

Music, Myth and Modernity: From Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* to Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*

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Abstract

This essay seeks to address the literary uses of music and myth, and the relation between the two, in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. While the roles of music and myth have been well documented as separate subjects in *Doctor Faustus*, few studies treat the intrinsic relationship between the two and show how, when considered together, they can inform our reading. The essay will begin with a close reading of the literary depiction of Adrian Leverkühn's compositions in relation to the 'Faustian' episodes of *Doctor Faustus*. I will juxtapose these episodes with the Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy and the concept of Dionysian music that are central to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Mann, like many other notable twentieth century novelists such as Joyce and Proust, chose the arduous task of representing ineffable subjects such as music and myth in prose in an attempt to test the limits of language and the novel as an art form. However, it will be evidenced that the connection between music and myth, which is at the heart of Nietzsche's book, was revitalized most prominently in the twentieth century by Mann in *Doctor Faustus*. Moreover, this essay will illustrate that a unique and fresh perspective on *Doctor Faustus* can be gained through a consideration of the relationship between music and myth; a configuration which, though underresearched, is central to literary modernism.

Keywords: Music, Myth, Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, Nietzsche.

1. Introduction: Music, Faust and Nietzsche

"Technical musical studies frighten and bore me", writes Thomas Mann in his exposé *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of Doctor Faustus* (1961, 40), and yet he did embark on technical musical studies, and with a vigour and depth that is unmatched in the modernist

period. Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is arguably the most comprehensive philosophical meditation on music in prose that we have. Nowhere else in the history of the modernist novel has an author spent such considerable time and resource acquainting themselves with the study of music for the purpose of creating a fictional composer and fictional music. However, it is from focusing on representations of music and myth, and the relationship between them, that the novel's characters, narrative and major themes (and Mann's own artistic and philosophical preoccupations) can be elucidated in a unique and interesting way.

Mann notes that he first had the idea of conceiving a Faust story in relation to *Tonio Kröger* in 1901 (1961, 17-18) and it will be forty-six years between this demonic impulse and the publication of *Doctor Faustus*. Thomas Mann's friend and colleague Erich Kahler offers the explanation in his classic and still immensely useful study *The Orbit of Thomas Mann* that *Tonio Kröger* treats:

[T]he innate conflict between the bourgeois and the artist, the inevitable, inborn alienation of the artist from the common world and its blond normality. This personal problem of his, together with the corresponding outer problem of the cultural situation in which he grew up, directed Thomas Mann toward the Faustus motif. To him, Faustus represents the most highly developed exponent of his arch-experience; he appears as a cosmic Tonio Kröger, a Tonio Kröger raised to an ultimate epochal and human significance. (111)

It is significant, however, that Mann, consciously or not, waited until writing his 'music novel' before realizing his Faust story. In having his Faust character be a musician, Mann is both responding to a historically productive relationship (that between music and myth, as found in the work of romantic composers) and stating the explicit cultural and artistic 'Germanness' of his protagonist. For Mann, the very best of Germany is represented by her music: it is therefore unsurprising that he conceives of Adrian Leverkühn as a musical genius in the line stemming from Bach to Beethoven to Wagner. This recalls Nietzsche's claim that:

Out of the Dionysian root of the German spirit a power has arisen which, having nothing in common with the primitive conditions of Socratic culture, can neither be explained nor excused by it, but which is rather felt by this culture as something terribly inexplicable and overwhelmingly hostile—*German music* as we must understand it, particularly in its vast solar orbit from Bach to Beethoven, from Beethoven to Wagner. (119)

Adrian also acts as a surrogate composer for Mann's contemporary Schoenberg and his ilk. In response to Nietzsche's challenge that "without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of its creativity" (135), Mann places Leverkühn firmly within the German Faust tradition and portrays him as a Dionysian anti-hero (in Nietzsche's sense) so as to reinstate both the value of myth and reflect the tragedy of their shared culture.

Mann's retelling of the Faust myth aligns most closely with the tales set out in the *Faustbuch*, a pseudo-biographical chapbook of stories concerning the life of Johann Georg Faust (Doctor Faustus) published by Johann Spies in 1587. Kahler underscores that the two main features Mann takes from this account are firstly that "Faust was of humble but respectable parentage, but so precociously clever that a wealthy relative adopted him and paid for his schooling and university studies. [...] The second important feature is, of

course, the pact with the Devil. So swiftly says the Spies book, did Faust advance in the art of magic that he was soon a position to trace the magic circle and summon up an evil spirit” (98-99). However, in many ways, as with Leverkühn’s *Lamentation* in relation to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, it is a reaction to, and negation of, the Faust stories that came before it, particularly Goethe’s *Faust*. In linking the fate of his Faust with that of Germany in the early twentieth century, Mann, unlike Goethe, leaves the fate of his Faust unresolved, and the possibility of redemption lingering in the air. Yet in having his Faust be a musician, Mann is also extending the traditional confines of the myth itself, as conventionally the Faust figure is willing to trade his soul for worldly knowledge: experiences that happen during his time on earth. Leverkühn, however, makes his pact in exchange for intoxicating time in which to create authentic, revolutionary music that will live on after his death. This music, which Leverkühn, prompted by the devil, believes will break through the cultural epoch, is the only hope for redemption that Mann provides us with. This draws on one of the more complicated aspects of the myth: whether the corrupted soul, or in this case the corrupted music, can ever be saved; and in keeping with the allegory, Mann invites us to mediate on whether Germany can be redeemed after the horrors of National Socialism and the Second World War. Mann seems to imply that the possibility of such salvation will come from the spheres of art and culture. The privileged position of music in German intellectual history (and the relationship between music and the demonic) will be explored in this essay in relation to the Faust myth. The demonic music is aided by the devil and is the result of Adrian’s ‘signing of the pact,’ marked by the syphilitic infection that comes from his sexual union with the prostitute Esmerelda. The inspiration for the meeting between Adrian and Esmerelda is based on an anecdote of Nietzsche’s visit to a brothel as a student, which Mann reproduces almost verbatim in his novel from Nietzsche’s friend Paul Jakob Deussen’s (1845-1919) account of the incident (29). The main complication of Mann’s nefarious retelling of the Faust myth here stems from the fact that the incident with Esmerelda is seemingly of secondary importance when considering Adrian’s ‘fate.’ The reader infers that the decision to enter into union with the devil (along with his decision to become a musician) was established much earlier in the novel. Mann’s Faustian myth, his negation of the prior versions of the myth, along with various episodic negations of high cultural achievements, such as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, give the novel an air of finality. In essence then, *Doctor Faustus* is a novel of conclusions, both in music and myth, in which the fate of both are intimately bound to the fate of Germany.

It has been well documented since Erich Heintel’s study *Adrian Leverkühn und Friedrich Nietzsche* (1950) that many of the biographical facts of Adrian’s life as portrayed in *Doctor Faustus* have been modelled on Nietzsche’s. However, few scholars have outlined the extent to which the depiction of music and myth, and indeed of Adrian Leverkühn, in *Doctor Faustus* can be juxtaposed with Nietzsche’s Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy. Nor has there been much focus on the multi-faceted ways in which *The Birth of Tragedy* can function as a base from which to explore the relationship between music and myth in the modern novel and thus inform our reading. For Michael Mann, music is the perfect vehicle through which to explore the demonic in art, because it is at once “calculative order and chaos-breeding irrationality” (1956, 37), which immediately brings to mind Nietzsche’s Apollo/

Dionysus dichotomy. This essay will primarily focus on the 'Faustian' episodes of the novel and Adrian Leverkühn's music. It will begin with a brief discussion of myth before turning to a critical analysis of Adrian Leverkühn's two major musical compositions: the devilish oratorio *Apocalypsis cum figuris* and the musico-mythic masterwork *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*.

2. Prelude: Mann and Myth

What is a myth? Is a myth an untruth or a trans-historical truth? Could it be both at once? And what does it mean for a literary artist to re-tell a particular myth? Before delving into this essay, it will be worth lingering on these questions in relation to Mann's use of myth as presented in *Doctor Faustus*. Mann wrote in a letter to the mythologist Karl Kerényi that he approached the technical study of music as a subject in *Doctor Faustus* with the same vigour with which he approached the study of myth in his tetralogy *Joseph and His Brothers* (1961, 41). This is not to say that myth is any less central to *Doctor Faustus* than it is to the *Joseph* novels, however. Mann's literary treatment of myth in *Doctor Faustus* is indeed bolstered by the fact that he came to the writing of *Doctor Faustus* armed with the mythic knowledge he had accumulated whilst studying for the *Joseph* tetralogy. Mann uses the Faust myth to serve particular functions in his novel, and it is from Nietzsche's aesthetic mythology and its relation to music, as presented in *The Birth of Tragedy* as the foundation of all art, that we note this book's intriguing influence on literary modernism. As Mann himself wrote to Karl Kerényi: "[i]t appears that a confrontation with the mythical sphere becomes the crowning, the chosen task of the greatest novelists" (1975, 44-5). Moreover, for Mann, the exposition of Nietzsche's (via Wagner) conception of myth is palpable as he is placed firmly in this German intellectual lineage. The theory of myth as a subject with ancient origins which offers a more holistic form of expression than conventional historic subject matter was powerfully attractive to both Wagner and Nietzsche and results in myth functioning as a living symbol that has universal qualities and thus transcends history. It is this aspect of myth that made it such a popular subject for romantic composers; it is also clear that myths in which music plays a central role, such as the Sirens, Orpheus and Eurydice, Don Juan and so forth, were particularly attractive to modernist authors. To represent the intersection of two ineffable subjects (music and myth) is both an artistic challenge and a literary innovation; Mann thus makes the Faust myth musical.

The Faust myth is the point at which Mann begins to build up and eventually break down the allegory of Adrian Leverkühn and Germany's fate. That the Faust myth is inextricably entwined with German intellectual history, literature and music and therefore deeply rooted in the German psyche is a fact Mann exploits in *Doctor Faustus*. Mann's retelling of the Faust myth therefore both alludes to connotations associated with the reception and history of the myth and serves to place *Doctor Faustus* within a canonic tradition, in line with Nietzsche's proclamation upon arriving to take up his chair at Basel: "[p]reservation of tradition is the main task" (Bertram, 13). Mann's original spin on the myth is for his Faust figure to be a musician, and there are telling reasons for this which help us understand his choice. Mann needs the Faust myth to establish Leverkühn

in a rich tradition of German music and allay any qualms we may have about the authenticity of his musical genius; a Faust figure is always destined for temporary greatness. Moreover, just as Zeitblom idolizes Leverkühn, Mann seems to live in the shadow of the authentic genius that he attributes to composers. Indeed, he appears to separate the writer and composer and insinuate that the realm of immediate authentic artistic genius belongs almost exclusively to the musical composer (such as Mozart or Beethoven), a fact reiterated by his highly self-conscious style of writing which is manifest in the narrative. However, it is precisely for this reason that Mann chose to make his Faust a musician, as this enabled him to both represent contemporary society (Faust/Germany selling its soul to the devil/Hitler) and the universal quality of the myth: the individual's unquenchable thirst for knowledge. The overtly Nietzschean aspect of Mann's use of myth is a response to Nietzsche's elaboration of the Apollonian and Dionysian as forces observable in art and nature. For Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Apollonian and Dionysian are symbolic of artistic impulses which, when combined, result in the pinnacle of tragic art, last observed in pre-Socratic Greek tragedy. The Apollonian is representative of the rational, the image, it appeals to logic and is best represented in the plastic arts. The Dionysian by contrast represents the irrational, intoxication, it appeals to emotions and instincts and is best represented in music. Nietzsche (82) attributes the annihilation of Greek tragedy to Socrates, and his disciple, Euripides, who elevated the Apollonian (to a new form 'Socratic') at the cost of repressing the Dionysian in tragic art. Mann exhibits the Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy most palpably in the representation of his protagonist via his narrator Zeitblom, particularly in the latter's descriptions of and responses to Adrian's 'Dionysian music.' The very enterprise of representing a Dionysian composer and his music in a form that is very much in line with Nietzsche's concept of the Apollonian (the novel) can itself be considered a reaction to Nietzsche's formulation. This results in a retelling of the Faust myth that, enhanced by Nietzsche's mythic dichotomy, has national significance while simultaneously conveying the transcendental and trans-historical properties of myth. In portraying Leverkühn via the national (Faust) and transcendental artistic myths (Apollo/Dionysus) Mann moves away from the Greek and biblical realm of mythos that was so agreeable to Kerényi and found expression in *Joseph and His Brothers*. Indeed, it is striking that although Kerényi expresses genuine excitement at the prospect of reading and hearing about the progress of *Doctor Faustus* in his correspondence with Mann in *Mythology and Humanism* there is a reticence in his tone regarding the literary uses and understanding of myth in *Doctor Faustus*. In *Joseph and his Brothers* Mann's (1975, 165) use of myth is somewhat closer to Kerényi's mythological position (in keeping, for example, with the ancient Greek and biblical traditions) and Mann is conscious of this, though he hopes that Kerényi will find interesting mythic parallels between the two novels. Kerényi therefore retains his reserve in the correspondence about *Doctor Faustus* until two years after the novel was published when he apprehensively describes it to Mann (1975, 174-75) as a Christian novel in a letter dated June 16, 1949 to which Mann positively responds: "[y]our remarks about the religious, Christian character of *Faustus* struck me and gave me a sense of satisfaction that comes with the truth" (1975, 178). The Christian character of the novel then alludes both to Nietzsche's (and Adrian's) complicated relationship with

Christianity and hints at the broader theme of finality, which is ultimately expressed via Dionysian music and a Faustian pact. The novel can justifiably be considered successful in keeping multiple myths alive, which chimes with Nietzsche's view that myth is palpably observable in art and life: both of which, he argues in *The Birth of Tragedy*, are intimately bound. Mann's use and understanding of myth is therefore closer to Nietzsche's own mythological position, as expressed in aesthetic terms in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Thomas Mann wrote to Karl Kerényi in September 1945: "[t]he pact with the devil is the main theme of the book, which covers the period from 1885 [Adrian's birth] to the arrival of Hitler, but stands with one foot in the German sixteenth century" (1975, 20). The scene in which Adrian encounters the devil, as recounted in his letter to Zeitblom, is thus worth examining before delving into the *Apocalypse* oratorio. The 'foot in the sixteenth century' refers to the devil of the *Faustbuch* (Mann 1961, 138-139), which Mann is harking back to in his retelling of the Faustian pact. Unlike prior Faustus, we learn of Adrian's pact retrospectively, via a letter Zeitblom reproduces in his faux-biography, pointing yet again to Mann's self-reflection on the ineffability of the mythic and musical. In a kind of phantasmagoria, the devil and Adrian have a heated intellectual discussion, parodying exchanges between Mephistopheles and Faust in Goethe's *Faust* (Pfaff, 17). The devil appears in various forms and guises, each of which, as Pfaff notes, serves two functions: firstly they show that the devil has accompanied Adrian throughout his life (recalling the fact that the pact itself is more an acknowledgement of destiny than a conscious choice); and secondly that they imitate various people Adrian has known, such as Kretschmar, Schleppfuss, and Kumpf. These professors, all of whom possess devilish qualities, act as Mephisto does in Goethe's *Faust*: lecturing (and thus influencing) young students (Pfaff, 27). The various guises also complicate our judgment of Adrian's sanity: the fact that they recall the physical descriptions of characters we have met previously complicates the fantastical aspects of Adrian's encounter with the "cold demon," as Mann described him to Kerényi (1975, 20). The most significant mask the devil wears is perhaps that of Adorno himself, following an exposition on the relative merits and authenticity of 'fresh ideas' in music with reference to Rimsky-Korsakov, Brahms and Beethoven (Mann 1999, 397). Adrian notices that the devil has adopted the appearance of:

[A] better gentleman, has a white collar and a bow-tie, spectacles rimmed in horn atop his hooked nose, behind which somewhat reddened eyes shine moist and dark; the face a mingling of sharpness and softness; the nose sharp, the lips sharp, but the chin soft, with a dimple in it, and yet another dimple in the cheek above; pale and vaulted the brow, from which the hair indeed retreats upward, whereas that to the sides stands thick black and woolly—an intellectualist, who writes of art, of music, for vulgar newspapers, a theorist and critic, who is himself a composer, in so far as thinking allows. (Mann 1999, 253)

Fittingly, the devil then offers a lengthy discourse on the nature of the history of the illusive in music and clarifies some of the details of the pact (Mann 1999, 256-59). The devil, as music critic and intellectual, lectures Adrian and tempts him to succumb to barbarism and push a new agenda for music that will break through the sterile, bourgeois age, and thus cement his fame. That music, myth and madness are all intimately tied up here, as examples of three distinct ineffable subjects, is testament to the complexity of

Mann's aim of telling the story of his era. Health (mental and physical), music and the mythic are all themes which Mann tackled throughout his oeuvre but it is in *Doctor Faustus* that they are synthesized, in harmony and discord, with unrelenting rigor. However, to return to Adrian's musical progression in order to illuminate the relevance of this to the novel's progression, it is timely to turn to the first work touched by the icy hand of the devil, the *Apocalipsis cum figuris*, and the useful ways in which Nietzsche's Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy can further elucidate the text.

3. Apocalypse Now!

Mann's reworking of the Faust myth in relation to the Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy and the concept of Dionysian music is palpable in Leverkühn's music. The dichotomy is particularly prevalent in Zeitblom's narrative description of the devilish oratorio *Apocalipsis cum figuris*. The description of Adrian's creative process (post-infection) evokes the Dionysian: when composing *Apocalypse*, Leverkühn remained "in a state of high tension [...] his rush of ideas gave him no rest, made him their slave" (Mann 1999, 378). Zeitblom's description not only alludes to the Faustian pact in which Leverkühn is promised "[g]reat time, mad time, most devilish time, in which to soar higher and higher" (Mann 1999, 246), but also makes explicit the Dionysian presence in Leverkühn's creative process and in the composition itself. This is not to suggest that the myths of Faust and Dionysus are interchangeable, as T. J. Reed rightly points out: "the Dionysia[n] is not a myth like Faust. It is a way of describing forces observable in man and society" (397). Thomas Mann's preoccupation with Dionysus does more than affirm the Leverkühn-Nietzsche link: it is fundamental to our understanding of the novel. To emphasise the Dionysian in Leverkühn, whose life and work reflect the period in which he lives, is to insinuate "that political and social phenomena, [...] are psychological in origin [...] And that origin is shown to be Dionysian" (Reed, 399). This is evident if one subscribes to the prevailing view that Mann's novel is a reflection on and diagnosis of Germany's decline into National Socialism and attempts to understand and salvage Germany's culture and identity; "Dionysus was after all the god of regeneration, something German culture and Mann himself had been seeking" (Reed, 406). It is clear then, that Mann's preoccupation with Faust and Dionysus in the text is multifaceted—evidenced by Leverkühn's artistic process, the return to primitivism and barbarism, and, as suggested by Reed, the psychological origin of Germany's descent into Nazism or hell.

To explore the links between Leverkühn, Germany, music and myth in more detail I will turn to Zeitblom's description of the *Apocalypse* oratorio itself:

Frozen within in it [ordered music], as a ... barbaric rudiment of premusical days, is the sliding tone, the glissando—a musical device ... in which I have always tended to hear something anticultural, indeed anti-human, even demonic. What I have in mind is Leverkühn's ... extraordinary frequent use of the sliding tone [...] that its dissonance is the expression of everything that is lofty, serious, devout, and spiritual, while the harmonic and tonal elements are restricted to the world of hell ... Adrian's powers of sardonic imitation, deeply rooted in the melancholy of his own nature, become productive here in parodies of the diverse musical styles in which hell's insipid excess indulges: burlesqued French impressionism, bourgeois drawing-room music,

Tchaikovsky, music hall songs, the syncopations and rhythms and rhythmic somersaults of jazz—it all whirls round like a brightly glittering tilting march, yet always sustained by the main orchestra, speaking its serious, dark, difficult language and asserting with radical rigor of the work's intellectual status. (Mann 1999, 394-95)

The use of the glissando, which Zeitblom describes as “anticultural,” “anti-human,” and “demonic,” conveys Leverkühn's conscious lapse into barbarism which indicates the fulfilment of the devil's prophecy that Adrian: “will break through the age itself, the cultural epoch [...] and dare at barbarism [...] because it comes after humanitarianism [...] barbarism has a better understanding [...] than does a culture [...] which saw only culture, only humanitarianism, but not excess, not the paradox, the mystical passion, the ordeal so utterly outside bourgeois experience” (Mann 1999, 258-59). This is significant, as it not only elucidates Mann's own unsettling observation that the contemporary barbarism he is facing was itself born out of liberal humanism, but reinforces the Nietzschean view in aesthetics that it is a necessary condition for art in order to reaffirm a spiritual unity between the artist and Dionysus. Leverkühn's “sardonic imitation” imbued with the “melancholy of his own nature” results in the parodies referred to in the last quote. These parodies are described by Zeitblom as “productive,” as Adrian is simultaneously avoiding artistic sterility, pre-empting the development of the formally rigorous twelve-tone system and mirroring Germany's descent into barbarism; the latter of which Zeitblom is either seemingly unaware or in denial. This is shown by Zeitblom's consistent rejection of the claim that Leverkühn's work could be seen as an example of barbarism as he states: “Soullessness!—I know very well that is what people mean when they attach the word “barbarism” to Adrian's creation. Have they ever, if only with the reading eye, listened to certain lyrical passages [...] in the *Apocalypse*—pieces of song, accompanied by a chamber orchestra, which, like a fervent plea for a soul, could bring tears to the eyes of a harder man than I?” (Mann 1999, 396-97) Here it is the Apollonian lyric and not the Dionysian music that Zeitblom is defending against charges of barbarism. In other words, the lyrical passages appear as language: we are told they have the capacity to appeal to “the reading eye” (reminding us of Kretzschmar's lecture on the visual qualities of music), and are therefore outside the realm of absolute, or pure, instrumental music which underscores these vocal passages with such rigour that it can reduce listeners to tears. Mann is weaving Nietzsche's complex dialectic between Apollo and Dionysus into Zeitblom's reaction to and defence of the *Apocalypse* here: as Nietzsche proclaims in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “Apollinian illusion [...] aims to deliver us from the Dionysian flood and excess” (129). It is clear that Zeitblom is susceptible to such an Apollonian illusion whereas Leverkühn, having consciously made his Faustian pact, is not; indeed, Mann's depiction of Leverkühn almost leads the reader to believe he is aware of the relation between the two myths throughout the novel, as exemplified by his conflicting emotional and physical states during composition and *in* the compositions themselves. The *Apocalypse* foreshadows both Leverkühn's and Germany's downfall and although Zeitblom cannot accept the charge of barbarism, he is inclined to “see some objective connection or symbolic parallel” (Mann 1999, 360) between Leverkühn's health and Germany's impending disaster. The allegory of the Faustian bargain leading Leverkühn and Germany into such decline is

expressed almost entirely through musical composition, taking the connection between music and myth to its most extreme.

Leverkühn's music has a profound impact on our reading of the novel and his composition *Apocalipsis cum figuris* evokes the Faust myth, the Dionysian and the difficulties of representing music in language. Mann, given his sustained preoccupation with representing music in prose, was evidently aware of Walter Pater's famous claim in his essay "The School of Giorgione" that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (1986, 86). This implicitly refers to the union of subject matter and form in art which, according to Pater, was predominantly accomplished in music. The response to this is clear in *Doctor Faustus*; however, I would contend that Mann is aware of the pitfalls of merely attempting to recreate the effect of music through language and *Doctor Faustus* can be seen as an example of the limitations of Pater's assumption. Mann, like Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu* [*In Search of Lost Time*], chose the more difficult task of representing fictional music by a fictional composer, and although in some cases we have reference points in the aural realm, it is mainly in the realm of the imagination that readers are to comprehend Leverkühn's music. In *Doctor Faustus* language does not simply function to recreate the abstract, emotional conditions that music inspires in its audience. Mann's pseudo-biographic novel requires a more complex development of themes and ideas regarding Leverkühn's artistic progress, creative process and the philosophical essence of music. The following literary depiction of Adrian's *Apocalypse* oratorio will demonstrate this:

I have always feared Adrian's penchant for laughter ... I feel that same fear, as [the *Apocalypse* oratorio] sweeps across fifty bars, beginning with the giggle of a single voice, only to spread rapidly and seize choir and orchestra, then, amid rhythmic upheavals and counterblows and jettisons, to swell to a horrible *fortissimo tutti*, to a dreadful mayhem of yowls, yelps, screeches, bleats, bellows, howls, and whinnies, to the mocking, triumphant laughter of hell. ... For this hellish laughter at the end of part one has its counterpart in the totally strange and wonderful children's chorus, ... that immediately thereafter opens part two—a piece of cosmic music of the spheres, icy, clear, transparent as glass, austere dissonant, to be sure, but whose sound is so sweet, might I say, so inaccessibly alien and superterrestrial that it fills the heart with hopeless longing. (Mann 1999, 396-97)

Zeitblom's description confirms the association between Leverkühn's music and the supernatural; namely with Dionysus, the devil and, subsequently, Faust. Mann is responding to Nietzsche's assertion of the importance of "the *rebirth of German myth!*" (137), and does so in the most Nietzschean way possible: through music that responds to the Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy. The "hellish laughter" evokes Dionysus, and the "children's chorus" simultaneously acts as an Apollonian veil over Dionysian ecstasy and recalls the chorus of Greek tragedy, which has been lost in art; a fact that Nietzsche laments in *The Birth of Tragedy*. The "inaccessibly alien and superterrestrial" which "fills the heart with hopeless longing" supports such a reading. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, outlines his concerns of German cultural decline and associates it with the destruction of the German myth; he therefore urges his readers to embrace the rebirth of German myth in order to reassert the German spirit, which he believes is only achievable through Dionysian music as it has the

capacity “to give birth to *myth*” (Nietzsche, 103). In having Zeitblom describe Adrian’s music in these terms, Mann is strengthening the correlation between Leverkühn, Germany and her cultural heritage via his Faustian pact. Adrian’s music therefore informs the reader of Mann’s preoccupation with myth and the potential future of German culture.

The description of the *Apocalypse* reminds the reader of the contents of the letter outlining Adrian’s conversation with the devil in Palestrina. Amongst varied topics of debate recounted in the letter, there is a brief moment when the devil discusses the limits of language. When asked by Adrian to give a description of hell, the devil retorts that it “is the secret delight and security of hell [...] that it lies hidden from language” (Mann 1999, 261). This would suggest that there are certain things, hell in this case, which are outside the boundaries of language, as language is merely capable of providing “weak symbols” (Mann 1999, 261) to represent what it fails to describe. A parallel can be drawn between hell and music as in this instance Mann is talking of the unknowable, the supernatural, just as one cannot *know* Adrian’s music, as it is fictional. However, it is interesting that immediately following the devil’s discourse, Mann provides a vivid description of hell:

That is the secret delight and security of hell, that it cannot be denounced, that it lies hidden from language, [...] which is why the words ‘subterranean,’ ‘cellar,’ ‘thick walls,’ ‘soundlessness,’ ‘oblivion,’ ‘hopelessness,’ are but weak symbols. One must, my good man, be entirely content with *symbolis* when one speaks of hell [...]. It is right to say that it will be quite loud in a sound-tight hell, loud beyond measure, filling the ear to more than overflowing with bawling and squalling, yowling, moaning, bellowing, gurgling, screeching, wailing, croaking, pleading, and exuberant tortured cries, so that no one will hear his own tune, for it is smothered in the general, tight, dense, hellish jubilee and abject trilling extracted by the eternal infliction of the unbelievable and unanswerable. (1999, 260-61)

The onomatopoeic “bawling and squalling, yowling, moaning, bellowing, gurgling, screeching, wailing, croaking, pleading, and exuberant tortured cries,” is a clear parallel of Zeitblom’s later description of the hellish music of Leverkühn’s *Apocalypse* with its “yowls, yelps, screeches, bleats, bellows, howls, and whinnies, to the mocking, triumphant laughter of hell” (Mann 1999, 397). The language employed by both the devil and Zeitblom is emotive, vivid and creates a clear image of hell and Adrian’s music in the reader’s imagination. Mann’s use of onomatopoeia and the rapid succession of words also demonstrate how he uses language to musical effect and remind us of other examples of authors attempting to recreate musical effects in prose, such as the “Sirens” episode of *Ulysses*, though Joyce takes these literary devices to their extreme. This, I would argue, implies that Mann is rejecting the assumption that language is *ipso facto* incapable of representing music; just as the devil nullifies his declaration that hell cannot be represented by language. In essence Mann treats music as a novelist treats any subject, and although there are clear examples of Adrian’s music being grounded in reality, such as the irresistible comparison between his early orchestral impressionism and Debussy and Ravel, his development of twelve-tone technique and Schoenberg (to whom it is really indebted) and a later comparison of the Faust cantata to Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy,” it is ultimately irrelevant to *hear* Leverkühn’s music outside of Mann’s literary depiction of it.

4. The Great Lament: Adrian Leverkühn's Masterpiece

The germ of Leverkühn's greatest work comes from his development and implementation of strict style, the twelve-tone technique, which led to the famous incident with Schoenberg who demanded that Mann acknowledge that the twelve-tone technique was his intellectual property (1961, 36). The *Lamentation* is also perhaps the most significant addition to the Faust tradition that comes in the music of the novel. Leverkühn's music resides outside the aural realm, but the question of how Mann represents his music is still highly significant. Thus we turn to Mann's representation of Leverkühn's music and technique via literary methods in the novel: firstly, the incorporation of the H-E-A-E-Es (B-E-A-E-E-flat in English notation) motif, and secondly, the incorporation of the twelve-tone technique of composition; as evidenced in both the *Brentano Cycle* and Leverkühn's final and most significant composition the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*. One of the major ways Mann incorporates musical technique in the novel is through Leverkühn's use of the note sequence signifying the name "Hetaera Esmeralda", the prostitute from whom Leverkühn knowingly contracts syphilis—solidifying his Faustian pact. It appears chiefly in the song which Zeitblom describes as "probably the most beautiful of the thirteen Brentano lieder ... 'Oh sweet maiden, how bad you are,' [...] and then in [...] *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*" (Mann 1999, 166). This five-note motif foreshadows Leverkühn's development of the twelve-tone technique and functions in "Oh Sweet Maiden" as the closest example thus far of "strict style," as Leverkühn outlines in the following:

"Just once, in the Brentano cycle," he said, "in the song 'Oh Sweet Maiden.' It all comes from ... a row of intervals capable of multiple variation, taken from the five notes B-E-A-E-E-flat—both the horizontal and vertical lines are determined and governed by it ... It is like a word, a key word that leaves its signature everywhere in the song and would like to determine it entirely. [...] One would have to proceed from here and build longer words from the twelve steps of the tempered semi-tone alphabet, words of twelve letters, specific combinations and interrelations of the twelve semi-tones, rows of notes—from which, then, the piece, a given movement, or a whole work of several movements would be strictly derived. [...] Free notes would no longer exist. That is what I would call strict style." (Mann 1999, 205)

Leverkühn likens his musical technique to "a key word that leaves its signature everywhere in the song", a description that both implies the Wagnerian leitmotif: the disease which will leave its mark, physically and mentally, on the composer; and demonstrates instances of language being *necessary* to represent music. It is worth pointing out at this juncture that nowhere in the novel does Mann incorporate musical notation, even though it would be entirely justifiable given the faux-biography style. Therefore, one can only assume that Mann believed language to be a satisfactory tool to express even the most technical of musical ideas. The motif itself constitutes an example of the dichotomy between Apollonian and Dionysian forces at work in Leverkühn: Adrian, although somewhat Dionysian in his pursuit and development of a strict rational mathematical method to create enharmonic music, ultimately creates an Apollonian system of composition whilst remaining entirely Dionysian in his passion for Esmeralda (Durrani, 657), for whom the work is cryptically devoted. Here we have a palpable example of how

music and myth are inextricably linked. Moreover, “Oh Maiden” is the first true example of Leverkühn experimenting with musical style and technique, and, as Reed argues, the piece is “actually born out of intoxication, not just in that Adrian’s serial method is invented after he infects himself, but because it stems from the source of his infection: Esmeralda” (386), alluding to his Faustian pact and the Dionysian state from which the piece was composed. This is further evidence of the configuration of music and myth in the novel. It is from this moment, however, that Leverkühn alternates between bouts of productive ecstasy and unproductive ill health, a feature of Nietzsche’s own life. The representation of Leverkühn’s music in conjunction with the Faust myth can shed light on aspects of his character that may otherwise have been overlooked: it is through his music that we discover the details of his life.

Leverkühn’s five-tone motif anticipates the development of his (Schoenberg’s) twelve-tone technique and is grounded in the phrase “For I die as both a wicked and good Christian” (Mann 1999, 512), which of course consists of twelve syllables. This technique is the chief mode of composition used in Adrian’s final work *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* and the piece as a whole is worth discussing. Firstly, the *Faust* cantata is described as being laden with “echo effects” (Mann 1999, 510): the repetition of the word ‘echo’ imprints its sound in the reader’s imagination and alludes to the memory of Leverkühn’s recently deceased nephew Nepomuk Schneidewein, known to him as ‘Echo,’ whose tragic death by cerebral meningitis we infer is the result of Leverkühn’s breaching of his pact with the devil by exhibiting love for his nephew. The intense and heart-wrenching suffering of Nepomuk is the catalyst for Leverkühn’s rebellion against the devil in the form of the emotionally expressive *Faustus* composition. Indeed, the episode with Echo is perhaps the most emotionally exhausting of the novel. Mann describes the intense physical and mental anguish experienced by the angelic child as being necessary to thaw Adrian’s cold demeanour and draw him out of a purely aesthetic, artistic experience of life into a more humane, emotional one. The mournful, antiphonal echo effect in the cantata is thus a small but poignant example of how Mann uses music via myth to convey key events of the novel. In other words, it demonstrates how Mann uses Adrian’s music to reflect and expound the myths of Faust and Dionysus. There are other such events in the novel which, when examined in light of this connection between music and myth, can elucidate the overarching themes of the novel. The major theme of the *Faustus* composition, for example, is worth looking at in detail in relation to this:

The words, “For I die as both a wicked and good Christian,” provide the general theme for this work of variations. If one counts syllables, one finds twelve in all, and the theme is set to all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, [...]. The theme lies at the basis of every sound heard, or better, it lies almost like a musical key, behind everything and builds the single identity of the most varied forms—the same identity that reigns between the crystal chorus of angels and the howls of hell in the *Apocalypse* [...] what a profoundly demonic jest!—as a result of the absoluteness of the form, music is liberated as language. (Mann 1999, 512)

Zeitblom’s narrative description of this music functions in various ways and informs our reading of Leverkühn’s fate. To die as both a “wicked and good Christian” is the

theme that “lies at the basis of every sound heard [...] like a musical key,” a somewhat juxtaposing assertion theologically speaking, but significant nonetheless as it is from this dichotomy that the reader’s subjectivity comes into play, as we must determine whether there is hope for Leverkühn after his imminent death. The theme provides the musical key because within this mode of composition there can be no formal key, as Leverkühn earlier discovered as a music student when discussing the cycle of fifths, which informs his development of this strict style. Pre-sensual-intoxication, Leverkühn was unable to harness what he was on the verge of discovering as a student, i.e. strict style, and formulate it into a liberating technique of composition; conversely, post-sensual-intoxication, he not only nurtures this technique but masters it. As Robert Vilain points out, Leverkühn “is fascinated by music, not as a form of emotional self-expression but for its abstract intellectuality, the arithmetical and geometric patterns discernible in it or creatable with it” (206). The Dionysian intoxication symbolized by his signing the pact with the devil (and his physical encounter with Esmeralda) results paradoxically in this intellectually cool form of compositional technique from which ‘purely expressive’ music occurs. The sense of the Dionysian is most prevalent in the music in Faust’s descent into hell in which “an orchestral piece of grand ballet music, a gallop of fantastic rhythmic variety” is described by Zeitblom as “an overwhelming eruption of lamentation after an orgy of infernal gaiety” (Mann 1999, 513). That this is born out of a work of the ‘utmost calculation’ is the essence of Nietzsche’s argument in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo; and Apollo, finally the language of Dionysus; and so the highest goal of tragedy and of all art is attained” (130).

5. Conclusion: Mann’s Faustian Myth and Redemption

In approaching Leverkühn’s music through a consideration of myth we are confronted with questions surrounding his fate and the possibility of salvation. It is clear that Leverkühn is consciously concerned with redemption: he confesses his sins to his peers and by implication appeals to the world from which he has isolated himself. This emotional appeal is as uncharacteristic as the ‘purely expressive’ *Faustus* composition, but it does reveal a sense of hope for his music, as ultimately it is for the music that Leverkühn died and through which he may enter into posterity. This offers a partial explanation as to why our somewhat unreliable narrator, Zeitblom, perceives to hear the high G of the cello resonating in the quiet after all other instruments have ceased playing *Faustus*, foreshadowing the melancholic fact that after Adrian’s death all that is left is his music. It appears a perfectly sensible reading of the novel to assume there is hope for Leverkühn’s music, if, as has been well established by T. J. Reed (1996) and others, there is indeed a link between Germany and Leverkühn; it follows that if there is hope for Germany’s cultural future there must also be hope for Leverkühn’s music: this is the crux from which to understand the *Faustus* composition. The purely orchestral conclusion of the piece is described as taking “the opposite path of the “Ode to Joy,” negating by its genius that transition from symphony to vocal jubilation. It is a revocation” (Mann 1999, 514). In other words, music is born out of language, as the opposite is true of Beethoven’s piece. This may function as a productive way of understanding the novel as a whole; while it is

perhaps an attractive proposition to identify Leverkühn and his music with existing composers and compositions, Mann, I would argue, is creating fictional music in his narrative for the realm of the imagination, for literary purposes, and to 'hear' it is irrelevant. This is not to say that it is not helpful to have aural reference points, particularly in the work of Beethoven, Wagner and Schoenberg, but we should not lose sight of the fact that Mann's primary focus is, of course, literary. If one recalls Kretzschmar's "terrifying tale" (Mann 1999, 62) at the beginning of the novel, of Beethoven struggling to finish the Credo with its problematic fugue (Mann 1999, 62-3), it is interesting to note that Beethoven would not 'hear' his late work in the strictest sense either. This is not so different from Leverkühn's own situation: he does not actually hear any of his work performed and, in a heightened dramatic and rare moment in which Adrian is about to perform parts of *Faustus* for a private audience, he collapses in a Dionysian fashion, striking a "strongly dissonant chord" (Mann 1999, 527), reminding us of his visit to the brothel where he first saw Esmeralda (Mann 1999, 152) and Nietzsche's collapse in Turin (Deussen, 29). The association with Beethoven and finality is made most obvious by Zeitblom who refers to the *Lament* as an "Ode to Sorrow" (Mann 1999, 514), the melancholic counterpoint to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

In many ways this essay has presented an argument against the primacy of music in *Doctor Faustus*, expounded the theme of finality and, above all, demonstrated the ways in which the intrinsic connection between music and myth can shed light on our understanding of the novel (as well as Mann's broader literary and philosophical concerns). This has been achieved with a particular reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in mind. I hope to have evidenced how the central tenets of Nietzsche's book can help us uncover key features of the novel that may otherwise have been overlooked. The latter sections of *The Birth of Tragedy*, though often dismissed as frivolous idolatry of Wagner, proved inspiration for modernist authors in profound and useful ways. Mann responds to the Apollo/Dionysus dichotomy in demonstrable ways and Nietzsche's concept of Dionysian music in particular chimes with literary depictions of music in *Doctor Faustus*. In the novel there is much subtle and explicit material in the narrative descriptions of music and myth which highlights the relationship between the two and evidences how both subjects perform parallel functions; from which we are able to elucidate the overarching themes of the entire work. The dichotomy between the intoxicating power of music and the rational method of composition is explored in *Doctor Faustus* at length through the representation of the Dionysian antihero Adrian Leverkühn and his music. Zeitblom, as a representative of the "inner emigration" has relatively conventional aesthetic views on art and oscillates between Apollonian rationale and Dionysian excess in his descriptions of, and responses to, his late friend's fate and music. The parallel between the conventionality of Zeitblom and the progressiveness of Leverkühn presents the reader with an additional layer in which Nietzsche's dichotomy can be read into the text. I hope to have demonstrated how the relation between music and myth indicates a literary and philosophical preoccupation which was revitalized during the modernist period, that clearly rewards study. It is thus in the modernist novel that, as literary subjects, the intersection of music and myth reaches its zenith. In *Doctor Faustus* Mann provides a deep and sustained philosophical meditation

on the essence of music by conveying with great plausibility the genesis of a genius composer, culminating in his development of an avant-garde compositional technique, fuelled by a Faustian pact; a highly original retelling of the myth which makes Faust a musician (for more on this see Carnegy, 1973). The treatment of music in relation to myth in *Doctor Faustus*, to some extent refutes, or at least probes, Nietzsche's claim that "language ... can never by any means disclose the innermost heart of music" (55).

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