The Infectious Performative: Contagion between Bacteriology and Literature

By Elisabeth Strohwick, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA

Abstract:
The following reading of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Robert Koch's writings on tuberculosis analyzes varying conceptions of infection in the discursive interface of literature and medicine. What is infectious proves to be fundamentally linked to methodological questions: just as Robert Koch works with isolating the bacillus and the cultivation of "pure cultures," the problem of infection within *The Magic Mountain* is influenced by poetological reflections. An approach based in theory of the performative is suitable for analyzing the poetology of the infectious developed in *The Magic Mountain* insofar as it leads to a decisively new treatment of the relation between language and body. Against this foil, literary stagings of infection can be theoretically related to the process of writing, which shifts toward the infectious performative, in which the sick body intersects with the matter of language. As I shall argue, Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* stages language as infectious material. The literary and theoretical stakes of infectious illness's treatement in literary modernity lie in the figuration of the act of writing as infectious performative. The epistemological implications of the literary-infectious performative will be worked out in a final constellation that includes Koch's bacteriological notion of infection.

Introduction

1 In *The Etiology of Tuberculosis* (1882) Robert Koch proves the tubercular bacillus to be the cause of tuberculosis. He thus conceives of tuberculosis as an etiologically defined entity of disease, and at the same time, he enables a microbiological conception of infectious illnesses to be generally accepted. From then on, tuberculosis is an object of bacteriological study. Yet literature too shows great interest in tuberculosis, above all in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in such prominent examples as Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Sterben* (1894) and Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain* (1924). The following reading of Robert Koch's writings on tuberculosis and Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* analyzes varying conceptions of infection in the discursive interface of medicine and literature. What is infectious proves to be fundamentally linked to methodological questions: just as Robert Koch works with isolating the bacillus and the cultivation of "pure cultures," the problem of infection within *The Magic Mountain* is influenced by poetological reflections. These in turn have to do with questions of the constitution of meaning, such as language's relation to the body, or the construction of gender. An approach based in the theory of the performative is therefore suitable for analyzing the poetology of the infectious developed in *The Magic Mountain* insofar as it leads to a decisively new treatment of the relation between language and body. When language

performs actions, language and body can no longer be thought of as opposed to one another, but rather they appear - as Shoshana Felman emphasizes in her reading of Austin - chiastically intertwined. Felman formulates the relation between body and language as a relation "consisting at once of incongruity and of inseparability," (Felman: 96) and the performative act as an act of the "speaking body." Against this foil, literary stagings of infection can be theoretically related to the process of writing, which - as it remains to be shown in detail - shifts toward the infectious performative, in which the sick body intersects with the matter of language. Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain,* according to the thesis proposed in the following discussion, stages language as infectious material. The literary and theoretical stakes of infectious illness's treatment in literary modernity lie in the figuration of the act of writing as infectious performative. The epistemological implications of the literary-infectious performative will be worked out in a final constellation that includes Koch's bacteriological notion of infection.

The Infectious in Pure Culture. Robert Koch's Preliminary Bacteriological Inquiry

2 Koch's famous *Etiology of Tuberculosis* is not least of all a methodological decree. The "discovery" of the tubercle bacillus connects both with an etiologic change in the definition of tuberculosis as a sickness and with the formulation of methodological postulates (later called *Koch's postulates*) which will leave a lasting mark on bacteriological research. The "discovery" of the tubercle bacillus can therefore not be separated from the techniques of investigation and methodological postulates because these are what - in the language of the text - lead to its "arrest" as a necessary cause of disease.

3 "If the importance of a disease for mankind is measured from the number of fatalities which are due to it, then tuberculosis must be considered much more important than those most feared infectious diseases, plague, cholera, and the like." (Koch, "Ätiologie": 77) After tuberculosis is characterized as "such a murderous disease" (77-78) the head counsel for the imperial health office in Berlin, Dr Robert Koch, takes up "investigatory work [*Ermittlungsarbeiten*]" (78) and proceeds to "explore the nature of turberculosis" (78). His goal is to establish the "demonstration of some sort of parasitic objects foreign to the body" (78), which means their microscopic clarification (i.e., making them visible). Those methods of dyeing successful with respect to other pathogenic micro-organisms had until that point left the research in tuberculosis "in the lurch" (78). Koch moves away from these methods and develops a method of dyeing that brings the tubercle bacillus to view quite nicely:

> Under the microscope, the structures of the animal tissues [...] appear brown, while the tubercle bacteria are a beautiful blue. [...] The color contrast between the brown-

> colored tissues and the blue tubercle bacteria is so striking that the latter [...] may be found and recognized with the greatest certainty- (78-79)

4 The tubercular bacillus is clearly visible, in notably contrasting color - "beautifully blue" or a "vivid blue" (80) - and thus "to be found with the greatest certainty." When using other dyes, "the dyeing does not turn out as beautifully by far as with methylene blue" (80). "Beautiful," in other words, stands for what is easily recognizable or noticeable "with the greatest certainty." Koch's technique of making visible, of representation, integrates knowledge within an aesthetics. The fabrication of the tuberculosis bacillus is an aesthetic undertaking: beautiful, blue, clearly delineated and, as Koch formulates in the concluding postulates, isolatable - an aesthetics of disinfection. The hygienic matter is dismissed in the methods of investigation and representation that produce the infectious matter in the pure culture.

5 Koch directs his search toward the cause. His experimental ordering is designed to prove that the tubercular bacilli not only appear regularly in the various tuberculosis diseases of man and animal, but are their very cause.

> In order to prove that tuberculosis is a disease brought about by the penetration of the bacilli, and that it is a parasitic disease conditioned by their growth and reproduction, the bacilli must be isolated from the body and cultivated in pure cultures until they are freed from any lingering diseased production of the animal organism; and finally, the same clinical picture of tuberculosis must be produced by transferring the isolated bacilli to animals. (83-84)

6 The "breeding" of "pure cultures" on slides is a technical innovation, established by Koch in bacteriology, and essential for his method of proof. The bacillus is to be "isolated" from the body, and the "pure culture" is to be "bred" until it is "freed from any lingering diseased production of the animal organism." If bacterial growths visible to the "naked eye [*unbewaffnete Auge*]" (86) already occur in the first days, then it is because of "impurities [*Verunreinigungen*], and the experiment has failed" (86). On the other hand, successful breeding results at the end of the first week in an increase of thirty to forty times in visible, "very delicate, spindle-shaped and mostly S-shaped forms, but also ones bent into similar figures" (86). It is not the only time that the form of the bacillus takes on the materiality of writing. In 1883 Koch "discovers" the "comma bacillus," which produces cholera. Of concern here is the "release" of "any diseased production" and the avoidance of "impurification"; in other words: the avoidance of infection. The pure culture is that which is "stripped of all infection," or the purely infectious. The techniques of making something visible cause it to gain an identity; thus at the end of the essay, Koch writes: "In the future, however, we will no longer deal with an undetermined something [*unbestimmten Etwas*] in the fight against the

horrid plague of the human race, but rather with a tangible parasite [*faßbaren Parasiten*]" (97).

7 For the elimination of the "undetermined something" by the hygiene of method or representation, the proof must be pursued to its conclusion. After breeding the pure culture from tubercular organs, "it now remained to prove the most important question, namely, that the isolated bacilli were able to bring about the typical tuberculosis disease process when inoculated again into animals" (90). While answering this question, it may be less the infectious matter itself than the hygienic-experimental production of its purity that dictates the series of experiments and propels them into infinity. In order to "exclude all mistakes" (90), Koch undertakes various series of experiments, of which I will name just a few: infecting the stomachs of guinea pigs with tubercle bacilli from human lungs; infecting the stomachs of guinea pigs with tubercle bacilli from the lungs of an ape; infecting mice, rats, hedgehogs, doves, frogs and hamsters with tubercle bacilli from the lungs of an ape; the injection of tubercle bacilli from a human long into the frontal eye-chamber of several hares, etc. Even if the animals do not die "spontaneously" from tuberculosis, they are killed for the purposes of investigation. The depiction of eight experiments is followed by the sentence: "I was however not yet satisfied with that [*Ich begnügte mich damit aber noch nicht*]" (91). Koch performs five further experiments with guinea pigs, hares, cats, a female dog, and several rats. The latter were fed "two months long almost exclusively with the corpses of tubercolic animals. From time to time a rat was killed and examined" (92). Koch's method of proof resides within the logic of the pure culture. In order to isolate the cause of illness, or in other words, to accomplish the methodological-hygienic extraction of the (pure) infectious matter, Koch plans greatly varying kinds of infections: "It is scarcely worth mentioning, that the injection needles used for all of these experiments were securely disinfected for one hour at a heat ranging from 160 to 170 degrees Celsius" (93). In the test injections, infection and disinfection collapse. For the dual logic within which Koch's bacteriological understanding maneuvers - he speaks in his essay "On bacteriological research" of a "struggle" and even a "war against the smallest but most dangerous enemy of the human race" (Koch, "Bakteriologische Forschung" 109) - this would be by all accounts a cause of irritation. Yet another one: Koch's insatiability ("I was however not yet satisfied with that"). Apparently "lord of the infection" and thus of the life and death of the test animals, Koch is increasingly compelled to conduct further infections/experiments. What these further infections demand is nothing other than the methodological hygiene which demands the exclusion of every mistake, every possibility that things have a different relationship to one another. It can be

said that Koch is subject to the impulse of an ever more thorough disinfection of his method, infected by the desire for the "pure infection." Precisely the etiological isolation of the infectious matter presents itself as "source of the infectious matter,"[1] whose exclusion takes up Koch's entire effort. His methodological hygiene thus proves itself to be of just such fatal ambivalence as the test injection. Precisely where the method tries to overcome the infectious matter through isolation or the pure culture, it becomes instead the very place of infection.

Poetology of the Infectious in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*

8 The microbiological perspective of tuberculosis established through Koch's research is also prevalent in *The Magic Mountain*, undoubtedly the most prominent tuberculosis novel in German literature.[2] At the same time, the concept of the "infectious" is here understood poetologically. After analyzing individual aspects of this "poetology of the infectious," I will return once again to Koch's bacteriological concept of infection.

Coughing

9 Upon his arrival in the sanatorium Berghof in Davos, Hans Castorp - the "simple Hero [*schlichte Held*]" (Mann, "Lebensabriß" 125) of the "strange Bildungsroman [*wunderliche Bildungsroman*]"[3] - encounters a particular kind of background noise. Tuberculosis makes its presence felt in vocal articulations, which deliver several shocks to the newcomer. Even before the first meal, he perceives a noise that he can only recognize gradually, and only piece by piece:

> They had reached the second floor, when Hans Castorp suddenly stopped in his tracks, mesmerized by a perfectly ghastly noise he heard coming from beyond a dogleg in the hall - not a loud noise, but so decidedly repulsive that Hans Castorp grimaced and stared wide-eyes at his cousin. It was a cough, apparently - a man's cough, but a cough unlike any that Hans Castorp had ever heard; [...] a cough [...] which didn't come in spasms, but sounded as if someone was stirring feebly in a terrible mush of decomposing organic material. (Mann, *Magic Mountain* 12)[4]

10 Directing his words to his cousin Joachim Ziemßen, who knows enough to report that

[1] "[...] the sources from which infectuous matter flows must be closed off from all things" (Koch, "Tuberkulosebekämpfung" 125).
[2] *The Magic Mountain* is not Mann's only engagement with the problem of tuberculosis - the earlier story *Tristan* (1903) already takes up this topic - and tuberculosis is not the only infectious disease in Mann's work, which actually considers the full range of infectious diseases. Consider, for example, the typhoid disease of Hanno Buddenbrook (*Die Buddenbrooks*, 1901); the sepsis of the old grand-duke in *Königliche Hoheit* (1909); cholera, which invades Venice and Gustav von Aschenbach (*Der Tod in Venedig*, 1912); and finally Adrian Leverkühn's syphilis (*Doktor Faustus*, 1947).
[3] "The renewal of the German *Bildungsroman* on the basis, and under the influence of pulmonary tuberculosis is already a parody" (Thomas Mann to Philipp Witkop, 14 December, 1921, in: Mann, *Selbstkommentare* 27).
[4] Subsequent references are given in the text.

this is the cough of an Austrian aristocrat born gentleman-rider [Herrenreiter], who is certainly not doing very well, Hans Castorp says:

> "You must realize that I've never heard anything like it [...] a cough like that - that's something new to me at least - it's not even human. It's not dry, but you can't call it loose, either, there's no word for it. It's as if you were looking right down inside and could see it all - the mucus and the slime...." (12)

11 The cough, not a living cough, which resembles no other and cannot be resolved within the semantic unity of the word, goes together with an irritation of the senses, and with an intersection of perceptive modalities. It sounds as if one were seeing. Here, the rhetorical figure of "placing-before-the eyes" or *evidentia* may be summoned: a figure which, according to Quintilian, "in words of such marked shape in their occurrence, that one more readily believes to see it than to hear it" (Quintilian, IX, 2, 40). Though so close to rhetorical evidence's crossover between hearing and seeing, the noise of the cough cannot be equated with it. It is not speech that apparently models for the eyes, but rather a noise that, stripped of all sense, lets only "mud" be seen. In its infectious rhetoric, tubercular coughing marks the "end" of evidence, the limit of visibility/representability, a radical deficit in interpretation. And this is precisely what makes Hans Castorp glassy-eyed:

> But Hans Castorp could not get the cough he had heard out of his mind and kept repeating that it was literally like looking down inside the horseman; as they entered the restaurant, his eyes, weary from the trip, had taken on a glint of nervous excitement. (12-13)

12 One can certainly speak of an infection here. With regard to this truly deadly acoustic sensation, and to this impossible gaze, an excited, feverish shine enters Hans Castorps' eyes. It returns on the next day: "[...] his eyes took on yesterday's look - seemed too hot and heavy [...] and shone with the same glint that the Austrian horseman's novel cough had enkindled [*entzündet*] in them" (39-40). The cough is inflammatory, infectious. It is, however, neither infectious in the medical sense of a droplet infection, as Hans Castorp only hears the sound from behind the curve of the hallway, nor in the psychoanalytical sense of a "psychic infection" or *Gefühlsansteckung* (Freud, *Massenpsychologie* 100), like the kind associated with hysterical identification, which becomes all too readily inflamed through coughing (one can recall Dora's coughing). Hans Castorp does not cough, as would be appropriate in a hysterical identification; instead, his eyes shine and he becomes feverish. The perceived cough is infectious as noise, the limit of interpretation and vocal articulation, an infectious-"parasitic" (Austin 22) "*etiolation*[ ] of language" (22) upon which the body becomes

inflamed, or upon which the body constitutes itself as a sick body.[5] In other words: infection completes itself as performance through the materiality of language. The literary performative is an infectious performative in which the language-body (the noise of coughing) and the sick body (fever, shine in the eyes) intersect structurally. Hans Castorp becomes feverish on account of the tubercular language-body - that is the specificity of the literary infectious, which has further acoustic sensations in stock;such sensations include, for example, the whistling of Hermine Kleefeld's pneumothorax - the pride of the "half-lung club" - or the voice of "unique toneless quality" (285) of the resident singer, who gives a concert in the Berghof Sanatorium during Hans Castorp's first Christmas.

13 Infectious matter behaves like tonal matter - as the limit of articulation, which posits, inscribes, and crosses through meaning and interpretation - in a word: as noise. One meaning of the French word *parasite* is "noise" (as in a radio's noise); *bruit parasite* means distorting noise [*Störgeräusch*], whereby the parasitic shows itself to be a linguistic-medialphenomenon of communication. Literary infection attaches itself to parasitic tonal material; language is presented as parasitic-infectious material. In its literary treatment, the infectious element is exposed as a mode of reflection of the constitution of meaning.

14 In his medical studies, Hans Castorp stumbles inevitably across a text that teaches him on "parasitic cell fusion and infectious tumors" (280).

> These were tissue formations - and very luxuriant [*üppige*] formations they were - caused by foreign cells invading an organism that proved receptive [*aufnahmelustig*] to them and for some reason offered favorable conditions (although, one had to admit, rather dissolute [*liederliche*] conditions at that) for them to flourish. It was not so much that the parasite deprived the surrounding tissue of its nourishment, but rather, in exchanging materials with its host cell, it formed organic compounds that proved amazingly toxic. Indeed ultimately destructive, to the cells of the host organisms. [...] This ritorious living [*Lustbarkeit*] [...] soon led to ruin, [...] lured [*angelockt*] to the scene of the accident, white corpuscules now arrived; [...] Meanwhile the soluble toxines from the bacteria had long since intoxicated [*berauscht*] the nerve centers; the organism was already feverish [*stand in Hochtemperatur*], and with heaving bosom [*mit wogendem Busen*], so to speak, it reeled toward its disintergration [*taumelte er seiner Auflösung entgegen*]. (280)

15 The parasitic attack, or the infection, takes the form of an erotic occurrence: luxuriant, dissolute, intoxicating. And Hans Castorp falls prey to it - as susceptible as the host organism - "feverish, and with heaving bosom." The medical description corresponds almost literally to the passage in which Hans Castorp - who catches a cold towards the end of the third week of

[5] The body is constitutively bound to disease in *The Magic Mountain*: "Illness makes people even more physical, turns them into only a body" (175); "disease [...] which at the same time was an emphasis on the body" (280); "just as disease in an organism was the intoxicating enhancement and crude accentuation of its own corporeality" (281).

his stay and is ordered by the head nurse to have his temperature checked - ascertains his infection:

> Between nine-thirty and ten, in the middle of the morning, his body temperature was 37.6 degrees - that was too high, it was a fever, the result of an infection to which he had been susceptible. And now the question was: what sort of infection? (166)

16 "What sort of infection?" Certainly not - or at least not primarily - an infection in the medical sense. Bearing in mind the poetological revision that the infectious undergoes in *The Magic Mountain*, Hans Castorp's parasitic-erotic infection is coupled with the tonal-/linguistic-matter (noise), and thus an infectious/parasitic matter, that crosses through meaning to become the articulation of a desire.

Unambivalent noises and door-shutting by a feminine hand

17 The infectious space of sound has a specific character. Just as Hans Castorp already had an "excited" glint in his eyes caused by the cough of the Austrian gentleman-rider, the fusion of the disturbing noise, or the tubercular language-body, with a sexual desire with regard to certain noises from the neighboring room is undeniable. As the neighbor of the couple from the "bad" russian table, Hans Castorp becomes the unwilling witness on the first day, during his morning grooming, to certain - one could almost say 'unambivalent' - noises, which attack him in "sticky" bodily fashion.

> An apparent chase around the furniture, the crash of an upturned chair, a grab, an embrace, slaps and kisses [...]. Hans Castorp stood [...] and listened against his best intentions. And suddenly a blush rose up under his talcum, because what he had clearly seen coming had now arrived, and beyond any doubt, the game had turned bestial. [...] 'I wonder if I shall see these people later [...]'. But now Hans Castorp realized to his amazement that the flush that had come to his freshly shaven cheeks had not subsided. (38)

18 Just like the coughing of the gentleman-rider, the noises of the Russian couple cause a bodily sensation: Hans Castorp blushes on account of the scene which has become almost visible through its noises; ear-witness of an 'invisible scene,' he sees clearly coming what then comes; and he states - through the idea, that he could "see these people later" - that the redness of his face does not fade. Here too, the "dissolute" noise functions as the performative, Hans Castorp is corporally infected. The infectious performative is of an erotic nature, whereby the real scandal lies in the fact that the erotic is a disturbing noise.

19 In this regard, no noise is more effective than "a noise that Hans Castorp absolutely could not tolerate, he had always hated" (43): that of a door-shutting. The door in question is the door to the dining room, whose squeaking, which will repeat itself henceforth at every

meal, reaches Hans Castorp's ears for the first time during his first breakfast at the Berghof Sanatorium. By the second occurrence, he is able to ascertain the cause: it is a door being shut by a female hand, the entrance - or perhaps one could say *performance* - of a woman who heads toward the 'good' Russian table. Hans Castorp notices fleetingly "her broad cheekbones and narrow eyes [...] a vague memory of something or somebody brushed over him" (75) He learns her name from Miss Engelhart, a teacher who sits at the same table as he does, and who follows the entrance of the woman with her own interest: "'That is Madame Chauchat,' she said. 'She's so careless. A charming lady.' And Fräulein Engelhart's fuzzy cheeks turned a shade rosier." (75) The noisy appearance of Madame Chauchat engenders widely divergent kinds of desire. Nothing other than the repeated noise proves decisive for Hans Castorp's love-infection: Miss Engelhart "had understood from Hans Castorp's sensitivity about slamming doors that a certain emotional bond was developing between her young tablemate and the Russian woman." (133) In fact, Hans Castorp finds his handkerchief reddened after the first lunch; the infectious noise-disturbance acquires a performative-corporeal validity: "When he used his handkerchief, he found red traces of blood [*von Blut gerötet*], but he did not have the energy to think much about it." (76) Although a nosebleed seems to be the case here, an indecisiveness persists with regard to the interpretation of this sign. The 'reddened' handkerchief may also be read as an indication of a bloody cough, i.e., as a sign of (pulmonary-)tuberculosis. Is it perhaps even the irresolution of the sign that makes the reddened handkerchief into infectious material?

Pencil, Repetition, and Gender

20 Madame Chauchat - as was mentioned above - reminds Hans Castorp of "something" and "someone" from the first moment onward. It is Pribislav Hippe, a boy who was in school together with the then thirteen year-old Hans Castorp, a boy with narrow eyes, sharply accentuated cheekbones, and a pleasantly hoarse voice, from whom Hans Castorp borrowed a pencil in the oft-cited school courtyard scene. At that time, Hans Castorp had been directing if not his words then at least his desiring gaze towards Pribislav for a year. The relation between Hans Castorp and Pribislav could hardly be described as a "friendship," since they did not know each other at all; but Hans Castorp "did not worry about the intellectual or emotional basis of his reaction [*Rechtfertigung seiner Empfindungen*]" (118) or about naming his feelings.

21 When he does finally name them, it occurs only due to repetition, when Hans Castorp

addresses Clawdia Chauchat on the night of carnival. In the logic of the repetition[6]- and love is always a repetition - the question of the correct or false address remains undecidable, and when one considers the intertwining of Pribislav Hippe and Clawdia Chauchat, that question of "true gender" (Foucault) remains undecidable as well:

> "[...] je t'ai déjà connue, anciennement, toi et tes yeux merveilleusement obliques et ta bouche et ta voix, avec laquelle tu parles, - une fois déjà, lorsque j'étais collégien, je t'ai demandé ton crayon, pour faire enfin ta connaisance mondaine, parce que je t'aimais irraisonnablement" (Mann, *Zauberberg* 361). ["[...] I knew you before, from days long past, you and your marvelously slanting eyes and your mouth and the voice with which you speak - there was a long time ago, when I was still just a schoolboy, that I asked you for a pencil, just so I could meet you at last, because I loved you with an irrational love" (336)].
> "Je t'aime [...] je t'ai aimée de tout temps, car tu es le Toi de ma vie" (Mann, *Zauberberg* 361). ["I love you, [...] I have always loved you, for you are the 'intimate you' of my life" (336)].

22 The naming, as the constitution of the love relationship, occurs belatedly. The relation - and with it the (primal) scene of the pencil loan - is from the very beginning doubled, or divided within itself. The "moment of the greatest closeness and corporeality" (129) that Hans Castorp and Pribislav Hippe experience in the schoolyard, repeats itself on the night of carnival between Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat.

> Drawing class was next, and Hans Castorp noticed that he did not have his drawing pencil with him. [...] And so there he stood in the tumult of the brick schoolyard, face to face with Pribislav Hippe. And he said, "Excuse me, could you lend me a pencil?" And Pribislav looked at him [...], "Glad to. But be sure to give it back to me after class." And he pulled a pencil from his pocket, in a silver-plated holder with a ring you had to push up to make the reddish pencil emerge from its metal casing. As he explained its simple mechanism, both their heads bent down over it. "But don't break it," ["*Aber mach ihn nicht entzwei!*"] he added [...]. That was all. (120)

23 Because the scene repeats itself on the night of carnival, during an opportunity in which "ladies in men's clothes, [...] and vice versa, gentlemen [...] in women's clothes" (320) appear, it permits the pencil-scene to appear in a travestic light, or more precisely: the scene marks the inherent travesty/travestic practice in which the pencil is the phallus.[7] The scene takes shape as follows: a society game has begun - drawing a piglet with closed eyes.Yet the number of available pencils does not suffice for those who wish to participate.

> "Who has a [...] pencil? Who'll lend me one?" [...] He turned around and walked back into the room, continuing to shout - headed directly toward Clavdia Chauchat [...] "Do you have a pencil, perhaps?" [...] "Do you mean me?" the bare-armed patient replied, in response to the familiar pronoun in his question. "Yes, I might." [...] She rummaged

[6] See Freud, *Bemerkungen über die Übertragungsliebe*.
[7] I understand "travesty" in Judith Butler's sense, as the practice that is irreducible for the constitution of gender identity and at the same time the marking of its contingency (see Butler, *Gender Trouble* 137-138).

> in her leather handbag [...], first pulled out a handkerchief, from which she then extracted a silver pencil-holder [...] "You see, I knew it - I knew you'd have one." [...] And as they both bent their heads down over the pencil, she showed him the standard screw mechanism. (327-328)

24 The pencil cannot be separated from the repetition. It circulates in the repetition which it designs performatively.[8] Within the borrowing of the pencil, Pribislav Hippe and Clawdia Chauchat intertwine. The moment of borrowing is, in other words, not only that of the "greatest closeness and corporeality" between Hans Castorp and Pribislav, and then Madame Chauchat, but most of all between Pribislav Hippe and Clawdia Chauchat. The repeated circulation, whose origin cannot be determined, completes a travestic intersection of genders. For who would say for certain whether it is not perhaps Pribislav's pencil which Hans Castorp returns to Clawdia Chauchat, or if it were perhaps Clawdia Chauchat's pencil which he had once borrowed?[9]The act of return or borrowing - and thus the structural measure of repetition - would accordingly always be a missing action, the return/borrowing of what is always already another pencil, or here: a pencil of another gender, that is, the articulation of (gender)difference. The 'Toi de sa [Hans Castorp's] vie' is a doubled 'toi' (*you*), cleft in two through repetition, and also with regard to gender. Pribislav's comment that Hans Castorp should not break the pencil "in two" [*entzwei*] is therefore scarcely precise; the pencil as repetition is of course always already in two, a writing material divided within itself that travesties gender identity and infects it with its other. Such a repeated/lacking writing of gender certainly may be identified as the infectious performative.

Series of Handkerchiefs

25 *The Magic Mountain* produces handkerchiefs in series. After the second door-shutting appearance of Madame Chauchat, Hans Castorp finds his handkerchief 'reddened by blood'; on his walk, a nosebleed of such severity occurs that he must go repeatedly to the stream "rinsing out his handkerchief." (117) A handkerchief serves Hans Castorp furthermore as an excuse to arrange an encounter with Clawdia Chauchat, once he knows how to take advantage of her habitual lateness: "After taking his seat at the table, he patted himself with both hands and said in dismayed annoyance, 'I knew it - I've forgotten my handkerchief. That means I'll

[8] When I interpret the pencil as phallus, it is not in the sense of Lacan's often criticized phallocentric orientation of the symbolic, but rather according to Butler's reformulation of the phallus which connects it to the performative's structure of repetition (see Butler, *Bodies* 53-91).

[9] In fact, Hans Castorp plays out the gender-crossing connected with the pencil grammatically during the later 'snow chapter': "[...] when Hans Castorp had found himself in a position equally as mad and difficult, when he had given son crayon, his pencil, Pribislav Hippe's pencil, back to the ailing Clavida Chauchat. [...] 'Son crayon'! In this case that means 'her' pencil, not 'his,' and you only say 'son' because 'crayon' is masculine - all the rest is just a vapid joke" (479-480). "I gave Pribislav Hippe's pencil back to ailing Clawdia" (486).

have to go back upstairs again.' Which he did - just so that he and 'Clavdia' could meet *head-on*, which was something quite different, more dangerous and more intensely alluring than when she walked before or behind him." (142-143) Yet another handkerchief supposedly - as Hans Castorp hears - lifted itself from the ground of its own accord during an occult session with the medium Ellen Brand. And finally, there is Hans Castorp's return from his walk, when the nosebleed and the 'dream' of the pencil-scene with Pribislav struck him - a return in a thoroughly exhausted state and rumpled attire: Hans Castorp, one could say, returns as a living handkerchief. Dr Krokowski's speech on 'love as a sickness-engendering power' has already begun:

> But it was a miserable walk home [...] He repeatedly had to stop to rest - the blood would suddenly drain from his face [*daß sein Gesicht plötzlich weiß wurde*], cold sweat would break out on his brow, and his irregular heartbeat made it hard to breathe. (121)

Luckily there was a corner seat available near the door. [...] The audience [...] paid Hans Castorp barely any notice. And that was a good thing, because he looked dreadful. His face was as pale as linen and his suit was bloodstained, so that he looked like a murderer fresh from his awful deed. (122)

6 The face 'white,' "pale as linen," the suit "bloodstained." In its red-white combination, Hans Castorp's bodily attire recalls a bloody handkerchief and thus the sign of the tubercular lung-disease. Having returned from his encounter with Pribislav Hippe, Hans Castorp presents himself as a corporeal sign of sickness. Within the sign of illness - the bloody handkerchief - body and text intersect, precisely: the sick body as sign with the corporeality of the sign of the disease. Just like a "murderer fresh from his deed," Hans Castorp returns from his encounter with Pribislav, in which he addresses his words to Pribislav for the first time, and which furthermore granted him a pleasant drawing-lesson with his pencil during which, as may be supposed, he drew with the *red* pencil on *white* paper. This scene is also a writing scene: if Hans Castorp were to be characterized before his journey to the Sanatorium Berghof as an "unwritten," or white piece of paper ("Hans Castorp, being an unwritten page" [35]), then he is certainly no longer after his walk. The "deed" from which he returns stained with blood and with a feverish body concerns not least of all a corporeal-infectious, homoerotic writing act with the pencil, which he borrowed from Pribislav, on an "unwritten page." In short, writing and the sick body intersect within the handkerchief, the tubercular sign/sign of illness, that unfolds its textual influence as an infectious performative.

Critique of Pure Infection

27 It may be concluded that *The Magic Mountain* develops a poetology of the infectious in its literary treatment of tuberculosis. Writing appears as an infectious act in which the sick body and the tubercular language-body merge structurally. As an infectious material, writing is divided within itself, thus producing a gender travesty and infecting gender identity with its other. With a different purpose the closeness of infection and the materiality of writing appears in the work of Robert Koch, where he characterizes the bacteria as "s-shaped" or as a "comma bacterium" with regard to their 'literal' aspects. Koch, one might say, breeds letters, whereby the letter appears at the same time as bacillus in "pure culture." With regard to the aforementioned medium of language, Koch's technique of the isolation/pure culture signifies the breeding of the pure, easily read and beautiful script. The bacillus may be easily understood, and communicate without noise (*bruit parasite*). In the constellation of bacteriology and literature undertaken in this essay, the literary discourse may be read as a *critique of pure infection*, a critique of the hygienic will to *pure infection*, insofar as the "undetermined something" (Koch, "Ätiologie" 97) of the infectious does not try to lead to a comprehensive identity, but rather installs itself simply as noise, etiolation of sense. Staged as infectious texture, the handkerchief - sickness-sign of tuberculosis - performatively subverts a bacteriological concept of infection. In fact, the handkerchief invades bacteriology as well - even Koch does not evade the infectious texture. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the popular documentation of his conquest of infection, which testifies to the closeness of infection and hygiene: the design of his laurel-crowned portrait in a red handkerchief. The handkerchiefs, produced in a quantity of around 100,000, were completely sold out by 1932.[10]

(translated by Jocelyn Holland, University of California, Santa Barbara)

[10] See Heymann 328.

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