

Introduction

1. Somehow Beside the Point?

Thomas Mann's novel *Der Zauberberg*, known in the English-speaking world as *The Magic Mountain*, tells the story of Hans Castorp, a young German man who voluntarily spends seven years in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Davos in the Swiss Alps, having initially come to visit his sick cousin.¹ To his surprise, he enjoys his stay there immensely. It gives him the time to think, talk, read, listen, love, learn, and unlearn: most of his days are dedicated to digesting food and ideas. When Mann's 1000-page-long novel was published in 1924, it quickly became a popular bestseller as well as a critical success in Germany. It was soon translated into numerous other languages and established Mann's international reputation, leading to his award of the Nobel Prize in Literature five years later. In time, *The Magic Mountain* has come to be seen as one of the masterpieces of European modernism and a powerful symbol of traditional learning and encyclopaedic erudition.

Outside Hans's sanatorium, the Berghof, the world is in crisis: the First World War is about to break out. But rather than leaving the sanatorium to pursue a career as a marine engineer, Hans turns to the edifice of human culture and different branches of learning, from philosophy to biology, and beyond. What good does it bring him? We are faced here with the foundational question that students and scholars of the humanities always come back to: what is the use of culture and learning in an age of crisis? *The Magic Mountain* is a novel about the uses of culture, but it is also a cultural text itself, one that Mann wrote in an attempt to think through the rising tensions in the Weimar Republic. In our age which, like many before it, often seems like one long, never-ending crisis, my study—*Mann's Magic Mountain: World Literature and Closer Reading*—seeks to understand how and why readers have used Mann's text over the years: how and why people read *The Magic Mountain*.

One might think that every study of *The Magic Mountain*, or of any literary text for that matter, is a study of its reading; very few are, however. Studies are written by academic readers who surprisingly often do not present themselves as readers

¹ Quotations from the novel in the text are taken from the following edition: Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, ed. Michael Neumann, GKFA (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated. English translations from *Der Zauberberg* are taken from the following edition: Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. John E. Woods (London: Everyman, 2005).

at all. Exegetists, scholars, theorists, writers, teachers, yes—but not readers. In fact, many literary studies come across as attempts to erase the act of reading with its surges of emotion, moments of boredom, distraction, and interruption, difficulties, confusions, and uncertainties. The everyday activity of reading is replaced with ‘a reading’—an academic interpretation.

If academic readers reflect on this erasure at all, they are likely to see it as justified by the valuable contribution their scholarship makes to how we understand the work in question. But who exactly are the ‘we’ here? Academic scholarship does not tend to be read by non-academic readers; it is mostly read by other academic readers, who are a small fraction of all readers—an exception, not the rule. Literature is not written for academic readers and is not read exclusively by them, yet most academic accounts of literary texts seem to tacitly assume as much. This is puzzling, given that one of the most powerful justifications for the academic study of literature is that the entire human species cares enormously about telling and being told stories.

Of course, I am not the only reader to marvel at the fact that academic readers rarely have meaningful conversations with non-academic readers, even though both groups are passionate about books, and, as I will argue later, ‘there is a common reader in every professional critic’.² But before moving on to discuss some recent (and not so recent) academic approaches to this problem, which will form a theoretical background to my study of *The Magic Mountain*, I would like to introduce the most memorable articulation of the disconnect between academic and non-academic readers that I came across while working on this book. It is a passage from Elif Batuman’s debut novel, *The Idiot* (2017), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

The protagonist Selin—a first-year undergraduate at Harvard—decides to attend a Russian literature seminar because Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878) is one of her favourite books. But to her disappointment,

everything the professors said seemed to be somehow beside the point. You wanted to know why Anna had to die, and instead they told you that nineteenth-century Russian landowners felt conflicted about whether they were really a part of Europe. The implication was that it was somehow naïve to want to talk about anything interesting, or to think that you would ever know anything important. I wasn’t interested in society, or ancient people’s money troubles. I wanted to know what books really meant. That was how my mother and I had always talked about literature. ‘I need you to read this, too’, she would say, handing me a *New Yorker* story in which an unhappily married man had to get a rabies shot, ‘so you can tell me what it really means’.³

² Terry Eagleton, ‘Not Just Anybody’, *London Review of Books*, 39.1 (2017), 35–37, p. 35.

³ Elif Batuman, *The Idiot* (New York: Penguin, 2018), p. 16.

What is so compelling about this passage—apart from Batuman’s deadpan wit and penchant for the absurd, coupled with the lucidity of her language—is that her protagonist’s plight in the novel is in fact not at all dissimilar from nineteenth-century Russian landowners’ conflicting feelings ‘about whether they were really a part of Europe’. Throughout *The Idiot*, Selin—a child of Turkish immigrants who grew up in the United States—is forced to navigate seemingly irreconcilable sets of cultural allegiances, too. Selin’s problem with her literature professors, then, is not that their response to *Anna Karenina* is irrelevant to her interest in the novel. It is rather that her professors frame their motivation for studying Tolstoy’s book differently, and consequently talk about *Anna Karenina* in terms that are meaningless to Selin, making her feel naïve and inept.

How could readers like Selin and her mother have meaningful conversations about the books they love with literature professors? It surely is an important question—and yet it does not often attract attention in literary scholarship, let alone guide the method of academic literary analysis. In this study of *The Magic Mountain*, I set myself the task of considering it more seriously. In this section of the Introduction I explain my motivations more fully, in Section 2 I discuss my methodology, and in Section 3 I sketch out my argument, chapter by chapter. For now, however, I will stay with Batuman’s writing a little longer, for reasons that will soon become apparent.

As illustrated by the passage from *The Idiot*, the most common setting in which academic and non-academic readers meet is the undergraduate literature classroom, where professors try to mould ‘naïve’ readers into academic readers, either through explicit instruction or by modelling intellectual habits that students are expected to pick up. In portraying Selin’s immersion in this process at Harvard, Batuman channels her own experiences: she too went to Harvard and studied literature there in the 1990s. Her first book—*The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them* (2010), a collection of interconnected essays previously published in *The New Yorker* and other magazines—recounts the next few years of her life, which she spent studying for a PhD in Comparative Literature at Stanford.

This was a time when it might have seemed that Batuman had been successfully transformed into an academic reader: in 2007, she submitted her doctoral dissertation, which bore the suitably cryptic title ‘The Windmill and the Giant: Double-Entry Bookkeeping in the Novel’. But in *The Possessed*, she retraces her steps and comes out as a non-academic reader. In a series of suggestive, whimsical essays, Batuman revisits the texts she studied during her doctoral degree as objects of passion and obsession rather than dispassionate analysis, and recounts her classes, research trips, and conferences she attended and helped organize, reflecting on the intellectual habits of academic readers with affection as well as a healthy dose of irony.

In the first paragraph of the introduction to *The Possessed*, Batuman asks: 'How does someone with no real academic aspirations end up spending seven years in suburban California studying the form of the Russian novel?'⁴ An attentive reader of my own introduction might notice that the time span specified here is the same as the time that Hans Castorp spent in his Swiss sanatorium, a parallel that is not lost on Batuman either. This is the first paragraph of *The Possessed* in full:

In Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, a young man named Hans Castorp arrives at a Swiss sanatorium to visit his tubercular cousin for three weeks. Although Castorp himself does not have tuberculosis, he somehow ends up staying in that sanatorium for seven years. The plot of *The Magic Mountain* mirrors the history of its composition: Mann set out to write a short story, but ended up producing a 1,200-page novel. Despite the novel's complexity, its central question is very simple: How does someone who doesn't actually have tuberculosis end up spending seven years at a tuberculosis sanatorium? I often ask myself a similar question: How does someone with no real academic aspirations end up spending seven years in suburban California studying the form of the Russian novel?⁵

Elif Batuman features so prominently in the introduction to my own study because her work offers a particularly stimulating perspective on straddling the boundary between academic and non-academic reading and writing. In the different genres of her work—the elegant academic prose of her Stanford dissertation, the playful collection of essays that revisit her field of research from the perspective of a recovering academic, and the novel which fictionalizes her experience as an undergraduate student of literature—Batuman explores the potential of novelistic form to capture 'the protagonist's struggle to transform his arbitrary, fragmented, given experience into a narrative as meaningful as his favourite books'.⁶ In this way, Batuman's writing articulates both real-life and fictional readers' attachments to literature, which are the subject of this book, too. How fitting that the novel selected by Batuman as the narrative lens through which to view her negotiation of the boundaries between academic and non-academic reading and writing is none other than *The Magic Mountain*.

Batuman's reference to Mann's novel can serve as a great introduction to the subject of this book too, that is, the cultural uses to which readers put books—*The Magic Mountain* being my main case study—and what these uses can tell us about the books themselves. In the words of Rita Felski, a critic whose work I turn to next, 'to propose that the meaning of literature lies in its uses is to open up for investigation a vast terrain of practices, expectations, emotions, hopes, dreams,

⁴ Elif Batuman, *The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

and interpretations'.⁷ In this first approximation of the uses to which *The Magic Mountain* can be and has been put, including by myself, we get a glimpse of the theme that runs throughout this book: Mann's 'Magic Mountain' as a space in which to explore the attractions and dangers of a life devoted to the self-indulgent cultivation of intellect. (Selin, the protagonist of *The Idiot*, reads *The Magic Mountain* too—in Hungary, where she works as an English teacher over the summer. 'I found a lot to relate to in *The Magic Mountain*', she notes; 'particularly how they ate breakfast twice a day.'⁸ It is a useful reminder that Mann's novel is not quite about the ethereal life of the mind, but rather about various kinds of pleasure, ranging from the intellectual to the culinary.)

Some literary scholars who feel more at home in the world of academia than Elif Batuman have also written engagingly about bridging the gap between academic and non-academic readers. Rita Felski's work, quoted above, is a particularly influential recent example. I have already gestured towards her critical vocabulary when I talked about the cultural uses of books. In 2008—while Batuman was honing her voice as a non-academic reader with academic credentials—Felski took over as the general editor of *New Literary History* (an influential journal founded in 1969, aiming to 'inquire into the theoretical bases of practical criticism and, in doing so, re-examine the relation between past works and present critical and theoretical needs'⁹), and published a book called *Uses of Literature* in the Blackwell Manifestos series.

The front cover of Felski's book bears the endorsement of Gerald Graff, president of the Modern Language Association at the time. 'Rita Felski demonstrates the impossible', it says, namely 'that recent literary theorists and common readers not only have something to say to each other, but actually need one another'. Graff's distinction between 'literary theorists' and 'common readers' corresponds to my distinction between academic and non-academic readers. Other critics talk about 'lay', 'amateur', or 'general' readers as opposed to 'professional' readers. I find these terms imprecise and unnecessarily judgemental. The distinction between academic and non-academic is more effective at articulating the most important difference between these two groups of readers: their position within or outside academia with its peculiar institutionalized reading practices. The fact that Graff describes a set of suggestions for a meaningful conversation between academic and non-academic readers as an 'impossible' feat shows just how profound the disconnect between these two groups of readers has become.

Felski's argument, which she further developed in *The Limits of Critique* (2015), is that the default mode of engagement with literature in contemporary academia—whether in Freudian, Lacanian, Marxist, feminist, queer, or

⁷ Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 8.

⁸ Batuman, *The Idiot*, p. 359.

⁹ Ralph Cohen, 'The First Decade: Some Editorial Remarks', *New Literary History*, 10 (1979), 417–21, p. 417.

postcolonial criticism, or most other recent schools of criticism—is to approach literary texts suspiciously, as objects to be dissected and subsumed under a theoretical paradigm that can explain them away.¹⁰ She is drawing here on Paul Ricoeur's famous description of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud as 'les maîtres du soupçon'—'the masters of suspicion'.

What I term 'academic reading' largely overlaps with what Felski terms 'critique', especially given that in *Uses of Literature* she argues that even the critics who shrug at the omnipresence of 'ideological' literary theory, such as Marxism or feminism, are unable to engage with non-academic readers' approaches to literature. In a passage that resonates with Selin's experiences in *The Idiot*, Felski writes:

faced with the disconcerting realization that people often turn to books for knowledge or entertainment, [critics] can only lament the naïveté of those unable or unwilling to read literature 'as literature'. To read in such a way, it turns out, means assenting to a view of art as impervious to comprehension, assimilation, or real-world consequence, perennially guarded by a forbidding 'do not touch' sign, its value adjudicated by a culture of connoisseurship and a seminar-room sensibility anxious to ward off the grubby handprints and smears of everyday life.¹¹

Felski's 'seminar-room sensibility' corresponds to Batuman's portrayal of the Russian literature seminar, where Selin grasps instinctively that her professors (Felski's 'critics') find it 'naïve to want to talk about anything interesting, or to think that you would ever know anything important'—which is how she and her mother talk about books. Felski paints a similar picture of a hierarchical relationship between 'disconcerted' critics who 'can only lament [those readers'] naïveté' and non-academic readers who 'turn to books for knowledge or entertainment'. Selin and Batuman, with their desire to relate their own experiences to narratives of their favourite novels, threaten to leave their 'grubby handprints and smears of everyday life' on the critics' cherished books—or perhaps Books, written with a capital 'B' to reflect a 'theological' reverence at play here, as Felski puts it.¹²

How to expand the scope of academic reading to better reflect the everyday experience of reading? It is important to clarify here that neither Felski nor I wish to simply 'critique critique', as it were; we both agree that it has given rise to many fascinating readings of literary texts and theories of what literature is and what it does in the world. Felski's ambition, described here in *Critique and Postcritique*, a volume that she edited with Elizabeth S. Anker in 2017, is rather to 'shed fresh

¹⁰ See Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹¹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. 5. ¹² See *ibid.*, p. 4.

light on what have become ubiquitous ways of reading'¹³ and 'reimagine the aims and practices of literary and cultural studies'.¹⁴ Both this volume and *The Limits of Critique* focus more on the former than the latter goal, and offer fewer practical examples of what an alternative to critique could be than in Felski's earlier *Uses of Literature*, where she describes the experience of reading through the lens of four 'modes of textual engagement'¹⁵—recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. Her most recent book, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020), further develops this alternative approach to the academic study of both 'high art' and 'popular culture' by analysing three 'attachment devices that connect audiences to works of art: identification, attunement, and interpretation', as the back-cover blurb has it.¹⁶

Like many other scholars over the past couple of decades, Felski sees phenomenology and affect theory as two particularly powerful tools to create a new language for literary scholarship. 'Phenomenology' is a term adopted from philosophy, where it describes 'structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view'.¹⁷ 'Affect' is a term adopted from psychology, where it describes 'emotion or subjectively experienced feeling'.¹⁸ In many literary studies that employ these terms, though, it is unclear why one could not just use the more straightforward '(description of) experience' and 'feeling'/'emotion', respectively. Often when coming across a formulation like 'the phenomenology of affective states' in literary scholarship, I wonder what is gained by using such a phrase rather than asking more straightforwardly 'how it feels to experience emotions'. It is paradoxical that branches of literary scholarship that set out to better capture the everyday experience of reading and to 'call into question the mistrust of ordinary language and thought endemic to critique'¹⁹ end up adopting more jargon, that is specialized language whose benefits are at best not clear and at worst non-existent. If our goal is to build bridges between academic and non-academic readers and we believe that 'suspicion of the commonplace and everyday risks entrenching the notion that critical thinking is the unique provenance of intellectuals—enclosing it within the rarefied space of the academy',²⁰ we should attend more seriously to the impact of linguistic and rhetorical choices we make in our writing. As literary scholars, we surely are very well equipped to do so.

¹³ Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, 'Introduction', in *Critique and Postcritique*, ed. Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 1–28, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Rita Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2020).

¹⁷ David Woodruff Smith, 'Phenomenology', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology>> [accessed 18 March 2019].

¹⁸ Andrew M. Colman, *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 16.

¹⁹ Anker and Felski, *Critique and Postcritique*, p. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

In the Introduction to *Critique and Postcritique*, Felski and Anker persuasively rebut various ideological objections to their formulation of the critic's task, but they do not address the question of practical challenges to it. One such practical challenge lies in the fact that even though Blackwell Manifestos 'set out to engage and challenge the broadest range of readers, from undergraduates to postgraduates, university teachers and general readers',²¹ *Uses of Literature* (published in that series) was highly unlikely to reach this kind of wide audience. This is because the stated goal of the series is undermined by its position in the book market: Felski's 150-page paperback, at £25, is in line with the price of academic publications purchased mostly by university libraries rather than that of non-fiction titles commonly available in bookshops. This is an external challenge faced by academics who want to follow in Felski's footsteps. But there is also a related internal challenge that needs to be addressed. To best explain its nature, I will revisit the circumstances under which I first read *Uses of Literature* and *The Limits of Critique*.

I first came across Rita Felski's work at around the time that I read David Lodge's *Campus Trilogy*. During the day, I would sit in my office and study *The Limits of Critique*; in the evening, I would come back home and flick open *Small World: An Academic Romance*, the second instalment of Lodge's trilogy. Published in 1984, when Lodge was a professor of English literature at Birmingham University, and set in 1979, *Small World* follows the adventures of several faculty members and graduate students from different universities as they keep running into each other at various academic conferences around the world over the course of several months. As the novel's subtitle indicates, its narrative structure is modelled on the genre of the romance, understood as a series of episodes in which the satisfaction of sexual desire is repeatedly deferred, and full of witty allusions to specific traditional romances, including Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. (At one point, one of the academic protagonists encourages an airport clerk to have a go at *Orlando Furioso* rather than resorting to her favourite Harlequin romances.) The novel's grand finale takes place at the MLA convention in New York, the 'megaconference'²² organized annually by the Modern Language Association of North America (the organization of which Gerald Graff was president in 2008). Forty years on, Lodge's description of its annual convention in *Small World* is still eerily familiar.

The most talked-about event at the MLA in *Small World* is the forum on 'The Function of Criticism' which comprises five talks. Four of them can easily be subsumed under Felski's category of 'critique': a French professor argues for the merits of structuralist narratology, a German professor extols the methods of reader-response theory (in its most 'scientific spirit',²³ therefore dealing with

²¹ Felski, *Uses of Literature*, p. ii.

²² David Lodge, *Small World* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 313.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

‘implied’ or ‘ideal’ rather than real-life readers), an Italian professor offers an impassioned plea for Marxist criticism, and an American professor gives a provocative talk on deconstruction. But the very first speaker, an old-school British professor called Philip Swallow, describes a very different approach to literature:

He said the function of criticism was to assist in the function of literature itself, which Dr Johnson had famously defined as enabling us better to enjoy life, or better to endure it. The great writers were men and women of exceptional wisdom, insight, and understanding. Their novels, plays and poems were inexhaustible reservoirs of values, ideas, images, which, when properly understood and appreciated, allowed us to live more fully, more finely, more intensely. But literary conventions changed, history changed, language changed, and these treasures too easily became locked away in libraries, covered with dust, neglected and forgotten. It was the job of the critic to unlock the drawers, blow away the dust, bring out the treasures into the light of day. Of course, he needed certain specialist skills to do this: a knowledge of history, a knowledge of philology, of generic convention and textual editing. But above all, he needed enthusiasm, the love of books. It was by the demonstration of this enthusiasm in action that the critic forged a bridge between the great writers and the general reader.²⁴

Even though Felski makes the occasional gesture of distancing herself from the dogmas of literary studies before the rise of theory in the 1960s, many aspects of Swallow’s conception of the function of criticism are surprisingly similar to hers. She would not endorse his normative talk of ‘the great writers’—in *Uses of Literature* she discusses Henrik Ibsen alongside Hayao Miyazaki (a Japanese anime master) and Bertolt Brecht alongside Gayl Jones (a controversial African American novelist)—and her conception of literature’s value is more capacious than Swallow’s: she believes it can shock as well as reassure us. But there is a lot that Felski and Swallow have in common. They both take literature seriously as a source of knowledge and enjoyment, and as an instrument of self-intensification (all these concepts play an important role in *Uses of Literature*); they both value the curatorial function of literary scholarship as a valid form of expertise, distinct from but not inferior to critique; neither of them shies away from the powerful language of love; both use the metaphor of ‘forging a bridge’ to express the ideal of literary scholarship as an activity that connects literature to life, rather than separating them. There seems to be a lot that could endear Swallow to Felski.

But however likeable and quirky, Swallow—who represents the school of counter-theory widespread in Britain in the 1970s—is fearful of, even hostile to, any intellectual project that challenges his ‘love of books’. In Lodge’s novel, literary

²⁴ Ibid., p. 317.

theorists present their ideas as a rigorous and ambitious antidote to Swallow's spurious and complacent approach to the study of literature. As Siegfried Mews writes, Swallow comes across as 'a quaint dilettante' in comparison with other academics portrayed in Lodge's campus trilogy.²⁵ As Felski acknowledges, the exciting promise of theory—of critique—was the recognition that what we read and how we read are shaped by implicit theories about value, meaning, and understanding, and the call to make these theories explicit, to acknowledge their multiplicity, and to study their differences. This is the process in which Swallow stubbornly refuses to participate and in which the other academics in *Small World* revel. But there is a decisive twist: these highly specialized, 'hard-nosed professional star[s]'²⁶—the French narratologist, the American deconstructionist, and so on—are themselves satirized as smug and self-righteous. In other words, Lodge's novel does not glorify Swallow's approach to literature, but it does not blindly endorse his colleagues, the theorists, either. It simply shows that these different attitudes towards 'the function of criticism', with their respective attractions and shortcomings, coexist in academia.

What is the upshot of my discussion of *Small World*? Lodge's novel shows that the full spectrum of views on the function of literary criticism recently discussed by Felski has been in play since at least the 1970s. What is more, it registers the advantages and the disadvantages of *both* critique *and* its opposite, which in the context of his novel might be termed 'pre-critique'. Reading Lodge alongside Felski is a forceful reminder of an alternative history of engagement with literature in modern Western scholarship that predates the rise of theory, and which theory set out to correct. If Felski's alternative to critique is to be successful, it must address the shortcomings of Swallow's approach to literature. 'Post-critique' can only get us so far; if critique did not manage to solve the problems of 'pre-critique', just being mindful of critique's shortcomings will not be enough either.

So what is the solution to this problem? The first step is to notice what the texts by Batuman, Lodge, and Felski discussed so far have in common. In Lodge's *Small World*, Swallow advocates 'forg[ing] a bridge between the great writers and the general reader'. But he never actually talks to a single 'general reader', and his 'love of books' and of reading is exposed as a self-indulgent obsession rather than a public mission with a humanist agenda. (In *Changing Places*, where we first meet Swallow, we find out that 'in odd moments when nobler examples of the written word were not to hand he read attentively the backs of cornflakes packets'.²⁷ In *Nice Work*, the third and final instalment of Lodge's trilogy, a precariously employed English professor in Swallow's department works on Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial novel *North and South* but finds it excruciatingly

²⁵ Siegfried Mews, 'The Professor's Novel: David Lodge's *Small World*', *MLN*, 104 (1989), 713–26, p. 716.

²⁶ *Ibid.* ²⁷ David Lodge, *Changing Places* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 11.

uncomfortable to talk to anybody who actually works in the industrial sector.) Selin, the protagonist of *The Idiot*, is made to feel stupid and naïve in a seminar on *Anna Karenina*, even though it is her favourite novel. In *The Possessed*, Batuman stages her own dilemmas as a passionate reader who does not feel fully at home in academia.

On the cover of Felski's *Uses of Literature*, Graff tells us that 'literary theorists and common readers [...] need one another', but the book was not in fact marketed to those 'common readers' at all, and in her other books Felski mostly addresses other academics like herself too. Despite her 'commitment to non-expert readers and ordinary life'²⁸ and her aim of 'narrow[ing] the gap between academic criticism and nonprofessional ways of reading',²⁹ in *Uses of Literature* and *The Limits of Critique* Felski only occasionally draws on reading experiences other than her own or those of other academics—something that she has in common with other critics who have recently called for the creation of more space to discuss non-academic experiences of reading in literary scholarship.³⁰

In his characteristically animated review of *The Limits of Critique* in the *London Review of Books*, Terry Eagleton—who, as he disarmingly acknowledges, has 'been known to indulge in the practice [him]self'³¹—finds Felski's take on critique compelling and timely, and reiterates his commitment to literary scholarship that grips the attention of non-academic readers. But, he observes humorously yet aptly:

it has always been an embarrassment to literary scholars that reading, along with talking about what you read, is something that a lot of non-scholarly people do as well. This is not the case with brain surgeons or analytic philosophers, whose professional status is untroubled by the awareness that ordinary men and women may be practising such pursuits in their front parlours.³²

To repeat once more a question that I have already asked several times in this introductory chapter: how can academic readers have meaningful conversations with non-academic readers? The solution is obvious, and yet it has proven surprisingly difficult to implement. We need to listen to what other readers have to say about the books we study. In the next section, I discuss how to go about it.

²⁸ Heather Love, 'Critique Is Ordinary', *PMLA*, 132.2 (2017), 364–70, p. 367. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

³⁰ See, for example, Philip Davis, *Reading and the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Evelyne Ender and Deidre Shauna Lynch, eds., 'Cultures of Reading' [special issue], *PMLA*, 134.1 (2019).

³¹ Eagleton, 'Not Just Anybody', p. 35.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

2. World Literature and Closer Reading

World literature and closer reading, the two concepts in this book's subtitle, have been particularly useful in puzzling over this problem. The first has been at the centre of comparative literary scholarship for about twenty years, since the publication of David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* in 2003,³³ and goes back much further, at least to Goethe's famous reflections on 'Weltliteratur' some two hundred years ago.³⁴ The various uses of this concept have two things in common. First, they displace the category of the nation as the most appropriate container for literary production, even though most literature departments have historically been organized around it. As Damrosch points out in his more recent book, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global World* (2020):

[National literature departments] have typically organized their studies in terms of a literary history divided into broad periods, subdivided into movements within periods. Each period and movement would have its particular canon of major and minor figures, who with few exceptions would have written in the national language, contributing to its refinement and to the prestige of the nation itself. Comparatists have often had an uneasy relation to national literatures conceived in these terms, whether through an ideological opposition to nationalism or through their impatience with the parochialism of national traditions seen as essentially self-contained entities.³⁵

A world literature lens allows us to sidestep these limitations of national literary histories by building the corpus of study in a dramatically different way, through an emphasis on the circulation of literature around the world, seen as a process that does not take us away from 'what books really mean', as Selin might say, but very much into the heart of the matter. This is the second methodological insight that various successful uses of the concept of world literature have in common.

Circulation of texts can be studied in various ways. One prominent example of such methodologies is 'distant reading', in Franco Moretti's term³⁶—a combination of surveys of large-scale literary histories and digital methods that can, for instance, map the publication of various editions and translations of a certain text. Another important example is book history, which pays special attention to the institutions and networks that fuel and sustain the movement of books, or

³³ David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³⁴ See Peter Goßens, *Weltliteratur. Modelle transnationaler Literaturwahrnehmung im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011).

³⁵ David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 207.

³⁶ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review*, 1 (2000), 54–68.

‘bibliomigrancy’, as B. Venkat Mani called it.³⁷ But there are other possibilities, too. We can tell the histories of texts by tracking their readings by individual, specific readers who left behind traces of their engagement with books. Such a ‘midlevel’ or ‘midscale’ perspective, as Rita Felski recently pointed out, often gets ‘short shrift in the recurring spats between formalists and historicists’ but is nevertheless ‘key to clarifying why literature and art are worth attending to’.³⁸

I propose to call such an approach ‘closer reading’, a term I encountered as the title of Laura Baudot’s recent essay in *The Point*.³⁹ Her ‘Closer Reading’, subtitled ‘Teaching Fiction at Work’, recounts her experiences teaching literature to a range of professionals working at a big corporation, and its effects on her teaching methods in the undergraduate classroom at Oberlin, where she is a professor of English. The phrase ‘closer reading’ is not glossed further in the essay, and in fact does not appear outside of the title at all; it does not seem to have been used elsewhere either. But, as I will explain in a moment, the phrase immediately struck me. These two concepts—world literature and closer reading—offer inroads into the vast, messy terrain of reading habits, and they can help navigate my specific case study—various readings of *The Magic Mountain*.

How is the concept of world literature helpful here? To start with, *The Magic Mountain* is usually studied as a classic of German—or European, or Western—literature. Such an approach unhelpfully reduces its actual cultural reach. Mann’s novel has also been influential—to varying extents—in places like Eastern Europe, Australia, Latin America, East Asia, the Middle East, and Central Africa. But even more importantly, once we stop expecting from *The Magic Mountain* qualities that we have been primed to expect from conservative literary canons, tied to constructs such as national culture or Western civilization, we may begin to notice other features of the text more easily. Read as a classic of European culture, *The Magic Mountain* is likely to be examined for characteristics such as seriousness, impenetrable complexity, difficulty. The necessity of deep study to get anything out of it will be assumed; mediation through educational institutions such as universities will be deemed the most appropriate. This way of reading has its unquestionable merits and rewards, and has produced many insightful studies of Mann’s novel. My goal is not to discredit or abandon such readings, which may be termed academic, since they almost always take place as part of academic study and research: it is rather to point out that other readings are possible—and valuable—too. Read as a text that circulates around the world, *The Magic Mountain* can more easily be appreciated as a playful novel that pays attention to and is part of everyday life. Approaching Mann’s novel as world literature can

³⁷ B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany’s Pact with Books* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

³⁸ Felski, *Hooked*, p. 144.

³⁹ Laura Baudot, ‘Closer Reading’, *The Point*, 19 (2019) <<https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/closer-reading/>> [accessed 1 May 2021].

bring to light readings that do not adhere to the rigorous protocols of literary scholarship but can nevertheless yield new, stimulating insights. A re-examination of the text itself through the lens of such readings will show that it can accommodate or even model unorthodox responses like these, that the text is in fact keenly interested in the role that books play in their readers' lives.

In other words, reading *The Magic Mountain* as a work of world literature allows us to mobilize more diverse resources for its study. Some are relatively well established by now, though arguably still not fully integrated into the mainstream of literary scholarship, at least not the scholarship on Mann's novel: the circulation of books, understood as both physical objects and the stories they tell; their life in translation; how they are often, to use Rebecca Walkowitz's term, 'born translated' themselves;⁴⁰ how their authors position themselves as international celebrities; and how books reflect, evoke, and help create complex networks of cultural, social, and political relations around the world. Liberated from a focus on one nation, one literary culture, a homogeneous linguistic context—all concepts which are themselves problematic, as scholars have been demonstrating over the last few decades—we can start noticing new possible research angles.

For example, two recent monographs on Thomas Mann have made use of a world-oriented optic to radically alter our view of his work. Tobias Boes's *Thomas Mann's War: Literature, Politics, and the World Republic of Letters* (2019) analyses Mann's international career from the 1920s until his death in 1955, often by studying archival materials and ideological aspects of the global circulation of his books, to show his savvy approach to questions of commercial and intellectual popularity, even celebrity.⁴¹ Todd Kontje's *Thomas Mann's World: Empire, Race, and the Jewish Question* (2011) persuasively shows how Mann's 'deeply autobiographical fiction expressed not only the concerns of the German nation, as he liked to claim, but also of the world in an era of imperial conquest and global conflict'.⁴² Veronika Fuechtner's forthcoming book on Thomas Mann's Brazilian-German mother Julia Mann, *née da Silva Bruhns*, similarly promises to 'radically alter the way we read not only Mann's writing but also his place within German literature, ultimately undermining the notion of canonical German literature and its unspoken assumption of racial and cultural homogeneity'.⁴³

⁴⁰ Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

⁴¹ Tobias Boes, *Thomas Mann's War: Literature, Politics, and the World Republic of Letters* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁴² Todd Kontje, *Thomas Mann's World: Empire, Race, and the Jewish Question* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), dustjacket blurb.

⁴³ Veronika Fuechtner, 'The Magician's Mother: A Story of Coffee, Race, and German Culture', presented at The American Academy in Berlin, 14 February 2020 <<https://www.americanacademy.de/videoaudio/the-magicians-mother-a-story-of-coffee-race-and-german-culture/>> [accessed 1 May 2021].

Looking at such specific examples of the concept of world literature being put to good use is one way of responding to its common critiques. Gayatri Spivak, Emily Apter, and Ottmar Ette—all prominent critics of world literature studies as practised by Damrosch and others—detect a neo-colonial or hegemonic undercurrent in contemporary attempts to study culture on a global scale.⁴⁴ To conceive of a category that has such a broad scope as world literature, they argue, it is necessary to occupy a privileged position from which a broad view is possible, and which bestows authority on the observer. These claims are, of course, true with regard to any broad theoretical category. The stated aim of most world literature theories, though, is to counter the biases that have made most of the world's literature almost invisible, chief among them the propagation of conservative Western literary canons. Seen in this light, the fact that those very theories are now being developed largely by American scholars at American universities becomes deeply problematic. Moreover, as Damrosch acknowledges, 'it is the privilege of critics writing within a hegemonic power to mock "the nationalistic heresy" [...]. Among colonized or otherwise dominated populations, literature has long been a prime force for fostering national identity and rallying opposition to imperial or hegemonic powers, and [...] literary nation-building has often had a significant comparative and international dimension.'⁴⁵

The most successful uses of the concept of world literature, however, are sensitive to these differences between national contexts and do not seek to make generalizing claims in pursuit of illusory universal truths about the totality of human culture. Rather, they painstakingly trace the lives of specific books in the world, cautiously working around the reigning paradigms of literary history, be it monolingual national literature or literary period, so they can dramatically reveal new networks of cultural connections. Some fifteen years ago Wai Chee Dimock asked: 'What would literary history look like if the field were divided, not into discrete periods, and not into discrete bodies of national literatures? What other organizing principles might come into play?'⁴⁶ The most refreshing scholarship inspired by the concept of world literature consists in case studies that develop such new organizing principles by describing how individual books exist in the world. This approach does not preclude illuminating generalizations (of which a national literature and literary period are perhaps the most prominent examples) but is not hampered by them. It most certainly does not require us to ignore the role played by social forces and political pressures either; if anything, it allows us to describe them in more fine-grained detail. It does not necessarily (and this

⁴⁴ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), Emily Apter, *Against World Literature* (London: Verso, 2013), and Ottmar Ette, *WeltFraktale. Wege durch die Literaturen der Welt* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017).

⁴⁵ Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures*, p. 208.

⁴⁶ Wai Chee Dimock, 'Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents', *Narrative*, 14.1 (2006), 85–101, p. 85.

anxiety is perhaps the most widespread) spell the end of close reading: it is not, or at least not exclusively, about sociological surveys of huge data sets seeking to establish impersonal patterns of how literature works.

In her essay, 'What Was "Close Reading"? A Century of Method in Literary Studies', Barbara Herrnstein Smith shows how 'the practices of close reading have operated in literary studies not as one method among others'—such as structuralism, feminism, deconstruction, and many more—'but as virtually definitive of the field'; 'their ongoing performance may be the one constant in a field notorious for its succession of new "approaches"', she writes.⁴⁷ Close reading, then, is a practice fundamental to the study of literature, which involves paying close attention to the unfolding of meaning through the medium of language and literary form. Rather than giving a similar definition, however, the first sentence in the entry on 'close reading' in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* highlights another aspect of the practice: 'close reading describes a set of procedures and methods that distinguishes the scholarly apprehension of textual material from the more prosaic reading practices of everyday life'.⁴⁸ Indeed, close reading is not just an approach to texts, but also—or even more importantly—a mark of professional identity. The contrast between 'the scholarly apprehension of textual material' and 'the more prosaic reading practices of everyday life' brings us squarely back to the disconnect between academic and non-academic reading that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

As I argued there, this disconnect is a problem because it erects an unhelpful barrier between different kinds of readers, which in turn thwarts our understanding of what reading is all about. 'Close reading directs us to the words on the page; yet critics may want to raise their eyes from the page and ask how these words connect to a larger world,' writes Felski in *Hooked*.⁴⁹ This is why I was so struck by the term 'closer reading' in the title of Laura Baudot's article about her experience as a professor venturing to talk about literature to readers outside the university walls. It sounded to me both like a bold answer to Moretti's distant reading, which has been causing such a stir for the past twenty years, and the next logical step after close reading. Closer reading is not an attempt to displace close reading, an extremely valuable practice which I have recourse to often throughout this book. At the same time, I share Felski's conviction 'that the social meanings of artworks are not encrypted in their depths—perceptible only to those trained in professional techniques of interpretation. Rather [...] any such meanings can be activated or actualised only by their differing audiences: calling for a rethinking of the fundamentals of aesthetic experience.'⁵⁰ In my usage, the comparative

⁴⁷ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, 'What Was "Close Reading"? A Century of Method in Literary Studies', *the minnesota review*, 87 (2016), 57–75, pp. 57–58.

⁴⁸ Mark Byron, 'Close Reading', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 25 March 2011 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1014>> [accessed 1 May 2021].

⁴⁹ Felski, *Hooked*, p. 19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

suffix ‘-er’ is meant to imbue the familiar phrase with the reality of reading that scholars have long attempted to bracket out. It invites an explicit reflection on the value of various reading practices and the deeply personal and emotional investments that make them worthwhile for readers.

Ultimately, academic and non-academic readings are not opposites; the distinction is more provocation than accurate description. It is meant as an invitation to notice the disconnect between what counts as a valuable reading within academia and outside it, and a rallying call for a more capacious understanding of which modes of reading can produce valuable insights about the meaning of books. As Felski notes, when it comes to ‘what counts as evidence of people’s reactions to movies or music or novels’, ‘no source can be definitive or unimpeachable’, which means that we need to draw on ‘a variety of examples: memoirs, works of fiction, critical essays, reflections on [our] own attachments, audience ethnographies, and online reviews’.⁵¹ In my study of *The Magic Mountain*, I use most of those types of sources and more, following the lessons of reception studies.

In one shape or another, the study of reading has been part and parcel of literary scholarship for decades, and is associated nowadays by most scholars with ‘Rezeptionsästhetik’, or reader-response theory. Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, who founded the Konstanz School of ‘Rezeptionsästhetik’ in the late 1960s, made the most substantial German contribution to the development of literary theory in the twentieth century, and their theories were later developed in the United States under the name of reader-response theory, whose most prominent representative is Stanley Fish.⁵² The most basic postulate of ‘Rezeptionsästhetik’ and reader-response theory is, to use Jane Tompkins’s compelling metaphor, that meaning ‘is not something one extracts from a poem, like a nut from its shell, but an experience one has in the course of reading’.⁵³ In other words, the study of reception does not do away with an interest in a literary text’s meaning to focus instead on some vague idea of subjective opinions about it that this or that reader might happen to have; it is rather that scholars of reception can produce more compelling accounts of meaning by focusing on how readers arrive at it, and why it might differ from reader to reader.

But, as I indicated when introducing the German professor from Lodge’s *Small World*, these theories deal predominantly with abstract models populated by

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵² For foundational texts of this tradition, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), Wolfgang Iser, *Die Appellstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1970), and Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁵³ Jane P. Tompkins, ‘Introduction’, in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. ix–xxvi, p. xvi.

'implied' and 'ideal' rather than real-life readers—that is, with theoretical concepts rather than evidence of everyday reading practices outside the university. As Ika Willis's book *Reception*, published in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series in 2018, powerfully demonstrates, though, reading and readers have also been investigated for decades in various other quarters of literary studies and related disciplines—even if few connections have so far been made between these different branches of scholarship, ranging from Biblical studies and classics to book history and cultural studies. In particular, the division of methods and approaches to 'high' and 'popular' culture is still very entrenched, but giving it up can be liberating—and productive. Jonathan Rose distinguishes between reception history's interest in 'professional intellectuals'—'literary and social critics, academics, clergymen'—and audience history's focus on 'the common reader—defined as any reader who did not read books for a living'.⁵⁴ As Felski points out, 'It is not that research on lay audiences is lacking—many such accounts have piled up over the years—and yet they've made barely a dent in prevailing views about what it means to be a sophisticated reader or discerning appreciator of art.'⁵⁵ In this book I aim to bridge this gap.

Willis is the first scholar to clearly and systematically capture the complex, multifarious field of scholarly engagement with reading, and show how all the available approaches to it are deeply interrelated. (Willis uses the terms 'reception' and 'reading' nearly interchangeably, and ultimately favours the term 'reception' because it is more capacious and does not privilege literature over other branches of art. I prefer 'reading' because it is more widely used in ordinary language and makes clearer the active nature of the experience.) She observes that reception is usually studied only in part, but that we will not be able to fully understand the activity of reading unless we relate all these disparate parts to each other.

In what follows, I list various types of evidence, and critical methods that build on them, that can be helpful in exploring the reception of *The Magic Mountain* specifically, in the many senses of the term 'reception' that Willis outlines. I include 'text-to-text' and 'text-to-reader' reception, to use her terms, as well as approaches that ask what it even means to read, and what institutional and sociocultural factors impact it powerfully. I point to studies of other texts where no comparable study of Mann's novel has yet been undertaken. I then give some examples of how I use these different types of evidence and critical methods in my study.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53.1 (1992), 47–70, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Felski, *Hooked*, p. 4.

Reviews and Famous Readers' Accounts of Their Reading Experience

The most widely used sources of information about the reception of literary texts in literary scholarship are contemporary reviews; in the case of *The Magic Mountain*, there has hardly been any research beyond them.⁵⁶ Hugh Ridley, Michael Neumann, and Meike Schlutt discuss a selection of contemporary reviews of the novel in Germany and beyond.⁵⁷ Neumann also includes comments by some contemporary readers who are generally perceived as the most interesting intellectuals of the Weimar Republic, such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger. In 1975, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Mann's birth, Marcel Reich-Ranicki invited eighteen writers and thinkers to answer the question 'was bedeutet Ihnen Thomas Mann?' ('what does Thomas Mann mean to you?'). Their responses were first published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) and ten years later revisited and compiled into a slim book.⁵⁸ Other similar examples include Susan Sontag's and Roland Barthes's personal accounts of their experiences reading *The Magic Mountain*.⁵⁹ In general, though, literary critics tend to pay much less attention to reviews and reading accounts that are not contemporary with the publication of the text. This approach rests on assumptions about the value and meaning of literary texts that my study sets out to challenge, such as that a work can only be properly understood in the specific chronological—as well as geographical, linguistic, and sociocultural—context of its conception.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Epoche, Werk, Wirkung* (Munich: Beck, 2010), p. 307. Even Holger Pils, *Thomas Manns 'geneigte Leser': die Publikationsgeschichte und populäre Rezeption der 'Bekanntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull', 1911–1955* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), the most substantial reception study of any of Mann's novels, focuses mostly on press reviews.

⁵⁷ See Hugh Ridley, *The Problematic Bourgeois: Twentieth-Century Criticism on Thomas Mann's 'Buddenbrooks' and 'The Magic Mountain'* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1994), Michael Neumann, *Thomas Mann, 'Der Zauberberg': Kommentar*, GKFA (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002), pp. 103–26, and Meike Schlutt, *Der repräsentative Außenseiter: Thomas Mann und sein Werk im Spiegel der deutschen Presse 1898 bis 1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002). See also Klaus Schröter, ed., *Thomas Mann im Urteil seiner Zeit: Dokumente 1891–1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000).

⁵⁸ See Marcel Reich-Ranicki, ed., *Was halten Sie von Thomas Mann?* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988). See also Charles Neider, ed., *The Stature of Thomas Mann* (New York: New Directions, 1947), Heinz L. Arnold, ed., *Text und Kritik: Sonderband Thomas Mann* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1976), and Hans Jürgen Balmes, Jörg Bong, and Helmut Mayer, eds., 'Thomas Mann' [special issue], *Neue Rundschau*, 116.2 (2005).

⁵⁹ See Susan Sontag, 'Pilgrimage', in *A Companion to Thomas Mann's 'The Magic Mountain'*, ed. Stephen D. Dowden (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), pp. 221–39, and Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2017), where she discusses Barthes's life-long engagement with *The Magic Mountain*.

⁶⁰ For a well-articulated challenge to this wide-spread attitude, see Felski, *Uses of Literature*, pp. 10–11.

Ordinary Readers' Accounts of Their Reading Experience

Even less attention is usually paid to comments by readers who have no claim to fame comparable to Benjamin or Barthes. One reason why the aesthetic experiences of ordinary readers are less widely discussed in academic criticism is that written accounts of them are harder to come by. In some cases, including that of Thomas Mann, authors received fan mail; there are also examples of marginalia in readers' copies of books.⁶¹ In 1984, Janice Radway demonstrated how scholars could go beyond these relatively rare and haphazard pieces of evidence in her pioneering ethnographic study *Reading the Romance*.⁶² She constructed a theory of the genre of the romance based on extensive interviews with a closely knit group of female readers in a small American town and participatory observation of their book club meetings. Radway's next book, *A Feeling for Books*,⁶³ explored the Book of the Month Club—a quintessential US institution, which featured several of Mann's novels (but not *The Magic Mountain*), significantly impacting his sales in America.⁶⁴ With the rise of the internet, we have gained unprecedented access to a wealth of material, including blogs and reviews on websites such as Goodreads and Amazon. This gives us an opportunity to get an insight into written records of reading experiences by readers with different levels of education, as well as of different linguistic backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, races, genders, ages, and health levels (which can be particularly interesting in the case of *The Magic Mountain*, an iconic novel about illness).

Not Reading

An intriguing reversal of this type of research is the study of readers who fail to engage with a given book. Inspired by Pierre Bayard's claim in *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read* that 'a book is less a book than it is the whole discussion about it',⁶⁵ and drawing on archival research, Priyasha Mukhopadhyay's work on book history in colonial South Asia explores the reading habits of 'unlikely readers': 'bored soldiers, savvy peasants, impatient office clerks, and aspirational

⁶¹ For a compelling recent example of study of marginalia, see Andrew M. Stauffer, 'An Image in Lava: Annotation, Sentiment, and the Traces of Nineteenth-Century Reading', *PMLA*, 134.1 (2019), 81–98.

⁶² See Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

⁶³ See Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁶⁴ See David Horton, *Thomas Mann in English: A Study in Literary Translation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 3.

⁶⁵ Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 150.

women'. These readers 'had always been marginal to reading publics, and yet derived their understanding of what it meant to inhabit empire through close and even intimate relationships' with the printed word—which, however, 'routinely went unread'.⁶⁶ Mukhopadhyay's research shows how much we can learn about books if we pay attention to the reasons why some people refuse or otherwise fail to read them. This approach acknowledges the fact that readers are usually informed by widely held ideas about a particular book without ever having read it. In the case of *The Magic Mountain*, readers might, for example, develop an idea of the novel based on its academic reputation, or even from references in annual press reports on the World Economic Forum held in Davos.

Material Book History

Records held by S. Fischer Verlag and Mann's overseas publishers, including Alfred A. Knopf in the USA, as well as by public and private libraries, can also illuminate the relationship between *The Magic Mountain* and its readers. This includes sales figures, advertising campaigns, prices, and physical properties of various editions of the novel (is it hardback or paperback? published in one or two volumes? with high- or low-quality materials? what is the cover design?), loan records in libraries, as well as annotations and glosses in various personal and library copies. Invigorated by Robert Darnton's influential article 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading' from 1986,⁶⁷ literary historians have developed ingenious approaches to extrapolating information from such data, and linking it productively with other sources, such as reviews, letters, and diary entries, to provide both quantitative and qualitative (or macro- and micro-level) insights into the reading habits of all sorts of readers. For example, as I will discuss in Chapter 1, Wilhelm Haefs, Björn Weyand, Catherine Turner, and Tobias Boes have recently studied marketing strategies that were used to sell *The Magic Mountain* in Germany and the United States in the interwar period.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Private correspondence. See also Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, 'On Not Reading *The Soldier's Pocket-book for Field Service*', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22.1 (2017), 40–56.

⁶⁷ See Robert Darnton, 'First Steps Toward a History of Reading', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (1986), 5–30.

⁶⁸ See Catherine Turner, *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), pp. 81–110; Wilhelm Haefs, 'Geist, Geld und Buch. Thomas Manns Aufstieg zum Erfolgsautor im S. Fischer Verlag in der Weimarer Republik', in *Die Erfindung des Schriftstellers Thomas Mann*, ed. Michael Ansel, Hans-Edwin Friedrich, and Gerhard Lauer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 123–59; Björn Weyand, *Poetik der Marke: Konsumkultur und literarische Verfahren 1900–2000* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Tobias Boes, 'Thomas Mann, World Author: Representation and Autonomy in the World Republic of Letters', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 51 (2015), 132–47.

Translation Studies

The Magic Mountain began its life in translation even before it was first published in German: the Hungarian and Swedish translators started working on the novel's first sections while Mann was still finishing the final chapter.⁶⁹ The book was then translated into several European languages in the late 1920s, and has since been translated and re-translated into around thirty different languages, ranging from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean to Yiddish and Hebrew.⁷⁰ The twenty-first century alone saw the first Arabic translation (2010), as well as new Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and French translations (2005, 2009, 2010, and 2016, respectively). Susan Bernofsky's new translation into English is forthcoming.⁷¹ That many readers encounter *The Magic Mountain* in translation rather than in the original German, though, is not taken into account in most academic studies of it. David Horton's comparative reading of translations of *The Magic Mountain* by Helen Lowe-Porter (1927) and John E. Woods (1995) gives an idea of the impact of different translations on the reading experience.⁷² Kate Briggs's book-length essay on literary translation focuses on translators themselves being readers, and among the most careful, meticulous, and highly attuned readers at that. With this in mind, she reconstructs a personal account of Lowe-Porter's work on Mann's novel, which she carried out in Oxford while her husband worked as a lecturer at the university.⁷³ More comparative translation-oriented approaches to canonical novels can be very illuminating too. 'Prismatic Jane Eyre', a research project currently underway at Oxford, brings together more than thirty scholars of different languages, whose 'collaborative experiment looks closely at Brontë's novel as it is translated into multiple languages, understanding this process as transformation and growth rather than as loss', and develops methods for 'comparative close reading [...] in a global context'.⁷⁴ In this way, 'Prismatic Jane Eyre' attempts to wrest the tools of digital humanities from the proponents of distant reading, often seen as a threat to the practice of close reading, and instead focuses on new reading experiences that are enabled by *Jane Eyre's* journeys in translation.

⁶⁹ See Thomas Mann, *Selbstkommentare: 'Der Zauberberg'*, ed. Hans Wysling and Marianne Eich-Fischer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993), p. 40.

⁷⁰ Georg Potempa, ed., *Thomas Mann-Bibliographie: Übersetzungen/Interviews* (Morsum/Sylt: Cicero Presse, 1997) lists all translations up to the late 1990s.

⁷¹ See Susan Bernofsky, 'Fresh Air', *The Berlin Journal*, 34 (2020), 58–59.

⁷² See Horton, *Thomas Mann in English*, pp. 83–121.

⁷³ See Briggs, *This Little Art*.

⁷⁴ Matthew Reynolds, 'Prismatic Translation' <<http://www.occt.ox.ac.uk/research/prismatic-translation>> [accessed 22 March 2019].

'Implied' or 'Ideal' Readers

Rather than considering accounts of real-life readers, or openly relying on their own reading experiences, literary scholars often discuss so-called 'implied' or 'ideal' readers. Both these terms are used to denote 'a hypothetical reader'—one 'towards whom the text is directed' in that it is he or she who 'would be best equipped [...] to get the most out of a particular text'—'equipped in terms of knowledge, sympathies and prejudices, strategies of reading, previous experience of reading', expectations, and so on.⁷⁵ But this normative conception of an abstract reader implied by the text can be extremely limiting when one considers its actual, real-life readers. Hermann Kurzke begins his authoritative monograph, *Thomas Mann: Epoche, Werk, Wirkung* by describing 'der beste Thomas-Mann-Leser'⁷⁶—a blend of an 'ideal' reader and Mann's real-life readership—which makes him reach rather short-sighted conclusions about who can productively read Mann in the twenty-first century:

Der beste Thomas-Mann-Leser ist immer noch ein Bildungsbürger auf Abwegen, der sich nicht mehr mit den Interessen seiner Klasse identifiziert, aber auch keine andere Heimat findet. Bürgerliche Bildung und Erziehung ist schon deshalb eine schwer ersetzbare Voraussetzung fruchtbarer Thomas-Mann-Lektüre, weil man [...] die Konventionen kennen muss, wenn man ihre ironische Verfremdung wahrnehmen will. Hier hat es große Verluste gegeben, die nur schwer durch das Surrogat schulischer und akademischer Nachhilfe ausgeglichen werden können.

The best reader of Thomas Mann is still a traditionally educated middle-class man gone astray, one who no longer identifies with the interests of his class but who has not found any other spiritual home either. If nothing else, traditional middle-class 'Bildung' is a nearly indispensable prerequisite for a fruitful reading of Thomas Mann because one [...] needs to be familiar with the various conventions to properly appreciate their ironic subversion. Great losses have been sustained in this respect, losses that can hardly be offset by the surrogate of instruction in schools and at universities.⁷⁷

Judging by this, the only readers these days who can truly appreciate and enjoy Thomas Mann are, it would seem, German academics who specialize in his work. All readers outside Germany are doomed from the start, since they will not have had a chance to experience first-hand the characteristically German model of 'Bildung', namely, cultural education imbued with moral ideas about the formation of the character and the integration of the individual into society. But even

⁷⁵ Andrew Bennett, ed., *Readers and Reading* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 236.

⁷⁶ Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Epoche, Werk, Wirkung*, pp. 14–15.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

among German readers, only those of a certain class stand a chance—those from good bourgeois families, whose forefathers resembled Mann's own proto-plasts, but who have grown critical of their milieu. The world is changing, though, and with every generation the traditions of early twentieth-century 'Bildungsbürgertum' are fading away, making it nearly impossible to educate young Germans on such matters at school or even at university. The implication is that, in the end, the only men left standing (for it is 'der beste Thomas-Mann-Leser' not 'Leserin' that Kurzke considers here) are those belonging to an older generation of German literature professors whose research is devoted to Thomas Mann. As my study of various readers of *The Magic Mountain* demonstrates, Kurzke's assessment is deeply reductive. It is not the case that non-academic readers who know little about Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner, Novalis, the tradition of the 'Bildungsroman', or Thomas Mann's evolving political views never read *The Magic Mountain*, or read it without any degree of sophistication. On the contrary: looking at how non-academic readers approach Mann's novel and come to enjoy it demonstrates the vast scope of possible readerly responses to the novel and shows that academic readings are but a tiny fraction of them. Taking stock of the variety of responses to the novel can help us create a productive exchange between different sorts of readers and readings, and help us better understand Mann's novel and its enduring cultural appeal—an appeal of which readers locked in the ivory tower of academia seem almost entirely unaware.

Fictional Depictions of Reading

Another way of countering Kurzke's model of how best to read Thomas Mann is to look at scenes of reading (or reception, to use Ika Willis's broader term) in *The Magic Mountain* itself, as well as at scenes of reading *The Magic Mountain* in later texts. I will discuss both in turn. Hans Castorp spends a lot of time in the sanatorium reading books and responding to other works of art. He discards his English textbook on ocean steamships in favour of handbooks on biology and anatomy and looks down on other patients who pass around a French guide to flirtation; he watches an early black-and-white film in the cinema; listens to his favourite classical music on the gramophone; marvels at a medieval Pietà sculpture; attends lectures on psychoanalysis; hears about various strands of European philosophy from Settembrini and Naphta, and so on.⁷⁸ To borrow Hermann J. Weigand's phrase from his early study of *The Magic Mountain*, whenever Hans reads, sees, or hears something interesting, 'the knowledge he absorbs ceases to be mere knowledge. It becomes completely integrated with the emotional core

⁷⁸ See Massimo Bonifazio, "Non si leggeva poco...". Considerazioni su Hans Castorp lettore', *Bollettino dell'Associazione italiana di germanistica*, iv (2011), 83–95.

of his personality. It becomes part of his living tissue.⁷⁹ Decades later, Anthony Heilbut put it somewhat more irreverently: ‘although [Hans is] capable of great bouts of research, his purpose is never scholarly. His discoveries shrivel into little nuggets of detail, retained only if they are emotionally useful’; Mann’s ‘sporadically inquisitive hero was made for the Internet’.⁸⁰ Hans’s encounters or—to use the novel’s own idiom—‘experiments’ with culture in *The Magic Mountain* can be read as models for our own experimental encounters with Mann’s novel.

There are also numerous characters in later novels, short stories, and films who are portrayed reading Mann’s novel. The first such scene I came across appears in a short story published in 1927, just three years after *The Magic Mountain*, and written by none other than Vladimir Nabokov, at that point a young Russian immigrant living in Berlin. The story is called ‘Podlets’ (literally ‘The Scoundrel’, but known in English as ‘An Affair of Honor’) and its protagonist feverishly reads about Settembrini and Naphta’s duel in *The Magic Mountain* in the middle of the night, awaiting his own duel with a man pointedly named Berg, who is having an affair with his wife.⁸¹ Nabokov’s protagonist could hardly be more different from Elif Batuman’s Selin, who, in a novel published exactly ninety years after ‘An Affair of Honor’, reads *The Magic Mountain* on her summer trip to Europe and relates to how the characters in the novel ‘ate breakfast twice a day’ more than anything else. As these two very different examples illustrate, reading Mann’s novel through the lens of its uses in later texts can drastically and imaginatively expand our conception of what it is about *The Magic Mountain* that can strike a chord with its readers—understood as both later writers, and the literary characters that they create.

Cognitive Literary Studies

Those who worry that analysing literary depictions of fictional characters reading *The Magic Mountain* takes us further away from the everyday activity of reading and deeper into the realm of fiction might turn to cognitive literary studies, a discipline which sets out to explore the very mechanisms underlying our ability and inclination to read fiction. In the last couple of decades, psychologists and cognitive scientists have started carrying out laboratory experiments on readers, such as brain scans to measure brain activity during reading. Keith Oatley’s *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction* (2011) and Terence Cave’s *Thinking with Literature: Towards a Cognitive Criticism* (2016) are two influential examples

⁷⁹ Hermann J. Weigand, ‘*The Magic Mountain*’: A Study of Thomas Mann’s Novel ‘*Der Zauberberg*’ (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 142.

⁸⁰ Anthony Heilbut, *Thomas Mann: Eros & Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 408 and 398.

⁸¹ Vladimir Nabokov, ‘An Affair of Honor’, in *Nabokov’s Quartet*, trans. Dmitri Nabokov (London: Panther, 1969), pp. 11–49.

of overviews of the field written by a psychologist and a literary scholar, respectively, focusing on a number of cognitive mechanisms that underlie readers' experiences of literature. These include building mental models of spaces and situations, activating mirror neurons, identifying with characters as a tool to develop empathy, sustaining attention, and so on. The attraction of cognitive literary studies is that they promise to provide rigorous scientific tools to capture the biological underpinnings of our reading experiences. The explanatory power of such approaches has been limited so far, however. In an attempt to provide an objective and generalizable description of how and why we read, cognitive literary studies often impoverish the rich personal involvements with books that individual readers are able to forge. That said, the rapidly developing technologies available for such experiments coupled with an increasingly sophisticated design of the experiments themselves might yield more interesting results in the future.

Reception in Literature and Art

Texts inspire other texts in various ways. At one end of the spectrum are the adaptations that retell a story in a new medium. *The Magic Mountain* has been filmed twice (to little critical acclaim), and has had many theatre, opera, and radio adaptations as well.⁸² At the other end of the spectrum one can posit putative connections between *The Magic Mountain* and texts that are, say, also set in a sanatorium and display some features comparable to Mann's work, but do not explicitly allude to it.⁸³ In between these two poles there are numerous texts and artworks in different genres and media that explicitly engage with *The Magic Mountain*, to varying degrees. I have identified over a hundred such artworks: paintings, poems, songs, short stories, essays, but mostly novels and films, spanning ten decades, ten languages, and fifteen countries on five continents. The most interesting among these texts create new imaginary worlds inhabited by Mann's memorable characters from *The Magic Mountain* or fill Mann's remarkable setting on the 'Magic Mountain' with new characters and new stories. Some of these texts and films were written and directed by canonical figures, including Vladimir Nabokov, Erich Maria Remarque, Vittorio De Sica, Thomas Bernhard,

⁸² See Peter Zander, *Thomas Mann im Kino* (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2005). See also Philip Kitcher, *Deaths in Venice: The Cases of Gustav von Aschenbach* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) for a recent discussion of *Death in Venice* alongside its two famous adaptations, Luchino Visconti's film from 1971 and Benjamin Britten's opera from 1973.

⁸³ On the central position of *The Magic Mountain* in the micro-genre of sanatorium novels, see Vera Pohland, *Das Sanatorium als literarischer Ort* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984) and Jens Herlth, 'Słodko-gorzkie heterotopie. Bruno Schulz i "tekst sanatoryjny" w europejskiej literaturze okresu międzywojennego', *Wielogłos: Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ*, 2 (2013), 25–37. See also Karolina Watroba, 'Blind Spots on the Magic Mountain: Zofia Nałkowska's *Choucas* (1926)', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 99.4 (2021), 676–98.

and Alice Munro; others by contemporary best-selling authors and Hollywood directors ranging from the popular Japanese writer Haruki Murakami to Gore Verbinski, of *Pirates of the Caribbean* fame; and others by little-known or forgotten authors, such as A. E. Ellis—an Oxford graduate who wrote a version of *The Magic Mountain* populated by Oxbridge students. Yet this robust cultural phenomenon had gone practically unnoticed in the vast scholarship on *The Magic Mountain*. In *Thomas Mann: Epoche, Werk, Wirkung*, Kurzke claims that the novel has had no literary afterlife to speak of, and only cites one novel from my corpus (*Castorp* by Paweł Huelle) as ‘eine kuriose Sondererscheinung’, ‘a peculiar exception to the rule’.⁸⁴ It is telling that a quick survey of Wikipedia entries on *The Magic Mountain* in various European languages yields a list of more texts inspired by Mann’s novel than a leading academic monograph does. This academic misrepresentation of the cultural field indicates that our understanding of what *The Magic Mountain* is, what it does to its readers, and how it manages to affect all segments of our cultural system, has been limited by the blind spots and biases of traditional scholarship.

History of Academic Reception

Of course, academic interpretations of *The Magic Mountain* offer myriads of insights into various possible responses to the novel too. However, by placing this type of evidence of readerly encounters with *The Magic Mountain* in the context of all other types of evidence, we can fully appreciate how limited our perspective will remain if we only pay attention to other academic readers of Mann’s novel. As fascinating and stimulating as many academic interpretations undoubtedly are, overall, the scholarship on *The Magic Mountain* is extremely unbalanced in that it tends to completely elide the experience of non-academic readers. One consequence of this is that, in stark contrast to the history of its non-academic reception, the history of its academic reception has been very well documented and studied. In English, the most extensive treatment can be found in Hugh Ridley’s *The Problematic Bourgeois: Twentieth-Century Criticism on Thomas Mann’s ‘Buddenbrooks’ and ‘The Magic Mountain’*; in German, extensive bibliographies of secondary criticism on the novel are available and detailed literature surveys are regularly published.⁸⁵ They focus almost exclusively on academic scholarship in the German- and English-speaking world, with some

⁸⁴ Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Epoche, Werk, Wirkung*, p. 322. See also Horton, *Thomas Mann in English*, p. 222.

⁸⁵ See Ridley, *The Problematic Bourgeois*; Herbert Lehnert, *Thomas-Mann-Forschung: Ein Bericht* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969); Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas-Mann-Forschung, 1969–1976: Ein kritischer Bericht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977); Hermann Kurzke, ed., *Stationen der Thomas-Mann-Forschung: Aufsätze seit 1970* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985), pp. 7–14; Heinrich

attention paid to other major Western European languages, but almost none to countries further afield—even though Thomas Mann has been widely studied for decades in regions ranging from Eastern Europe to Latin America to East Asia, often with a particular emphasis on *The Magic Mountain*.⁸⁶

In addition to a purely historical approach, the academic reception of Mann's novel can be studied as a sociocultural phenomenon. One could analyse trends in the study of Thomas Mann relative to other writers, considering the fluctuating numbers and shifting topics of doctoral theses, academic publications, and conferences on Mann compared to those on other writers.⁸⁷ One could also study the activities of the two major Thomas Mann societies—the Deutsche Thomas Mann-Gesellschaft (Lübeck) and Thomas Mann Gesellschaft Zürich—and the research activities undertaken by the Thomas Mann Archive at the ETH Zurich.⁸⁸ Another angle would be to gather data on when and where it has been taught as a set text, whether at school or university, as part of which degrees, in which classes or modules, alongside which other texts, and so on.

* * *

Most scholars of *The Magic Mountain* draw solely on other academic interpretations of the novel; in some cases, they mention in passing one or two of the other types of evidence I outlined above. In this study I make use of as many of them as I can, based on the availability of material and its interest in relation to my argument about academic and non-academic reading, and consider the potential for drawing intriguing connections between these different kinds of sources. This is what I take to be the greatest advantage of studying literature and culture from the perspective of their reception: that we can see how readers very different from ourselves respond to the texts we cherish, and can find a language for talking about these texts that makes sense to us as well as these other readers.

Detering and Stephan Stachorski, eds., *Thomas Mann: Neue Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2008), pp. 7–12; and Helmut Koopmann, ed., *Thomas-Mann-Handbuch* (Stuttgart: A. Kröner, 2001), pp. 941–1007.

⁸⁶ See Changshan Shu, *Die Rezeption Thomas Manns in China* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995); Tsunekazu Murata, 'Thomas Mann in Japan', in *Thomas Mann 1875–1975: Vorträge in München—Zürich—Lübeck*, ed. Beatrix Bludau, Eckhard Heftrich, and Helmut Koopmann (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1977), pp. 434–46; Yasumasa Oguro, 'Die Brechungen der modernen japanischen Literatur: Thomas Mann bei Yukio Mishima, Kunio Tsuji und Haruki Murakami', *Neue Beiträge zur Germanistik*, 2.4 (2003), 107–21; Young-Ok Kim, 'Übernahme, Anverwandlung, Umgestaltung. Thomas Mann in der koreanischen Literatur', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 7 (1997), 9–24; Katarzyna Bałżewska, 'Czarodziejska góra' w literaturze polskiej: ślady/interpretacje/nawiązania (Katowice: Śląsk, 2018); Carlos Fuentes, 'How Zurich Invented the Modern World', *Salon*, 30 September 1997 <<https://www.salon.com/1997/09/30/zurich>> [accessed 10 May 2019].

⁸⁷ David Damrosch briefly discusses some data of this kind in *What Is World Literature?*, p. 188. Klaus Jonas and Holger R. Stunz, eds., *Die Internationalität der Brüder Mann: 100 Jahre Rezeption auf fünf Kontinenten (1907–2008)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2011), would be a useful resource for this kind of project.

⁸⁸ See Thomas Sprecher, ed., *Im Geiste der Genauigkeit. Das Thomas-Mann-Archiv der ETH Zürich 1956–2006* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006).

This common language will always be provisional and based on a narrow selection of all possible approaches to a given text. It is a recognition that is increasingly seen as central to any kind of meaningful comparative study. In the introduction to a recent issue of *Comparative Critical Studies*, the guest editors—who founded the Oxford Comparative Criticism and Translation research centre, of which I am a member—argue that ‘to write comparative criticism is [...] to be aware of yourself as participating in the construction of one among many possible literary and cultural worlds’.⁸⁹ Accordingly, my goal in this study is not to provide a systematic overview of how *The Magic Mountain* has been read inside and outside academia. This is an impossible task: the data I have managed to access are extremely incomplete, often almost haphazard. On a more fundamental level, we will never identify *all* readers who have ever read *The Magic Mountain*, or chosen *not* to read it, and even if we could, we would still be faced with the problem that the experience of reading ‘takes place inside a reader’s mind and body, and must be represented in some form before we can access it’.⁹⁰ Rather than putting together a semblance of a taxonomy for my corpus of non-academic responses to *The Magic Mountain*, I set out to convey its excitement and whimsy. In short, I wanted to capture the appeal of culture, not destroy it.

Throughout this study I discuss novels and films that respond to *The Magic Mountain* and offer the most robust, complex, and imaginative perspectives on Mann’s novel and what it means to its readers in my entire corpus. When interpreting these texts I often use traditional tools of comparative literature—the study of influences, similarities, and differences—to develop a more fine-tuned exploration of the uses to which Mann’s novel has been put by its readers around the world over the past century. An integral part of my approach is that I relate these texts to various other types of accounts of reading experience, by both famous and ordinary readers of *The Magic Mountain*, including interpretations produced by academic readers. For example, I discuss the material history of the book and its use in tourist advertising alongside several novels and films that rework central motifs from *The Magic Mountain*; I relate psychological theories of why and how people read to models of reading in *The Magic Mountain* and its afterlives; I consider letters Mann received from his fans and recent blog posts about the book; I analyse a non-academic online book club and advertising campaigns and marketing strategies deployed by Mann’s German and American publishers; and so on. By grouping disparate pieces of evidence together around a common thread, I uncover patterns in readerly engagement with *The Magic Mountain*.

⁸⁹ Matthew Reynolds, Mohamed-Salah Omri, and Ben Morgan, guest eds., ‘Introduction’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 12 (2015), 147–59, p. 148.

⁹⁰ Ika Willis, *Reception* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), p. 39.

The concepts of world literature and closer reading go hand in hand in enabling us to do this. A 'closer reading' of Mann's novel as 'world literature', in the senses I have been outlining in this section, moves us beyond two unhelpfully narrow paradigms: that of academic reading and that of the national canon. In other words, enlarging the scope of the material that is potentially relevant to us as literary scholars enables us to cut new, more imaginative paths through it, rather than relying on a few well-established ways of categorizing culture. This is not to say that those established categories (national literature, literary period, and so on) should be abandoned altogether. Rather, the goal is to try and chart some new paths through the messy reality of reading to see Mann's novel afresh through the eyes of its many diverse readers.

In contemporary scholarship, the study of reception does not seem to have the same kind of cachet that world literature theory does, but its methods in fact undergird most of the best world literature studies. For example, all of the chapters in Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* chart the reception of various books, starting with Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe (Conversations with Goethe, 1836)* in the Introduction. In fact, Goethe himself used the term 'Weltliteratur' when telling Eckermann about his experience of reading Chinese and Serbian texts in translation, and soon Marx and Engels used the same term in *Das Kommunistische Manifest (The Communist Manifesto, 1848)* to describe the selling and buying of books around the world. World literature and reception go hand in hand, and my hope is that the term 'closer reading' recaptures some of the excitement that the best reception studies can generate.

3. Roadmap for the Journey Ahead

At the centre of this book are nine comparative readings of five novels, three films, and one short story that have been conceived as responses to *The Magic Mountain*. They provide access to distinct readings of Mann's text on three levels: they function as records of their authors' reading of Mann; they provide insights into broader, culturally and historically specific interpretations of the novel; and they—in most cases—feature portrayals of fictional readers of *The Magic Mountain*. These nine case studies are contextualized, complemented, enhanced, and expanded through references to dozens of other diverse sources that testify to a lively engagement with *The Magic Mountain* outside of academic scholarship. They include journalistic reviews, discussions on internet fora and blogs, personal essays and memoirs, marketing brochures from Davos (where the novel is set), advertisements used to sell the novel, Mann's fan mail and his replies to it, and other books and films that respond to *The Magic Mountain*. Most of the diverse sources discussed in this study have not been considered in the scholarship on Thomas Mann before.

This is also true of the main nine texts, which have been subject to little—in most cases no—critical commentary in the context of their relationship to Mann’s novel, even though they comprise works by critically acclaimed and widely read contemporary authors (Alice Munro, Paweł Huelle, Haruki Murakami), historically important writers (Erich Kästner, Konstantin Fedin, A. E. Ellis), and prize-winning contemporary directors (Paolo Sorrentino, Hayao Miyazaki, Gore Verbinski). Encompassing, among other countries, Germany, Britain, the United States, Canada, Russia, Poland, and Japan, as well as spanning the full century since *The Magic Mountain*’s publication (with sources dating from the 1920s to the 2010s), this study aims to be both highly specific, thanks to its focus on the afterlife of one text, and wide-ranging, this focus providing a framework for discussing a century of diverse global cultural production across various media.

Where it appeared particularly helpful, I contextualized my discussion of *The Magic Mountain* with reference to Mann’s other texts: *Buddenbrooks* (1901), *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912), *Doktor Faustus* (1947), his essays, diaries, and letters. But this is done sparingly, and intentionally so. An important part of my strategy in this book is to reinvigorate the study of *The Magic Mountain* by placing it in a radically different set of texts and contexts than is usually the case. Here Mann’s novel does not appear primarily as a crucial node in his long writing career, nor is it read alongside Proust, Joyce, Musil, Kafka, Woolf, and other classics of German, French, and English modernism. Instead, attention is directed to texts that respond to *The Magic Mountain*, whether literary works by critically acclaimed authors, contemporary films, memoirs of Mann’s readers, or online reviews of the novel. Reading Mann’s novel alongside those texts allows us to read it afresh.

Each of the book’s three chapters focuses on one aspect of *The Magic Mountain* that is almost entirely absent from academic discussions about the novel but is central to many non-academic responses to it: economy, emotions, and erudition. Chapter 1 is about readers who respond strongly to the economic structure underlying Mann’s novel. Chapter 2 is about readers whose responses to the novel are highly emotional and inflected by personal experience. Chapter 3 is about readers who are particularly sensitive to the novel’s intimations of erudition and intellectualism that can act as barriers to comprehension and pleasure. In this way, each chapter responds to an aspect of the reading experience that mainstream literary scholarship often ignores: what it takes to afford to read books—in terms of money, time, education, social and cultural capital; how books make people feel; and how academic reading advocated by literary scholars compares to what non-academic readers do with books.

Chapter 1: Economy

I start by outlining Thomas Mann's concerns about the readability of *The Magic Mountain* and the readership that the novel would reach. I then move on to a close reading of the novel's first pages, which—in a classic opening move—describe Hans Castorp's literal transportation from his lowland hometown Hamburg to Davos in the Swiss Alps. The reader's gradual immersion in the story-world as she moves through those first pages is analogous to the protagonist's immersion in his new environment, but various aspects of Hans's experience can at the same time act as a barrier to readerly immersion. I discuss a selection of records left by readers who experienced this tension specifically in the context of class identity. These records range from short comments to a fully fledged novel from the late 1930s—*Sanatorium Arktur* by Konstantin Fedin, one of the founding fathers of socialist realism in Soviet Russia. Just like Mann's novel, it is set in Davos, at a sanatorium whose patients grapple with the ideology behind *The Magic Mountain*, a novel that they find uniquely immersive, but—to use Settembrini's characterization of the power of music—politically suspect.

I relate Fedin's novel to *Der Zauberlehrling* (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*), a text written at about the same time by Erich Kästner, who received a commission from the tourist board of Davos for an upbeat novel set in the town to counter the morbid association with tuberculosis supposedly propagated by *The Magic Mountain*. I place Fedin's propagandistic text and Kästner's commission alongside other traces of engagement with the novel, ranging from records of a Davos summer school in the 1920s, where a famous discussion between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer was seen by many to symbolically encapsulate the divergence of continental and analytical philosophical traditions in Europe, to the inception of World Economic Forum meetings. Taken together, all these pieces of evidence show how exceptionally effective Mann was at world-making: in his novel, he created a story-world so robust that it overshadowed the reality of Davos, and determined its public image and tourism marketing for years to come.

Mann was fully aware of the dynamic he had tapped into. Commenting on the novel's early sales, he wrote to a friend: 'ich habe, unter uns gesagt, an Eintrittsgeldern in mein mystisch-humoristisches Aquarium schon einige siebzigtausend Mark verdient' ('between you and me, I have already made some 70,000 Marks on entry fees into my mystical-humorous aquarium').⁹¹ His book was bringing in handsome profits—in 1925, 70,000 Marks was roughly five hundred times the monthly salary of a worker⁹²—and its price was the entry fee into a

⁹¹ Mann, *Selbstkommentare*, p. 56.

⁹² See Gerd Hardach, '1929: Wirtschaft im Umbruch', in *Die Welt spielt Roulette. Zur Kultur der Moderne in der Krise 1927 bis 1932*, ed. Werner Möller (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002), pp. 20–31, p. 22.

story-world in which a reader could be immersed as in an aquarium. Gore Verbinski's recent Hollywood horror film *A Cure for Wellness*, which I discuss at the end of this chapter, offers an arresting parallel to Mann's aquarium metaphor. In a key scene the protagonist—a young banker, called Hans Castorp in the original screenplay—enters a float tank as part of his water cure in a luxurious Swiss spa, as the technician in charge of his treatment flips open a copy of *The Magic Mountain*.

In Chapter 1, I analyse themes ranging from money, class, and ideology to tourism and marketing, and explore what is at stake in the decision to enter the immersive world of Mann's novel.

Chapter 2: Emotions

In this chapter, I trace the consequences of the decision to enter the world of *The Magic Mountain*, whether with enthusiasm, diffidence, or reluctance. I discuss one particular subset of readers who have found the novel uniquely engaging: readers who have suffered from tuberculosis or another long-term illness themselves. I move from fan mail which Thomas Mann received at various points in his life from tubercular readers of *The Magic Mountain* to much more recent online accounts of reading the novel by people convalescing from complicated surgeries or suffering from terminal diseases. I extend my analysis of these individual cases to more public-facing instances of the novel being perceived in this way, from the more inconsequential, for example, the 2011 review in *The Guardian* that recommended *The Magic Mountain* as 'an essential purchase for every sickbed this winter',⁹³ to the more profound, for example, the new art installation in the Cancer Centre at Guy's Hospital in London, which was inspired by Mann's novel. These real-life examples of engagement with *The Magic Mountain* set the stage for a discussion of three literary texts that respond to Mann's novel in a similar way—using it as a tool to navigate and negotiate culturally acceptable ways of expressing, managing, and coming to terms with physical and psychological suffering.

I first look at how Hans Castorp deals with his feelings in *The Magic Mountain* at three different points in the novel: when he observes Clawdia Chauchat's departure from the sanatorium, when he interacts with Ferdinand Wehsal after her return, and when he listens to classical music after Joachim's death. These examples showcase the productive ambiguities surrounding the culturally

⁹³ W. B. Gooderham, 'Winter Reads: *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann', *The Guardian*, 14 December 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/dec/14/winter-reads-thomas-mann-magic-mountain>> [accessed 10 May 2019].

contested issue of emotional expression in Mann's novel. I then move on to show how three very different responses to *The Magic Mountain* use Mann's novel, alongside various other cultural texts, to navigate crises of their own. The three texts are A. E. Ellis's *The Rack* (1958), a half-forgotten English novel which was once included in the Penguin Modern Classics series; Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (1987), a global bestseller from Japan, which sold more than ten million copies worldwide; and Alice Munro's short story 'Amundsen' (2012), published just a few months before the Canadian author was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In a gesture not dissimilar to the Davos tourist board's commissioning of Kästner to write an upbeat version of *The Magic Mountain*, Ellis unsuccessfully attempts to reject Mann's portrayal of a Swiss sanatorium and overwrite it with his own story. In contrast to Ellis, Murakami shows a young man who deeply engages with Mann's novel. The protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* reads *The Magic Mountain* while his love interest leaves for an isolated sanatorium in the Japanese mountains during the 1968 student movement. Similarly, Munro writes about a young woman who takes up a job at a tuberculosis sanatorium in rural Canada during the Second World War and attempts to make her new environment more manageable by likening it to the setting of *The Magic Mountain*. While this proves impossible, she ends up navigating her strained relationship with the head doctor through competing readings of *The Magic Mountain*, and thus—like young Munro herself, as we find out from 'Dear Life', an autobiographical essay published in the same collection as 'Amundsen'—carving out some intellectual independence for herself.

In Chapter 2, I consider themes of illness, suffering, heartbreak, marginalization, and entrapment to look at how some of the most engaged readers of *The Magic Mountain* have imaginatively written themselves into Mann's novel.

Chapter 3: Erudition

Having analysed the complexities of entering the story-world and motivations behind it in Chapter 1, and a range of deeply emotional encounters with *The Magic Mountain* in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I discuss the widespread scholarly assumption that the opposite of an emotionally engaged reading, which snaps the reader out of it, is critical reflection. This notion has a long history. At the time of *The Magic Mountain*'s publication, for example, Bertolt Brecht was insisting that modern theatre should prevent the spectator from emotionally engaging with a play's events (being 'in eine Bühnenaktion verwickelt' or 'hineinversetzt') and instead turn her into a critical observer, and early film theory was painting a chilling picture of an impressionable, defenceless spectator who surrenders herself

to the spectacle ('sich [dem] Schauspiel hingibt').⁹⁴ Drawing on *The Magic Mountain* and the history of its reception, I destabilize the opposition between emotions and critical reflection.

I start by challenging a widely held view that *The Magic Mountain* privileges critical reflection over immersive reading and thus appeals only to highly erudite readers, drawing on Mann's own conception of his work, the metaphorical connotations of the novel's title and their impact on readers, advertising campaigns and marketing strategies deployed by Mann's German and American publishers, and various records of reading encounters with the novel. A key resource that I draw on here is Goodreads, a website where readers form online book clubs and together read a book, discussing it in real time over the course of a few months. I analyse the forum devoted to debates between Settembrini and Naphta and argue that *The Magic Mountain* was designed to make its reader feel like an intellectual imposter, but in the process the reader gets an exciting chance to dissect the cultural politics of erudition. I develop this argument by considering three recent afterlives of *The Magic Mountain* that are sensitive to this issue: Paweł Huelle's Polish novel *Castorp* (2004), Hayao Miyazaki's Japanese animated film *The Wind Rises* (2013), and Paolo Sorrentino's British/Italian film *Youth* (2015).

Castorp and *The Wind Rises*—a prequel and a sequel to *The Magic Mountain*, respectively—both feature Hans Castorp as a figure who is at once uniquely immersed in and reflective about his cultural environment. In Huelle's novel, *Castorp*—a young student in Danzig—rereads Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895) and finds the novel singularly engaging, but this emotional experience of reading teaches him about the reality of German imperial expansion in Eastern Europe. In Miyazaki's film, *Castorp*—a dissident who has escaped from Nazi Germany to Japan—sings a German song about the attraction of immersion, but at the same time is the only character in the film fully aware of the fraught political situation in the run-up to the Second World War. Sorrentino's film, while a much more distant relative of Mann's novel, stages cultural anxiety about the relative merits of intellectualism and levity in art in a similar way, which suggests that this is one of the most powerful cultural tropes activated by *The Magic Mountain*. All three texts enter into a playful dialogue with Mann's novel, probing the boundary between emotions and critical reflection, and ultimately demonstrating that it is more porous than critics usually assume.

⁹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zur Oper *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*', in *Werke: Große Kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht and others (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988–98), xxiv: *Schriften 4: Texte zu Stücken*, ed. Peter Kraft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 74–86, pp. 78 and 85; Hugo von Hofmannsthal, 'Der Ersatz für die Träume', in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Bernd Schoeller (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979–80), ix: *Reden und Aufsätze II: 1914–1924* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979), pp. 141–45, p. 144.

In Chapter 3, I discuss themes of erudition, intellectualism, levity, reflection, and critique. I show how scholars, writers and readers have tried to delineate the boundaries of immersion, and argue that this issue is at the very heart of *The Magic Mountain* itself.

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One of the main aims of my study is to show that all these records of reception—both real-life readers' records and cultural representations of *The Magic Mountain's* readership—do not take us outside of the novel, but rather deeper inside it. *The Magic Mountain* registers with seismographic sensitivity cultural anxieties around the notions of erudition, sophistication, and taste—in short, it is about the anxiety of not being a good enough reader. This unresolved, pressing cultural anxiety embodied so eloquently and provocatively in and by *The Magic Mountain* comes to life again when I compare various encounters with Mann's novel, ranging from academic debates to online reading groups and from literary afterlives to Hollywood blockbusters. My analysis of them can help us better understand the book, which describes and produces an uncommonly immersive reading and learning experience. My recontextualization of Mann's novel shows that this text is much more receptive towards various unorthodox models of culture and learning than academic discussions of it would have us believe. Considering non-academic responses to *The Magic Mountain* alongside its reception in literary criticism affords a fresh perspective on what it means to interact with culture—which, as I argue, is what Mann's book is all about.