

**DEATH IN VENICE: BRITTEN'S OPERATIC TRIUMPH
– AND –
THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOENBERG: TWELVE TONE MUSIC
IN THOMAS MANN'S DOCTOR FAUSTUS**

by

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Bachelor of Applied Arts, University College of the Fraser Valley 2002

EXTENDED ESSAYS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

In the
Graduate Liberal Studies Program

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Summer 2008

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ABSTRACT

Essay 1: Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* is rooted in Greek myth and the Apolline and Dionysian struggle presented by Nietzsche. Aschenbach's struggle and demise is understood through the boy Tadzio, who is best represented in the opera. In this paper I argue that Benjamin Britten's opera surpasses the emotional impact of either Mann's novella or Luchino Visconti's movie adaptation.

Keywords: Thomas Mann; Benjamin Britten; Luchino Visconti; Death in Venice; opera

Subject Terms: Mann, Thomas, 1875-1955 – Music.; Britten, Benjamin, 1913-76, Death in Venice.

Essay 2: In his novel *Doctor Faustus* Thomas Mann casts Adrian Leverkühn, a composer, as a modern version of Faust. In his pact with the devil, Leverkühn exchanges his soul for revolutionary musical genius. In this paper I argue that Thomas Mann's use of Schoenberg's revolutionary method of composing in twelve tones supplies the compelling justification for Leverkühn's pact with the devil.

Keywords: Thomas Mann; Arnold Schoenberg; Doctor Faustus; twelve tone music; Faust

Subject Terms: Mann, Thomas, 1875-1955 – Music.; Mann, Thomas, 1875-1955. Doctor Faustus.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Sandy and my daughter Elise who give me the inspiration and passion to follow my dreams wherever they may lead and to my parents who instilled in me a life long love of learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to Simon Fraser University and especially to the staff, faculty and fellow students in Graduate Liberal Studies for their encouragement, support and inspiration.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Rodney Sharman, who inspired me to write these papers and discover my own inner artist.

I thank Dr. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon for her dedicated encouragement and help with my academic development.

I thank Dr. Nicholas Clark of the Britten-Pears Institute for his kind assistance and encouragement, and to Nigel Luckhurst for his kind permission to use his photograph of Peter Pears and Robert Huguenin.

Finally, I thank my family for always supporting my academic endeavours.

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**1:
DEATH IN VENICE:
BRITTEN'S
OPERATIC TRIUMPH**

Introduction

One of Thomas Mann's best-known short works, *Death in Venice*, is a complex tale of a man, Aschenbach, who falls obsessively in love with a boy, Tadzio. Mann's powerful novella became the basis for interpretations in several different media. Two of the best-known adaptations of the story are Luchino Visconti's film and Benjamin Britten's opera. The novella and these two adaptations are the subject of this paper.

Following an outline of Thomas Mann's novella and an overview of the theories of Tadzio's origin, this paper will provide an analysis of two crucial influences in Mann's novella, Plato's *Phaedrus* and Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* with the dialectic between the Apolline and Dionysian. We will then look briefly at director Luchino Visconti's film adaptation of *Death in Venice*. Finally, we will examine Benjamin Britten's opera in detail, arguing that the opera has a more visceral, compelling, and timeless presentation of Aschenbach and Tadzio than either the original novella or Visconti's film. The opera strips the story down to its fundamental components, bringing out the mythical roots of the story most clearly and doing full justice to both the Platonic and Nietzschean elements in Mann's work.

Thomas Mann and the *Death in Venice* Novella

Thomas Mann's background provides a useful context for understanding *Death in Venice*. Mann had an extensive classical education in the *Gymnasium*,

which in Germany is preparatory for university studies. Mann's education exposed him to the study of Greek, Latin, philosophy, and classical literature. When he left the *Gymnasium* in 1894 without completing his *Abitur*,¹ he had already established a reputation as a writer. He eventually received an honorary doctorate from the University of Bonn in 1919. Mann's classical education shows in his writing; one can see elements of Greek mythology throughout *Death in Venice*, including direct and indirect references to "Dionysus, Apollo, Hermes, Hyacinth, Narcissus, Semele and Zeus, and Socrates and Phaedrus."² As we shall see, the references to Socrates and Phaedrus are especially relevant in considering Mann's representation of Tadzio.

Thomas Mann wrote *Death in Venice* in 1911 after a vacation in Venice with his family. He originally intended to write an allegory of Goethe's last love for a younger girl. The protagonist is Gustav von Aschenbach, an aging writer who initially exemplifies dignity and self-discipline, but who ultimately loses control over his passions and dies. Gustav von Aschenbach's name is, according to Mundt, "a composite, based in part on the composer Gustav Mahler. ... Aschenbach is the last name of the painter Andreas Aschenbach (1815-1910), who broke with the Romantic tradition of painting landscapes."³

¹ A document received after completing the final exams at the *Gymnasium* that formally enables students to enter university.

² *Death in Venice*, pg. 6

³ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 88

Mann described his tale as “a story of death, death as a seductive moral anti-power – a story of the voluptuousness of doom.”⁴ He sets a foreboding tone right from the start of the novella, in Munich. We are greeted with suggestions that all is not well in the world: there are political problems and possibly war on the horizon; clouds herald the coming of a storm; and finally the gaze of a stranger with red hair makes Aschenbach uncomfortable as he walks through a cemetery. The colour red will be used symbolically throughout the story; red is commonly associated with passion, the devil, and death, and Mann uses it to symbolize all three.

Aschenbach is a nationally renowned writer suffering from writer’s block. After a difficult morning writing he takes a walk, and during this walk sees the strange red-haired man; the sight of this man disturbs him. After seeing the strange man Aschenbach is drawn to the idea of travelling, thinking it will inspire him to renewed literary efforts.

Aschenbach is described as the son of a rather important legal official with a long history of service to the Prussian state; his mother was the daughter of a music director from Bohemia. The competing influences of a disciplined Prussian and a more artistically (and perhaps passionately) inclined Bohemian created the artist Aschenbach has become. He is mentally disciplined and strongly devoted to work. Having earned early fame and success, he never had the chance to enjoy the freedom associated with youth. Aschenbach suffers from ill health, but he sees it as

⁴ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 76 (letter to Elisabeth Zimmer, 6 September 1915)

merely another obstacle to maintaining his ordered life. Ill health appears to be the high price for his self-imposed disciplined work ethic.

Mann also draws a link between Aschenbach and his historical era and geographical context: Aschenbach's work addresses the bourgeois, middle-class establishment, and his readers see themselves in his work. Aschenbach's psychological repression seems to stand as a symbol for repression in Christian northern Europe, or perhaps, more specifically, German culture.⁵

Aschenbach decides to go on a vacation to an island in the Adriatic Sea, but unfortunately the climate is rainy and not to his taste. As he does not find his writer's block lifting, he moves to Venice. On the steamer that takes Aschenbach to Venice, Mann once again foreshadows events. Aschenbach sees an elderly drunk fop, slathered in makeup and pretending to be youthful; Aschenbach, ironically as it turns out later, is disgusted by the display. Of particular note is the elderly fop's rouged face, another threatening use of red by Mann.

Once he has arrived in Venice, Aschenbach takes a gondola ride to the hotel. Here, Mann uses frequent references to death and the underworld and evokes the image of a soul travelling across the river Styx, which in Greek myth separates the world of the living from the dead:

Can there be anyone who has not had to overcome a fleeting sense of dread, a secret shudder of uneasiness, on stepping for the first time ... into a Venetian gondola? How strange a vehicle it is, coming down unchanged from times of old romance, and so

⁵ Although Mann deliberately kept the timeframe of the novella vague, it preceded World War I.

characteristically black, the way no other thing is black except a coffin.⁶

Thinking about the gondolier and the discussion about payment, Aschenbach reflects “even if you ... dispatch me to the house of Hades, you will have rowed me well.”⁷

Mann chose Venice as the setting for his story to provide a strong contrast to Munich; Italy represents the sensuous warm south. The journey also suggests Aschenbach’s own physical and psychological shift from the cool and controlled Aschenbach of Munich to the heated and passionate Aschenbach of Venice. Moreover, the setting of Venice, a city where both Tadzio and Aschenbach are foreigners, allows Aschenbach’s forbidden love to develop in a way that it could not have in Munich. Finally, Venice is a place of moist heat and decay, with the winds of the Orient bringing Asiatic cholera.

In the hotel, Aschenbach sees the beautiful boy Tadzio, reminiscent of a Greek statue. At first, Aschenbach believes the boy stimulates him only aesthetically, but it is soon apparent that his attraction is much more profound. Aschenbach tries to leave Venice because of dreary weather, but an incident with misdirected luggage drives him back to the Lido Hotel. He finds that he is thoroughly pleased that he does not have to leave after all and realizes that Tadzio is the reason he is reluctant to leave. At first, Aschenbach doesn’t understand his interest in Tadzio. Later he comes to see Tadzio as an avatar for pure artistic

⁶ *Death in Venice*, pg. 39

⁷ *Death in Venice*, pg. 41

Beauty. However, rather than being an inspiration for artistic creativity, Tadzio instead becomes a catalyst for Aschenbach's disintegration and ultimate demise.

The Origin and Role of Tadzio

It is important at this juncture to consider the character of Tadzio in some detail. There are conflicting accounts of the origin of *Death in Venice* and of Tadzio, sculptural, biographical, and literary. Gary Schmigdall⁸ claims that Mann based the mythic descriptions of Tadzio on Thorvaldsen's sculpture *The Shepherd*, while Naomi Ritter⁹ points to the *Spinario*,¹⁰ which Mann mentions in the novella. Gilbert Adair, in his book *The Real Tadzio*, asserts that the boy loved by Aschenbach is actually based on Wladyslaw "Adzio" Moes, a Polish youth Mann saw while on vacation. Mann acknowledges the biographical element:

Nothing is invented in *Death in Venice*. The 'pilgrim' at the North Cemetery, the dreary Pola boat, the grey-haired rake, the sinister gondolier, Tadzio and his family, the journey interrupted by a mistake about the luggage, the cholera, the upright clerk at the travel bureau, the rascally ballad singer, all that and anything else you like, they were all there. I had only to arrange them when they showed at once in the oddest way their capacity as elements of composition.¹¹

Although the last sentence could lead to the interpretation that *Death in Venice* is largely autobiographical, there are clear differences between Mann and Aschenbach. Gustav von Aschenbach is a man in his fifties, already well past the apogee of his success as a writer, a widower, and so overwhelmed by his passion

⁸ *Literature as Opera*, pg. 339

⁹ *Death in Venice*, pg. 6

¹⁰ Also known as the *Greek Boy Pulling a Thorn*. See PLATE 1.

¹¹ *The Real Tadzio*, pg. 15

for Tadzio that he dies. Thomas Mann was in his mid-thirties, married with children, and on an enjoyable family vacation. If Mann modelled Tadzio on Wladyslaw, it was only through serendipity.

Susan Gustafson puts forward another theory of the origin of Tadzio. She contends that Mann was strongly inspired by Goethe: “in Goethe’s novels and dramas we find the confirmations and reiterations of Tasso’s vision, ... and of the poetic bonding of men who identify with and desire men.”¹² Tasso was a famous sixteenth century Italian poet. She adds that one is “compelled to wonder if the young boy, Tadzio ... is not a metaphoric reiteration of Tasso. ... One wonders if Tadzio is a ‘respelling’ ... of Tasso.”¹³ She then goes on to claim Mann originally conceived of *Death in Venice*

As a literary representation of the aged Goethe and his obsession with the little girl in Marienbad.... At some point during this process, Mann shifted the principal desire depicted in his novella from that of an aged man for a little girl to that of an old man for a young boy. He explained that he wanted to intensify the effect of the novella by shifting to a ‘forbidden love’.¹⁴

Mundt also writes that Mann’s “repeated and continual interest in Goethe, in the artist’s dignity and the questionable sides of artistic ambitions”¹⁵ decisively shape *Death in Venice*.

Whatever his origins, Tadzio is represented in the original novella as “entirely beautiful. His entire countenance, pale and gracefully reserved, ...

¹² *Men Desiring Men*, pg. 212

¹³ *Men Desiring Men*, pg 213

¹⁴ *Men Desiring Men*, pg. 213

¹⁵ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 88

recalled Greek sculpture of the noblest period.”¹⁶ But Aschenbach also considers Tadzio’s flaws. “He had noticed that Tadzio’s teeth were not as attractive as they might have been ... lacking the lustre of health and having that peculiar brittle transparency that is sometimes found in cases of anaemia. ‘He’s very delicate, he’s sickly,’ thought Aschenbach, ‘he’ll probably not live to grow old.’ And he made no attempt to explain to himself a certain feeling of satisfaction or relief that accompanied this thought.”¹⁷ From this point forward, Aschenbach’s passion for Tadzio only grows.

Significantly, as Aschenbach reflects on his passion for Tadzio, he contemplates Plato’s *Phaedrus*, wherein Socrates says “artists cannot tread the path of Beauty without Eros keeping us company and appointing himself as our guide.”¹⁸ This passage suggests the struggle with the divine madness of love, as we will see later. It also confirms for Aschenbach what he already knows, that he is doomed. “Form and naïveté, *Phaedrus*, lead to intoxication and lust; they may lead a noble mind into terrible criminal emotions, which his own fine rigor condemns as infamous; they lead, they too lead, to the abyss. ... And now I shall go, *Phaedrus*, and you shall stay here.”¹⁹ Aschenbach, metaphorically, has been condemned to the abyss. Aschenbach’s musings on the *Phaedrus* are an attempt to intellectualize his feelings for Tadzio and cast his attraction as philosophical. In reality, however,

¹⁶ *Death in Venice*, pg. 44

¹⁷ *Death in Venice*, pg. 51

¹⁸ *Death in Venice*, pg. 84

¹⁹ *Death in Venice*, pg. 86

Aschenbach feels shame about his attraction to Tadzio. His shame belies the purity of his interest.

For Aschenbach, Tadzio is Beauty incarnate, his muse and inspiration to write. He ensures that he is always where he can observe the boy, first only at the beach, but soon throughout the city. The two make frequent eye contact and Aschenbach believes that the boy's gaze indicates that he reciprocates his affection. Despite this, Aschenbach cannot bring himself to speak to the boy. Tadzio notices Aschenbach's attentions and smiles at him. Aschenbach is so overwhelmed by the smile that he has to sit on a bench to recover and admits out loud that he loves the boy.

As Mann's story approaches its climax, news of the cholera epidemic spreads and the number of tourists in Venice dwindles. While he still observes Tadzio obsessively, Aschenbach also begins to worry about the cholera, finally fearing for his own health. Once again he sees a red-haired figure, this time as a street performer, who reassures Aschenbach there is no plague. Unconvinced, Aschenbach goes to the travel agency to try to find out more information, and the agent tells him, "You would be well advised to leave today rather than tomorrow. The imposition of quarantine can be expected any day now."²⁰ The spread of illness throughout Venice also metaphorically represents the disease spreading through Aschenbach.

Aschenbach chooses to remain in Venice and that night has a vivid dream:

²⁰ *Death in Venice*, pg. 79

It began with fear, fear and joy and a horrified curiosity about what was to come. It was night, and his senses were alert; for from far off a hubbub was approaching, un uproar, a compendium of noise, a clangour and blare and dull thundering, yells of exultation and a particular howl with a long-drawn-out *u* at the end – all of it permeated and dominated by a terrible sweet sound of flute music: by deep-warbling, infamously persistent, shamelessly clinging tones that bewitched the innermost heart. Yet he was aware of a word, an obscure word, but one that gave a name to what was coming; ‘*the stranger-god!*’²¹

The “stranger-god” is Dionysus. Mann was profoundly influenced in the writing of *Death in Venice* by Erwin Rhode’s *Psyche*, which provided the source material and inspiration for the Bacchanalian dream sequence above. As Herbert Lehnert notes, “Thomas Mann’s pencil-marked copy of Erwin Rhode’s *Psyche: Seelencult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* is now in the *Thomas Mann Archiv der Eidengenössichen Technischen Hochschule* in Zurich, and excerpts from the book are found in notes Mann took in collecting mythological material”²² for *Death in Venice*.

Aschenbach awakes from the Dionysian dream enslaved by his passion; his self-discipline and reason has abandoned him. Even knowing that cholera has infested Venice and that he is in serious danger, he can no longer leave; he is trapped by his love of Tadzio.

In a final act of unrestrained passion Aschenbach visits a barber and has his hair dyed to mask the grey and his face made up with makeup and rouge to give himself a more youthful appearance. He now resembles the old man who had so

²¹ *Death in Venice*, pg. 81

²² “Thomas Mann’s Early Interest in Myth”, pg. 299

disgusted him on the steamship on his arrival in Venice. Thus we see the end of the disciplined, rational, controlled Aschenbach; all that remains is the fully corrupted mind and diseased body. A few days later, Aschenbach sees Tadzio on the beach once more. Tadzio loses a fight with another boy on the beach and walks forlornly into the ocean afterwards. Aschenbach gestures to the boy, and dies.

Nietzsche and The Birth of Tragedy

The opposition between Aschenbach, the disciplined writer, and the Aschenbach, who succumbs to passion, clearly alludes to the central idea in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, a work that greatly influenced Thomas Mann. Friedrich Nietzsche published his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*), which was later shortened to simply *The Birth of Tragedy* in its revised form of 1886.²³ In this work Nietzsche introduces the dichotomy between what he termed the Dionysian and Apolline, two primordial forces in constant struggle with one another. The Apolline can be broadly defined to encompass the principles of individualism, light, and the controlling structuring forces of civilization; in opposition, the Dionysian can be broadly defined to denote darkness (as of the underworld) and the uncontrolled primal forces of nature. A parallel dichotomy is found in the "good horse" and "bad horse" opposition in the second speech of Socrates in *Phaedrus*, which I will examine later. The bad, or Dionysian, horse will lead one to dissolution and death if left uncontrolled.

²³ *The Birth of Tragedy*, pg. vii

Nietzsche argues that the ancient Greek tragedies were the highest art form, since the Apolline and Dionysian dichotomy embodied in them allowed the spectators to experience the full range of the human condition. The Dionysian was found in the music of the chorus and the Apolline in the dialogue. Nietzsche argued that among his artistic contemporaries that these elements were strongest in opera, particularly the works of Richard Wagner, which inspired *The Birth of Tragedy*:

We can designate the innermost form of this Socratic culture most precisely when we call it the culture of opera, for in this area our Socratic culture, with characteristic naiveté, has expressed its wishes and perceptions—something astonishing to us if we bring the genesis of opera and the facts of the development of opera together with the eternal truths of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.²⁴

Nietzsche held that tragedy was created through the combination of Apolline representations of the world and the Dionysian present in revelry, drunkenness, and particularly in music. Nietzsche theorized that it was unhealthy for individuals (or societies) to be entirely Apolline or Dionysian. In opera, on the protected and safe context of the Apollonian stage, the audience could be exposed to the Dionysian. As Nietzsche himself put it, "Apollo could not live without Dionysus!"²⁵

Mann explicitly names Nietzsche as well as Wagner as formative influences:

My roots lie in the cultural world of Goethe's autobiography, in the bourgeois atmosphere, in romanticism. ... *Death in Venice* [is an] extremely romantic conception. Wagner was my strongest and most

²⁴ *The Birth of Tragedy*, pg. 78

²⁵ *The Birth of Tragedy*, pg. 22

formative artistic experience. However, there is another element that links me with modernity and alone gives my work some validity on the intellectual plane: my experience with romanticism's self-transcendence in Nietzsche.²⁶

The Nietzschean dichotomy is obvious in Mann's novella. *Death in Venice* is characterized by Aschenbach's continuous internal struggle between his staid and orderly world in Munich and his increasingly passionate and uncontrolled world in Venice. Mann described this struggle as the inherent "difference between the Dionysian spirit of lyricism, whose outpouring is irresponsible and individualistic, and the Apollonian, objectively controlled, morally and socially responsible...."²⁷ The settings of Munich and Venice themselves aptly represent some of these opposing characteristics. Munich, a major cosmopolitan German city with a cool continental climate and a very well ordered societal structure, contrasts nicely with Venice. With its warmer climate and seemingly chronic outbreaks of cholera,²⁸ Venice was for many early twentieth century German visitors a place of "beauty, fear, and death."²⁹

Gustav von Aschenbach's internal monologue expresses the human struggle between the Apolline and Dionysian as described in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the beginning of the novella, Aschenbach is presented as classically Apolline – his passion is under strict control and he lives the life of a successful and scholarly author. Much of the first chapter of the novella describes how Aschenbach keeps

²⁶ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 152 (letter to Ernst Fischer, 25 May 1926)

²⁷ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 103

²⁸ "Time and Place in *Death in Venice*", pg. 69

²⁹ "Time and Place in *Death in Venice*", pg. 66

his passion in check. Even his decision to travel to Venice for a rest appears to Aschenbach as a medical necessity, “nothing more than a necessary health precaution, to be taken from time to time however disinclined to it one might be.”³⁰

The focal point of Aschenbach’s struggle between the Apolline and Dionysian in *Death in Venice* is the boy Tadzio. That Tadzio is a boy is no accident; had he instead been a young girl, then the story would have lost much of its mythic quality. The forbidden nature of Aschenbach’s obsessive love lends power to the story.

Phaedrus

The choice to make Tadzio a young boy relates the novella to the Greek classics, and evokes especially Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Mann adopts an ideal of Beauty incarnate, “absolute, pure, and unmixed”,³¹ as Diotima says in *The Symposium* in his description of Tadzio and describes Aschenbach’s reaction:

With astonishment, Aschenbach noticed that the boy was entirely beautiful. His countenance, pale and gracefully reserved, was surrounded by ringlets of honey-colored hair, and with its straight nose, its enchanting mouth, its expression of sweet and divine gravity, it recalled Greek sculpture of the noblest period. ... No one had ever dared to cut short his beautiful hair; like that of the *Boy Extracting a Thorn* it fell in curls over his forehead, over his ears, and still lower over his neck...³²

Here Mann borrows from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, a dialogue between Socrates and a young boy named Phaedrus, that contains speeches on love in the first half

³⁰ *Death in Venice*, pg. 26

³¹ *The Symposium*, pg. 49

³² *Death in Venice*, pg. 43-44

while the second half presents a discussion on the nature and proper practice of love and rhetoric. In Mann's novella, Tadzio is obviously modelled after the beautiful boy Phaedrus. Mann uses Plato's dialogue to illustrate Aschenbach's struggle, especially the second speech of Socrates discussing the four kinds of divine madness and especially the madness of love.

Socrates explains in his first speech that we are all ruled by two principles, our inborn desire for pleasure, and the judgement acquired through the wisdom of experience. To follow one's judgement shows one is in one's right mind, while following our passion for pleasure is "outrage". Socrates names the desire to take pleasure in beauty "Eros".³³

In his second speech, Socrates goes further to explain that madness is actually a gift of the gods. He defines four kinds of divine madness: prophecy (from Apollo); mysticism (from Dionysius); poetry (from the Muses); and love (from Aphrodite). It is the last that is most important in helping us understand Aschenbach.

In his discussion of love as a form of divine madness, Socrates presents the allegory of the (immortal) soul as a chariot. Socrates states that the soul resembles "a winged team of horses and their charioteer"³⁴ and that while the gods all have two good horses, mortals have one that is beautiful and good and one that is neither. The charioteer, according to Socrates, is filled with warmth and desire as

³³ *Phaedrus*, pg. 15

³⁴ *Phaedrus*, pg. 26

he gazes into the eyes of the one he loves. The good horse is controlled by a sense of shame, but the bad horse is overcome with desire and will exert all its efforts into approaching the boy and suggesting the pleasures of the flesh. The persistence of the bad horse will eventually wear out both the charioteer and the good horse and drag them toward the boy. Still, when the charioteer gazes at the boy, he is reminded of the form of Beauty and self-control granted by the gods and thus is able to force the bad horse back by pulling on the reins. The bad horse will eventually become obedient and even die of fright in seeing the boy's face, which allows the lover's soul to follow the boy in reverential awe.

In his second speech in *Phaedrus*, Socrates contrasts the lover of a boy with a non-lover, saying that the latter will succumb to desire and thus not do what is best for the boy, whereas a lover will be ruled by judgement. Mann thus creates a contrast between Socrates' admonitions and Aschenbach's fate. Aschenbach is enchanted with Tadzio much as Socrates is enchanted with Phaedrus. Unlike in Plato's dialogue, we realize by the novella's conclusion that Aschenbach does succumb to his desires.

Nietzsche explicitly contrasts his position with that of Socrates. He says the Apolline is a self-deceptive illusion, an inauthentic reality. In his essay, Nietzsche contends that the Apolline "holds sway of beautiful illusion of the inner fantasy world"³⁵ In contrast, the Dionysian is unrestrained and unfiltered reality, in all its beauty and ugliness. Nietzsche says that if we accept the Dionysian and "dare to

³⁵ *Birth of Tragedy*, pg. 16

be tragic men”³⁶ then we will achieve “redemption.”³⁷ In other words, acceptance and recognition of the Dionysian will temper the self-deception of the Apolline. Nietzsche challenges his readers to experience the full range of the human condition:

Join me in my faith in this Dionysian life and the birth of tragedy. The age of Socratic man is past: crown yourselves with ivy, grasp the thyrsus and do not be amazed if tigers and panthers lie down fawning at your feet. Dare to be tragic men, for you will be redeemed. You shall join the Dionysian procession from India to Greece! Gird yourselves for a hard battle, but have faith in the miracles of your god!³⁸

Although Aschenbach allows himself to rise to Nietzsche’s challenge, his passion for Tadzio overcomes his Apolline discipline, destroying what he has formerly understood as his Self. His physical death by cholera is the final manifestation of this inner death.

Luchino Visconti and the Film *Death in Venice*

There is little trace of either Plato or Nietzsche in the 1971 film of *Death in Venice*. Its director, the Italian Luchino Visconti often boasted of his German heritage, loosely based on family origins in the middle ages³⁹. He was well versed in classic and modern literature, but he particularly liked German literature and culture. According to Henry Bacon, “to Visconti Germany meant above all culture:

³⁶ *Birth of Tragedy*, pg. 98

³⁷ In the original German, the word used is *erlösung*. This translates literally as *release*, with redemption as an acceptable substitute. While Nietzsche may have a spiritual end in mind in this context of *erlösung*, in my opinion *epiphany* would be a better word to use.

³⁸ *Birth of Tragedy*, pg. 98

³⁹ *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, pg. 139. Visconti’s family was descended from the Langobards of medieval Germany.

the works of Goethe, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, and Richard Wagner; also, the Austrian variety of German culture – Gustav Mahler and [many others].”⁴⁰ Visconti had a particular fondness for Thomas Mann. He once said “After Goethe I love Thomas Mann. In one way or another, all my films are dipped in Mann.”⁴¹ In addition to directing twenty films,⁴² Visconti also directed many theatrical and operatic productions.

In 1971, Luchino Visconti adapted Mann’s *Death in Venice* as a visually lush film, starring Dirk Bogarde as Gustav von Aschenbach and Bjørn Andresen as Tadzio. (PLATES 2 & 3) Visconti made several key changes in his film interpretation. In a marked departure from the novella, Visconti makes Aschenbach a composer rather than a writer, with a significant nod to both Mahler and Adrian Leverkühn from Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*.⁴³ Modelling Aschenbach after Mahler provided Visconti an obvious choice of music to use in the movie’s soundtrack.

The film translates the written story into visual elements in great detail, from Aschenbach’s dress to an “apparently abandoned camera stood on its tripod at the edge of the sea, ... the black cloth over it fluttered and flapped in the freshening breeze.”⁴⁴ Visconti provides us with a sense of time and place wherein we can fully visualize Mann’s experience of Venice. Ironically however, this focus on the intimate detail of the setting detracts from the essential story of the novella.

⁴⁰ *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, pg. 139

⁴¹ *Visconti: Explorations of Beauty and Decay*, pg. 140

⁴² Fifteen of which were feature length; the remaining five were documentaries and short films.

⁴³ *Luchino Visconti*, pg. 167

⁴⁴ *Death in Venice*, pg. 86

While the movie is visually luscious, its greatest limitation as an interpretation of Mann's work is that we have no insight into Aschenbach's thoughts, which are crucial in understanding his motivations. Mann's novella is presented as Aschenbach's internal monologue, and this is simply not present in the film. Although a voiceover narrative could have provided this context, Visconti chose to reduce the story to a visual transliteration of the text with admittedly stunning cinematography of Venice and the Lido.

Tadzio, played by Bjørn Andresen, is a beautiful youth, and the details of his dress and appearance accurately follow Mann's description. The film incarnation of Tadzio is true to the text,⁴⁵ but the mythic references to Tadzio, revealed through Aschenbach's internal monologue, are absent. Viewers of the film are deprived of this vital context and only see an older man obsessed with a beautiful young boy. Robbed of Aschenbach's viewpoint from the beginning, we never see Tadzio as anything but handsome and desirable.

In Visconti's film, the effect of the climactic dream representing the Nietzschean struggle between the Apolline and Dionysian is severely blunted. In the film, Aschenbach wake up from a dream shouting "NO!", followed by a voiceover announcing:

Wisdom. Truth. Human dignity. All finished. Now there is no reason why you cannot go to your grave with your music. You have achieved perfect balance. The man and the artist are one. They have touched bottom together. You never possessed chastity. Chastity is

⁴⁵ The costumes used resemble those of the photos of Wladyslaw "Adzio" Moes as well. See page 26 of *The Real Tadzio*.

the gift of purity, not the painful result of old age, and you are old Gustav. And in all the world, there is no impurity so impure as old age.⁴⁶

Visconti has made a drastic change here. Whereas in the novella Aschenbach succumbs during a Bacchanalian frenzy and gives himself completely to the Dionysian, in the film Aschenbach does not. The scene then cuts from Aschenbach to Tadzio's face at the beach.

Andresen's portrayal of Tadzio is faithful to the text, the cinematography gives viewers a strong sense of time and place, and Bogarde portrays a convincing Aschenbach in mannerism and dress. However, Visconti focused on what I regard as the least important elements of the story. Unlike Britten's opera, which I shall now discuss, Visconti's film fails to convey the depth and richness of Mann's text.

Benjamin Britten and the Opera *Death in Venice*

Benjamin Britten, one of England's most important twentieth century composers, wrote several operas over the course of his career. After a prolific musical career, Britten's final oeuvre was the opera *Death in Venice*, based on a libretto by Myfawny Piper.

The role of Aschenbach was written specifically for Britten's partner, the tenor Peter Pears:

Of all Britten's operas, *Death in Venice* is the most dependent on the particular vocal qualities of Peter Pears, to whom it is dedicated. The intimate, intense character of the music reflects the refinement and

⁴⁶ *Death in Venice* [Motion Picture]. 1:56:24 to 1:57:32

delicacy of the Pears sound at that relatively late stage of his career, and the musical idiom – an economical blend of Britten’s personal adaptation of the 12-note features in association with those fundamental elements of tonal harmony that he never abandoned – is the fullest demonstration of the focus of Britten’s own late style.⁴⁷

Britten dedicated this opera to Pears, and Pears said it was “Ben’s most wonderful gift to me.”⁴⁸

Britten was very fond of Venice, which in part influenced him to create an opera based on Mann’s novella. Britten composed his opera at the same time that Visconti’s film was being produced, but “made a point of not seeing the film, partly in case he should be accused of borrowing ideas from it.”⁴⁹ Britten need not have worried. While the film was a faithful adaptation of the novella in visual details, Britten was able to convey the essence of Mann’s novella and Aschenbach’s inner monologue in a way that Visconti’s film simply did not. Britten and Piper’s collaboration produced a magnificent retelling of the original tale.

The power of the operatic medium is to present a story both through music and voice, as well as the verbal and visual. The music in an opera adds an emotional element to the story that can evoke strong reactions to the story. As Schmigdall puts it, “opera is an epiphanic art form.”⁵⁰ The mediation between the written word and the musical work requires a careful balance. Schmigdall notes that not every story can be successfully transformed for the operatic stage. For

⁴⁷ *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, pg. 1095

⁴⁸ *Benjamin Britten’s Operas*, pg. 91.

⁴⁹ *Benjamin Britten’s Operas*, pg. 92

⁵⁰ *Literature as Opera*, pg. 12

example “at least twenty-five attempts have been made”⁵¹ to create an operatic from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*.

Britten deliberately sought out difficult literary works for his operas. For *Death in Venice*, Britten and his librettist Myfawny Piper relied on “a willingness to follow with tightrope care our (and Mann’s) paradoxically detached and passionate observation of Gustav von Aschenbach’s ironic tragedy.”⁵²

One requirement of the operatic medium is to reduce a tale to its fundamental essence. For example, Verdi’s librettist (Arrigo Boito) condensed Shakespeare’s *Othello* to approximately 800 lines that capture the spirit and the core of the story even while excising much of the original text. In a similar vein, Piper reduced Mann’s original text to its bare essence for Britten, emphasizing the role of Tadzio and explicitly introducing Apollo (via a countertenor) and Dionysius (via the chorus) to showcase the Nietzschean dialectic. Britten’s music propels the audience through Aschenbach’s inner monologue, and the audience can also see Tadzio in the flesh.

Unlike the film, Britten’s opera does not attempt to and indeed cannot recreate the exact scenery of the book. Rather, the music gives us an indication of the flow of the story while Aschenbach provides the inner monologue that is so important in the novella.

⁵¹ *Literature as Opera*, pg. 3

⁵² *Literature as Opera*, pg. 324

The opera provides the strongest interpretation of the story as it not only allows us to hear and see Aschenbach's inner thoughts, but also brings the mythological elements to the forefront. Britten strategically uses musical cues to create foreshadowing and defines each character with his or her own distinctive musical signature. For example, a specific passage is played every time Tadzio enters a scene, which keeps the audience as focused on Tadzio as Aschenbach is.

The music sets the mood in the opera and ebbs and flows according to the inner monologue of Aschenbach. In an interesting coincidence, Britten uses his own adaptation of the twelve tone method of composition developed by Arnold Schoenberg, a contemporary of Thomas Mann. The singing in the opera is a mix of classic operatic recitative and what Arnold Schoenberg dubbed *Sprechgesang*.⁵³ Britten's score exhibits the atonal nature characteristic of composing with twelve tones, yet still retains a strong melodic sense.

Britten's music is also influenced by Gamelan, an Indonesian and Javanese style of musical ensemble. These ensembles primarily use metallophones, xylophones, drums, and gongs, but sometimes also use string and wind instruments. While Colin McPhee introduced Britten to Gamelan music in the 1940's, Britten's 1955 trip to Bali marked the beginning of a strong Gamelan influence in his music that would last until the end of his life. Britten had to invent

⁵³ *The Rough Guide to Opera*, pg. 601. *Sprechgesang* is a style of dramatic vocalization intermediate between speech and song in which pitches are sung, but the articulation is rapid and loose like speech. The term comes from Schoenberg.

his own musical notation to indicate the trademark Gamelan sound; the mark resembles a vertically striped “arrow” centred on the F line of the treble staff.

The Gamelan influence can be clearly heard in the leitmotif for the Polish family,⁵⁴ and is particularly strong during both the scenes with children playing at the beach and distinctively for Tadzio’s music. During his visit to Java and Bali, Britten was taken with how much the local young boys enjoyed dancing to Gamelan music.⁵⁵ Tadzio’s status in the novella as a foreigner, quite outside of Aschenbach’s experience, is enhanced by Britten’s choice to use Gamelan’s oriental sound to “create a more potent musical metaphor of an unearthly beckoning beauty than could have been achieved by a medley of Chopinesque mazurkas, for example. ... Britten adds his own emphasis by bringing into the foreground the notion that the story can be understood as that of a Western Platonic psyche undone by the Orient.”⁵⁶

The spare score uses mood-setting passages that are *durchkomponiert*⁵⁷ to link the relatively short scenes in this opera. This technique permits the music to follow the story line and change according to the text, rather than requiring the text to conform to the structure of the music.

In Britten’s opera, Tadzio is portrayed by a handsome young ballet dancer who is lithe and muscular and in the peak of health. (PLATE 4) This is a departure

⁵⁴ *Death in Venice* [Vocal Score], pg. 72

⁵⁵ *Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice*, pg. 116

⁵⁶ *Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice*, pg. 175

⁵⁷ Literally: through-composed

from the text of the novella, but it is effective because the audience has Aschenbach's inner monologue to provide context. As Wilcox, author of *Benjamin Britten's Operas*, writes comparing the opera with the film, "Britten's Tazio, ... is represented by a dancer with both Apollonian and Dionysian qualities, a meeting point of reason and sensuality, and an altogether more complex characterization which lifts the entire opera onto a different artistic and philosophical level."⁵⁸

One key change made by Britten is the inclusion of Apollo and Dionysus as characters. This is an explicit acknowledgement of the Apolline and Dionysian elements inherent in the story and emphasizes the mythical roots of the tale to the audience. Apollo and Dionysus make their appearance toward the end of the first act in Scene 7, the games of Apollo. As Aschenbach sits in a chair on the Lido beach, watching Tazio and his friends at play, his thoughts (as voiced by the chorus) are of Greek gods, their actions mirroring those of Tazio. Tazio and the other boys participate in a pantomimed pentathlon of running, long jump, discus, javelin, and wrestling. Tazio's conclusive win inspires Aschenbach and he is determined to congratulate Tazio on his victory. But when the opportunity arises, he cannot bring himself to speak. Almost choking on the words, Aschenbach realises the truth: he is in love with Tazio. Aschenbach sings:

⁵⁸ *Benjamin Britten's Operas*, pg. 92

(As TADZIO passes ASCHENBACH on the way into the hotel he smiles.)

Ah, don't smile like that:

No one should smile like that.

(Then realizing the truth at last)

I – love you.

(Blacks out)⁵⁹

The opera, like the novella, reaches its climax during Aschenbach's dream of Tadzio. In Scene 13, during Aschenbach's dream, Apollo and Dionysus wage a battle for him, "culminating in a graphic musical orgasm as Tadzio himself appears."⁶⁰

Aschenbach finally succumbs to the Dionysian and this surrender seals his fate. Mann's novella simply mentions Dionysus as "the god with the burning cheeks."⁶¹ Britten's opera gives us a duel between Apollo and Dionysus within Aschenbach's dream. This vital scene is almost four minutes long, and the duel is vivid:⁶²

(A dark stage. ASCHENBACH is faintly discernable asleep.)

DIONYSUS	Receive the stranger god.
APOLLO	No! Reject the abyss.
DIONYSUS	Do not turn away from life.
APOLLO	No! Abjure the knowledge that forgives.
DIONYSUS	Do not refuse the mysteries.
APOLLO	No! Love reason, beauty, form.
DIONYSUS	He who denies the god denies nature.
APOLLO	No! Remember the miracle of regained detachment.

⁵⁹ *Death in Venice* [Libretto], pg. 21

⁶⁰ *Benjamin Britten's Operas*, pg. 94

⁶¹ *Death in Venice*, pg. 57

⁶² *Death in Venice* [Libretto], pg. 33

DIONYSUS	Come! Beat on the drums.
APOLLO	No!
DIONYSUS	Come! Beat on the drums.
APOLLO	No!
DIONYSUS	Stumble in the reeling dance.
APOLLO (fading)	No!
DIONYSUS	Goad the beasts with garlanded staves, Seize their horns Ride into the throng. Behold the sacrifice!
APOLLO (distant)	I go, I go now.

At this point, the followers of Dionysus appear, engaged in a riotous dance while chanting “aa-oo!”⁶³ The chorus continues its chant of “aa-oo!” as the music reaches its crescendo.⁶⁴ Myfawny Piper deliberately played up the Bacchanalian atmosphere in the scene, and the “aa-oo” sound of the chorus invokes the last syllable in Tadzio.

After the music climaxes, the chant slowly fades and Aschenbach awakes singing “aa-oo” himself. The scene ends with the acceptance of his fate, where he simply speaks “It is true, it is all true. I can fall no further, O the taste of knowledge. Let the gods do what they will with me.”⁶⁵

Conclusion

In the novella, Mann engages our imagination. With the guidance of Aschenbach’s inner monologue, we are left to visualize Tadzio for ourselves. We

⁶³ *Death in Venice* [Libretto], pg 33

⁶⁴ *Death in Venice* [Vocal Score], pg. 234

⁶⁵ *Death in Venice* [Libretto]. pg. 34

can see the progression of Aschenbach's initial infatuation, his subsequent *Schadenfreude* over Tadzio's ill health, and ultimate acceptance of his love and obsession for Tadzio. Tadzio's imperfection makes him more approachable. Were Tadzio perfect, Aschenbach would have been able to consider the boy in a more abstract fashion. However, the human frailties that Tadzio exhibits are what allow Aschenbach to develop feelings for the boy; they provide the impetus for sympathetic feelings that eventually become love.

The two adaptations represent Tadzio in very different ways. In Visconti's film, an actor who is never spoken to by Aschenbach portrays Tadzio; only glances are exchanged. Tadzio's beauty is emphasized, and his ill health or weakness is downplayed. It plays well to Visconti's lush hedonistic view of Venice, but does not provide the full context of the story. In Britten's opera, Tadzio is also never spoken to, but he is portrayed by a young ballet dancer. Schmigdoll is critical of the use of a ballet dancer in the opera, saying "the ballet requires that Tadzio have the musculature of a dancer (i.e. a man), that he be the self-conscious poseur classical balletic style requires, that he be notoriously athletic. ... All this blithely disregards numerous hints in *Der Tod in Venedig* that Tadzio is not a young balletic god, but one of a rather different, Platonic sort, [that of the soft boy described in Plato's *Phaedrus*]." ⁶⁶

However, I disagree. First, the operatic Tadzio is in essence a physical avatar for Beauty; ballet dancers with their musculature and healthy glow

⁶⁶ *Literature as Opera*, pg. 351

encompass two qualities that many consider essential for beauty. Second, in seeing Tadzio as an athletic young man, the audience shares the visual experience of Aschenbach. The visual symbolism, complemented by the lyrics of Aschenbach's inner monologue, helps the audience perceive Tadzio in the same way Aschenbach does. Therefore, Aschenbach becomes more understandable to us than in either the film or the novella. We feel empathy for Aschenbach. Third, portraying Tadzio more directly as Phaedrus allows Britten to introduce Apollo and Dionysus as characters in the opera. Britten's adaptation in this way emphasizes the mythical elements of Mann's original text. Two such examples are Apollo as he sings the "Games of Apollo" pentathlon in Scene 7,⁶⁷ and Dionysus in the aforementioned climactic Scene 13.

In all three mediums, Aschenbach progresses from merely admiring Tadzio as an avatar of Beauty to actually worshipping the boy as if he were a god himself. Ironically, Tadzio remains a mere young boy, enjoying time on the beach and seemingly unaffected by Aschenbach's transformation.

Each medium, novella, film, and opera, has its own strengths and limitations. Each reader or viewer may choose a favourite representation of Tadzio, whether the beautiful but frail boy of the novella, the smiling fop in the cinematic rendition, or the fit and healthy ballet dancer in the opera, as a matter of personal preference. However, Tadzio's form as a ballet dancer for the opera suits the medium and serves the story exceedingly well.

⁶⁷ *Death in Venice* [Libretto], pgs. 18-21

Mann has brilliantly crafted an enduring story that works even in the modern context. The themes of forbidden love, the conflict between reason (the Apolline) and passion (the Dionysian), and the inspired use and reference to Greek myth all contribute to a work that resonates strongly with its readers.

However, Britten's composition with Piper's libretto, while capturing the essence of Mann's novella, enhances the timeless story it draws upon. Although Nietzsche's dialectic from *Birth of Tragedy* was written in homage to the operatic works of Richard Wagner, it would not be out of place in describing this much later opera. The key elements, the clash of the Apolline and Dionysian, the reference to classic Greek myths, and the tragic end of Aschenbach are all encapsulated here. Britten has taken a remarkable work and transformed it into a stunning opera; one that takes the basic theme of the struggle between reason and passion and succeeds in rendering Mann's original tale even more engaging.

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Plates



Figure 1 - Spinario (Greek Boy Extracting a Thorn)⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Photo used under terms of the Wikipedia creative commons license – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Lo_Spinario.JPG



**Figure 2 – Bjorn Andresen as Tadzio in Luchino Visconti’s 1971 movie.
DEATH IN VENICE © Warner Bros., a division of Time Warner Entertainment
Company, L.P. All Rights Reserved.⁶⁹**

⁶⁹ Photo used by permission of Warner Brothers



Figure 3 – Bjorn Andresen as Tadzio (right) and Sergio Garfagnoli as Jaschiu during the filming of Luchino Visconti's 1971 movie⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Photo used by permission of The Kobal Collection.

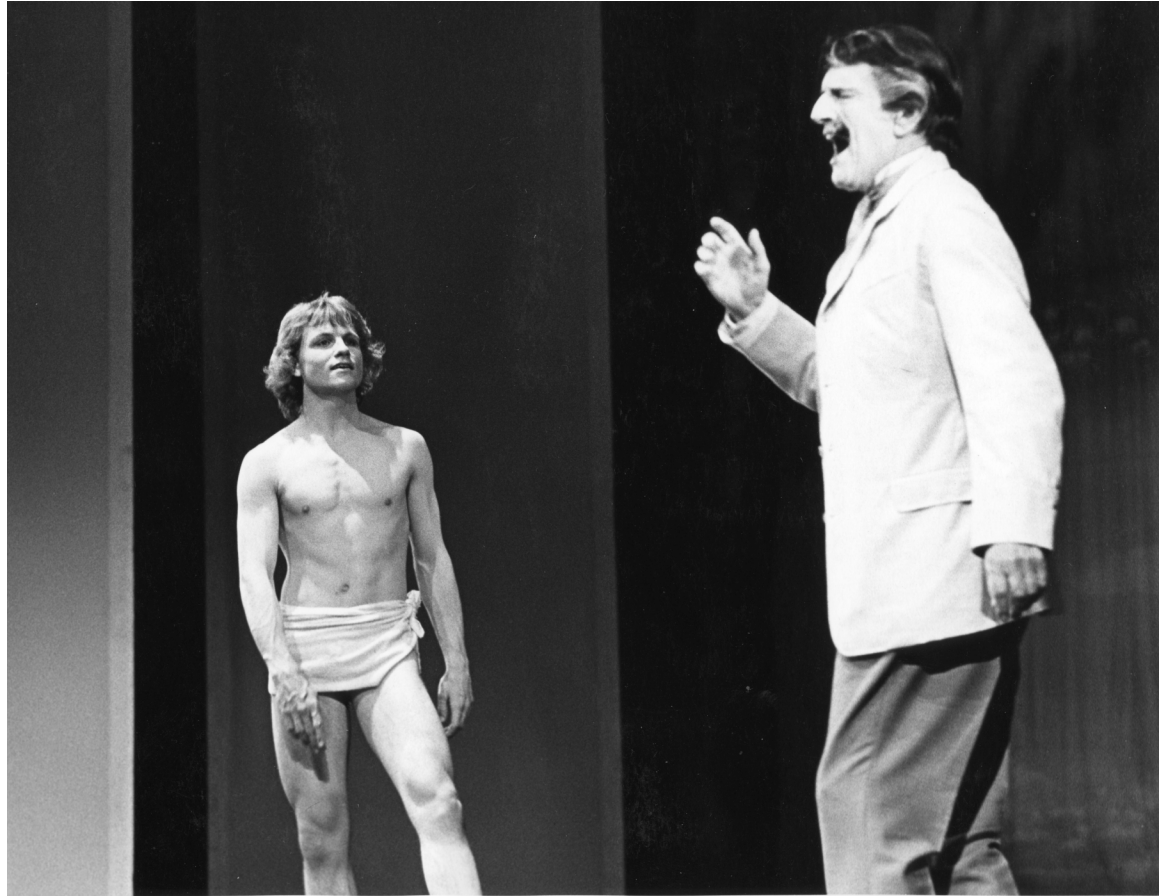


Figure 4 –Tadzio (Robert Huguenin) and Gustav von Aschenbach (Peter Pears), in the first production of Benjamin Britten’s Death in Venice, Aldeburgh Festival, June 1973, ref. PHPN/6/1/81⁷¹

⁷¹ Photo used by kind permission of Nigel Luckhurst.

2:
THE ALLEGORICAL SCHOENBERG:
TWELVE TONE MUSIC IN
THOMAS MANN'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Introduction

The early part of the twentieth century was a time of enormous change in Europe with the emergence of many social and artistic movements collectively categorized as the Avant-Garde. During this exciting time in history, the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg broke revolutionary new ground in musical composition with his move to atonality and the formal development of his method of composing with twelve tones. During the same era the German author Thomas Mann, drawing upon Classical roots and in the spirit of Goethe, wrote stories notable for their insight into the minds of artists and intellectuals. Both Thomas Mann and Arnold Schoenberg left Germany in the 1930's in response to the rise of Nazism; Mann because he was opposed to the Nazis, and Schoenberg because he was Jewish.

Mann began writing *Doctor Faustus* in 1943. The central idea of the novel, in Mann's own words, is "the flight from the difficulties of the cultural crisis into the pact with the devil, the craving of a proud mind, threatened by sterility, for an unblocking of inhibitions at any cost, and the parallel between pernicious euphoria ending in collapse with the nationalistic frenzy of Fascism."¹ *Doctor Faustus* is certainly an allegory of German culture² in Nazi Germany told as a modernized version of the classic Faust³ legend. Thomas Mann deliberately chose Arnold

¹ *The Genesis of a Novel*, pg. 28

² Dr. Gunilla Bergsten explored this allegorical relationship in *Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus*.

³ From the sixteenth century, as so eloquently portrayed by Marlowe and Goethe.

Schoenberg's musical theories, as explained to him by Theodor Adorno, as the basis for the character Adrian Leverkühn's revolutionary genius.

A controversy erupted shortly after the publication of the first edition of *Doctor Faustus* when Schoenberg claimed in the pages of *The Saturday Review of Literature* that Mann had maliciously stolen his intellectual property. Worse, according to Schoenberg, he had been portrayed as a lunatic. In response, Mann added a very small appendix in the second and subsequent printings explaining that the twelve-tone method of composition was the invention of Schoenberg. Music critic Robert Anderson, writing in 1974, boldly dismissed "Schoenberg's petulant protest about Mann's use of his 'method of composing with 12 tones'" adding "it scarcely warrants a footnote."⁴

That conclusion is untenable. Mann himself stated that the book is saturated with Schoenberg's music. Furthermore, it is entirely through the conscious choice of music as the art form, specifically the unique style of Arnold Schoenberg, that Mann was able to create a modern Faust character in Adrian Leverkühn so successfully.

This paper will explore the significance of Arnold Schoenberg's music in Thomas Mann's modern retelling of the Faust legend. We will examine Schoenberg's method of composing in twelve tones, briefly compare the Faust myth as interpreted by Goethe and by Mann, and ultimately show how the use of

⁴ Reviewed Work: *Faust as Musician: A Study of Thomas Mann's Novel Doctor Faustus* by Patrick Carnegie, *The Musical Times*, Vol 115, No. 1581. (Nov 1974), pg. 949

Schoenberg's music establishes Adrian Leverkühn as an enduring Faustian character.

Arnold Schoenberg

Arnold Schoenberg, born 1874 in Vienna, was both a composer and a visual artist. He had many experiences in his youth playing the violin and cello in amateur music groups. His talents were good enough to draw the attention of Alexander Zemlinsky, a friend of Brahms, who accepted Schoenberg as a pupil. Under Zemlinsky's tutelage, Schoenberg learned counterpoint.

Despite this formal training, Schoenberg was mostly a musical autodidact. His early works were in the style of Wagner and Brahms, but even his first published work in 1899 caused "opposition, controversy, and fist fights!"⁵ Despite these early critical setbacks, Richard Strauss was sufficiently impressed by Schoenberg's *Gurre Lieder* to help him obtain a teaching post in Berlin.

During his time in Berlin, Schoenberg began to experiment with "very active and complicated counterpoint,"⁶ including his *Orchestral Songs Op. 8* and the *String Quartet Op. 7*. Although his music in that era was still tonal in style his *Chamber Symphony* was unconventional enough that it was "performed amid protests"⁷ in 1906. During the years leading up to 1911, Schoenberg spent some time experimenting with painting, creating many Expressionist style portraits that

⁵ *Theory of Harmony*, pg. xiii

⁶ *Theory of Harmony*, pg. xiii

⁷ *Theory of Harmony*, pg. xiv

echoed the style of his music. This period also marks the early transition to the atonal qualities Schoenberg's music is famous for.

In January 1911, the famous abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky attended a performance of Schoenberg's *Second Quartet Op. 10* and the *Piano Pieces Op. 11*. The music moved Kandinsky so much that he felt compelled to write to Schoenberg. The two formed a strong friendship and working relationship. Schoenberg contributed to the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*, which appeared in 1911, and Kandinsky showed Schoenberg's works at the Blaue Reiter exhibition. Kandinsky wrote to Schoenberg "in your works, you have realized what I ... have so greatly longed for in music. The independent progress through their own destinies, the independent life of the individual voices in your compositions, is exactly what I am trying to find in my paintings."⁸

1911 also saw the publication of Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre*, or *Theory of Harmony*. This textbook introduced Schoenberg's ideas on atonality and contrapuntal methodology. Once again, Kandinsky drew great inspiration from his friend, writing to him in April 1911, "I envy you very much! You have your *Theory of Harmony* already in print. ... How long will painting have to wait for this?"^{9,10}

Schoenberg's contribution to music is better understood with reference to the Classical and Romantic musical periods that preceded his work. This contrast

⁸ Arnold Schönberg – Wassily Kandinsky: *Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, pg. 21

⁹ Arnold Schönberg – Wassily Kandinsky: *Letters, Pictures, and Documents*, pg. 27

¹⁰ Kandinsky's *Point and Line to Plane* was published in 1926.

serves to illustrate his accomplishment more clearly and explains Mann's decision to use Schoenberg's music in *Doctor Faustus*.

The Tradition of Classical Music

The era of Classical music began circa 1750 and endured into the early decades of the nineteenth century, encompassing great composers such as Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. For almost one hundred and fifty years, the musical conventions of the Classical period informed and conditioned audiences what to expect when listening to a concert.

Classical music uses a tonal framework. Tonality is a "system of pitch organization related to a seven-note scale in which the octave is divided into seconds of varying size."¹¹ Within this framework, one tone, called the key or tonic, will be the most important and lead the other tones within the composition to it; it roots the music by providing a tonal centre. The tonal centre provides a "confident expectation of eventual resolution to a predictable point of repose ... and expectation is important to the communication of musical meaning."¹²

Tonality contributed both to unity and to variety; during the course of a composition, the tonal centre shifted, often with great frequency, but the "eventual return to the original tonality was as predictable as it was satisfying."¹³ The meter allows the listener to follow along and both understand and predict when a work is

¹¹ *Music in Perspective*, pg. 11

¹² *Music in Perspective*, pg. 12

¹³ *Music in Perspective*, pg. 162

finished. The Classical form was the basis by which music was understood and adhered to for the better part of two centuries.

In this context, first, tonality is expressed through tertian harmony, which is the use of different pitches to create a chord; the most common use of chords involves three tones, but it can range from two to as many as six. Chords are often subcategorized into major, minor, augmented, and diminished. These terms describe the interrelationship between the notes within the chord. The predominance of tertian harmony held sway well into the early twentieth century.

Second, diatonic chords using tones adhering to the key were predominant in Classical composition. Rich chromaticism, or tones not belonging to the key, provides contrast or is used “at climaxes or to underscore passages of emotional intensity.”¹⁴

Third, Classical music relies on meter. While other elements of the music were variable, “the Classical style depended on consistent meter and steady pulse.”¹⁵

Romanticism in Music

Romanticism emerged in literature in the late eighteenth century and emerged musically in the early part of the nineteenth, including the last fifteen years of Beethoven’s life. Although Romantic music continued to use the tonal framework of the Classical period, Romantic music reflected the social mores of the

¹⁴ *Music in Perspective*, pg. 161

¹⁵ *Music in Perspective*, pg. 161

time as an outlet for the self-expression of the composer and the glorification of the individual.¹⁶

The music also explored the idea that the world could be understood by evoking emotion, feeling and intuition. However, while Romantic music was primarily focused on the expression of emotion, it preserved and in some cases even extended the formal structures from the classical period.

The Music of the Avant-Garde

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, composers began to challenge the norms that had held sway for the better part of three centuries. As Griffiths writes “it is difficult to generalize about avant-garde music, but one can say it normally implies a questioning of the system of major and minor keys which had provided motivation and coherence for most western art music since the seventeenth century.”¹⁷

Just as Kandinsky is often credited with being the first visual artist to paint in the abstract, Claude Debussy is often credited with being the first avant-garde composer. Between 1892 and 1894, in a “clear-sighted rejection of conventional musical norms,”¹⁸ he composed *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. This beautiful piece of music gives the listener no guidance as to melody because it has removed the significance of the harmonic relationships and, as Griffiths notes, “at times

¹⁶ *Music in Perspective*, pg. 203

¹⁷ *A Concise History Of Avant-Garde Music*, pg. 7

¹⁸ *A Concise History Of Avant-Garde Music*, pg. 7

Debussy leaves the key in doubt."¹⁹ Debussy also broke the conventions about rhythm:

The spontaneity of the *Prélude* is not just a matter of harmonic ambiguity and formal freedom; it depends also on the fluctuating tempos and irregular rhythms, and on the subtle colouring of the piece. Traditional thematic working had demanded a certain regularity and homogeneity of rhythm in order that attention might be focused on matters of harmony and melodic shape, and the tempos had to be chosen to ensure the goal-directed force of the music. Debussy's music, wayward in harmony and form, is correspondingly less constrained in its measurement of time.²⁰

Others composers also broke with tradition, but it was the popular acceptance of Debussy's *Prélude* that "opened the paths of modern music – the abandonment of traditional tonality, the development of new rhythmic complexity, the recognition of colour as an essential, the creation of a quite new form for each work, the exploration of deeper mental processes."²¹

A Transition to Atonal Music

In the decade that followed Debussy's *Prélude*, several composers including Arnold Schoenberg experimented with new styles of musical composition. Atonal music was a key innovation in this time period.

Atonality is a method of organizing notes such that none is more important than the others; in other words, the music is lacking a key (or rootless). To early twentieth century listeners who were long accustomed and conditioned to Classical

¹⁹ *A Concise History Of Avant-Garde Music*, pg. 8

²⁰ *A Concise History Of Avant-Garde Music*, pg. 9

²¹ *A Concise History Of Avant-Garde Music*, pg. 13

and Romantic music, atonality must have often sounded like “total musical anarchy.”²²

Schoenberg adopted atonality in his music in 1908 while working on musical settings for the poems of the German poet Stefan George. The reasons for this move are unclear; it was in part symptomatic of a “larger historical evolution that engaged progressive composers around the world,” who “share the same free treatment of dissonance, attenuation or removal of key, and outré expressivity that also characterize Schoenbergian atonality.”²³ Schoenberg said of the period that “surprisingly, without any expectation on my part, these songs showed a style quite different from everything I had written before.”²⁴

Schoenberg found this transition very difficult. The combination of difficult personal circumstances²⁵ and an experimental foray into Expressionist painting led to an almost seven year period with virtually no new musical compositions. His foray as a painter can be understood through the artistic *Zeitgeist* that “the artist was possessed of a vision which demanded expression in whatever form; what mattered was not the form but the vision, not technique but truth.”²⁶

An example of Schoenberg’s atonal composition is his 1911 *Sechs Kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19*. Written in the same period as he composed his famous *Gurre Lieder* and wrote his seminal *Harmonielehre*, these six short piano pieces are

²² *Music in Perspective*, pg. 31

²³ *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg*, pg. 7

²⁴ *Style & Idea*, pg. 49

²⁵ His wife was having an affair with one of his students.

²⁶ *A Concise History of Music*, pg. 30

a departure from the Expressionist style characteristic of his music up to this period. A scant five minutes in total, they are a showcase of atonality. In the second of the six pieces, entitled *Langsam*, or “Slow”, a simple ostinato is repeated for three bars when the listener is jarred to attention with what must be described as an auditory abstraction that is both dissonant and jarring, though not unpleasant. The pattern is repeated twice and ends softly with a riff that pays homage to the opening ostinato.

Schoenberg and the Twelve Tones

According to his own writings, Schoenberg first consciously used “rows of twelve tones in 1921,” but “I was silent for nearly two years. ... I gathered about twenty of my pupils together to explain to them the new method in 1923.”²⁷ In the twelve tone method of composition the basic building block is known as the tone row, an ordered arrangement of the chromatic scale. The chromatic scale contains all twelve pitches of the musical scale; specifically, each pitch is a semitone removed from its neighbour. Mathematically speaking there are 479,001,600²⁸ unique tone rows, and the tone row used as the basis of a composition is known as the prime series. In its strictest application, the remainder of the composition should conform to various transformations of the prime series, namely transposition, inversion, and retrograde. Each prime series has at most forty-eight possible permutations. In practice though, composers do not strictly adhere to this rather dry limitation; as Schoenberg wrote, “I myself, who was sometimes forced by

²⁷ *Style & Idea*, pg. 213. Schoenberg goes on to note that he revealed his method at the time in order to not appear as an imitator of Hauer.

²⁸ $12! = 12 \times 11 \times 10 \dots \times 1 = 479,001,600$

bothersome inquiries to analyse the way in which I used the rows in certain parts of a work – I myself know how difficult it is often to get a result. ... I did not call it a 'system' but a 'method' and considered it as a tool of composition."²⁹

Schoenberg was seeking an effective method to present both the mood and the idea inherent in his music. He contended that the "method of composing with twelve tones grew out of a necessity,"³⁰ once what he called the "emancipation of the dissonance" occurred. In his 1941 essay "Composing With Twelve Tones" he wrote

The ear had gradually become acquainted with a great number of dissonances, and so had lost the fear of their 'sense-interrupting' effect. One no longer expected preparations of Wagner's dissonances or resolutions of Strauß' discords; one was not perturbed by Debussy's non-functional harmonies, or by the harsh counterpoint of later composers. This state of affairs led to a freer use of dissonances comparable to classic composers' treatment of diminished seventh chords, which could precede and follow any other harmony, consonant or dissonant, as if there were no dissonance at all.³¹

What Schoenberg achieved in his method of composing with twelve tones, then, was to formalize the evolution of atonality in music; whereas atonality had merely freed music from the constraints of a key, Schoenberg provided a framework within which composers such as Alban Berg and later Benjamin Britten could build their works. Whereas Debussy's *Prélude* had done away with the regularity of traditional classic composition, Schoenberg had now also done away with the distinction between consonance and dissonance; with that, music now

²⁹ *Style & Idea*, pg. 213

³⁰ *Style & Idea*, pg. 216

³¹ *Style & Idea*, pg. 216

had the freedom of the power of abstraction akin to what Kandinsky had achieved with abstraction in the world of painting.

Although Schoenberg's method of composing with twelve tones earned him devoted musical disciples, such as Alban Berg, Theodor Adorno and Anton Webern, it did not achieve his much hoped for popularity during his lifetime. However, it did finally gain more widespread recognition after the Second World War.³²

With this basic understanding of Schoenberg's contribution to music, we can begin to see why Mann used it in *Doctor Faustus*. The twelve tone method was an enormous musical innovation, precisely the kind of thing Mann needed for Leverkühn.

Schoenberg, Mann, and Adorno

Mann deliberately chose a musician as the protagonist of his novel in no small part because he considered himself to be a musician of literature. In his letter to the philosopher Theodor Adorno at the end of 1945, Mann wrote:

[My] relationship to music is fairly accepted; I have always been adept at literary music-making, have felt myself to be half-and-half a musician, and have translated the technique of musical interweaving to the novel. ... But, in order to write a musician novel which occasionally even seems to aspire to become ... a novel of music, more is needed than mere 'initiation'. Scholarship is wanted, and that I simply lack. Which is one reason I was determined from the start ... to shrink from no borrowing, no appropriation of other men's property. I trust the borrowings will serve as an independent function within the pattern of the whole, will acquire a symbolic life of their

³² *Music in Perspective*, pg. 252

own – while at the same time continuing *intact in their original places* in the works of criticism.³³

Mann needed to provide Leverkühn with a compelling reason to conclude a pact with the Devil, and Schoenberg's musical method provided a ready made solution. Mann was also conscious of criticisms of other great contemporary writers. In particular, when reading Harry Levin's book on Joyce, he wrote "there are sentences in Levin's book³⁴ which touched me with a strange intensity. 'The best writing of our contemporaries is not an act of creation, but an act of evocation, peculiarly saturated with reminiscences.' And this other one: 'He has enormously increased the difficulties of being a novelist.'³⁵ In this respect Mann was successful – just as Joyce and his *Ulysses* evoked *Homer's Odyssey*, so too does Mann's *Doctor Faustus* evoke the mythical *Faust*.

When the novel was first published, Mann sent an autographed copy to Schoenberg with the inscription "Dem Eigentlichen!"³⁶ as an homage to and recognition of one of the inspirations for a key element of the novel. Schoenberg, who had not read the book because of his deteriorating vision, relied on the comments of friends. He concluded that his intellectual property had been stolen and feared that its misattribution would lessen his historical importance.³⁷ Worse, Schoenberg was further angered by the (incorrect) idea that Adrian Leverkühn was modelled after him.

³³ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1889-1955*, pg. 494-495

³⁴ *James Joyce* by Harry Levin

³⁵ *The Genesis of a Novel*, pg. 76

³⁶ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 37. Translated, "to the real one".

³⁷ *The Arnold Schoenberg Companion*, pg. 38

A public fight ensued in the pages of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. In his initial letter, Schoenberg wrote:

In his novel *Doctor Faustus*, Thomas Mann has taken advantage of my literary property. He has produced a fictitious composer as the hero of his book; and in order to lend him qualities a hero needs to arouse people's interest, he made him the creator of what one erroneously calls 'my system of twelve tones', which I call 'method of composing with twelve tones'.³⁸

Schoenberg went on at length to denounce the (mis)use of his work by Mann, and to distance himself from Adorno, a former pupil of Alban Berg, who had provided the musical background Mann needed. In the same letter, Schoenberg says of Adorno that he "was capable of giving Mr. Mann quite an accurate account of what a layman – the author – needs to tell another layman – the reader – to make him believe that he understands what it is about."

Unwilling to leave it at that, Schoenberg disparaged the fictional Leverkühn in an essay explaining that his method requires a certain level of inherent or possibly instinctual musical talent, adding "this is also the reason why Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkühn does not know the essentials of composing with twelve tones. All he knows has been told to him by Mr. Adorno, who knows only the little I was able to tell my pupils. The real fact will probably remain secret science until there is one who inherits it by virtue of an unsolicited gift. ... [it] is also the reason

³⁸ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 168

why, of the hundreds of my pupils, only a few have become composers."³⁹

Adorno's name is not on the list of composers Schoenberg accredits.

However, Adorno was no musical amateur. While he may not have become a composer, he was "an outstanding musical scholar, philosopher, and critic who developed some provocative theories of art,"⁴⁰ including a thorough analysis of Beethoven that is reflected in some of Leverkühn's dialogue in the novel. Mann also gave Adorno ample leeway to shape the musical underpinnings of the novel's main character. Mann decided he wanted Adorno to provide this content after reading the latter's manuscript on "Schoenberg and Progress."⁴¹ Mann went to great lengths to ensure that the musical details in *Doctor Faustus* were authentic. In addition to Adorno, Mann also sought advice and help from his son Michael, Bruno Walter, Arnold Schoenberg himself, and many others.⁴²

Adorno was able to provide Mann with the artistic insight he needed to bring Adrian Leverkühn to life, including mock-ups of the compositions for Leverkühn's chamber music and the outline for the *Lament of Doctor Faustus*. The most important contribution Adorno made was to allow Mann to express in layman language the musical terminology needed for the *Doctor Faustus* novel to succeed as a work of art. As Mundt points out, "from Adorno, Mann had learned that the emancipation of tonal music from traditional forms and musical organizations had

³⁹ *Style & Idea*, pg. 386

⁴⁰ "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style", pg. 242

⁴¹ *Theodor W. Adorno & Thomas Mann: Correspondences 1943-1955*, pg. vi

⁴² *Faust as Musician*, pg. 5

reached its highest point with Beethoven's late compositions, that all creative possibilities had been explored and exhausted. In his 1948 book, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, which Mann knew prior to its publication, Adorno explains how this stagnation was overcome by Arnold Schoenberg.⁴³

Adorno neatly divided Schoenberg's artistic career into three phases: "the imitation of tradition, followed by the parody of tradition, and third, the breakthrough to atonal, twelve-tone music. The last two phases also define Leverkühn's artistic development."⁴⁴ Schoenberg thus provides the ideal paradigm for Mann's protagonist, and positions music as the binding undercurrent in the story.

Schoenberg did not see it that way. He even sent Mann a letter where the imaginary encyclopaedia editor "Hugo Tribsamen" not only gave Mann credit for the method of composing in twelve tones, but also accused Schoenberg of being the plagiarist! Mann, in a letter to Schoenberg, replied, "I imagine every Hottentot nowadays knows who is the creator of the so-called twelve tone system. Anyone who as much as picks up *Doctor Faustus* certainly knows. ... Didn't he [Tribsamen] notice that the whole musical theory of the book is saturated in your ideas, in fact that by "music" what is really implied all along in Schoenbergian music?"⁴⁵

⁴³ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 186

⁴⁴ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 186

⁴⁵ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 547

However, Mann agreed to add a note to future copies indicating that Schoenberg was the originator of the twelve-tone method. Mann wrote the publisher "I myself also include today a note which I promised to add to ... the novel. You can imagine that it was Maestro Schoenberg who ... asked me to do so, and I could not refuse his wish. The note should be placed at the end of the book, *not* on the last page of the text of course, but at some distance from it, so that its disenchanting effect is kept at a minimum."⁴⁶

Schoenberg confessed his invention of *Triebstücken* in a letter of reconciliation in 1948 and, in 1950 the two finally made up. However, the reconciliation was not made public until after Schoenberg's death in 1951, because Schoenberg did not wish to, in his own words, "stab in the back those who supported me in this fight – friends, acquaintances, and strangers."⁴⁷

Doctor Faustus

Doctor Faustus is a tale of love, music, and death. Serenus Zeitblom, the lifelong friend of the protagonist, Adrian Leverkühn, narrates the tale, beginning with their shared experiences as boys growing up in the small rural town of Kaisersaschern.⁴⁸ Were we to consider Leverkühn on his own merits, one would arguably describe him as "arrogant, cold-hearted, excessively cerebral, and cruel to

⁴⁶ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 551

⁴⁷ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 41

⁴⁸ Kaisersaschern is a fictional town compiled from several real towns in much the same way as Proust's Combray in the latter's *In Search of Lost Time*.

his friends."⁴⁹ However, Serenus Zeitblom plays a significant role as the narrator in this piece. He mediates our view and experience of Adrian Leverkühn in a positive light. Zeitblom is not only a complementary opposite character to Adrian, but also protects his friend throughout the narrative. Zeitblom sympathetically recounts the rise and ultimate fall of Leverkühn. As Osman Durrani describes it, "their contrasting figures include most aspects of their lives: the bourgeois and the artist, mediocrity and genius, reason and energy, tradition and innovation, the Catholic and the Protestant, the 'classical' Humanist and the irrational Romantic, and so forth."⁵⁰

From the outset, Mann had decided on a musician as the main character. In a letter to Bruno Walter, Mann wrote "I have something very different in mind, tending in the theological and demonical direction. ... the novel of a pathological, unlawful inspiration. The hero, incidentally, will be a musician (a composer)."⁵¹ Mann considered setting the story in a conservatory. Schoenberg worked in a conservatory in Berlin and also taught at UCLA. However, many composers like Stravinsky and Hugo Wolf, had not studied in a conservatory, and so Mann ultimately abandoned the idea. Mann also noted "I also intend to ask Schoenberg for advice."⁵²

⁴⁹ "The Tearful Teacher: The Role of Serenus Zeitblom in Thomas Mann's 'Doctor Faustus'", pg. 652

⁵⁰ "The Tearful Teacher: The Role of Serenus Zeitblom in Thomas Mann's 'Doctor Faustus'", pg. 655

⁵¹ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 419

⁵² *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 419

While the music of Schoenberg resonates throughout the book, the contention that Leverkühn is modelled after Schoenberg personally must be addressed. Schoenberg, in a letter to Mann, complained that he was “depicted, from beginning to end, as a lunatic. I am now seventy-four and I am not yet insane, and I have never acquired the disease from which this insanity stems. I consider this an insult!”⁵³

When one examines the main character in *Doctor Faustus* in detail it is clearly evident that Adrian Leverkühn is not Arnold Schoenberg. As Mundt highlights, Leverkühn is a pastiche and based not only on the fictional figure of [Faust], but also on real persons such as Martin Luther (1483-1546), Mann himself, and Friedrich Nietzsche who is “one of the most prominent models.”⁵⁴ Mann, in a letter to Frederic Warburg wrote “it is the fictitious biography of a modern musician, a composer, written by a surviving friend. The artist shares the fate of, let us say, Nietzsche and Hugo Wolf....”⁵⁵ Mann also expresses astonishment that people believed Leverkühn was based on Schoenberg. In a 1945 letter to Bruno Walter, wherein Mann discusses some of the musical elements of a chapter he had sent to Walter for review, Mann comments of Leverkühn, “what I can’t for the life of me understand is how anything of that sort could cause people to think that my model was Schoenberg.”⁵⁶

⁵³ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 169

⁵⁴ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 175

⁵⁵ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 464

⁵⁶ *Letters of Thomas Mann: 1899-1955*, pg. 419

However, there are some genuine similarities between Leverkühn and Schoenberg. Both are largely self-taught musicians and both produced music that was controversial and misunderstood in its time. However, in terms of Leverkühn's life experiences, temperament, and other major events, Leverkühn owes a lot more to Nietzsche.

It is worth noting that Nietzsche had a deeply rooted interest in music and even composed some pieces himself, although he was never able to find a conductor willing to perform his works. While "talent and addiction to music made of Nietzsche neither a great musician nor even a consistently reliable critic of music,"⁵⁷ Nietzsche was nevertheless deeply influenced by music. He dedicated his *Geburt der Tragödie* to Richard Wagner, and also promoted other musicians he liked, even though he exhibited "a distressing uncertainty in distinguishing the mediocre from the outstanding on objective musical grounds."⁵⁸

Mann borrows elements from Nietzsche's life almost verbatim in setting up a key event in Leverkühn's. In an extensive narrative, Mann depicts Leverkühn's arrival in Leipzig and hiring of a guide. Misinterpreting his request, the guide takes Leverkühn to a brothel. Shocked, and not knowing what else to do, the latter goes and plays a few notes on a piano he finds in the room, and then flees the building, but not before a prostitute caresses him on the cheek. This narrative has "faithfully reproduced the outward facts as told by Deussen and chronicled by the Nietzsche

⁵⁷ "Nietzsche, Music and Madness", pg. 187

⁵⁸ "Nietzsche, Music and Madness", pg. 187

biographer Helmut Walther Brana.⁵⁹ This episode assumes tragic importance in the life of Adrian Leverkühn as it did with Nietzsche.

The Musical Mann

Mann's *Doctor Faustus* opens with the narrator, Serenus Zeitblom explaining that he is in wartime Germany telling us the posthumous story of his childhood friend Adrian Leverkühn, a composer of great renown. Zeitblom's epistle begins the 23rd of May 1943, "on the same day as Mann begins to write the novel."⁶⁰ However, Zeitblom introduces us to the young Adrian Leverkühn, who was born in 1885⁶¹. Leverkühn is portrayed as a very serious person for whom the normal quotidian social niceties and curiosities hold little importance. Despite his apparent indifference to the arts, his future as a composer is foreshadowed. Zeitblom remarks that Leverkühn "hid himself from music. For a long time, with intuitive perseverance, the man hid himself from his own destiny."⁶²

His musical intuition and genius quickly becomes clear. Leverkühn at fifteen "made his own, autodidactic, secret explorations of the keyboard, of chord structures, the compass card of musical keys, the circle of fifths, and that without any knowledge of notation or fingering, he has used these harmonic discoveries for all sorts of exercises in modulation and to build vaguely rhythmic structures of

⁵⁹ "A Nietzsche Incident in Thomas Mann's '*Doctor Faustus*'", pg. 388

⁶⁰ *Understanding Thomas Mann*, pg. 173

⁶¹ Thomas Mann notes in *The Genesis of a Novel* that Leverkühn is born in 1885, as was Alban Berg, a student of Schoenberg's. Adorno had given a book by Berg to Mann as a gift.

⁶² *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 48. The 1999 translation of the novel by John E. Woods is used for all citations taken from the text of the novel unless otherwise noted.

melody.”⁶³ He tells Zeitblom “A chord like this has no key as such. It’s all relationship.”⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, he is sent to begin studying music with Wendell Kretzschmar, who would become his musical mentor.

Mann thus establishes the early link to atonality, paralleling the development of Schoenberg’s music. The novel continues to show us the forces that would help construct and shape young Adrian, including lectures by Kretzschmar and the further development and discussion of musical theory. In a span of some thirty pages, Mann presents the twelve tones of the chromatic scale, polyphonic objectivity, the “emancipation of music” from Beethoven’s “cultic to cultural”, and a lengthy dialogue on the secularization of art. As a metaphor of the inherently mathematical nature of twelve tone compositions, as well as an illustration of Leverkühn’s intelligence, Mann has Leverkühn decorate his apartment with “an arithmetical etching that he had found in some curio shop or another: a so-called magic square, like the one visible in Dürer’s *Melancholia*.”⁶⁵ This narrative overture to the novel provides a musical leitmotif to the development of the plot. When Mann occasionally breaks the narrative flow of Leverkühn’s biography with Zeitblom’s commentary on the imminent collapse of Nazi Germany and the end of World War Two, it is almost as a melodic interlude within a greater work and highlights an oft-recurring theme of Germany forever struggling with the rest of Europe for cultural supremacy. In the context of Mann’s writing of the book,

⁶³ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 50

⁶⁴ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 51

⁶⁵ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 102

it is even in part a bitter critique of the rise of Hitler and the Nazis and their unleashing destruction on the German state. Mann comments ironically on German culture through one of Leverkühn's university classmates, who claims, "the Russians have depth, but no form. Those to our west have form, but no depth. Only we Germans have both together!"⁶⁶

Leverkühn as Faust

The original Faust legend was based on the disreputable astrologer Johannes Faustus, who lived in Germany in the early part of the sixteenth century. The classic fable of Faust selling his soul to the devil for knowledge was first published in a chapbook in 1587.⁶⁷ Faust, in exchange for youth and the love of a beautiful woman named Marguerite, promises his soul to Mephistopheles. Marguerite's brother, Valentin, goes off to war and entrusts his good friend Siebel with the care of his sister. While Valentin is away, Faust seduces Marguerite and has a child with her. When Valentin returns from the wars and discovers that Faust has betrayed his sister's honour, he challenges Faust to a duel and is slain. Marguerite meanwhile commits infanticide and is jailed. Faust attempts to free her with a key provided by Mephistopheles, but she refuses. Faust then watches as angels take Marguerite to heaven while Mephistopheles takes him into hell.

⁶⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 132

⁶⁷ "Faust" *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. Ed. Phyllis Hartnoll and Peter Found. Oxford University Press, 1996. Oxford Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Simon Fraser University. 17 July 2007
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t79.e1062>>

Christopher Marlowe around 1593 wrote a play entitled *Doctor Faustus* based on the original legend. In the play, Faustus, despite warnings of the horrors of hell, makes a bargain with Lucifer to exchange his soul for twenty-four years of service from with Mephistopheles. When his time is up, Faustus regrets his infernal deal. Despite a confession to a group of scholars about his infernal deal and a plea for mercy, he is also taken to hell by a host of devils.

Over two centuries later, the Faust legend was reformulated in Goethe's great classic *Faust*. Goethe's version differs from the first two in that God gives permission to the devil to tempt Faust. Faust makes a deal with Mephisto, his soul in exchange for youth and beauty. In contrast to the previous versions of the legend, Faust escapes the clutches of the devil; he achieves transcendence through grace and ascends to heaven.

Mann's version of the legend borrows elements from all of these, but the scene with the devil in chapter XXV is clearly influenced by Goethe. In a departure from the rest of the novel, this chapter is written in the form of a dialogue, much as Goethe would have written it. As Herbert Reichert asked, "why the brief introduction of dramatic form into a novel by an artist acutely conscious of style? It would seem that Goethe's pact scene was so vivid in Mann's mind that he was unable or unwilling to conceive it differently."⁶⁸ As with Goethe's original, Mann uses the dialog to express his own views of Germany, the artistic life, and the

⁶⁸ "Goethe's Faust in Two Novels by Thomas Mann", pg. 213

relation “of genius to illness and criminality.”⁶⁹ The structure of the dialogue even follows Goethe’s form, including the famous adage that the Gods bestow their favours completely, with all their attendant joys and sorrows, on their favourites. It is worth noting too that Mann felt an artistic and personal affinity with Goethe.

Becoming Faust

Leverkühn, having completed his Gymnasium studies, is sent to the university in Halle, where he has chosen to study theology. However, he only has an intellectual interest in the topic, saying “I took shelter in it not so much because I saw in it the highest of the sciences ... as because I wished to submit myself to it, to humble myself, to discipline myself, to punish the arrogance of my coldness – in short, out of *contritio*.”⁷⁰

The confession of contrition to Zeitblom is interesting because, in the other incarnations of the myth, the Faust character has always searched for power or knowledge for personal gain and has wielded that power over others. However, Leverkühn is sorry that he is a cold and emotionless person, and is afraid that if he pursues his interest in music, he would be “an object of exceptional pity.”⁷¹ In other words, the struggle Leverkühn is facing is an internal one; he seeks power not over others, but over his Self.

⁶⁹ “Goethe’s Faust in Two Novels by Thomas Mann”, pg. 213

⁷⁰ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 140

⁷¹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 140

However, Leverkühn continues, in Faustian fashion, with, “My Lutheranism agrees with that, since it sees theology and music as neighbouring spheres, as members of the same family; ... music has always seemed a magical union of theology and the fine sport of mathematics. ... There is about it a great deal of the ... alchemist and sorcerer of ages past, which likewise stood under the sign of theology, but at the same time under that of emancipation and apostasy – and it was apostasy, not from the faith, that was not possible, but rather in the faith, and everything is and happens in God – falling away from him most especially.”⁷²

Leverkühn abandons academic theology and the university, deciding instead to continue the study of music under his old music teacher Kretzschmar in Leipzig. Our dedicated narrator, who had always protected his friend, is separated from Leverkühn and spends a year serving out his compulsory military service.

Leverkühn in Leipzig

Once Adrian arrives in Leipzig, the novel changes in tone, as does Leverkühn’s music. There is a sense of anticipation that something vitally important is about to happen, and Mann does not disappoint. In an incident taken directly from Nietzsche’s life, Adrian hires a guide to show him around the city, and is taken to a brothel. Leverkühn writes Zeitblom a letter about the event in antiquated prose, a style Zeitblom calls “a self-stylization, a manifestation of his inner

⁷² *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 140

disposition and of a highly characteristic tendency to hide behind and find fulfilment in parody."⁷³

Leverkühn's anger spills out in his letter:

That churl, that ale-knight Schlepfuß, had led me to a bawdy house! I stand up ... behold opposite me a piano ... – a friend – tread straightaway across the carpet and, still standing, strike two, three chords, and know full well what they were ... [from the *Freischütz*] Know that now, afterwards, though knew it not at the time, but simply struck the keys. There steps to my side a nut-brown lass, in Spanish jacket, with large mouth, stubbed nose, and almond eyes – Esmeralda, who strokes my cheek with her arm. I turn about, thrust the bench aside with my knee, and stride back across the carpet, through this hell-hole of lusts, past the vaunting bawdstrot, through the entry, and down the stairs into the street, never touching the rail of brass.⁷⁴

Zeitblom deconstructs the letter and informs the reader that a profound event has happened; the touch of the prostitute has corrupted Leverkühn. As Zeitblom narrates, "the proudest intellectual stands in more immediate confrontation with what is bestial, is most abjectly at its mercy; ... it is also why I found that damnable adventure he wrote me about so terrifyingly symbolic."⁷⁵

The moment is symbolic for two reasons. First, only a few phrases earlier, Mann had invoked nostalgia for the characters' childhood in describing Kaisersaschern as a metaphor for "petit-bourgeois mentality and its medieval dread of sin."⁷⁶ Second, Mann, through Zeitblom, also gives us one of his acts of evocation, an ostinato that would echo through Leverkühn's music, the "*Hetaera*

⁷³ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 148

⁷⁴ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 152

⁷⁵ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 158

⁷⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 157

Esmeralda.⁷⁷ Serenus knew all too well that “Adrian had not escaped.... The arrogance of the intellect had suffered the trauma of an encounter with a soulless instinct. Adrian would return to the spot where the deceiver had led him.”⁷⁸

Indeed, Adrian does return a year later to the brothel where he first saw Esmeralda, but she had moved to Pressburg.⁷⁹ Adrian travelled to Graz, using the premise of seeing the 1906 Austrian premiere of *Salome*,⁸⁰ and sought her out. Esmeralda warns Adrian, “the man who desired her against ‘herself’ – and that means an act of the soul”, that she carried a harmful disease. However, as Zeitblom tells it, “good heavens, ... what act of will recklessly tempting God ... caused him, though warned, to spurn the warning and insist on possessing that flesh?”⁸¹

Leverkühn contracts an illness from Esmeralda. Though the disease is never specifically labelled as syphilis,⁸² the symptoms he suffers through the rest of the novel mimic to a great extent the pains and eventual descent into madness just as happened to Nietzsche.

For the remainder of his time in Leipzig, Leverkühn’s musical style becomes incrementally more atonal in nature. He composes a small piece in the style of Debussy called *Meerleuchtung*, and creates tonal compositions with very simple harmonies based on the poems of Verlaine and Blake. He then begins work on the

⁷⁷ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 158.

⁷⁸ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 158

⁷⁹ Poszony, Hungary

⁸⁰ The opera by Richard Strauß.

⁸¹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 165

⁸² We can also infer it from the Devil’s description of Adrian’s illness as the “French Measles” later in the novel.

Brentano Song Cycle, which strongly suggests Schoenberg's own *Pierrot Lunaire*. As Carnegy points out, "the most striking parallel between *Pierrot Lunaire* and the *Brentano Song Cycle* is that both real and fictional compositions show the rudiments of what was to be systematized later into 12-tone serial technique."⁸³

One can only speculate whether Mann deliberately based this aspect of the *Brentano Song Cycle* on *Pierrot Lunaire*, but one can infer from their close association that Mann would have been familiar with Schoenberg's works.

Carnegy notes that in *Pierrot Lunaire*, "the passacaglia nocturne ('Nacht') permutes one three note motif (E, G, E-Flat) through more than a hundred variants, in twenty-six bars; harmonically, contrapuntally – in every way imaginable."⁸⁴

Mann echoes this in Zeitblom's description of the *Brentano Song Cycle*:

And thus within my friend's tonal tapestry there is conspicuously frequent use of a figure, a sequence of five or six notes, that begins with an H (which Anglo-Saxons call a B) and ends on an Es (known in the English-speaking world as E-flat), with E and A alternating in between – a basic motif with an oddly melancholy sound that pervades his music in a variety of harmonic and rhythmic disguises, assigned now to one voice, now to another, often in its inverted form, as if turned on its axis, with the intervals still the same, but with the notes in reverse sequence. It appears first in what is probably the most beautiful of the thirteen Brentano Lieder, composed while he was still in Leipzig, in the heart wrenching song: 'Oh Sweet Maiden, how bad you are.'⁸⁵

⁸³ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 45

⁸⁴ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 45

⁸⁵ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 166

As Zeitblom notes “that encoded sound reads as: H-E-A-E-Es: *Hetaera Esmeralda*.”⁸⁶ This has substantial significance in the narrative. The theme becomes a signature ostinato in all of Leverkühn’s future works, not least in his final opus, the *Lamentation of Doctor Faustus* and it evokes and foreshadows Leverkühn’s Faustian pact with the devil. It also links to the theme of metamorphosis, alluded to early in the novel when Jonathan Leverkühn first introduces the young Serenus and Adrian to exotic moths. Adrian is particularly impressed with the butterfly *Hetaera Esmeralda*, “whose transparent nakedness makes it a lover of dusky, leafy shade...its wings smudged with just a dark splash of violet and pink, so that in flight, with nothing else visible, it imitates a windblown petal.”⁸⁷ *Esmeralda* from the brothel symbolizes both the butterfly and Adrian’s later transformation from creative sterility to musical genius.

Adrian spends four and a half years in Leipzig under the tutelage of Kretzschmar. Except for a few travels to hear musical performances, he stays in the same simple lodgings that he first found through the guide who also led him to *Esmeralda*.

In a visit to Geneva, Leverkühn hears a performance of his own music, and afterwards he “no more contradicted the delighted listeners than he did the dissatisfied.”⁸⁸ Leverkühn was indifferent to the public’s reaction to his music, in no

⁸⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 166

⁸⁷ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 17. *Hetaera* is from the Greek *hetaira*, which means “female companion or paramour, a mistress, a concubine; a courtesan, harlot.”Oxford English Dictionary

⁸⁸ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 190

small part because for him the compositions were intellectual experiments. At the concert in question, it was a work of music that he had “moved beyond.”⁸⁹

This reaction is somewhat typical of Schoenberg’s own experiences with performances of his music. In 1930, Schoenberg commented, “Called upon to say something about my public, I have to confess: I do not believe I have one.”⁹⁰ Later, in 1937, he said, “While the music proved to be lasting, these audiences were unstable. As suddenly as they turned their favour to me and had procured me a popularity which was not consistent with my style, and which always seemed to me unsound, the same audiences made another turn and became hostile towards my music.”⁹¹ The Geneva episode also demonstrates the kind of loneliness that Leverkühn experiences and gives him further artistic commonality with Schoenberg who wrote, “Through this turn in the mind of the public, I became for the first time in my life really lonely.”⁹²

Prelude to a Pact

In 1910, Adrian moves to Munich to continue his career as a composer in a major German cultural centre. That September, both Zeitblom and Leverkühn return to Kaisersaschern to attend a wedding. Serenus catches up on Adrian’s life since their parting of ways, and also announces his own wedding plans.

⁸⁹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 190

⁹⁰ *Style & Idea*, pg. 96

⁹¹ *Style & Idea*, pg. 51

⁹² *Style & Idea*, pg. 52

Toward the end of the lengthy conversation, Leverkühn talks about his musical breakthrough, how he has developed a new musical style. He explains that his *Hetaera Esmeralda* is the closest he had come to a strict style, and then lays out his development of the twelve tone style:

The tonal space it [the *Hetaera Esmeralda*] provides is too limited. One would have to proceed from here and build longer words from the twelve steps of the tempered semitone alphabet, words of twelve letters, specific combinations and interrelations of the twelve semitones, rows of notes – from which, then, the piece, a given movement, or a whole work of several movements would be strictly derived. Each tone in the entire composition, melodic and harmonic, would have to demonstrate its relation to this predetermined basic row. None would dare recur until all have first occurred. No note would dare appear that did not fulfil its motif function within the structure as a whole. Free notes would no longer exist. That is what I call a strict style.⁹³

Zeitblom inquires if Leverkühn hopes the audience will perceive or even derive aesthetic pleasure from such compositions, and Adrian replies that “they will hear the order itself, and the perception of it would provide an unknown aesthetic satisfaction.”⁹⁴

This contrasts with Schoenberg’s view. For him, composing with twelve tones had to do with ensuring comprehensibility in music that was very complex. It was required “not only for intellectual, but also for emotional satisfaction.”⁹⁵ One of the key differences between Schoenberg and Leverkühn in their development of the twelve tone method is that for Schoenberg, it was a long progression and

⁹³ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 205

⁹⁴ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 206

⁹⁵ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 48. Carnegie is quoting Schoenberg.

indeed a musical evolution while for Leverkühn it was an abrupt departure. Carnegie points out that Schoenberg was “following an inner compulsion.”⁹⁶ In contradistinction, for Leverkühn it was a “necessity to compose anything serious,”⁹⁷ such as the *Apocalipsis cum Figuris* and his final *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*.

Furthermore, where Schoenberg notes that he “must depend ... on feeling, sense of form, and musical instinct”⁹⁸ as paramount for composing, Leverkühn is consistently portrayed as cold and devoid of feeling; for him, the twelve tone compositional style would perforce be an intellectual exercise of the kind Schoenberg would eschew.

The Pact With the Devil

The most compelling moment of the novel occurs with Leverkühn’s stay in Italy, somewhere between 1911 and 1912. The details are left deliberately unclear and lend an aura of mystery and the uncanny to the affair. Leverkühn is staying with an Italian family in Palestrina, accompanied by his friend Rüdiger Schildknapp. Mann injects some irony into the scene, with the Italian lady of the household forever saying *fa sangue il vino*, (wine makes the blood), a comment on both the theological idea of transubstantiation and Leverkühn’s lack of religiosity.

One evening, Leverkühn demurs from a social occasion, feeling one of the many headaches he has experienced since his fateful trip to Pressburg. Alone, he is

⁹⁶ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 48

⁹⁷ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 49

⁹⁸ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 50. Carnegie is quoting Schoenberg.

reading Kierkegaard's treatise on Mozart's *Don Giovanni*⁹⁹ when he feels a cold presence.

When he asks who is there, the figure replies, "Speak only German! Avail yourself of naught but good old-fashioned German, no feignings, no presence. I understand it. Squarely said, my favourite language. At times I understand only German."¹⁰⁰ Later, the Devil even admits to being German, "German I am, German to the core, if you will, but then surely in an older, better sense, to wit: cosmopolitan at heart."¹⁰¹

The dialogue with the Devil is of course a discourse with the Self, and not an actual exchange between the natural and supernatural. "An important implication of these dialogues is a rejection of the possibility of dialogue with any reality (particularly of transcendent aspect) other than that of one's own person."¹⁰²

As mentioned earlier, Goethe's Faust character ultimately achieved salvation. In contrast, Mann's Faust character, Adrian Leverkühn, "is an aristocratic nihilist,"¹⁰³ one who has great intellect but finds himself at odds with the world. It is only through the acceptance of what the Devil can offer him that Adrian can progress musically and artistically. Furthermore, unlike Goethe's Faust, there is no salvation possible for Leverkühn, no hope of transcendence through grace.

⁹⁹ Based on the story of Don Juan, another tale of a man's soul claimed by the Devil.

¹⁰⁰ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 239

¹⁰¹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 242

¹⁰² *Faust as Musician*, pg. 82

¹⁰³ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 82

In Leverkühn's dialogue with the Devil, the Devil names himself Sammael, or "Angel of Poison."¹⁰⁴ Sammael tells Adrian that "we saw that your case entirely worth our attention ... Gifted, but lame is the German – gifted enough to be vexed by his lameness and overcome it by illumination ... You, dear boy, knew well enough what you lacked, and held true to your German nature when you made your journey and, *salva venia*, caught the French measles." The implication of the Devil's words is that Leverkühn deliberately sought to become infected by Esmeralda in hopes of releasing his creative genius, a reference to Nietzsche's powerful creativity.

The Devil informs Adrian that much pain is to be paid for the genius he seeks. "They are pains that one gladly and proudly takes in the bargain with pleasures so enormous, pains such as one knows from a fairy tale, pains like slashing knives, like those the little mermaid felt in the beautiful human legs she had acquired for a tail. You know Andersen's little mermaid, do you now?"¹⁰⁵

By invoking Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, Mann has made it clear to the reader that Leverkühn's journey will be full of pain and has no guarantee of success. Andersen's tale is the tragic fable of a mermaid who wishes for legs and longs for a human soul. A witch gives her a potion that will give her legs, but in exchange she loses her tongue and ability to speak and feels pain like sharp shooting knives with every step she takes. Should she successfully be able to

¹⁰⁴ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 244

¹⁰⁵ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 246

marry the prince she loves, she will gain a soul and be fully human. However, the mermaid's prince marries another, and so she dissolves into foam on an ocean wave.

Leverkühn endures the Devil's lecture on other artists, such as Spengler who is referred to as "an Esmeraldus,"¹⁰⁶ and listens as the Devil explains, "The artist is the brother of the felon and madman. Do you esteem that a merry worker has ever come about without that its maker had learned to practice with condition of the felon and the lunatic?"¹⁰⁷

The Devil discusses terms with Adrian, who in turn debates philosophically with the Devil about the possibility that the Devil will be unable to collect Adrian's soul. However, Adrian comes to the conclusion that no logical loopholes exist. If he is to progress musically, to improve on his idea of twelve tone composition, then he must agree to exchange his soul. The Devil sets his terms for Leverkühn:

We are in league and in business – with your blood you have certified it and promised yourself to us and are baptized ours – this visit of mine is intended merely for confirmation. From us you have taken time, genius time, high-flying time, a full twenty-four years *ab dato recessi*, which we set as your bound. And when they are over and their course run, which cannot be foreseen, and such a time is likewise an eternity – you shall be fetched. In recompense of which we will meanwhile be subject and obedient to you in all things, and hell shall profit you, if you but renounce all who live, all the heavenly host and all men, for that must be.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 248

¹⁰⁷ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 252

¹⁰⁸ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 264

And thus does Leverkühn make his Faustian deal with the Devil. In exchange for his soul and his renunciation of loving others, Leverkühn will be guaranteed genius and musical immortality.

The Schoenberg Finale

Leverkühn, armed with the devil's promise, moves to a life of relative solitude at the Schweigestill farm in Pfeifferring, a short train ride from Munich. Our sympathetic narrator Zeitblom soon arrives in nearby Freising, and the two are again in regular contact.

Leverkühn continues to compose, finishing his critically unsuccessful opera *Love's Labour Lost*, and then songs based on the poetry of Blake. After the outbreak of World War One, he composes the *Gesta Romanorum* suite for puppet theatre, which uses a Stravinsky-style orchestration of speaker, voices, and a small orchestra, comprised of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, and percussion.

However, the 1919 *Apocalipsis cum Figuris*, and his 1930 magnum opus, the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus*, overshadow these works. Nowhere better does Mann evoke music than through Zeitblom's narrative descriptions of these works.

The *Apocalipsis* is a cantata based on the fifteen woodcut series by Albrecht Dürer, which Zeitblom asserts is Leverkühn's most representative work and "took him [Leverkühn], amazingly enough, six months to complete."¹⁰⁹ Zeitblom's

¹⁰⁹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 380

description of this work identifies it as Expressionist. Here Mann has borrowed from Schoenberg's incomplete oratorio, *Die Jakobsleiter* (1917-22). Mann commented that he found the religious poetry of *Die Jakobsleiter* "impure."¹¹⁰ In terms of style, the oratorio is a "transitional piece poised between the atonal expressionism of *Erwartung* and the new classicism defined by the first strict 12-tone compositions."¹¹¹ Of this period, Schoenberg wrote that he had planned to build all his main themes of *Die Jakobsleiter* from a tone row of six notes.¹¹² As he continued to develop his eventual movement towards twelve tones, he called it "'working with tones'. This became more distinct in the piano pieces of Op. 23."¹¹³

At the same time, Schoenberg was warning against musical orthodoxy. He noted that while he was frequently asked whether his compositions are 'pure' twelve tone, or twelve tone at all, his response has been "The fact is I do not know. I am still more a composer than a theorist. When I compose, I try to forget all theories and I continue composing only after having freed my mind of them. It seems to me urgent to warn my friends against orthodoxy."¹¹⁴

Schoenberg had intended to complete *Die Jakobsleiter* but never did. However, it seems probable that Mann used the ideas therein for Leverkühn's *Apocalipsis*. Schoenberg did continue work on it in 1944 and he "sent Mann a copy of *Die Jakobsleiter* 'with a nice dedication'. ... Since we know that Mann

¹¹⁰ *The Genesis of a Novel*, pg. 45

¹¹¹ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 107

¹¹² *Style & Idea*, pg. 88

¹¹³ *Style & Idea*, pg. 89

¹¹⁴ *Style & Idea*, pg. 91-92

'stole' Leverkühn's String Trio directly from one of Schoenberg's completed works, we may guess that he would have had few scruples about transplanting ingredients for the *Apocalipsis* from *Die Jakobsleiter*."¹¹⁵ Whether Mann was gifted with the required "instinctual musical talent" for the twelve tone method of composition and managed to strike upon the same great idea from a literary angle, or whether he poached from Schoenberg's work, it is clear that Leverkühn's compositional works owe very much of their power to Schoenberg.

Leverkühn's *Apocalipsis* enjoys but a single performance in 1926, but is published in 1927 by the "Universal Edition" publishing house, the same one that issued Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre*. By then Leverkühn's fame has spread and one admirer sends him a ring with a Greek inscription from the hymn to Apollo by Callimachus, which he wears while composing.¹¹⁶

The Penultimate Movement

Rudi Schwertfeger, one of the members of a Munich society that Adrian frequents, persuades Leverkühn to compose a violin concerto for him. As Zeitblom explains, "There is something peculiar about the piece. Written in three movements, it has no key signature, even though, if I may put it this way, three tonalities are built into it: B minor, C minor, and D minor. ...The work ingeniously plays with these keys, in such a way that for most of the time none of them clearly

¹¹⁵ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 108

¹¹⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 413

takes over."¹¹⁷ After a joint trip to Vienna after a successful performance of the piece, Schwertfeger and Leverkühn return addressing each other by the "familiar 'you'."¹¹⁸ Thanks to this new closeness, Adrian sends Rudi on his behalf to woo Marie, a set and costume designer. Rudi betrays Adrian by marrying Marie and breaking off any further contact. Leverkühn is reminded of his pact with the Devil.

After this bitter betrayal, Leverkühn's creativity dries up and he believes that he will never compose another note.

The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus

Although temporarily at a creative standstill, Leverkühn finally returns to the composer's desk in 1927 with several works, including an ensemble for "three strings, three woodwinds, and piano,"¹¹⁹ a string quartet, and a trio for violin, viola, and cello. He composes at a feverish pace, completing three pieces in a short time and writes to Zeitblom that "I feel as had I studied at Cracow." Zeitblom describes this as "a turn of phrase I did not understand right off, not until I remembered that it was at the University of Cracow where magic had been publicly taught until the sixteenth century."¹²⁰

Leverkühn's final work, his final masterpiece, the *Lamentation of Dr.*

Faustus, is already in process when Zeitblom narrates the arrival of one Nepomuk

¹¹⁷ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 429

¹¹⁸ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 436. In German, it is considered proper to call someone the formal "Sie" until such time as sufficient closeness has developed or permission is given to use the more informal "du". It is possible, though not common, for one to call the other "du" as Zeitblom does with Leverkühn with the other remaining formal in return.

¹¹⁹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 478

¹²⁰ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 480

'Echo' Scheidewein, his young nephew, who comes to the bucolic surroundings of the Schweigestill farm in Pfeiffering. The boy is beloved by all who meet him, and particularly by Adrian. Although Leverkühn suffers more frequently from headaches and frequently requires total darkness to mitigate their effects, he always makes time for the boy.

Echo unfortunately contracts meningitis and, after a short period of lucidity, falls into a painful and intense coma. Leverkühn rails against the Devil and blames himself for the illness. He laments to Zeitblom who of course attempts to reassure him. Then, in a moment of great despair and determination, Adrian declares, "I have discovered that it ought not to be, the good and the noble, what people call human, even though it is good and noble. What people have fought for, have stormed citadels for, and what people filled to overflowing have announced with jubilation – it ought not be. It will be taken back. I shall take it back." When asked by a perplexed Zeitblom, "I don't understand, my dear fellow. What do you want to take back?", Leverkühn replies "The Ninth Symphony."¹²¹ Echo dies the very same day and Leverkühn is crushed by the loss.

Historically, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony broke the tradition that every note in a composition needed to be thematic; as a result, the Ninth Symphony had a powerful cultural impact in music and is regarded as one of the forebears of Romantic music.

¹²¹ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 501

Zeitblom, writing in the narrative present tense of 1945 in the closing days of World War Two, declares that he understands what Leverkühn meant by taking back Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, that the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* was intended as an antithesis to the *Ode to Joy* of Beethoven's Ninth. The death of Echo, for Mann, represents the suspension of the history of German culture.

Of the lamentation Zeitblom asks rhetorically, "A *de profundis* that with fond fervour I can say has no parallel. But from a creative viewpoint, ... is there not something jubilant, some high triumph in this terrible gift of redress and compensation? Does it not imply the kind of 'breakthrough', which, whenever was contemplated and discussed the destiny of art, its state and crisis, ... as a paradoxical possibility?"¹²²

The subject of the *Lamentation* is the Faust legend, and "specifically the version of the first chapbook, the *Urfaustbuch*."¹²³ The music lasts approximately an hour and a quarter, mirroring the length of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Zeitblom tells us the piece is "accompanied by the most painful *Ecco homo* gestures,"¹²⁴ and reminds us of the conversation in Kaisersaschern where Adrian discussed his journey to a "strict style" with the *Hetaera Esmeralda* ostinato. The *Lamentation* contains the word "For I die as both a wicked and good Christian,"¹²⁵ which are from the original chapbook, and also contains twelve syllables, and

¹²² *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 509

¹²³ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 129

¹²⁴ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 511

¹²⁵ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 511. In the original *Doktor Faustus*, pg. 646, it reads "Denn ich sterbe as ein böser und guter Christ."

these syllables form the theme which “is set to all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, and is thereby related to all possible intervals.”¹²⁶

Zeitblom concludes that the fugue in the piece becomes meaningless as there are no free notes, and that in turn the music is liberated as language thanks to the absoluteness of the form, or

In a cruder sense, in terms of tonal material, the work as such is finished before its composition even begins and thus can now unfold outside all restraints – that is to say, abandon itself to expression, which, being beyond the constructive form, or inside its perfect strictness, has now been reclaimed. Working uninhibitedly within preorganized material and unconcerned about its preexistent construction, the creator of the *Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* can abandon himself to subjectivity. Therefore, this, his strictest work, a work of utmost calculation, is simultaneously purely expressive. The return on Monteverdi and the style of his era is precisely what I called the ‘reconstruction of expression’ – of expressing in its first and primal manifestation, the expression of lament.¹²⁷

In May of 1930, Leverkühn invites an assembly of friends and acquaintances to his chambers at the farm and announces that he has an important announcement to make to them. He tells them of his latest work, his *Lamentation*, and then confesses to them his deal with the Devil. He names Andersen’s mermaid, Hyphialta, as his sister and bride in pain, with pain being his recompense for his infernal deal. Then, finally playing a few notes for the assembly, he collapses into unconsciousness.

Leverkühn mimics Nietzsche in his ultimate demise, dying at the age of 55 of the infection contracted from a prostitute.

¹²⁶ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 511

¹²⁷ *Doctor Faustus*, pg. 512

Conclusion

While Adrian Leverkühn is clearly not Schoenberg, were it not for Schoenberg's contribution to music, and in particular his method of composing with twelve tones, Thomas Mann would have had a much more difficult challenge in developing a believable and complicated protagonist.

The criticism that Schoenberg's music "hardly deserves a footnote" is clearly mistaken and misinformed. Carnegy argues instead that the Schoenbergian system is fine for musical purposes, but the wrong music for Mann to have used in his novel, that they were "the wrong, bad, energies, which were better left untapped."¹²⁸

Perhaps that conclusion was tenable when it was written in 1973, with the Second World War less than thirty years removed from popular memory. However, as an enduring classic of Modern writing, *Doctor Faustus* works precisely because of Schoenberg's ultimately difficult music. Music is a high-universal artistic medium, and one that can reach many people.

The legend of *Faust*, as retold by Mann through the twelve tones of Schoenberg, will remain as a canonical modern interpretation.

¹²⁸ *Faust as Musician*, pg. 142

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