "constructing disease" demonstrates how the disparities between sickness, the biological state and illness, and the social interpretation of the condition are startling. Disabilities and illnesses are two different classifications for bio-physiological abnormalities. This notion of perfect bodies that are used to evaluate other bodies is a social construct. Though the medicine's social construction differs from that of illness, according to Brennan, "medicine plays an important role in the building of illness through direct interaction."

Throughout the human history the theme of life, death, and eros are addressed in the science, philosophy, literature and art. It was necessary to adapt old ideas to a new reality because of the unprecedented scale of human annihilation that occurred during World War I at the beginning of the 20th century. Thomas Mann, a German author, reveals in his novel *The Magic Mountain* his evolving ideas about life, death, and disease. The main character of the story is Hans Castorp, a sleepy and dreamy young German who is having a hard time finishing his studies. He sets out on an entirely different kind of adventure. The snow in Davos, Switzerland, plays an important role in the text when Hans Castorp arrives at Berghof where he got infected with tuberculosis and spends seven years in a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps. Hans is diagnosed with sickness by Dr. Hofrat Behrens. He decides to stay at the sanatorium for a brief period of time, but it takes seven years, and during that time he unfortunately lost his cousin and an elderly military man. Besides Joachim, Hans interacts with many other characters, including Clavdia, Chosha's wife, Hofrat Behrens, a physiologist, and Dr. Clark, a psychoanalyst. Klokowski, Mr. Settembrini, Mr. Napta, two philosophers who constantly debate current philosophical issues, and Mr. Piepercorn.

In the field of Medical Humanities, *The Magic Mountain* is regarded as one of the important texts for investigating the impact of disease and particularly tuberculosis at sanatorium. Though the novel appears to be a parody of life in a tuberculosis sanatorium prior to World War I, it also depicts early twentieth-century European culture, the conflict of ideas, and the political ambitions that eventually led to war. Mann in this novel detailed the in-depth information on the tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment options that were available before anti-tuberculosis medications were developed. Mann presents the Berghof as a laboratory where Hans learns about life and death, health and disease, illness and disease, through physicians or laboratory, X-ray, symptoms.

X-Rays was discovered by Wilhelm Rontgen in 1895 which helps in radiologic diagnosis of pulmonary tuberculosis and it was made available in most of the European and North American Hospital within a decade. Patients at Berghof had their chest radiographs taken in their rooms or even on their bodies. Clavdia gave Hans an x-ray of her chest as a memento of their shared memories as she made her way out of the Santorium. That strengthens Hans' attraction towards her. During the gathering, the plate miraculously reappears at his knees. As a result, both body and soul intertwined in the love. Hans contends: "the body, love, and death are all intertwined. Since affection and mortality are sensual in nature, which is the root of their horror and immense magic. Disease, depravity, and death are all caused by the flesh, and death is caused by the body" (312).

Because of its ephemeral appearance, the X-ray, according to Downing, represents change rather than scientific certainty. These x-rays constantly reminded the patients of their biological reality, their physical health. One such interesting incident happens in the story when Hans was examined through x-ray: "He is forced to confront his own mortality for the first time after observing the skeleton shape of his hand and Joachim's beating heart beneath the fluoroscope" (12).

Berghof regularly uses an acid-fast stain of a saliva smear to confirm the presence of pulmonary tuberculosis. Patients with a productive cough had to provide a saliva sample to the cleaning lab weekly, and they must carry small bottles. The "Gaffky scale" was used to count the number of acid-reactive bacilli found on the smear. Each patient is aware of his or her weekly Gaffky number and can use it to monitor disease progression. The length of stay at Berghof is determined by the GAFFKY scale where no two denotes good health and a six-month extension and ten denotes a "life sentence". But in reality, the patients having saliva of a 50% hardly survived 5 years.

Hans' education began at Berghof, where he faced illness and death. Mann believes that illness, no matter how painful, leads to a clear understanding of life and health, and that this knowledge has an inseparable connection with the afterlife. He was astounded by them and described the effects of tuberculosis on the body. The effects of tuberculosis were obvious, despite Berghof's best efforts to

conceal what was happening to many of his patients. Cousin Joachim used to say that on the day of his arrival, they used to pull bodies down from the highest Alpine sanatorium during the winter, further he realizes, “a patient had died two days ago on his bed, clearing it for his use, and he hears the absolutely horrible sound of a man coughing a feeble, dreadful welling comprised of natural break - down fluids” (Mann 25).

The peace is disturbed when a young man makes a shotgun threat to kill himself because he is tired of his depressing outlook. Following the introduction to death and illness, Hans examines his own hand in the X-ray machine and, as a result, for the first time realizes that he is about to die, as he stared into his own grave. Later in the novel, Hans chooses to take the worst patients, who have terrible coughs and periodic blood vomiting, shortness of breath, and chest pain, on a journey into the dark, and discover more about the process of dying.

The narrative is thus an epic about self-realization or self-growth. Snow Scene shows him that even if a disease cannot be physically cured, it can be defeated spiritually and mentally, it will no longer rule his thoughts, and love will help him triumph over it.

Mann also depicts lovely mountain scenes with spring snows blooming in the emerald grass and the sun shining brightly on a gleaming frost under blue skies. *The Magic Mountain* is an adventure that leads to a newfound faith in life. It is impossible to predict the weather up here; the seasons are all mixed up, and it's impossible to tell them apart or arrange them in a logical way; It is common for people to be misled about what to expect each day. Hans has to adjust with the alpine climate in both literal and metaphorical senses. The change from the hot and muggy air at sea level to the cool mountain air made Hans' heart beat faster. In the view of Doctor Behrens, “air is beneficial for disease”. The impact of the air on illnesses, particularly tuberculosis, is unknown. Hans explained to his uncle the ability of the air to heal certain diseases. Behrens, on the other hand, believes that air stimulates illnesses like tuberculosis and drives it to the edge to be observed. In fact, the air often helps the doctor in understanding what is happening inside the lung of a patient. It is challenging to distinguish between orthodoxy and liberalism, between those who believe in God or the devil, or who are on the side of life or death.

The two concepts of life and death are intertwined; one must confront death to experience rebirth, when death is there, one embraces life more passionately. A catastrophic sickness or other major life experience might change someone's attitude toward life, but analysing such events may require exploring beyond biological facts for more symbolic explanations. Though Hans, Mann rejects the idea of illness and death as a largely cliché concept. According to Mann, sickness and death seem both noble and vile which he shows through the debates between Settembrini and Naptha. where Hans' view of illness as a spiritual refinement is rejected by Settembrini to which Naptha responds that he has a spiritual side that leads to life understanding. When it comes to determining the significance of medical facts, such as what thermometers and X-rays mean, the story goes beyond the merely biological in order to do so. The cause of the physical symptoms is a question can never have a satisfactory answer. Is it true that tuberculosis can be cured by mountain's air or it is caused by it and therefore revealed to the doctor? Is the new evidence of Hans' infectious diseases a result of an earlier disease, or is it something new? To what extent was Hans' condition being the result of psychological factors, such as his dissatisfaction with his affluent lifestyle or his ardent wish to stay in the village where he lived? or maybe meeting with Clavdia her illness seemed to be not just an infection, but an outward reflection of something within her nature. If he wants to get beyond medical fixation of an illness, he has to leave the sanatorium.

Herein lies the significance of places; one should examine health in relation to place in order to learn more about illness and health as they are experienced in sanatoria, like an artist who attributes places to draw meaning out of it. Despite the fact that geography is both an art and a science; yet, many geographers prioritise science over the arts in their pursuit of knowledge. According to Kearns, a

medical geographer, the incorporation of more embedded viewpoints of health and illness could reinvigorate geography.

To put it another way, sickness needs to be present in our body of knowledge. This is demonstrated by Mann's horrific depiction of the ravages of tuberculosis. When examining medical issues, Hans observes the body beyond scientific descriptions. He recognizes that Although Clavdia's body is constituted of a variety of cells, some of which are sick, the entire of her body surpasses simple freshness and is the object of adoration. Someone who painted a portrait of her has depicted Clavdia with scientific accuracy. Each of Mann's work displays a critical knowledge of how confinement in medicine and psychology represented a deeper societal logic. As Foucault puts, "by wearing the masks of Father and Judge...the physician, by one of those sudden short cuts that end up leaving aside mere medical expertise, became the almost magical perpetrator of the cure...it was enough that he noticed but spoke, to cause hidden faults to appear, insane assumptions to disappear, and insanity at long last to yield to reason" (*Madness and Civilization*).

The fundamental ambivalence of medical practices is exemplified by the novel's depiction of the connection between medicine and psychiatry. One of the earliest depictions of a psychotherapist in literature is Dr. Krokowski, who lived at the sanatorium and was Behrens's rival in psychoanalysis. He challenges Behrens' emphasis on natural causes of illness by stating that Hans' "wet spot" should not be considered as a significant area of investigation. It is only a side effect of the main event. In most cases, organic components are a secondary consideration. Joachim says that "Krokowski dissects the psyches of the patients. His studies of psychic dissection and the dreams of his patients had always had a catacomb-like subterranean character" (644). In a lecture series entitled "Love as a Force Conducive to Illness", Krokowski shares his belief that his explorations of the unconscious caverns have shown what disease really means.

Health and disease are contradictory and ambiguous concepts. For some illness or death depressing, while others find it uplifting; illnesses are only physical for few, while for others it is psychological in nature. After seven years Hans Castrop was cured of tuberculosis and left Davos sanatorium because of proper medicalization, which According to Cole, Carlin, and Carson, medical diagnosis and treatment are the transformation of human problems into diseases or disorders.

In an unconventional way, *The Magic Mountain* teaches us the true meaning of disease and death, health and life. The study concentrated on historical, social, and geographical shifts in the construction of disease in *The Magic Mountain*. The implication is that a disease diagnosis and health framework is historically dependent and ever-changing, and this must be considered.

Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* was undoubtedly a bildungsroman, novel, a work of human discernment about disease, illness and death. Hans Castrop, Mann's hero, evolved from a competent writer within a confined perspectives and a narrow viewpoint to an multinational author with a satirical, empathetic description of human civilization that continues to inspire the subsequent generations of readers. In the history of medicine, no medical textbook has ever been able to do what Mann has done: construct a lively tale of tuberculosis and its treatment in a world that for us is otherwise a fuzzy, faded image from a ruined album in our grandparents' attic. Finally, we are left to deal with the chaos, rain, and dusk as *The Magic Mountain* disapproves our need for a resolution. The study also shows that familiarity with such literary works improves reader comprehension of the lively conversation of life, illness, and death in modern context.

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