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*From Beethoven to Schoenberg: The Micro-Myths  
of Viennese Classicism and Viennese Modernism  
in Thomas Mann's 'Doktor Faustus'*

ABSTRACT. A misreading of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* as a simple allegory lies at the heart of the controversy surrounding Mann's use of Arnold Schoenberg's music as a demonically inspired fascist aesthetic. If we look upon Schoenberg's music as a micro-myth, intersecting and interacting with a counterpart myth, namely Viennese Classicism, then a different picture emerges. This article will take a closer look at the construction and interplay between the micro-myths of Viennese Modernism and Viennese Classicism in Mann's novel. The article seeks to clarify the use of atonality vs. tonality in the myth-building process and to shed more light on the Mann-Schoenberg controversy.

## *I. Introduction*

In his 1947 novel *Doktor Faustus*, Thomas Mann famously equated the demonically inspired music of his fictional Faustian protagonist with the very real music of his friend Arnold Schoenberg. The comparison became controversial, because in the context of the novel, the music could be interpreted as representing a fascist aesthetic of control. In fact, Mann's musical consultant on the novel, Theodor W. Adorno, did exactly that, construing Schoenberg's compositional technique as a kind of musical cult of order. As a result, the main protagonist and modern-day Faust of the novel, Adrian Leverkühn, can be seen as a kind of Hitler apologist, harboring a mentality of cultural chauvinism that could be said to represent Germany's cultural claim to mastery over Europe. Schoenberg, who fled the Nazis both as a Jew and as a so-called «degenerate artist», was obviously offended and dumbfounded by Mann's association of his atonal music with Nazi sympathies. Indeed, many

scholars also remained perplexed as to why Thomas Mann would utilize Schoenberg's music in such a way (Neher 240). Thomas Mann scholar Hans Rudolf Vaget has pointed out that one possible reason for this befuddlement was that the novel has had a history of being misread as a simple allegory, with Leverkühn serving as a parallel to Hitler (Vaget 34). One of the factors that contributes to this kind of misreading, both of Adrian Leverkühn and of Schoenberg's music, lies in the complex system of myths that Mann created in order to drive forth the greater premise of the novel.

In his forward to the 2009 publication of the correspondence between Thomas Mann and his grandfather, E. Randol Schoenberg noted that Arnold Schoenberg believed that his twelve tone method reflected a kind of divine unity that had its roots in the composer's deeply held musical and moral philosophy (*Briefwechsel* 19). Commenting on the Mann-Schoenberg controversy, André Neher has also observed that it rests primarily on Thomas Mann's own willful ignorance of Schoenberg's religiously informed view of art as an attempt to obscure its Jewish dimension (Neher 240). Regardless of Mann's motivations, I believe the main factor leading to Mann's disregard for Schoenberg's views was his use of dodecaphonic music as a literary device designed to bolster both the mythical dimensions of the novel as well as his own particular view of music, which is clearly different from that of Schoenberg's and perhaps even from Adorno's<sup>1</sup>. Mann saw in music an ambiguous and even demonic art form. It was the most dangerous of the arts, a view that has its roots in 19th century aesthetics, most notably with Nietzsche (Carnegy 26-27). Central to Mann's use of Schoenberg's compositional technique are the mythological structures that he built around the music, which include this demonic element. As Neher points out, *Doktor Faustus* is a myth in polyhedron-form. It lives from a multitude of encapsulated myths of different scope built into one another and intersecting with each other in terms of depiction, association and relevance, the Faust legend constituting the mega-myth to which the others adhere (Neher

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Cobley argues that Adorno's negative dialectic was different than Mann's humanistic framework, but that Mann's incorporation of it into the novel redirected Mann's overall outlook (47).

237). Neher goes on to classify Schoenberg's music as a micro-myth, one of the smaller myths that intersects with the others, making up this multifaceted and multidimensional structure (Neher 237).

The basic premise of Mann's novel regarding the role of music in Germany's history, which I believe Hans Rudolf Vaget has most clearly articulated, is that Adrian Leverkühn's musical development mirrors that of Germany's musical history, revealing not only its successes but also the arrogance and imagined superiority that ensued as a result of those successes. Vaget speaks of Leverkühn as representing the deadly sin of *superbia*, which ties him not only to the Faustus of legend, the macro-myth of the story, but also to the chauvinistic mentality surrounding German musical culture in the decades leading up to the Nazi regime (Vaget 35). Vaget argues that the point of Mann's novel is not to offer Adrian Leverkühn as a kind of musical Hitler, but to show how a crisis of culture, rooted in an imagined superiority that Germany desperately sought to salvage, reflects the greater atmosphere and mentality of the nation that led to its damnation via the mortal sin of *superbia*<sup>2</sup>. According to Vaget it is the history and anticipation of a cultural mentality predisposed to barbarity (Vaget 34). Schoenberg's music is not the Nazi barbarity itself, but rather a suitable representative of the Austro-German musical tradition's response to a crisis of culture that made this mentality possible.

As Alex Ross has pointed out, it was Schoenberg who sought to stabilize the chaotic musical landscape of his day with his ordered system of composition, reacting to things like the influence of Jazz in modern music. It also had a nationalistic side with Schoenberg's reassertion of Austro-German musical primacy via his return to and use of counterpoint and thematic development. He may have even unwittingly anticipated Hitler's own words when he allegedly stated that his music would guarantee German musical supremacy for a thousand years (Ross 197). Therefore the use of Schoenberg's music is not only fitting in Mann's eyes but also necessary. Issues of

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<sup>2</sup> The biblical connection may be found in Proverbs 16:18: «Pride goes before disaster and a haughty spirit before a fall». In this case Germany's cultural pride precedes her fall into barbarity.

form, traditional thematic development via variation, tonality and atonality stand at the center of the crisis of music and of the greater culture, which Mann wishes to depict as reflective of this specific German mentality between the wars.

If we follow Neher's lead and look upon Schoenberg's music as a micro-myth, intersecting and interacting with other similarly constructed myths, then atonality in the story cannot be understood in isolation as a mere representation of Schoenberg's view of art. It is neither a superficial allusion, nor is it a simple one-to-one correspondence. Furthermore, I would argue that its role in the novel derives much of its extended meaning from its relation to a counterpart myth developed along similar lines and placed in the larger context of the novel. That counterpart myth to Schoenberg's Viennese Modernism is in my view Viennese Classicism. In this article I will take a closer look at the construction and interplay between the micro-myths of Viennese Modernism and Viennese Classicism, serial atonality vs. tonal variation, focusing in particular on the variation principle as an important component in Mann's depiction of Germany's cultural ascendancy and its eventual moral, cultural and political decline. In doing so, I hope to not only clarify the use of atonality vs. tonality in the myth-building process of the novel from a structural-conceptual point of view, but also to shed more light on the Mann-Schoenberg controversy.

## *II. Beethoven's Music as Micro-Myth and Tatkraft*

For better or ill, Mann used not only Schoenberg's music to build his mythically complex story but also the Austro-German musical tradition of Viennese classicism, as well as the critical philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno in equal measure. So the question that logically arises and which is in need of clarification is: how does Viennese Modernism, embodied by Schoenberg's dodecaphonic music, fulfill its function in the novel and how does the counter myth of Viennese Classicism compliment and bolster that function? To answer these questions, we must first take a closer look at Mann's treatment of Viennese Classicism, which he also represents mythically through one representative composer, namely Ludwig van Beethoven.

The myth that Thomas Mann creates around Viennese Classicism rests largely on his depiction of Beethoven and his role in influencing the development of Western classical music. Mann recognized the importance of Beethoven and the myths surrounding him in constructing his own micro-myths in *Doktor Faustus* (Kropfinger 266). In many ways Thomas Mann is merely building on to an already established mythical background with regard to the image of Beethoven. Nineteenth century music post-Beethoven was in desperate need of legitimization, reaching well into the 20th century (Floros 13). A common perception was that Beethoven had exhausted symphonic form and paved the way for the music of the future after having first perfected it. Beethoven was both the apotheosis of the classical ideal as well as its vanquisher (Plantinga 67). The variation principle inherent in the thematic development of traditional sonata-allegro form of the classical symphony is important in understanding how Beethoven helped to influence music in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Central to sonata-allegro form is its reliance on tonality in articulating both contrast and thematic variation. The key relationships are crucial for the development of musical ideas. Typically a piece will begin with an exposition that introduces a theme in a home key, the tonic. This is followed by a development section, in which the introduced theme or idea is modulated with variations playing through many different keys. The tendency of sonata form is to modulate from the tonic to the dominant, which is a perfect fifth above the home key. This relationship of tonic to dominant is binary in nature and determined by the key system established in the tonal hierarchy (Rosen, *Classical Style*, 23-30). As Charles Rosen points out it is akin to a kind of musical grammar of the age that defined not only compositional technique but also musical expectation in the 18th and 19th centuries (Rosen, *Classical Style*, 56). The natural effect of this expected modulation was an increased sense of musical tension that the composer could use to highlight contrasts in themes as well as intensify expression.

Famously it was Beethoven who pushed this musical language to the heights of subjective expression in the service of a kind of narrative, utilizing musical themes that could be associatively attached to ideals like heroism,

fortitude, perseverance, and even freedom. These highly expressive musical themes, departing from the home key to the dominant and then back again, resembled a musical journey with contrasting themes as protagonists and musical transformations acting as resolutions to perceived story lines (Botstein 347). It became the signature of Beethoven's heroic style and it made the idea of classical transformation not only symbolic but tangible in the form of musical variation. Perfection of sonata-allegro form became synonymous with the Austro-German musical tradition reaching well into the twentieth century (Lang viii).

Thomas Mann connects Beethoven's so called heroic story lines to the more positive political ideals of the nineteenth century. Beethoven serves as a representation of what Elvira Seiwert calls a «*Menschheitsheld*» (Seiwert 132). Extra-musical ideals like those of the French Revolution atmospherically expressed in Beethoven's *Eroica Symphony*, the fight against tyranny in his opera *Fidelio*, or the call to the brotherhood of man in the *Ninth Symphony* take on mythical and symbolic form in the novel, as does the very person of their creator. For Thomas Mann, Beethoven's works stood next to Goethe's *Faust* as one of the supreme representatives of classical and humanistic ideas. Beethoven symbolized for Mann definite ideals, which he saw as living symbols for the resistance against all oppression and barbarism (Kropfinger 269). Mann depicts Adrian Leverkühn as recognizing both Beethoven's positive practical application in the real world as well as his more romantic transcendent dimension, which recalls the early Beethoven reception of E.T.A. Hoffmann.

Leverkühn is less a reflection of Hitler than he is of the reception of Beethoven in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which includes Schoenberg. Mann creates with Leverkühn a parallel to the Austro-German music tradition through Beethoven's development as a composer<sup>3</sup>, whose

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<sup>3</sup> Susan von Rohr Scaff in her book *History, Myth, and Music, Thomas Mann's Timely Fiction* notes how Leverkühn initially has difficulty mastering any kind of musical narration. However, he does finally master it only to then become ultimately repulsed by it, especially as it pertains to Wagner (p. 80-81). He will later abandon such music altogether for more abstract

music underwent a change from classical form to a kind of inwardly directed esotericism in his late period, which proved to be less accessible to a larger listening public (Hermand 128). Central in this depiction is the myth that Beethoven and his music embodied something essentially good and higher, even approaching the divine, which Leverkühn will ultimately reject as he is confronted with a creative and cultural crisis in the wake of Beethoven's legacy. Leverkühn demonstrates this view of Beethoven in his youth when he describes the third *Leonora* overture in C major. Beethoven's third attempt at an overture for his only opera *Fidelio*, whose central themes encompass love, freedom and human perseverance in the face of evil and tyranny, is described in almost supernatural terms:

Wir Deutschen haben aus der Philosophie die Redewendung 'an sich' übernommen und brauchen sie alle Tage, ohne uns viel Metaphysik dabei zu denken. Aber hier hast du's, solche Musik ist die Tatkraft an sich, die Tatkraft selbst, aber nicht als Idee, sondern in ihrer Wirklichkeit. Ich gebe dir zu bedenken, daß das beinahe die Definition Gottes ist. Imitatio dei – mich wundert, daß das nicht verboten ist (Mann, *Faustus*, 119).

This statement, with its allusions to Kant, Schopenhauer and E. T. A. Hoffmann, highlights the idea of music as an essential force penetrating into the realm of the noumenon and the divine in a way that is almost blasphemous, or at least promethean, which is not Schoenberg's view. At the same time there is an element of ethical engagement with the outside world in Beethoven's music, especially in its tangible expression of ideas «*an sich*» revealed in essential form in the music. This Schopenhauerian formulation is on display in the heroic symphony in its vicinity to the humanistic ideals of the French Revolution, in the *Fidelio* music's expression of vigorous resistance to tyranny and most importantly in the *Ninth Symphony* in its call to universal brotherhood in the setting of Schiller's *Ode an die Freude*. All of these pieces were important for Thomas Mann and they represented an

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forms. Leverkühn experiences the same kind of musical evolution over time as the Austro-German tradition itself.

active, morally and politically focused Classicism (Kropfinger 269). This is the «*Tatkraft*» that Leverkühn references. It is in many ways the opposite of an inward, self-absorbed and passive *art pour l'art* mindset, which will become increasingly associated with the Romantic Movement. Beethoven mirrors the kind of positive classical productivity that Mann also identifies in Goethe<sup>4</sup>, but which is expressed through an inward subjective music that speaks to the essence of reality, while maintaining a relevant connection to the outside concrete world. But Leverkühn will come to reject this balance between inward and outward oriented music in favor of a more politically suspect aesthetic.

Mann links the Austro-German musical tradition, with Beethoven at its head, to German national identity through the Faust legend. Mann clarified this relationship in his 1945 essay entitled *Deutschland und die Deutschen*:

Soll Faust der Repräsentant der deutschen Seele sein, so müßte er musikalisch sein; denn abstrakt und mystisch, i.e. musikalisch, ist das Verhältnis des Deutschen zur Welt, - das Verhältnis eines dämonisch angehauchten Professors, ungeschickt und dabei von dem hochmütigen Bewußtsein bestimmt, der Welt an 'Tiefe' überlegen zu sein. Worin besteht diese Tiefe? Eben in der Musikalität der deutschen Seele, dem, was man ihre Innerlichkeit nennt, das heißt: dem Auseinanderfallen des spekulativen und des gesellschaftlich-politischen Elements menschlicher Energie und der völligen Prävalenz des ersten vor dem zweiten (Mann, *Deutschland*, 265).

For Mann, German thought had long been separated from any concrete realization in the social and political sphere. As a result, the Germans concentrated their intellectual activity in the speculative philosophy of Idealism, in abstract musical form, and in romantic aesthetics. This retreat into the inwardness of romanticism and metaphysics is exemplified in E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1808 critique of Beethoven's instrumental music where he describes

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<sup>4</sup> Mann's 1922 essay *Goethe und Tolstoy* offers an image of Goethe as a model for a modern artist in a republican democratic context. Goethe's life is seen as an example of an artist taking on social and pedagogical responsibilities beyond the self-absorbed aesthetics of art for art sake.



instrumental music itself as a romantic art form that stands apart from the concrete world of mere mortals.

Sie ist die romantischste aller Künste – fast möchte man sagen: allein rein romantisch. – Orpheus' Lyra öffnet die Tore des Orkus. Die Musik schließt dem Menschen ein unbekanntes Reich auf; eine Welt, die nichts gemein hat mit der äußern Sinnenwelt, die ihn umgibt, und in der er alle durch Begriffe bestimmbaren Gefühle zurückläßt, um sich dem Unaussprechlichen hinzugeben (Hoffmann 23).

Hoffmann illustrates the romantic tendency, which Thomas Mann underscores in his 1945 essay, namely that German inwardness is mirrored by a music that separates itself from the concrete world and it transcends both the human subject as well as the material ephemeral world that surrounds it. Additionally, Hoffmann characterizes Beethoven's expressive qualities as transcendent, evoked in the form of subject-less and indefinite abstract emotion: «Beethovens Musik bewegt die Hebel des Schauers, der Furcht, des Entsetzens, des Schmerzes und erweckt jene unendliche Sehnsucht, die das Wesen der Romantik ist (Hoffmann 25)». This longing has no cause, it is longing itself removed from any worldly context of cause and effect. It ultimately represents a loss of subjectivity (Lönker 36-37). This metaphysical framing of Beethoven will prove to be important for the development of Mann's Faust figure, as he moves away from the freer sonata form of Viennese Classicism to the strict order of Schoenberg's serial atonality.

### III. *The Myth of Opus 111 and the Subjective Turn*

Adrian Leverkühn will turn away from the *Tatkraft* in Beethoven's music and its application to the outside world of morals and politics, ultimately «taking them back» in favor of the solely subjective dimension of his art. In order to hold on to the cultural ascendancy of Austro-German music Leverkühn must first renounce its traditions and all that they stood for in order to move beyond them into new forms of expression. The classical ideal that would balance inner subjectivity with the outer objectivity of the modern world will be sacrificed in favor of esoteric inwardness. Mann demonstrates this extraordinary turn away from the classical by undoing its

hallmark in music, namely the idea of thematic variation in sonata-form. This mythical dimension of Beethoven as vanquisher of harmonious classical form in favor of a more indulgent romanticism is on prominent display in Mann's famous description of Beethoven's final piano sonata.

Leverkühn's mentor and teacher Wendel Kretschmar, who will ultimately inspire him to move away from classical forms, delivers a lecture with the almost humorous title «Why did Beethoven not write a third movement to the Piano Sonata Opus 111?». The lecture details a possible reason as to why Beethoven, deviating from typical classical sonata-form, chose to compose his final piano sonata with only two movements of disproportionate size. The lecture creates a mystique around this sonata in its very title as if a two-movement sonata were unheard of in Beethoven's oeuvre. Although it is true that most Beethoven sonatas are in the traditional three or four movements, there are in fact three two-movement sonatas in Beethoven's middle period<sup>5</sup> and two simple two-movement sonatas from his early period, for a total of six out of thirty-two<sup>6</sup>. Beethoven is also very free with the structure of other sonata-form compositions, like the five movement pastoral symphony, many of the late string quartettes, to say nothing of the disproportionate size of the final movement of the *Ninth Symphony* with its colossal and unique choral finale. And yet none of these works is shrouded in the same kind of mystery as the op. 111.

Jost Hermand has pointed out how Mann has almost single handedly created a myth behind this sonata even beyond the confines of his novel (Hermand 128). Mann constructs a definite aura of mysteriousness around the last piano sonata, making much of the fact that Beethoven abandoned the genre after its completion in 1822 some five years before his death. Kretschmar, as agent of Mann's myth making, dismisses all of the conventional wisdom regarding the piece and offers a more enigmatic hypothesis as to why it was the «last sonata». The basis for his view rests primarily on

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<sup>5</sup> Sonata No. 22 in F major, Op. 54, the Sonata No. 24 in F# major, Op. 78 and the Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49, No. 1, and Piano Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49, No. 2.

Theodor W. Adorno's interpretation of the piece, which sees Beethoven's late work as a kind of dissolution of form and loss of subjectivity in music. Although this aligns itself with Hoffmann's understanding of Beethoven in some regards, it is not celebratory in tone but reads more like a diagnosis of decay. It may be said that Adorno's Marxist reading is in fact at odds with the humanistic view of Beethoven's *Tatkraft* as well as Hoffmann's romanticism (Cobley 70). But more importantly, it reinforces the myth that this music single handedly signals the end of classical and romantic aesthetics while prefiguring new paths forward for modern composition.

In the novel, Kretschmar explains that Beethoven's middle period, which his admirers adored for its heroically expressed subjectivity, developed into something nearly incomprehensible in his later years, its main trademark being an excess of introspection. Interestingly, Kretschmar identifies a process of dissolution or alienation precisely in the variation form that occurs in the second movement of the sonata as the main expression of Beethoven's late compositional style with its tendency toward brooding introspection. The principle of variation is of course central to the structure of sonata-allegro form and its theme development. For Kretschmar, the extreme inward romantic turn occurs in the form of uninhibited variation, which ultimately leads to its own formal unraveling, the loss of classical focus and structure and ultimately of Beethoven's famous *tatkräftige* heroic subjectivity.

Kretschmar describes the sonata as outgrowing itself, «ein in Absolutheit schmerzlich isoliertes, durch die Ausgestorbenheit seines Gehörs auch noch vom Sinnlichen isoliertes Ich» (Mann, *Faustus*, 81). Beethoven is described as reaching Romanticism's peak through a radical harmonic will to expression that began modestly in the anchoring function of homophonic classicism. This summit of expressive realization then outgrew itself through isolation in the absolute, eventually losing itself entirely in technical objectivity. Kretschmar comments on the second movement, the *adagio molto semplice e cantabile*, which contains a number of variations on an initial arietta theme. He describes the variations and their enormous transformations while noting the presence of still perceptible conventions stemming from

the classical period. As he reaches the final variation, he observes that Beethoven suddenly throws off all convention. And within this final transformation occurs a grand farewell: «Mit dem vielerfahrenen Motiv, das Abschied nimmt und dabei selbst ganz und gar Abschied, zu einem Ruf und Winken des Abschieds wird» (Mann, *Faustus*, 84). This final farewell in the form of a transformation from subjectivity and convention to the subjectlessness of its own oblivion is followed by Kretschmar's final answer to the question why Beethoven wrote no final third movement:

Ein dritter Satz? Ein neues Anheben – nach diesem Abschied? Ein Wiederkommen – nach dieser Trennung? Unmöglich! Es sei geschehen, daß die Sonate im zweiten Satz, diesem enormen, sich zu Ende geführt habe, zu Ende auf Nimmerwiederkehr. Und wenn er sagte: 'Die Sonate', so meinte er nicht diese nur, in c-moll, sondern er meinte die Sonate überhaupt, als Gattung, als überlieferte Kunstform: sie selber sei hier zu Ende, ans Ende geführt, sie habe ihr Schicksal erfüllt, ihr Ziel erreicht, über das hinaus es nicht gehe, sie hebe und löse sich auf, sie nehme Abschied, - das Abschiedswinken des vom cis melodisch getrösteten d-g-g-Motivs, es sei ein Abschied auch dieses Sinnes, ein Abschied, groß wie das Stück, der Abschied von der Sonate (Mann, *Faustus*, 85).

Adorno saw Beethoven's late works as creating a sense of alienation in his music and the feeling that nothing more was possible (Hermend 131). Mann depicts this through Kretschmar's parsing of the final variation by way of an imaginary text added to the note values. He sings his own little *cantabile arietta*, with the words «O- du Him-melsblau', Grü-ner Wie-sen-grund», «Leb'- mir ewig wohl», which is not only an allusion to Adorno's middle name Wiesengrund, but also a way of citing him as the source of the idea of the farewell to sonata-form. This imagined text not only pays homage to Adorno, but also utilizes Adorno intertextually via a montage technique (Cobley 48) that serves to formulate his ideas mythically in the same way that Mann has mythically used both Schoenberg and Beethoven.

#### IV. Adorno as Micro Myth and the Crisis of Culture

The idea of Beethoven having said goodbye to the sonata form as such,

which also includes concertos, symphonies, and the very variation principle upon which many classical and romantic forms are based, is also Theodor W. Adorno's judgement. As Jost Hermand has pointed out, Adorno saw Beethoven's middle period as firmly «classical», with his late works departing markedly from them with its gradual dismantling of traditional forms and its loss of subjectivity. Adorno will connect the abandonment of the subject, the reliance on technical form and the alienation that results as the modern aspects that lead toward Schoenberg's music. The Kretschmar lecture shows unrealistically how Beethoven's Classicism evolved into something more modern in an instant. In reality, this was a much slower process. Adorno regarded the chromatism that developed in the expressive styles of late romantic composers such as Liszt and Wagner as the eventual facilitators of Schoenberg's style of atonal composition (Holtmeier and Linke 122-123). Leverkühn will initially compose in the post-Wagnerian vein with its extreme chromatism, upon which the twelve-tone technique is based in the form of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. But he will see the limitations of the late romantic idiom, which will facilitate a creative crisis, mirroring the musical and cultural crisis of modernity, seeking to cut ties with its own past.

Luca Crescenzi argues that Thomas Mann's micro-mythology of dodecaphonic music is generally representative of the state of art, culture and human intellect during the immediate post war period. And that this representation, which is in fact the statement of a larger crisis of culture, is an expression of Thomas Mann's rejection of the aestheticism of the nineteenth century in favor of an art that would embrace the moral and ethical sphere instead of maintaining an ambivalent distance to that realm (Crescenzi 107). This stance is predicated on Mann's view of music as an ambiguous art full of both the divine as well as the demonic as measures of creativity. In his 1944 essay *Die Sendung der Musik*, Mann wrote:

Ist die Welt Musik, so ist umgekehrt die Musik das Abbild der Welt, des dämonisch durchwalteten Kosmos...Denn sie ist Moral und Verführung zugleich, Nüchternheit und Trunkenheit zugleich, Aufforderung zu höchster Wachheit und Lockerung zu süßem Zauberschlaf

zugleich, Vernunft und Widervernunft, - kurz, ein Mysterium, einschließlich all der initiatorisch-erzieherischen Weihen, die seit eleusischen und pythagoräischen Tagen dem Mysterium eigen waren; und ihre Priester und Meister sind Eingeweihte und Praeceptoren der Doppeltheit, der göttlich-dämonischen Ganzheit der Welt, des Lebens, des Menschen und der Kultur (Mann, *Sendung*, 241).

Unlike Schoenberg, Mann follows Nietzsche's lead and problematizes music's very nature in the wake of Wagner<sup>7</sup> (as well as aestheticism in general), making it subject to a kind of ethical reevaluation after the war. As with Nietzsche, Mann's own problematic relationship with Richard Wagner's politically dubious aesthetic loomed large in the background of these reflections (Vaget 157). Crescenzi's argument, which clarifies the use of Schoenberg's music as symbol and not as actual fascist aesthetic, highlights the point where Mann agrees with Theodor W. Adorno, namely that after the Nazis and Auschwitz the old aesthetics of perfected art are no longer suitable (Crescenzi 105). This is significant because it is the development of music from Viennese Classicism to Viennese Modernism that represents this older aesthetic model. As Allen Shawn stated in his book on Schoenberg, what lies behind Schoenberg's music is the tradition of Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms, and Mahler (Shawn 168). In fact Mann uses the music of Ludwig van Beethoven and Arnold Schoenberg as bookends in his novel that frame Austro-German music and culture leading into modern times. As such, Mann found it necessary to utilize specifically Adorno's critique of this tradition of music from Beethoven to Schoenberg in order to create both micro-myths and formulate his own questioning of the older aesthetic.

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<sup>7</sup> In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* Nietzsche famously described his evolution away from Wagner's music and Romanticism in general: «Ich began damit, dass ich mir gründlich und grundsätzlich alle romantische Musik verbot, diese zweideutige grosstherische schwüle Kunst, welche den Geist um seine Strenge und Lustigkeit bringt und jede Art unklarer Sehnsucht, schwammichter Begehrlichkeit wuchern macht. 'Cave musicam' ist auch heute noch mein Rath an Alle, die Manns genug sind, um in Dingen des Geistes auf Redlichkeit zu halten; solche Musik entnervt, erweicht, verweiblicht, ihr 'Ewig-Weibliches' zieht uns–hinab!» (373). –

In his *Philosophie der modernen Musik*, Adorno questions the ultimate result of dodecaphonic music:

Ein System der Naturbeherrschung in Musik resultiert. Es entspricht einer Sehnsucht aus der bürgerlichen Urzeit: was immer klingt, ordnend zu 'erfassen' und das magische Wesen der Musik in menschliche Vernunft aufzulösen...Die bewußte Verfügung übers Naturmaterial ist beides: die Emanzipation des Menschen vom musikalischen Naturzwang und die Unterwerfung der Natur unter menschliche Zwecke (Adorno 65).

Adorno understands twelve-tone composition as being related to the violent domination of both nature and the body politic. Music is interestingly seen here as a force of nature that can be dominated and exploited. This Marxist reading, ignoring Schoenberg's musical Jewish mysticism just as Mann did, attributes to atonal music domineering tendencies connected to the Enlightenment, capitalism, and the failure of Western Humanism in the wake of Auschwitz (Cobley 53). Adorno sees a connection between the controlling force of reason and fascist, totalitarian domination. Mann used Adorno in the same way that he used Schoenberg, namely mythologically in order to create the micro-myth of twelve-tone music as it is seen in the novel. Mann even admitted that Adorno's critique of Schoenberg is meant to go over the composer's head entering into the dark and the mythological realm (Mann, *Entstehung*, 34).

In the final Kretschmar lecture, serving as a kind of myth within a myth, Adrian and his humanistic friend Zeitblom hear an anecdote about a German immigrant in America named Johann Conrad Beissel, who, against his own intentions, finds himself the de facto leader of the Seventh-Day Anabaptists of Pennsylvania. In fact, he becomes not only their leader but their absolute ruler. The allusion to fascism is obvious. Beissel, not unlike Luther (another micro-myth in the story), became not only a kind of leader-prophet but also poet and composer as he sought to create compositions for the Anabaptist liturgy. He wrote many hymns and songs but lacked the underlying music. So without formal training, he set about trying to find a new way of composing, and began to develop his own musical theory. The result

was a hierarchy of tones, with so called «*Herren*» and «*Diener*» notes in every scale with the common chord as the melodic center of any given key. The so called «master» notes are those belonging to the common chord and the «servant» notes make up the rest of the notes in the scale.

The details of how this theory of composition functions are both complicated and vague, but what Mann highlights here is a primitive, elemental form of composition that evidences extreme control of the process, removing subjective creativity from the procedure in the service of cult. This ties Beissel's form of composition to Schoenberg and the controlled forms of serialism, a break from tradition using traditional means in an entirely new way. It mirrors Schoenberg's tone-rows consisting of twelve notes of a chromatic scale. By calling the notes of the common chord «masters» and because of Beissel's role as absolute leader, Mann accentuates the dominating nature of the technique as a kind of musical fascism centered on a cult of order. This also aligns with Adorno's particular skeptical reading of Schoenberg's music as a domination of nature.

After the lecture, Adrian and Zeitblom laugh at Beissel calling him «diesen Winkel-Diktator in seiner belustigenden Tatkraft» (Mann, *Faustus*, 103). The allusion to Hitler as well as a new kind of *Tatkraft* here is again obvious, but Leverkühn also expresses admiration for Beissel. Zeitblom is taken aback and comments to himself on Adrian's arrogance in his willingness to consider objectively a dogmatic perversion of music, which he feels must be instinctively dismissed from a humanistic perspective. He identifies barbarism as a possible risk inherent in aestheticism. But Adrian sticks to his right to admire Beissel saying «laß mir den Kauz in Frieden, ich habe was für ihn übrig. Wenigstens hatte er Ordnungssinn, und sogar eine alberne Ordnung ist immer noch besser als gar keine» (Mann, *Faustus*, 104). Mann uses the Kretschmar lectures to connect the antipodal myths of Beethoven/Schoenberg and Classicism/Modernism with Romanticism as a kind of silent missing link. Wagner and Nietzsche are never mentioned, but allusions abound. At the center of these references lies the crisis of culture that links them all to the Faust myth. This crisis of culture and fear of sterility will necessitate a radical break with the past and its aesthetics.



This is mythically represented by the taking back of Beethoven's *Choral Symphony* in D minor.

V. *The Myth of «Taking Back» the Ninth*

Thomas Mann's choice of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* as the work that Leverkühn wishes to «take back» is both symbolically as well as formalistically significant. As Harvey Sachs pointed out in his book on the ninth, the symphony is «perceived as a vessel for a message that confers a quasi-religious yet nondenominational blessing on all 'good' and 'just' people, institutions, and enterprises» (Sachs 3). This perception is reflected in Leverkühn's ultimate view that both the sonata-form as well as the humanity that can be expressed through it must be rescinded. He comes to this decision when his beloved nephew succumbs to Typhus, a consequence of Leverkühn's pact with the devil requiring a renunciation of all human love. In contemplating this, he remarks to his friend Zeitblom:

Ich habe gefunden...es soll nicht sein...Das Gute und Edle...was man das Menschliche nennt, obwohl es gut ist und edel. Um was die Menschen gekämpft, wofür sie Zwingburgen gestürmt, und was die Erfüllten jubelnd verkündigt haben, das soll nicht sein. Es wird zurückgenommen. Ich will es zurücknehmen...Die Neunte Symphonie (Mann, *Faustus*, 692-693).

Leverkühn rejects the *Tatkraft* of Beethoven's music and its classical variation in the service of greater humanity, or he at least wishes to supplant it with a new kind of music, void of human warmth and broader social purpose. Mann's choice of Schoenberg's atonality to represent that new music is logical given the role that classical tonality has played in the construction of musical narrative in the nineteenth century.

Not only does Beethoven's ninth express the human desire for joy and universal brotherhood and perhaps social and political freedom, it is also an extraordinary work of musical variation. Charles Rosen famously called the final movement a symphony within a symphony, in which Beethoven basically compresses four movements distinguished from one another as variations into one final movement (Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 480). David

Benjamin Levy goes even further, calling the final movement a microcosm of the entire *Ninth Symphony* itself (Levy 93). Structurally it is an exponential magnification of sonata-form. Using sonata-form development, the first three movements create the famous Beethoven musical narrative. The first movement offers a story of catastrophe, struggle, aggression and punishing defeat, a familiar Beethoven trope most famously heard in the opening of his *Fifth Symphony*. The second movement delivers a frenetic scherzo, functioning as a counterweight to the despair of the first movement. The third is a moment of peace, respite and a dreamy, almost nostalgic longing for peace and solace after the struggles of the previous movements. The final movement jolts the listener out of this reverie with the famous *Schreckensfanfare*. The previous movements are revisited as musical quotes and then the final theme of the final movement is at first introduced only instrumentally. The conventional instrumental development is then abandoned, and the final theme is set to the words of Schiller's *Ode an die Freude*. What follows is a series of incredible variations on the joy theme, developed and transformed throughout four mini-movements until it reaches its final transformation and apotheosis in the ultimate proclamation that all men shall become brothers.

What Thomas Mann seems to see embodied in the ninth is structurally the apotheosis of Austro-German music in sonata-form as well as the promise of an ethics-based aesthetic articulated through the human voice via Schiller's poem. Taking this symphony back would be tantamount to a farewell to both the traditions of Austro-German music as well as to its classical humanistic dimension. Thomas Mann's use of the ninth as a symbol for an ethical art that is not purely the product of an inwardly turned aesthetic is tied to its almost mythical historical interpretation as a work representative of all that is good in man's political and social strivings. This view of the ninth is bolstered by its antithesis, which Mann's Faustus has created, namely Adrian Leverkühn's final composition the cantata, *Dr. Fausti Weheklag*.

It is not Goethe's *Faust* but the much earlier Faust material of the chapbook and Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which Leverkühn utilizes

for his final work. Wagner famously provided a program for Beethoven's ninth that used the redemptive story of Goethe's *Faust* as a kind of script for each movement<sup>8</sup>. Unlike Goethe's more modern version offering salvation and redemption for human striving or Wagner's heroic reading, *Doktor Fausti Weheklag* offers a bleak view of the protagonist void of any hope of salvation. Adrian's final work before he falls prey to syphilis like Nietzsche shall be a twelve-tone-like work that is the structural and conceptual inversion of Beethoven's ninth. It is not an *Ode to Joy* but a lament of damnation, which, as the structural opposite of the ninth, starts off with the human voice only to transform itself into a voiceless, detached purely instrumental work. The final sounds that we hear in this work are of the celli in E-flat major. Here we are reminded of the introduction of the Joy theme in the ninth through the celli. Steven Paul Scher notes that for Leverkühn the cello represents the human voice throughout the novel and Kretschmar describes the cello in Bach's E-flat major cello suite as nothing more than the simplest and most fundamental of sounds (Scher 412-413).

Leverkühn's composition reverses the effect of Beethoven's ninth. Instead of the fundamental *vox humana* of the cello slowly bidding farewell to the absolute music and introducing the real human voice, we have a work that begins with the human voice only to have it devolve into purely elemental instrumental tones, a kind of regression. The celli eventually die away, but are related to Leverkühn's characterization of them as asking the question «Wozu all des Hetzens und Treibens und Jagens und einander Plagens?» (Scher 403). As such, it removes the subjective human element of voice and reverts into formulaic alienated sound, while also expressing the hopelessness of human endeavor. It sacrifices the subjective human in favor of a cold order. It is degeneration into mathematical detachment and isolation. It is akin to Kretschmar's description of Beethoven as an ego painfully isolated in the absolute. Adrian's music expresses the irreconcilable hopelessness of modern man's situation and art's inability to address it solely in the aesthetic realm.

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<sup>8</sup> See Richard Wagner's *Bericht über die Aufführung der Neunten Symphonie von Beethoven im Jahre 1846 in Dresden nebst Programm dazu*.

Schoenberg's music serves as the symbol for Adorno's view of modern aesthetics, which take back the beauty of the nineteenth century in favor of the aesthetics of despair and lamentation post-Auschwitz. Beethoven's ninth is taken back by means of a process of dissolution similar to Beethoven's unraveling of sonata-form in his op. 111 piano sonata. We are following the mythical development of tonal sonata-form based Viennese Classicism to a freer but more introverted Romanticism and finally to a kind of over-correction in the form of a strictly ordered atonal serialism. Mann has created multiple myths to represent this development from Viennese Classicism to Viennese Modernism.

#### *VI. Conclusion: The Micro Myth Controversy*

In detailing the Schoenberg-Mann controversy surrounding *Doktor Faustus*, Bernhold Schmid notes that as time went on, Schoenberg became less irate with Mann and more suspicious of Adorno (Schmid 234). Even prior to the controversy Schoenberg was never friendly with Adorno and was always circumspect regarding Adorno's views of his music. Adorno had initially viewed Schoenberg's atonality as the only possible way forward for music, attacking everything else as regressive and even fascistic in character. His attacks on Stravinsky, Sibelius, and even Copland as retrogrades and reactionaries are well-known (Scheible 52). But as Alex Ross points out, Schoenberg «understood that he was being elevated as the patron saint of a newly militant avant-garde mentality, with whose premises he did not agree» (Ross 358). The premises, which Ross alludes to, seem to lie at the center of Schoenberg's discomfort with how his music is portrayed in *Doktor Faustus*.

Adorno's view of music is a Marxist or post-Marxist vision, radically casting off the musical dialog of tradition in favor of a Hegelian aesthetic of despair, a «happiness in unhappiness»; as Adorno put it himself regarding the goals of modern music: «All ihr Glück hat sie daran, das Unglück zu erkennen; all ihre Schönheit, dem Schein des Schönen sich zu versagen» (Adorno 126). This is connected to Adorno's famous dictum in *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, with poetry

being a stand-in for art in general (Kramer 206). As such it is equally barbaric to write beautiful music in traditional tonal form. Schoenberg was more tempered in his reading of the history of music, seeing in it a grand conversation throughout the ages, a back and forth of tendencies that would continue to produce new things (Ross 358). Schoenberg never dismissed tonal composition altogether. He also personally recognized a certain divine essence in music, which differs from Mann's demonic ambiguity, and which can ultimately be traced back to the rediscovery of his once alienated Jewish faith. His fascination with numbers and numerology is in many ways connected to Kabbalistic tradition (Neher 278). Neher even argues that Mann's ignorance of the influence of Jewish mysticism in Schoenberg's music contributed to the continued concealment of Jewish thought in the cultural history of European modernity (Neher 278). This view of Schoenberg is far removed from the demonization of music that we see in Mann's novel. It was not Mann's intent to portray twelve-tone music as it was for Schoenberg, but to use it to build his micro-myth. For this purpose, Adorno's criticism proved more fruitful than Schoenberg's own views on the nature of his music or even than Mann's own evaluation of modernist atonality. Adorno's original positive estimation of Schoenberg's bravely austere art in the post-Auschwitz era began to take on a more critical veneer, which held within it the seeds of a deeper and darker criticism.

It was no coincidence that Adorno was working on the manuscript of *Philosophie der modernen Musik* when Mann asked him for help in understanding and describing Schoenberg's music for *Doktor Faustus*. Adorno had given Mann a copy of the unfinished text and it was after reading its passages dedicated to Schoenberg that Mann came to the realization that Adorno would be ideal as a musical consultant on the novel. Mann summed up his reaction to Adorno's manuscript in his novel about a novel, *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*:

Hier war in der Tat etwas 'Wichtiges'. Ich fand eine artistisch-soziologische Situationskritik von größter Fortgeschrittenheit, Feinheit und Tiefe, welche die eigentümlichste Affinität zur Idee meines Werkes, zu der 'Komposition', hatte, in der ich lebte, an der ich webte. In mir entschied es sich: 'Das ist mein Mann'. (Mann, Entstehung, 33)

What is interesting in Mann's epiphany about Adorno is that he describes an affinity between the philosopher's view of modern music and the *idea* of his novel. Mann never says that an affinity exists between Adorno and his own thinking<sup>9</sup>. It also never occurred to Mann to turn to Schoenberg himself for help in describing the music. He is instead intrigued by Adorno's impressive critique of the «situation». What he means by «Situationskritik» is clearer in a letter he wrote to Adorno in December of 1945 where he describes his novel as being about «die Situation der Kunst» (*Briefwechsel* 88). As Schoenberg biographer Bojan Bujić put it, Mann's novel is about the disintegration of a personality, a personality whose «life and fate are intended as a symbolic representation of German culture during the Third Reich» (Bujić 204).

The use of Adorno in creating the dark mythological realm of the story can also be observed in his own demonic identification in Mann's novel, which the philosopher seems to have found more flattering than Schoenberg, even proudly referring to himself as Mann's «*alter Teufel*» (Meinhold 117). The appearance of the devil in Chapter XXV is famous for the figure's perceived similarities to Adorno's own appearance and mannerisms, revealing a diabolic aspect of both music and critic. But what becomes clear in Thomas Mann's writing process is that what can be said of Schoenberg's music in the novel can also be said of Adorno's critique of the situation of music and art in the modern world. Mann needed Adorno's critique not because he agreed with all aspects of it, but rather because it was central in framing a mythology of the music and its composer in order to represent the state of art and culture. Edward Said perhaps said it best in his book on late style regarding Adorno's view of Schoenberg and Beethoven:

Are late-style Beethoven and Schoenberg actually like this, we finally ask, and is their music so isolated in its antithesis to society? Or is it the case that Adorno's descriptions of them are models, paradigms,

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<sup>9</sup> Bojan Bujić believes that Mann was completely ignorant of modernist culture, harboring little or no sympathy for its aesthetic (207), a view shared by Klaus Kropfinger who saw Mann's idea of modernism in music as limited to Wagner (267). Cobley believes that ultimately Adorno's critique is incompatible with Mann's humanistic values (55).

constructs intended to highlight certain features and thereby give the two composers a certain appearance, a certain profile in and for Adorno's own writing (Said 19).

I would argue that it is precisely for this reason that Mann used Adorno's critique to help build his micro-myths. Mann wanted these models, paradigms and constructs for his own project. He wanted Adrian Leverkühn's music to be «etwas Satanisches-Religiöses, Dämonisch-Frommes, zugleich Streng-Gebundenes und verbrecherisch Wirkendes, oft die Kunst Verhöh-nendes. ., auch etwas auf Primitiv-Elementare Zurückgehendes» (*Briefwechsel* 89). And this portrayal of Leverkühn's music is not complete without Adorno's critique to bolster the multiple micro-myths of the story.

In the end, Thomas Mann seems to be most interested in Adorno's reading of Schoenberg due to its potential as an antipode to Viennese Classicism. The undoing of the principle of variation in this context underscores the connection. Adorno's reading provides a political connection between the *superbia* of musical culture and the fascism that appropriated it for its own diabolical usage. It is Mann's use of Adorno, Schoenberg, Beethoven, and the variation principle of sonata-form, which together construct the micro-myths connected to the macro-myth of *Faust*. One could argue that the entire Austro-German musical tradition is also a myth in the novel composed of the micro myths of Beethoven, Romanticism, Schoenberg and Adorno's critique thereof revolving around the structural context of sonata-form and the principle of variation. As such, this structural context is a further aide in understanding both the larger premise of the novel as well as the Schoenberg controversy, which in reality is an Adorno, Schoenberg Beethoven controversy, or more simply put, variations on the theme of the crisis of Western Culture after Auschwitz.

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