

# **Buddenbrooks Study Guide**

## **Buddenbrooks by Thomas Mann**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Buddenbrooks Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Part I.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Part II.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Part III.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Part IV.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Part V.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Part VI.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Part VII.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Part VIII.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Part IX.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Part X.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Part XI.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>

# Plot Summary

Buddenbrooks is a novel about the decline of a family. The story chronicles four generations of a German merchant family and their decline over that period.

The novel begins in 135 with the entire family hosting other prominent townspeople for a housewarming dinner at their new home on Meng Strasse. The head of the family is Johann Buddenbrook, the son of the original founder of the firm. The family business is in grain and related enterprises and over the last several decades, the elder Johann has built the business up to be one of the best in town. His son the Consul Buddenbrook and his wife with their three children, Tony (Antonie), Thomas, and Christian are also present. After the dinner, The Consul discusses a letter that he has received from his half brother and the elder Johann's first son, Gotthold. Johann has cut Gotthold off from the family business because of his choice of wife and now Gotthold wants more money. The elder Johann decides not to give Gotthold any more funds.

Years later, the Buddenbrooks have another daughter and send Tony off first to visit her relatives the Krogers and then to boarding school. The elder Johann dies leaving the business to the Consul. Thomas, expecting to follow his father into the family business, leaves school to join his father. Tony vacations in the nearby town of Travemunde and meets a young medical student named Morten. They fall in love but her father wants her to marry a merchant named Grunlich. Believing that it is her family duty to marry Grunlich, she leaves Morten. After living together for a while and having a daughter with Grunlich, the Consul learns that Grunlich has only married his daughter to pay off debts and now he wants the Consul to pay off more of his debts. The consul feeling guilty for putting Tony in this position and takes her and her daughter Erica home and divorces Grunlich.

In 1848 there is an uprising in the town, but the Consul, through force of will and the power of his reputation, settles the mob and prevents any more disturbance. Shortly after this, the Consul dies and leaves the business to his son Thomas. Thomas is an able businessman, though he lacks the religious devotion and virtue of his father. His brother, Christian, has no interest in business and prefers to spend his time in the theaters and bars of London and Chile. Thomas marries an old school friend of Tony's from Amsterdam, Gerda. He grows the business well and Christian returns to the town from abroad. Tony travels to Munich to stay with friends and meets a hop merchant named Alois Permenader. She later marries the man and moves to Munich. Thomas and Gerda have a son named Johann (Hanno), though he is sickly. Immediately after receiving Tony's dowry, the hop dealer quits his job to live and drink off the money. Tony leaves him when she finds him attempting to rape the servant after a night of drinking.

Thomas is elected senator and expands his business further. He builds a new house for his family on Broad Strasse, much larger than the other house. Thomas's mother dies a painful death and the two brothers quarrel after her death. Thomas is alienated from everyone except his sister Tony. Hanno grows up to be a sickly child that is only interested in music. Thomas despairs and loses interest in life. He dies from a stroke



after an unsuccessful tooth extraction. Gerda sells the home on Broad Strasse and Thomas has already sold the house on Meng Strasse. Christian marries a woman in Hamburg before being committed to a mental asylum. Gerda and Hanno move outside the town gates. Hanno dies of typhoid fever a couple of years after this father and Gerda moves back to Amsterdam. Tony is the only Buddenbrook left in the town and the last of her family.



# Part I

## Part I Summary

Part one begins in the Buddenbrook family home in 1835 in what is probably Luebeck, Germany, though the actual town is never named. Three generations of Buddenbrooks are gathered in the family sitting room. Eight-year old Antonie is sitting on her grandfather and master of the house Johann Buddenbrook's knee reciting the newly approved catechism. They are sitting in the Buddenbrook home on Meng Street. They have just recently moved into the house after Johann Buddenbrook's firm acquired it. It is Thursday, the day on which the family gathers at the home and this Thursday they have invited some friends over to dine with them as well and to have a kind of house-warming party.

Johann Buddenbrooks the younger, also known as the Consul, the son of the elder Johann, welcomes his two sons Tom and Christian home from school. The first dinner guests to arrive, the poet Jean Jacques Hoffstede and the family doctor, Grabow, join the two children. Next to arrive is Pastor Wunderlich and the broker Herr Gratjens. They are joined by Senator Doctor Langhals with his wife and Koppen the wine seller. The final group to arrive includes the relatives of Frau Consul, the Krogers, as well as the lumber dealer Overdieck and his wife. The group stays in the sitting room talking before moving on to the dining room for dinner.

On the way into the dining room, the Consul takes his mother to have a private word with her. The Consul has received a letter from his half-brother, Gotthold who is demanding money from the family. He claims that, by right, he is entitled to some money from the household. The Consul is not sure how to approach his father about the matter, as he does not want to upset him during dinner. The Consul's mother advises his to wait until after dinner to inform Johann senior about the matter.

In the dining room, the guests discuss the age of the house. The Consul claims that the house was built in 1682. The previous owner apparently lost their fortune through bad business dealings and family problems and was forced to sell the house to the Buddenbrooks. The silver plates and utensils remind Pastor Wunderlich of a story from the war with Napoleon only twenty years ago. The town had surrendered to Napoleon early and the Buddenbrooks, among others, were boarding French troops. The Soldiers in Mrs. Buddenbrook's home found her silver and were clearly planning of liberating it from her. She, panicking, ran into the streets claiming she was going to jump in the river when she ran into Wunderlich. He took her back to the house and tried to reason with the French. This did not completely work, but the family was able to save some of their silver. The group then turns to an argument about the merits of Napoleon. The older generation, especially Johann Buddenbrook, claims that Napoleon was a great man, though the enemy of Germans. The younger generation, especially The Consul, argues that Napoleon was a butcher and not to be admired.



Dinner continues and the poet Hoffstede gives a poem in honor of the occasion. Dinner ends and the men retire to the billiards room. The men debate the merits of the recently proposed union of German states into one national German state. The debate gets heated and it takes Hoffstede reading another poem to defuse the tension. Eventually, the guests leave, all congratulating the Buddenbrooks on a wonderful dinner party.

After the guests have left, the Consul finds his father pacing in the Billiards room and tells him about the contents of the letter. Gotthold, who married a woman against his father's wishes and was subsequently cut off from all but a meager portion of his inheritance, claims that he deserves one third of the proceeds from the house. The Consul, devout Christian that he is, wonders whether they should pay Gotthold. Johann vehemently disagrees, claiming that this will just increase Gotthold's desire for more money. The consul eventually agrees and they decide not to pay his half-brother anything.

## Part I Analysis

Part one serves to introduce the Buddenbrook family and to describe the social milieu of the family. The family is upper class German, though not nobility. They are business owners and quite wealthy. They have recently acquired a new, luxurious house and part of the point of the dinner party is to show the house off to owner notable people in the town. The previous owner of the house, Dietrich Ratenkamp, was once a wealthy business owner like Johann Buddenbrook, though after taking on a man named Geelmaack as a business partner, the business went downhill and the family started to disintegrate. Eventually the Ratenkamp's were forced to leave the house, broken and impoverished. The story of the Ratenkamp's is a warning and foreshadows what will happen to the Buddenbrooks.

We see the seeds of discord already sown in the letter from Gotthold. The Consul even tells his father that in the letter, he believes he sees the cracks in the house of Buddenbrooks that could mean problems for the family. Despite this ominous symbolism, Part one shows an upper class family at its peak and in control of its own fate. Most of the section involves introductions of the characters, with very little action. Johann Buddenbrook, though wealthy and upper class, shows signs of his low breeding during the dinner by lapsing into a lower-class German dialect. This focus on class is another of the important themes that will reappear throughout the novel.



## Part II

### Part II Summary

Part II begins two and a half years after the events in Part I. Frau Consul or Elizabeth Buddenbrook nee Kroger, delivers a new daughter into the clan, Clara. The Consul, writing in his journal, discusses the new birth, giving thanks to God and wishing the Lord's blessings on everyone in the family. He thinks about his wife Elizabeth noting that his marriage to her was much like his father's second marriage. They certainly did not marry for love, though love did grow between them. Johann Buddenbrook, the elder, took the daughter of a merchant as his first wife. He loved her madly but directly after the birth of their first son, Gotthold, his first wife Josephine died. The elder Buddenbrook always blamed the death of his first wife on Gotthold, going so far as to consider Gotthold Josephine's murderer. Johann's second marriage, to the Consul's mother, had been a marriage of convenience, not unlike his son's marriage. Whereas the younger Buddenbrook had come to genuinely love Elizabeth, though, the elder man had spent all of his love on Josephine and was only able to respect and care for his second wife, not really love her.

In the summers, little Antonie Buddenbrook, or Tony, stays with her maternal grandparents the Krogers in their estate outside the Castle Gate. The Krogers are in the same general class as the Buddenbrooks, though they have more money and they are more willing to spend the money they have on extravagant living. Their estate is much nicer than the Buddenbrooks' home in the city. Tony takes to the lifestyle and enjoys cups of hot chocolate, the kind she would normally only have on her birthday, every morning for breakfast. In the mornings, she walks to school with her neighbor, Julie Hagenstrom. Julie and Tony do not have a very good relationship. They mostly tease or directly insult one another on their walks. That is until one day when Julie and her brother ambush Tony on the walk so that Hermann, the brother, can give Tony a kiss. Tony pushes Hermann away, but Julie scratches her face nevertheless. After this incident, the two girls avoid each other. Tony's experience at the Krogers' spoils her a little bit and her imperial tendencies become more pronounced after her visits. She sometimes abuses strangers in the streets, jumping out in front of them and scaring them. Eventually this type of behavior gets so bad that the Consul decides to send her to a boarding school.

Of the Consul's two sons, Tom and Christian, Tom is slated to be the heir to the Buddenbrook business and to join his father in the company. Christian is less responsible and his main gift seems to be his ability to ably imitate other people. The elder Buddenbrook's death, directly after his second wife's, leaves possession of the family business to the Consul, who wastes no time formally bringing his 16 year old son into the business. The business is profitable, though not as profitable as Johann would like. His half-brother Gotthold visits the day after the death of their father and attends the funeral with Johann. Gotthold raises the question of money, but Johann is firm in his



insistence that Gotthold will not get any more out of the family than what his father had already given him.

Money is on the mind of Johann when, not long after his assumption of the proprietorship of the business, his wife Elizabeth, recovered from her recent birth, asks Johann for another servant. The family already has two women servants, but Elizabeth is convinced that they need a manservant as well. After a lengthy account of their financial situation and a lecture about how the Buddenbrooks cannot afford to live as extravagantly as the Krogers, Johann denies her request before giving in to her several days later.

Meanwhile at her boarding school, Tony makes friends with some of the other girls at the school and is impressed and a little envious by one of the girls, Armgard von Schilling, and her noble status. The Buddenbrooks are wealthy, but they lack the nobility that the von signifies. Tony, in a conversation with another of her friends, the aristocratic Gerda, suggests that Gerda should marry one of the Buddenbrook brothers.

## Part II Analysis

Part II deals with the passing of the reins from one generation to another. The elder Johann dies and leaves the business to his son Johann. We know from the last section and what we have read in this section that the younger Johann is religiously devout and responsible. He is so religious in fact that during and directly after his wife's labor with Clara, he spends his time writing prayers in his diary as a penance. He also has trouble disciplining his children properly, especially young Christian and Tony, because of his meek, Christian ways. His lifestyle and demeanor are also in line with his faith and he has a northern European Protestant dislike of ostentation and luxury. Unlike his relatives the Krogers, he sees work and business as positively good and rewarding pursuits rather than just means to the end of having money. He also, in his discussion with Elizabeth about the servant, discusses his capital as if it were a sacred thing, ever fearful that he might draw his capital down. His behavior in business also reflects his devout beliefs. Rather than using his business capital to grow the company, he immediately starts paying off all of his creditors. We see his personality traits in Tom, but it is clear that many of those positive traits are lacking in Christian and Tony.





## Part III

### Part III Summary

Part III begins on a June afternoon with the family sitting around reading novels. A note comes to the Consul announcing that a Herr Grunlich has arrived and the Consul agrees to let him into the house. A neatly dressed, though somewhat ugly man comes in to the reading room and very politely introduces himself and then joins the conversation. Grunlich is at the home to discuss business, but he spends a good amount of time ingratiating himself with the Consul's wife and Tony. Tony thinks he is silly and finds him offensive. When her parents ask her opinion, she does not hesitate to tell them this. After hearing her appraisal, the Consul chastises Tony for her opinion, claiming that Grunlich is a fine man and that she will need to look for a husband soon.

The next day, she runs into Grunlich in the street and he asks to talk to her. Tony rebukes him and returns home only to find that Grunlich has sent a letter proposing marriage between himself and Tony. Tony is mortified by the prospect, though her parents think it is a reasonable match and are disappointed that she does not take the proposal seriously. The Consul sends a letter to Grunlich telling him that Tony has put off the decision, effectively to stall Grunlich. Days later Grunlich calls on the Buddenbrook home and asks Tony on his knees why she has insulted him. He pleads with her to reconsider and comes to the point of tears. Tony, pleased by his display of strong emotion and taken in emotionally by the melodrama of his action, opens up to Grunlich and says that she is honored by his proposal and will consider it. Still despite this and her father's urgings to marry the man, Tony thinks Grunlich is highly objectionable and avoids seeing him whenever possible.

The Consul decides to send Tony out to stay with a friend at their beach house in Travemunde for the summer to improve her mood so that she may eventually reconsider Grunlich's proposition. Tom, her brother, accompanies her on her visit to the Schwarzkopf's home. The head of the family is a pilot captain and of considerably lower class than the Buddenbrooks, though he is a good and decent man who lives with his wife and son. His son is studying to be a doctor and although Tony cannot pick up on his name because of the Schwarzkopfs' accent, she takes a liking to him. The next day after breakfast, Tony asks the younger Schwarzkopf to join her at the beach. On the walk down to the beach the son, who Tony discovers is named Morten, discusses the gory details of a pulmonary catarrh while Tony is more concerned with romance novels. Upon arriving, Tony sees some of her upper class friends from town and asks Morten to join her in conversation with them, but Morten declines and goes to sit on the rocks alone and read.

Tony and Morten continue to spend time together at the beach, though Morten holds strident and liberal views that he has no qualms about sharing. He argues against the nobility in general and the Prussian aristocracy in particular. He tells Tony that he has taken a vow against the nobility in favor of freedom at college in his secret fraternity.



Tony, her summer almost over and about to return to town, has a talk with Morten where she tells him about Grunlich and he expresses his feelings of love for her. Tony reciprocates his affection and they kiss on the beach while pledging themselves to each other.

Meanwhile, Grunlich has sent a ring and is pestering her father for a definitive answer from Tony. Tony writes to her father telling him that she is not interested and asks whether Morten might be acceptable. Her father responds in no uncertain terms that she must do what is best for the family and that means marrying Grunlich. Grunlich, learning of Tony's interest in Morten, visits the Schwarzkopfs and tell the father that his son is interfering with his marriage. The father immediately chastises Morten and promises there will be no more interference. The next day, Tony leaves the beach house though Morten is not there to see her off. She is upset and her brother tries to console her by telling her that someday she will forget about it.

Upon her return she gives into her family's wishes and agrees to marry Grunlich. In January, 1846, they are wed. Meanwhile, Tom has his own secret romance with Anna the shopkeeper interrupted when his father calls him to go to Amsterdam on business.

## Part III Analysis

In this section we see the coming of age of Tony and the tension between freedom and commitments. Morten is obsessed with freedom, yet he also does not have the same kinds of family commitments that Tony has. Tony's father tells her that no one is free and that the family is made up of individuals connected together over time as a great chain. The Consul is a devout Christian and is much more concerned with duty than with freedom or, rather, he may see freedom as being the same thing as acting from duty, like Kant. In any case, his concerns are with the prospects of the family, morality generally, and propriety. In this character, Mann is sketching what he takes to be the exemplary mid-19th century German Bourgeois. Morten, on the other hand, comes from a lower class of workers rather than business owners. His family is poorer, but paradoxically this fact makes him in some ways more free than Tony because he does not have to live within a family tradition. He may go off to the university and pursue his own intellectual and political interests.

For Morten, freedom is a cause, something that gives his life meaning and informs his set of values. Tony, while she respects Morten, does not have a similar cause. Indeed, she seems rootless and her life lacks meaning. She spends her days wasting time in walks and reading novels. When she returns home from the beach she remembers what her father tells her about the links in the chain of their family and she decides that it is important to fulfill her familial duty and marry Grunlich. She feels connected with the past and imbued with meaning when she decides to marry Grunlich, though this feeling starts to fade when she is forced to actually interact with the man.

# Part IV

## Part IV Summary

Part IV begins in April of 1846. Tony has been married for some time now and writes to her mother asking her to come visit. Grunlich keeps her in their house in the country and refuses to buy a carriage so that she can visit people in town. The elder Buddenbrook also writes to his son Thomas who is still in Amsterdam. Christian has left for England and Thomas is doing business for the family in Amsterdam though he may be coming down with an illness. Tony writes her mother another letter telling her that she has just had a daughter with Grunlich named Erica.

At the Buddenbrook home on Mengstrasse, one of the servants refuses to serve the family and tells them that the servants will be taking over the house soon. This unruly servant is immediately fired, but the general tone around town is one of unrest. Revolution is in the air. The year is 1848 and all over Europe, the lower classes begin to rise up and demand voting rights and even, in many cases, socialism. A riot breaks out in the streets outside the Buddenbrook home and instead of hiding, Johann decides to go to the assembly meeting that he has already planned to attend. Once at the town hall with all the other notables in town, they see the mob start to organize and shout outside the streets of the hall, throwing bricks and hurling insults at the burghers huddled inside. After sitting for several hours in the hall without starting the meeting for fear of feeling the wrath of the mob, the Consul leans over to talk to his father-in-law Herr Kroger. Kroger is concerned that his coach has not arrived and tells the Consul that he wants to leave the meeting. This is all the Consul needs to hear and he makes for the door to confront the crowd and tell them to disperse. Along the way he runs into Gosch the broker who joins him in the street. The first thing the Consul notices is that the street lamps have not been lit, this angers him and offends his sense of propriety and regularity. He immediately singles out one man in the group and asks for an account of the mob's action. After the man fails to fully justify himself, the Consul tells the mob to disperse and they go home. The Consul summons Kroger's carriage and he helps the old man home. Upon arrival at the Kroger estate, the old man dies while the Consul is helping him into the house.

A year and several months later the Grunlichs are sitting down for breakfast when Tony tells Herr Grunlich that she needs a nanny for Erica. Grunlich says that they cannot afford a nanny and just then, Herr Kesselmeyer, Grunlich's chief creditor and a generally despicable fellow enters the house to meet with Grunlich. They talk about his debts and it becomes clear that Grunlich's business has completely failed and he owes far more money than he has. Kesselmeyer tells him that he had better contact his wife's father for a loan and Grunlich summons the Consul. The Consul has some indication of what the situation is when he arrives, but before he speaks with Grunlich he goes to see Tony. Seeing that Grunlich is likely bankrupt and will probably ask him for a loan, the Consul wants to determine whether or not his daughter loves the man. After some conversation, Tony makes it known that she has always hated Grunlich and she only married him to



please her father. Resolved not to bail out Grunlich, the Consul meets with him and Kesselmeyer. The Consul refuse to give Grunlich any more money and it comes out that when Grunlich was courting Tony he was also bankrupt and sought her hand only in order to get the large dowry she would bring to pay off his creditors. The Consul is outraged and takes Tony and Erica back to his house with him, leaving Grunlich. Tony readjusts and thrives in her father's home and several years later the Consul dies quietly in his office.

## Part IV Analysis

Two major events happen in Part IV, both of which illustrate parts of the Consul's character. The first event is the uprising of 1848. It is not always clear from the action in the novel, but historically aware readers will realize that the uprising is very serious throughout Europe and especially in Germany so the threat of violence is very real. Given that fact, the Consul behaves in a way that can only be describes bourgeois heroic. He calms the crowd, disperses the mob and all without violence or really even threats. Men of the older generation, Kroger and probably the Consul's father if he were still alive, would prefer to turn the cannons on the mob, though they lack the courage to do so. The Consul on the other hand uses his virtue to sway the crowd. Smolt, the man that he recognizes in the crowd, clearly respects the Consul for his virtue and his honesty and the fact that the Consul tells the mob to disperse is, for that reason, reason enough to comply.

In his dealings with Grunlich we also see the same type of unwavering moral commitment to do the right thing. If the Consul lacks one quality it is prudence and the ability to see bad men for what they are, bad. Being a good Christian he looks for the best in all and this allows men like Grunlich to take advantage of him. Once he discovers what is in his daughter's best interest and the true nature of her husband, no appeal to emotion, emotion that might sway another man, will turn the Consul from his path. With the death of the consul at the end of this part, we can also see the death of that strong, if moral and gentle, power of bourgeois Christian greatness. We will see if his children can inherit his moral legacy with the same ease that they will inherit his financial legacy.



# Part V

## Part V Summary

Part V begins directly after the death of the Consul Buddenbrook. The Consul's brother-in-law and Frau Consul's brother Justus Kroger has arrived to discuss the will with the family. After the death of the Consul Kroger, Justus decides to sell their considerable estate, the one where Tony spent such happy times, to be demolished. It seems that the Consul Buddenbrook had quietly amassed a considerable fortune, well over a million Thaler. Thomas Buddenbrook decides to take over the business but to make his uncle Gotthold the Consul to the Netherlands and to make his father's assistant Marcus a partner in the business.

After eight years spent away from home in England and in Chile, the Consul's other son Christian returns home. He joins his family again but he seems out of place with his strange stories, his laziness and his love of the theater. His brother Thomas disapproves of him but, despite this, decides to take him on as his assistant. Despite a good start at the job, however, Christian proves to be a poor assistant and rarely comes to the office other than to drink and smoke. Meanwhile, Thomas is spending his time growing the business and amassing an even greater fortune than the one he was left.

Not long after Christian's return, the new Consul Gotthold dies of a heart attack. Thomas resumes his Consular reign and became even more ambitious. The daughters of the late Gotthold disapproved of the other group of Buddenbrooks, especially Tony, though they respect Thomas, whose character, except maybe for its severity and love of luxury, is unimpeachable. The Frau Consul, mother of Thomas, has during this time become more and more religious, often hosting groups of wandering preachers and religious fanatics at her house. Despite the religious devotion of their father, none of the Buddenbrook children are very devout, except Clara. One of the preachers, one of the younger and more promising men, takes an interest in the youngest of the Buddenbrook children, Clara. Deciding that their temperaments are well suited for one another, the two decide to marry. Meanwhile, while traveling in Amsterdam, Thomas meets one of Tony's childhood friends Gerda and falls in love with her, at least enough to propose to her. Upon Thomas's return, both pairs marry with Thomas and Gerda heading off to northern Italy for their honeymoon. Upon their return they find that Tony has fixed up a new house for them and Tony discusses a visit away from town with her brother. She is bored and fears she will not remarry. They both decide the trip is a good idea and the chapter ends with the imposing image of Gerda in the doorway.

## Part V Analysis

This Part shows the passing of the familial reins from one generation of Buddenbrooks to the next. In the last Part we saw a somewhat heroic sketch of the elder consul. In this Part we see sketches of both Christian and Thomas that put the younger Buddenbrooks



in a different light from their father. First, Christian is a moody aesthete who cares nothing for religion or business. This is the direct opposite of his father. Thomas, though he loves business, is in business for the accumulation of wealth and the advancement of his own ambition, again the opposite of his father's interest. Thomas is interested in religion only insofar as it is important for a good citizen to be interested in religion. His care for his own soul only goes so deep as to let others know that he is not deviating from their creed. He is pretentious and aristocratic, or so the townspeople say, and it is clear that he has political ambitions. His wife is the greatest contrast. Gerda possesses a quality that all Buddenbrooks lack: the ability to play music. This fact is significant and much is made of it in this part of the novel. Schopenhauer believed that music was the true expression of the will or life force of the world, the fact that Gerda can tap into that primeval will, though the Buddenbrooks cannot, may well be more important in the rest of the novel.

## Part VI

### Part VI Summary

Part VI begins with the Consul and his mother sitting down in the Meng Street home for breakfast and reading Tony's recent letter from Munich. Tony discusses the strange, mostly gibberish sounding dialect of the Bavarians as well as their strange, and to her mind, barbaric Catholicism. She mentions the good time she is having and also writes of a hops dealer in Munich named Permaneder that she seems to like. The matter ends there though and in April, Tony returns to her home in Meng Street.

While she has been gone, discord between the two brothers has only grown. Christian spends his time cavorting around town, going to the theater, having affairs with women, and generally, to Thomas' mind, behaving disreputably. More than that it is Christian's frame of mind, his introspective nature, that bothers Thomas. The matter comes to a head one day after Thomas hears from one local business man, a member of Thomas' reading group, about a remark that Christian made the previous evening. Christian, while at the club, had said, in his off hand way, that all businessmen were swindlers. Thomas sees in this remark not only an insult to himself, but also an insult to their class. The brothers quarrel and Thomas tells Christian that he no longer wants Christian to have any responsibility in the business. Thomas agrees to give Christian the money that their father had put aside for them so that his brother can go and become an independent partner in some other business.

Back at the house, a certain Alois Permaneder has come to call on Tony. Although neither the servants nor Frau Consul can completely understand the man, they invite him into their home and invite him to lunch. Thomas shows up at the meal just in time to meet Tony's presumed suitor. The Bavarian is quite comfortable with himself, that is, he is much less formal than the Buddenbrooks. He speaks freely and lounges comfortably, though the family is not upset with him because it is clear that he is a good man. They invite him to stay for as long as he like and Thomas is clearly encouraged by the prospect of a marriage for his sister. On a trip into the country, Permaneder proposes to Tony and she agrees to marry him, partly out of perceived duty to the family, partly out of affection for the man.

They are married in a simple ceremony and the two newly-weds plus Erica return to Munich. It is clear back on Broad street that Thomas has political ambitions. He seeks to be head of the city if nothing else and talks to his friend about the need for German unification and a common market. His sister Clara, with her new husband, continues to have serious headaches and without too much delay, news from Munich arrives.

Immediately after receiving his wife's dowry and returning to Munich, the portly hops merchant decides that he has had enough of working for a living and proceeds to retire with the money from the marriage. This, not surprisingly, enrages Tony and they quarrel. Tony, realizing that she had made another bad decision in marriage, settles into her life



in Munich not expecting very much out of the future. That is, until she finds that she is pregnant in 1859. She delivers a child, only to have it die immediately after childbirth. After this tragedy it is clear that Tony and Alois cannot be reconciled. It is the next piece of news that forever severs their marriage, though. In November, the Frau Conul receives a telegram telling her that Tony is coming right away from Berlin with Erica. Once they arrive, the family finds out that Tony has seen Alois, after a night of hard drinking, attempting indiscreet and indecent relations with the servant Babette. Tony immediately leaves the home and returns home.

Her brother Thomas, fearing that more scandal from Tony will ruin his chances of political ambition, attempts to convince her to return to her lapsed husband. She refuses and is enraged by Thomas's suggestion. Thomas realizes she is right and agrees to help her get a divorce. A penitent Alois agrees to the divorce and agrees to give back the dowry money.

## Part VI Analysis

Part VI shows the cancer starting to grow and widen in the Buddenbrook family. Almost all the noble elements of the family have begun to die off and all the restraint is starting to leave them. We see this primarily in the relationship between Christian and Thomas. Thomas has grown to resent and even hate his brother Christian. All this, despite the fact, as Christian points out, that Thomas was, in their youth, not so different from Christian. Thomas loved novels and poetry in his youth and his sentiment has not completely died up. It may be that it is because of this one time similarity that Thomas hates Christian. Maybe he hates Christian because of the similarities that he sees to his brother in himself. Thomas is driven and ambitious and his brother is a reproach to that part of his soul. Thomas drives his brother off.

Tony's misfortunes also continue to multiply. What looks potentially like a good match eventually devolves into heartache and recriminations. Part of the problem is that, just as in her marriage to Grunlich, Tony marries out of duty to her brother and her family rather than because she thinks it is a good match. She is so desirous to fulfill her perceived familial duty to marry that she overrides her sense and marries the hop dealer. Her duty leads her down the wrong road again and not surprisingly it is her brother who, until the end, tries to persuade her to do her duty and continue the marriage. Despite her protestations to the contrary, all of her misfortune seems to have taught neither her nor her family any lessons at all.



## Part VII

### Part VII Summary

Part VII opens with the birth and christening of the new Buddenbrook heir. Despite their fears, a son has been born to Gerda and Thomas Buddenbrook. They name him Johann, though he is often called Hanno. All the best people attend the christening including the head of the city and all of the distant members of the family return home for the event. Still, despite the happiness, some people notice that the child looks sickly and it is clear that Christian and Clara's health is deteriorating.

Christian, who has been running his own business in Hamburg for some time now, requests a hearing with Thomas immediately. Christian tells Thomas of his ever-worsening health and also informs him of the fate of his business. Christian's firm is bankrupt and without any funds from the business, Christian has been going into debt using credit for living expenses. He asks Thomas for some money to pay off his debts. Thomas is upset, but allows his brother to go off to London and live with a girl he has found there.

Not too long after this event, news reaches the Buddenbrooks that James Mollendorf, a merchant senator, has just died and hence, his seat has become available. Thomas Buddenbrook and Tony's old nemesis, Hermann Hagenstrom are suggested as candidates. After a election that is in doubt until the very end, Thomas Buddenbrook is announced as the new senator.

Thomas, happy to finally have achieved the distinction he has always desired, takes on the role of city leader. He decides to build a grand new estate on new land and invests a small fortune in the house's construction. The house reflects Thomas's overall manner; he must wear many different hats and he seeks to make his outward appearance conform to his vision of himself. Hanno, his son, is developing slowly. He does not speak properly and he is too slow to walk. There is a fear among the women that he will not develop. News comes that Clara has tuberculosis of the brain and will not last very long. Tom fears that success and happiness are beginning to slip away from the Buddenbrooks and news comes that Clara has succumbed to her illness.

The sadness of this event is counteracted by the anger that Thomas feels for his mother who has sent Clara's husband, the pastor from Riga, 100,000 marks, his wife's inheritance. Thomas is insecure about his and the firm's finances and sees the move as reckless. He also believes that the pastor and his brother Christian have conspired to get the money, though there is no proof of this. The part ends with news of war between Austria and Prussia. The Buddenbrooks' town wisely allies with Prussia, the eventual victor, but Frankfurt allies with Austria and loses its independence after the war. This result is good news for the town, but the Buddenbrooks' business, which has heavy dealings with a Frankfurt firm that fails, takes very heavy losses.



## Part VII Analysis

Part VII is where we begin to see many of the strands of discord or the cracks in the family begin to break apart. As Tom says to his sister, oftentimes outward signs of prosperity only mask the fact that decline has already set in. Thomas gives a good explanation for this fact in that the signs of success take time to become apparent, whereas decline and weakness set in immediately. The implication of this is that the Buddenbrooks have been in some sense living off the capital of their father Johann for some time, not realizing they were overdrawing his account. Their father, so virtuous and pious, had all of the qualities that his children lack. Thomas has no mercy or sympathy and he is unable to enjoy his success. Christian has no discipline or virtue and their sister's sense of virtue has been perverted into something else. What looks on the surface like the Buddenbrooks' final rise to glory will, no doubt, be the last gasp before the great fall of the house of Buddenbrooks.

## Part VIII

### Part VIII Summary

Part VIII begins with the meeting of Herr Hugo Weinschenk, the Director of the city fire insurance company, and Erica Grunlich. The director works on Meng street so the two will often run into one and other on the street. Erica, embarrassed and flattered to be noticed by the director, immediately runs home and cries. As a result of her mother's shame at her divorces and her belief that all of the other families in town despise her, Tony avoids the society of the town. This puts Erica at a disadvantage though, because she is not invited to any of the dinners or balls in town and hence has not met any young men to marry. She is twenty years old and pretty, but unknown outside of her small family circle. The director on the other hand is a Prussian by birth and has become a self-made man without the benefit of connection in the town and without the time to take a wife. He is, therefore, a well off man in his early forties without a wife. He notices Erica, who is also of the same social situation, and begins to court her. He is likeable enough and Tony believes he has the making of a good husband, though it is clear that he does not have the social graces or temperament of a Buddenbrook. Christian imitates him mercilessly and Frau Consul is a little wary of him. The senator and Erica like him, though and they are duly married.

The director employs Christian in the insurance business, but their partnership does not last long and the Director soon fires his relative. Christian's condition has gotten better, though he still feels his pain on the left side at times. He is good friends with another senator, Gieseke, who, though outwardly respectable, is no better than Christian. The senator keeps a house on the edge of town for his mistress, a house Christian also visits from time to time.

Despite the misgivings of some, Tony throws herself into the preparation for the marriage, excited to be marrying again, at least by proxy. Thomas even jokes that Tony is getting married for the third time and she even moves in with the newlyweds to help Erica run the house.

Later, Tony comes to Thomas while he is eating alone to ask him for some money for a friend of hers, a Herr von Maiboom. The noble Maiboom is a landowner, but he is also a gambler and has amassed certain debt that needs to be paid. Tony is called by the noble family to see if he can get her brother Thomas to give hem an advance on their harvest. Thomas is upset by the request. He sees himself as a producer and merchant not as a money-lender. He complains that the business is not going as well as he would like and that he believes his life is slipping away from him. Tony leaves her brother to go upstairs and see her nephew, Hanno. When she comes back down she finds Thomas pacing in the dark. He has been thinking about his own character and his life and he has decided that he will enter the venture.



It is 1868 and the Buddenbrook firm has been in business for 100 years. The entire town and the family celebrate the jubilee, though Thomas is still depressed. Hanno is a sickly, pensive boy and during the celebration when he is asked to recite a poem, the boy ends up crying instead of reciting and his father chastises him mercilessly. The boy has taken to music via his mother and via an instructor becomes an accomplished pianist and musician. He has no interest in the business and his father despairs of this turn. One day, Hanno goes to the big book that records all of the important events in the family and writes a large line through the last page, telling his enraged father that he assumes that nothing else will happen.

It is Christmas time, though the celebration is marred by the accusation that the Director has engaged in insurance fraud. He has been brought up on charges and is to be tried. Despite his hiring the best lawyer anyone has ever seen, the Director is sentenced to three years in jail and so ends Tony's third marriage.

## Part VIII Analysis

In this part we see another ill-fated marriage encouraged by Thomas and Tony started and ended. The Buddenbrooks continue to marry outside of their family in temperament and class to bad effects. All of Tony's marriages have been to self-made men and lower merchants. All have been dishonest and have ended in disgrace. Some in the family, chiefly Thomas, overlook the obvious signs that these people do not fit into the family but, nevertheless, sanction and even encourage the unions. Thomas, on the other hand, marries a woman who is totally alien to the Buddenbrook type. The Buddenbrooks have no musical ability and aside from the degenerate Christian, no interest in music aside from light entertainment. Gerda is a great musician and their son, Hanno, shares this trait.

Thomas needs an heir with the same qualities of his father and namesake, Johann Buddenbrook. Instead he gets a combination of many of the hidden qualities inside Thomas, the longing the melancholy, and the outward characteristic of Christian, the love of music and the theater as well as a kind of laziness and lack of interest in business. As a result of this, and as Thomas knows all too well at this point, the family is probably done for, despite the recent celebration of their 100th anniversary. A combination of character flaws, often only minor ones, and bad decisions have led the family to this and instead of following the advice of the now dead Johann, the family has lost its moorings and is floundering in business and in life.



# Part IX

## Part IX Summary

Part IX begins in the house on Mengstrasse with Thomas nervously talking to two doctors. His mother is ill and the doctors believe she has an infection of her left lung. The doctors attempt to reduce the infection to no avail, and over time it spreads to the other lung. Tony is very upset by these developments and even more upset that her brother has hired a catholic nun to tend to her mother. Frau Consul gets worse and worse until her lungs fill with fluid and she begins to suffocate in front of the family. She begs for a narcotic so that she can end her struggle and join her husband in death, but the doctors refuse to help her die. After a long and painful struggle, she finally succumbs to death.

After their mother's death, it is up to the children to split up the remaining possessions. Tony takes most of the furniture, though Christian is interested in plates and silverware as well. Thomas asks him why he is interested and Christian responds that he plans to marry a woman he has met and to make her bastard children legitimate by adopting them. This enrages Thomas who claims that under no circumstances will Christian be allowed to marry this woman. They argue vehemently with Christian impugning Thomas's character and Thomas using every insult available to attack his brother. Eventually the argument ends and Christian leaves. It is then that Thomas tells Tony that they will have to sell the house. This upsets her and she pleads with Thomas not to sell it. Thomas convinces her that he must sell the house and arranges to sell it through Herr Grosch, the broker. He thinks they should sell it for less than Thomas would like, though Thomas eventually allows the sale to go through.

Everyone in town attends the funeral for Elisabeth Buddenbrooks and they all, even her enemies or perceived enemies, give their condolences to Tony. Johann attends the funeral but does not really recognize the woman in the casket with the life drained out of her.

Eventually Herr Hagenstrom, the same Hagenstrom who tormented Tony as a child, buys the house on Mengstrasse. This upsets Tony greatly and she cries every time she goes by the house after the sale.

## Part IX Analysis

The house on Mengstrasse is a symbol of the Buddenbrook family. It is the elder Johann Buddenbrook who originally buys the house when the business is on the rise and the housewarming is the first scene in the novel. Now that the firm and the family are on the decline, the house itself is declining. The outdoor garden is unkempt, and the billiards room is so bad off that a family of cats is making their home in the room. The death of the Frau Consul is the last moment in the history of the house on Mengstrasse



as a Buddenbrook home and directly after the death, a feud between the two brothers erupts, once again showing the cracks in the foundation of the family have become larger and larger. In the same way that the Buddenbrooks bought their house on Mengstrasse as an up and coming family from a family in decline, so too do the up and coming Hagenstroms buy the Buddenbrook house. It is clearly a symbol of the families' decline and their lack of unity.



# Part X

## Part X Summary

Part X begins with Thomas brooding about the direction his life has taken. He knows that he has reached the high point in his life and he wonders what he is to do now. As his business fortune has decreased, the fortunes of his town have increased. It has finally joined the customs union and has seen its trade with neighboring towns increase substantially. Thomas knows that because he elected to join the business early instead of going to school, he can never reach the highest rank in politics. This thought torments him. He spends his days acting the part of the prosperous merchant, though he feels no pleasure in the act anymore.

Hanno remains anemic and no more interested in the family business than he has ever been. His father tries to neutralize the boy's interest in music to no effect. He also takes the boy along to see him do his business, but the boy realizes his father is acting and despairs of ever having to live the life of despair that he sees in his father. The family takes Hanno to the sea, hoping that it will improve his constitution, though the trip only has the effect of making Hanno long for nature and the sea even more than before.

Erica's husband, the ex-director is finally pardoned, but does not return home immediately. Prison life has racked his nerves and he spends all day smoking and has no interest in seeing his wife or daughter. Eventually Erica files for a divorce and three generations of Buddenbrook women have no husband or father.

Gerda has begun to play music with a young lieutenant. So much so that Thomas begins to get jealous. This jealousy only has the effect of estranging Thomas more and more from his wife and son. His mood has worsened and in desperation to find some answers to the questions he has, Thomas begins to read a book he finds on the bookshelf. Thomas's health has been failing and, lacking the faith of his father in Christianity, he has always clung to the hope that he could live on in his children. Realizing that Hanno will never be able to carry on his legacy he finds in the mysterious book a new philosophy. The book says that life is a mistake and that death will be a release from the pain of life back into the common spirit that all men share before their ill-fated sojourn on earth. The book invigorates him and amazes him. He finally decides that he will live his life differently, though after a night's sleep, he goes back to his old routine.

The senator visits the seashore with his brother and two other distinguished men from the city. The men sit on the shore and drink and smoke while they discuss the evils of life. Sometime after their return from the shore, Thomas goes to the dentist with a bad toothache. The dentist tries to remove the tooth, but there is a complication. The dentist tells Thomas to go home and come back the next day. On his way home, Thomas has a stroke and falls into the street. Some strangers bring him home, where he dies. There is a great funeral for the man that is well attended by the entire town.



## Part X Analysis

Part X shows the final decline of Thomas Buddenbrook. He has felt as if his fortunes are waning for some time now, but by the time we get to this chapter, he has nothing else to look forward to anymore. He knows that his political ambitions can not go any higher given his education, so he must accept that his station in the town is as high as it will ever go. He also begins to wonder if his wife is having an affair with a younger man. Regardless of whether or not this suspicion is well founded, in his own mind, he has been eclipsed in the eyes of his wife. His son shows no interest in the values of his father and Thomas realizes that his son will no longer carry on his legacy. When he goes to the beach with other similarly situated men it is clear that none of these men have anything left to live for and all they can do is curse life. His death then really is a relief as his life has become so miserable.

The book that Thomas finds that gives him so much elation and hope for such a short time is, most likely Schopenhauer whose pessimistic philosophy preaches renunciation of the world. We see this philosophy at work in Thomas in his behavior at the beach. In one scene, the men are sitting, smoking and cursing life. They are engaged in the type of renunciation that Schopenhauer advocates, at least superficially. Suddenly, though, a well-endowed woman walks by and commands all of their attention. Schopenhauer claims that it is the will, or the life force that pushes us along in life to reproduce and multiply against our best interest. Interest in sex is one of the key desires that emanates from the will and it impels us into unhappiness. Thomas, however much he may feel liberated by this philosophy, does not have the strength for it though and in no time he is back to, in the author's view, the cowardly doctrine of Christianity which is both ridiculous and does not satisfy the spiritual hunger within us.



# Part XI

## Part XI Summary

Part XI begins with a list of all those relatives that have recently died. Most of the family and the close friends of the family have died. After his brother's death, Christian Buddenbrook moves to Hamburg where he marries Aline Puvogel and makes her children his heirs. Soon after he is committed to a mental institution. His new wife may now enjoy the benefits of his wealth and marriage without having Christian around. Thomas' will makes it clear that the business should be liquidated and the proceeds should go to his wife. The sale is done quickly, too quickly, and the family only gets a fraction of what the business is worth. Gerda decides to sell her large house and moves to a smaller home outside of town. She also releases the Buddenbrook's oldest servant Ida, who travels back to her native Prussia. Tony, despairing at the fortunes of the family and the business, thinks that at least Hanno still lives so that the family line will carry on.

After this catalog of woe, we are treated to an extended description of a day in the life of Hanno. The day begins with Hanno oversleeping for school because he went to the opera the night before. After rushing to school and sneaking into class he meets up with his best friend Kai, who is in a similar position. They bluff their way through school and talk of their real interests. In Kai's case, it is literature. Throughout the school day he is reading Poe and has composed several stories himself. Hanno talks about music. At the end of the day Hanno confesses to his friend that he is weary of life and hopes that he can just die and sleep forever. Kai tells him to hang on and Hanno returns home where he plays a duet with his mother.

The next chapter explains the effects of Typhoid on the body and the author suggests that in the final stage, if the sick individual does not want to live, the disease will take them. The next scene involves the women of the family, Gerda, Tony, Erica, and the other Buddenbrook women. Gerda has decided to leave the town and go back to Amsterdam. Hanno has died, he succumbed to the fever and she sees no reason to stay in town. Tony, finally realizing that there is nothing left of the family, gets very upset. The more religious sister quiets her by telling her that all will be well in heaven when they die.

## Part XI Analysis

In Hanno we see all of the character traits of Thomas and Christian combined into one. Hanno loves art like Christian, but is depressed and does not know what to make of life like his father. It is no surprise when Hanno dies as he has never really seemed at home on the earth. The fact that his friend Kai is reading Poe, specifically the Fall of the House of Usher, is relevant. The Buddenbrook family has taken a similar fall. The family disintegrates in a literal sense. They do not stick together and they forget or lose all of the virtues of the earlier generations.



The later Buddenbrooks had neither the pious devotion to religion and morality that the Consul Johann had, nor did they embrace another philosophy of life like Thomas flirts with towards the end. They put their faith in the city and in business, failing to realize, until it is too late that there is no foundation to their success or happiness. Thomas finds that his life is hollow. Tony who has sacrificed everything for what she believes is her familial duty, is the only one to see the final end of the family. Christian, without the help of his brother, becomes a laughingstock and is ultimately institutionalized. There are many interesting themes at play in Buddenbrooks, but ultimately Hanno in the final chapters embodies the whole novel. He has lost interest in life because he has nothing to live for. There is nothing else for him to do but die. Once the family loses its goal and purpose, it too must die.



# Characters

## Thomas Buddenbrook

Thomas Buddenbrook is the head of the Buddenbrook clan after the death of his father the younger Johann Buddenbrook. As a young boy he has an interest in business and desires to follow in his father's footsteps in running the company. He cuts his education short to join his father in the business after the death of his grandfather. He makes a name for himself and clearly has social ambitions. During the same time that Grunlich is courting, so to speak, his sister, Tom is engaged in a secret relationship with a butcher's daughter in his hometown. His father asks Tom to go to Amsterdam on business and Tom, realizing that he can never have a marriage with this woman, breaks off their relationship before he goes to Amsterdam. Although this relationship is not mentioned much after his trip to Amsterdam, it is clear that this woman represents the life he has sacrificed for the business and really, for his own sense of propriety.

After his father's death he takes over the family business and expands the enterprise far beyond what his father would have dared to do. This is partly because he sees business success as an end in itself and partly because he has greater ambition in general than his father. Eventually he is able to run for senator in the town and he wins, achieving a rank his father never attained. He marries a childhood friend of his sisters, Gerda, an austere, beautiful woman who possesses the musical skill that all the Buddenbrooks lack. He has a son, Johann or Hanno, though his son disappoints him in not being interested in business. Later in life Thomas realizes that he accomplished everything and more that he wanted to but that he is still not happy and content. He realizes that he has built his life around the accolades of others around him and that inside he is really empty. This leads him to despair and aside from a short episode where he discovers the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Thomas is weary of life and ready to die. His death comes in the form of a stroke after an unsuccessful tooth extraction.

## Tony (Antonie) Buddenbrook

Tony is the female counterpart to Thomas in the novel. As a child she is pretty and probably a little bit spoiled. She enjoys long uninterrupted mornings and enjoys honey above all foods. In her youth she visits the Kroger estate outside of town and becomes acclimated to that part of the family's aristocratic mindset. Above all the other Buddenbrooks, she is conscious of and treasures the value of the family name. She considers the record of family events that her father keeps to be a sacred record and she considers her father's word on a par with the word of God.

On a visit to Travemunde in her youth she stays with the Schwarzkopf family and meets and falls in love with their son Morten. Morten has republican sympathies and believes that the nobility should be eliminated. She would like to marry Morten, though another man, a merchant named Grunlich has already proposed to her. Grunlich disgusts her,



but her father believes that a union between the two would be best for the family and with her developed sense of familial duty she marries Grunlich. Despite appearances, Grunlich only marries her for the sizable dowry so he can pay off his debts. Soon after their marriage and after the birth of their daughter Erica, Grunlich goes into more debt and asks Tony to have her father come and give him money to pay off her debtors. In an impassioned discussion, Tony tells her father that she never loved Grunlich and Johann Buddenbrook refuses to pay Grunlich and takes his daughter and granddaughter back to his house with him.

Eventually after a trip to Munich, Tony marries a hops merchant in Munich and moves down there with him. He immediately quits his business and lives off the dowry in pleasure. One night he comes home drunk and attempts to rape the servant. This is enough for Tony and she comes home immediately and divorces the man. After this second failed marriage, she becomes a devoted sister to Thomas and aunt to Hanno. She, more than anything, desires the success of the family and is heartbroken when it finally breaks apart completely.

## **Johann Buddenbrook (the Elder)**

Son of the original Johann Buddenbrook who founded the family firm in 1768. He has built the firm up and at the beginning of the novel has just moved into a new home on Meng Strasse that signifies their rise in rank. He has two sons, Johann (Consul, Jean) and Gotthold. Gotthold defies his father and marries a shopkeeper and has been cut off from the Buddenbrook business. He is married once before to a woman named Josephine who dies after giving birth to Gotthold. Johann blames Gotthold for her death and has never forgiven him. Eventually he dies and leaves his business to his son.

## **Madame (Antoinette) Buddenbrooks**

Wife of the Elder Johann Buddenbrook. Their marriage is one of convenience though she makes a very good mother to Jean and learns to love the elder Buddenbrook. She dies not long before her husband.

## **Johann Buddenbrook (younger)**

The second son of his father, the elder Buddenbrook. The Consul to Amsterdam and, after his father's death, the head of the Buddenbrook firm. Johann is a devout and pious protestant and mediates all of his business and family dealings through his religious devotion. He pressures his daughter into marriage with Grunlich, an act that he later regrets. Although never a senator, he is greatly respected in town and is instrumental in stopping the rebellion of 1848 in the town. Dies at his desk not long after the uprising.



## **Elisabeth nee Kroger Buddenbrook**

The daughter of the Kroger clan the wife of Johann is a devoted wife and mother. She outlives her husband by many years, long enough to see her family decline. Her death is very painful and prolonged.

## **Christian Buddenbrook**

Christian is the brother of Tony, Thomas, and Clara Buddenbrook. From an early age he is more concerned with the theater and with imitation than with Business. He leads a life of dissolution in the gentleman's clubs and theaters. For a while he lives in Valparaiso, Chile and also in London. He is stricken with rheumatism on his left side, which troubles him for most of his life. He attempts to run a business in Hamburg for some time, but is a failure. Constantly quarrels with his brother who hates him. After Thomas's death, Christian marries a woman he has been interested in for some time, but soon after is committed to a mental institution.

## **Bendix Grunlich**

A petty merchant who negotiates a marriage with Tony primarily to pay off his debts. After their marriage he quickly racks up more debts and Tony leaves with their child after it is clear that he is a bankrupt.

## **Morten Schwartzkopf**

Son of the family that Tony stays with in Travemunde, he is a student of medicine in the university. He is a free thinker and a republican who believes the nobility should be eliminated. He loves Tony, but any possibility of marriage is ended when Grunlich and Johann Buddenbrook make it clear that Tony will marry Grunlich.

## **Gerda Arnoldsen**

Gerda is a boarding school friend and eventually marries Thomas Buddenbrook. She is adept at the violin and has a passion for music. She has a son, Johann (Hanno), with Thomas.

## **Clara Buddenbrook**

Other daughter of Elisabeth Buddenbrook, though much younger than Tony. Clara is very religious and she marries a pastor from Riga. She suffers from extremely bad headaches and eventually dies with her husband due to her bad health.



# Objects/Places

## Prussia

Prussia was a large kingdom in northeastern Germany. Adept at war and known for their focus on duty and organization, the Prussians, after a series of military victories would lead the unification of Germany towards the end of the 19th century.

## Hamburg

A large free city in the north of Germany, one of the main centers of trade and commerce in Germany.

## Travemunde

A seaport on the Baltic Sea, Travemunde is a popular seaside destination for residents of Luebeck.

## German Unification

Until unification, Germany was a collection of kingdoms and free cities that shared a similar language and history. After the defeat of France in the Franco Prussian war, Germany united as one nation under Prussian leadership in 1871.

## Free Town

A German city not ruled by a king or emperor. A city-state usually ruled by some type of council.

## Consul

A title given to important men in the town of the novel. Something like an ambassador position for the holder for the title.

## Munich

Munich is the largest city in the German state of Bavaria. Known for its beer and friendly people, Munich is in southern Germany and has more Catholics and Catholic influences than northern Germany.



## Hops

A plant important in beer making. Hops gives the flowery head to the beer and cut through the sweeter malt flavor.

## Strasse

Strasse is the German word for street.

## Wagner

Richard Wagner was an important German composer of Operas in the 19th century. His operas include Lohengrin, Parsifal, The Ring of the Niebulungen cycle, and Wilhelm Meistersinger. He is known for his revolutionary music and his use of leit motifs.

## Revolution of 1848

Uprising throughout Europe, though not organized by any central group. The revolution led to the overthrow of French monarchy and the creation of republics in several German states.

# Themes

## Art and Business

One of the key themes in the novel is the distinction and tension between art and business. The two Buddenbrook brothers symbolize this distinction well. Thomas is clearly interested in business and material advancement. Christian is interested in the theater and in art. In the distinction between these two brothers we see decadent perverted types of the Dionysian and Apollonian. This distinction plays its way throughout the novel and is originally made by Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche believed that there were two strong forces in culture, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Apollo stands for order and rationality whereas the Dionysian is representative of music, chaos and passion. The focus on the general lack of musical ability or interest in the family is a signifier that the Buddenbrooks exemplify the Apollonian type. Christian is more Dionysian; he cares for music and art above rational, practical pursuits. Gerda is a more purified version of the art type, whereas Christian is a perverted decadent version. He cannot make any art himself; he can only admire it and be seduced by it. Thomas has restrained and destroyed the parts of his soul that respond to art and has suffered because of his lack of that aspect of culture.

Hanno is a culmination of Thomas and Gerda. He has artistic ability, but he also shares the decadence of Thomas and is doomed to despair. The author clearly thinks that both art and business have their place but also believes that the Buddenbrooks have tried to silence one side or the other instead of trying to harmonize them, with disastrous results.

## Decay

The novel is about the decline of a family so it is no surprise that one of the major themes would be decay; Mann uses the theme of decay as a leit motif throughout the novel. First there is the color yellow that reappears in important places throughout the novel. This color signifies jaundice and decay. Next there is the obsession that Tony has with honey and hot cocoa. Both of these are sweet and neither food has any real nutritional value. They symbolize Tony's approach to life—sweet but not nourishing.

The most clear example of decay throughout the novel is with teeth. Thomas Buddenbrook has a toothache that leads him to the dentist. While at the dentist, he has his tooth extracted. Unfortunately, the operation is not completely successful and he is told to come back later. The operation has been extremely painful, but Thomas leaves to come back the next day. On his way home, he has a stroke and dies in the street. His tooth decay reflects the decay in his own soul. His son also has tooth problems. As a young child the dentist fears that he may die after a set of operations on his teeth. Later his toothache, like his father's earlier toothache, is a sign of his impending death.





At one point in the novel, Thomas tells his sister Tony that sometimes success masks the problems at the heart of something. He is right to think that success may not always tell the whole story and his whole family, towards the end of the novel, is rotting from the inside out like a bad tooth.

## The Protestant Work Ethic

The novel is both a celebration of and a critique of the bourgeois or merchant/business class. Mann clearly admires this class in the person of the Consul Johann Buddenbrook. Johann's religious devotion and moral uprightness make his business dealings a kind of extension of his morality. He desires to see his family prosper and wishes no ill on any man. In the person of Johann we see the businessman combined with a devout religious and moral foundation. Mann seems to admire this kind of businessman.

His son Thomas is a different sort of man. He retains the business skill of his father and maybe even exceeds his father's skill in business. He lacks any of the religious or moral views of his father, however. For Johann, life is a kind of celebration, for Thomas it is a chore. Thomas strives for more and more wealth and respect but realizes once he has achieved the respect and wealth he desires that it has not made him happy. Thomas lacks charity with his brother and moves his sister into one after another bad relationships. He thinks he is helping the family, but because he lacks the piety of his father, he has no way of knowing what is good for the family. The author seems to be saying that once business and indeed life are divorced from some greater moral or even aesthetic purpose, life becomes horrific and tedious. Tony believes she has the same devotion to duty and morality as her father, but she never really understood it and every time she tries to act on that duty it leads to disaster. Mann seems to be saying that if life becomes merely a striving after more and more material things, life will not have any meaning.



# Style

## Point of View

Buddenbrooks is told from the point of view of a third party narrator who has knowledge of future events. It is not clear if the narrator is completely omniscient, but he clearly knows the upcoming events of the family. The reader then is given an objective view of the family from the narrator, or at least an impartial view. Part of the interest and excitement that comes from this novel about the decline of a family is the sense, due in large part to techniques in narration, that a character is plunging into an enterprise that is doomed. We get that sense when Grunlich is first courting and then marries Tony. Johann, Tony, and Thomas all seem to think that Grunlich is a fine man and good marriage potential. The reader, though, from the start knows better. It is not anything the narrator tells the reader directly, but it is the subtle foreshadowing and hints of impending doom. This happens throughout the novel, for instance with little Hanno at the end of the novel. Although there is no reason to think that Hanno will die suddenly given what we know in the novel, the narrator does a good job of making the reader expect tragedy.

This technique is evident even in the title, which tells the reader right from the start that the novel is about the decline of a family. Still, because of the way the story is constructed, the reader still feels suspense and anticipation during what has become an inevitable decline.

## Setting

The novel is set in a small German free town in the north of Germany. The town is probably modeled on the author's hometown of Luebeck, but there is no mention of the name of the town in the novel. The town is a free and independent city-state in a not yet unified Germany. Most of the scenes in the novel take place either in the home on Meng Strasse or on Broad Strasse. The elder Johann home purchased the Meng Strasse from another merchant family that had recently lost all of their money. It is the setting of the first scene with the family in the novel. The home is passed down to the younger Johann and is kept by his wife until she dies. Thomas, wishing to show his wealth and prestige, builds a new, more luxurious mansion after he takes control of the family and becomes senator. Both of these homes, but especially the Meng Strasse home, symbolize the family in general and their sale at the end of the novel is the final sign of decline.

There are also scenes outside of the town. Tony visits the Kroger estate outside of town in an important episode at the beginning of the novel and she also lives in Munich with her second husband later in the novel. There is also an important episode with Tony at the seashore in Travemunde where she meets and falls in love with Morten. Throughout



the rest of the novel, the seashore will represent freedom and lack of responsibility while Broad street will begin to seem more and more oppressive.

## Language and Meaning

This novel is translated into English from the German so we are probably losing a great deal of Mann's style and linguistic charm. For instance, it is clear that Mann uses several of the German dialects to differentiate between a characters' classes. Although German is one language, different dialects can vary so much region to region that a German speaker in one part many not understand another German speaker at all because of differences in dialect. The translator tries to use cockney and southern dialects to approximate this, but none of our dialect differences are as severe as some of the differences in German.

There is also a strong focus on color in the novel, especially the color yellow. Yellow is the color of decay and death in this novel and it shows up constantly. The characters never comment on the color and they seem not to be affected by it consciously. The recurrent use of color and other things like honey is an example of a leit motif used in the novel to evoke a certain sense without the author having to come right out an tell the reader something. This technique is taken from the work of Richard Wagner who employed the technique in his operas on a large scale. The leit motif is an efficient way to transmit an emotion or a sense of doom or joy to the reader, often without the conscious mind picking up on what is going on. This kind of manipulation allows the author to evoke dense and complex emotions in simple situations.

## Structure

The novel is fairly long, about 600 pages, and is divided into 11 parts. These parts do not take place over uniform amounts of time. Some parts last only a year or two, some much longer. This is also true about the time between the parts. The story of the family Buddenbrook is told in parts that act as episodes. That is, the parts do not necessarily or usually pick up the story line from the previous part; rather each part is its own, somewhat self-contained, episode in the life of the family. Chapters within the part are more discrete episodes, usually focusing on one character. Towards the end of the novel, the parts increasingly end with the death of one or more characters.

The novel begins with a housewarming dinner at the family's new Meng Strasse home. This is the initial point of unity in the story where the entire family is together and harmonious. From that point the novel shows the disintegration until all the characters that attended the original dinner are dead, save Tony, and the Meng Strasse house is gone. The novel then is structured so that we keep the original starting point in mind while we watch the family drift further and further apart. No doubt we are also supposed to feel the passage of time in the same way that Thomas feels it throughout the novel. Towards the end, we wonder as does Thomas, "where did all the time go?" This is true despite the fact that we have followed the family from the beginning.



## Quotes

"But this bitter feud with my own brother, with your eldest son, is like a hidden crack in the building we have erected. A family should be united, Father. It must keep together. 'A house divided against itself will fall.'" (35)

"My son [Thomas], attend with zeal to thy business by day, but do none that hinders thee from thy sleep at night." (137)

"Work, pray, and save." (137)

"Why, even the lamps aren't lighted. That's going too far with the revolution." (150)

"She [Tony] had, unconsciously, the feeling that any trait of hers, no matter of what kind, was a family tradition and therefore worthy of respect." (159)

"Bankrupt—that was more dreadful than death, that was catastrophe, ruin, shame, disgrace, misery, despair." (168)

"The sad thing is that one lives but once—one can't begin life over again. And one would know so much better the second time!" (274)

"Everything gets done too slowly—so when it is finished, the pleasure is already gone." (337)

"...often, the outward and visible material signs and symbols of happiness and success only show themselves when the process of decline has already set in. The outer manifestations take time—like the light of that star up there, which may in reality be already quenched, when it looks to be shining the brightest." (338)

"A man who stands firm and confident in his own calling, whatever it may be, recognizes only it, understands only it, values only it." (372-3)

"God gives strength to one, and not to another. But that is the way you are made, Thomas. You are self-righteous." (453)

"Was not every human being a mistake and a blunder?...The human being stares hopelessly through the barred window of his personality at the high walls of outward circumstances, till Death comes and calls him home to freedom!" (513)

"Yes, he strove to subscribe to the whole confused unconvincing story, which required no intelligence, only obedient credulity; and which, when the last anguish came, would sustain one in a firm and childlike faith.—But would it really?" (515)



## Topics for Discussion

Explain the relationship between Thomas and Christian. How is this relationship symbolic in the novel?

Explain Tony's views about duty to her family. In what way are these views similar to her father's, in what way different?

Why is Tony involved in so many failed marriages?

Describe the liot motif technique used in the novel. Give examples.

In what way is Buddenbrooks a critique of the German bourgeoisie? In what way is it a celebration of the same class?

Explain the differences in virtue and value between Thomas and his father Johann.

The novel brings out the conflict and differences between art and commerce. Explain how this theme is developed in the novel.