KNOWLEDGE VERSUS LOVE: THE PROBLEMS OF PASSION AND ART IN THOMAS MANN’S DOCTOR FAUSTUS

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Throughout history, myths have been used to explain the unexplainable, explore tensions and conflicts in human history, and to communicate truths about the human condition. Prometheus, the Biblical Adam, and Faust are legends that all confront the idea of knowledge and whether one can go too far in the quest to learn more. In this thesis, I argue that Thomas Mann builds upon these pre-existing myths in his novel Doctor Faustus to expand the tension between love and knowledge in order to explain World War II Germany and the ramifications the Nazi regime had on the world. Though many argue that myths and the questions they raise are becoming obsolete, the idea of forgetting humanity in the quest to learn more is arguably more relevant today than it has ever been before, and Mann’s novel calls this question to the forefront for continued debate.
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INTRODUCTION

Thomas Mann’s novel Doctor Faustus is a work that strives to explain, through the biography of a fictitious composer, how the Germany of the 20th century fell from a cultural superpower to a power-hungry fascist state with little regard for art or humanity alike. Mann uses the Faustian prototype that harkens back to Goethe and the original Faust chapbook in order to correlate the traditional German myth with the rise of Nazi ideology. The stories of Faust(us), Mann’s cultural framework, first began cropping up in the 16th century. These tales were loosely based on the famous German charlatan Johann or Georg Faust, a con artist and black magic practitioner who lived in the early 1500s. The Faust stories were popularized through morality puppet plays and medieval tales as a warning and example, but first appeared as a complete work in print in publisher Johann Spies’s chapbook in 1587. After this publication, popularity of the myth continued to increase until the version of Faust’s story by Goethe made the tale one of Germany’s most famous, and it continues to be a ubiquitous symbol of striving for divine knowledge and the consequences entailed. Dissatisfied with religion, the scholar turns to earthly studies and eventually calls upon magic to make a deal with the devil that would help him decipher the universe. He considers learning to be the highest pinnacle of human understanding and renounces God and his soul in order to unearth the secrets generally denied to mortals. Faust is damned in most variations of the tale for this choice, though Goethe’s version of the myth has the scholar achieve salvation, despite his many sins.\(^1\) Mann adapts this archetype to his Adrian Leverkühn, a brilliant but troubled composer living on the outskirts of society in order to work

on his pieces without interference from the outside world. He gives up the study of theology (the renunciation of God) to create music, and after contracting syphilis through a brief encounter with a prostitute, converses with a devil and gives up his soul for the chance to create music entirely new to and distanced from the world instead of a parody or echo of a previous work. As our musical Faustus grows older and more remote from society to work on his composing, the Nazi regime slowly gains power in Germany, and Leverkühn dies on the cusp of World War II. The downfall of Leverkühn’s life into a vegetative state and the rise of the Nazi party are directly paralleled, so that the disease and death of the main character correlates with the disease and death of his country’s future. Though Mann leaves the question of damnation in the particular case of Leverkühn open at the end of the novel, Germany itself seems to be damned by the beginning of the Second World War. Mann takes a classic German myth and ties it to the rise of the Nazi party to contrast established German cultural ideals with the troubled principles that dominate in modern times.

**Prometheus, Faust, and Adam**

Along with the Faustian myth, the trope of knowledge banned from mortal minds has a long lineage. From the Biblical Adam to Aeschylus’s Prometheus to the chapbook Faust, the idea of forbidden knowledge has manifested itself throughout history to define the moral implications of which obtaining understanding at any means necessary consists. The Bible story tells of the fall of man, where the first humans are tempted to choose the “knowledge of good and evil” over divine obedience and for this are cast out of Paradise and sentenced to a world of perpetual woe. In Adam’s tale, the choice of the apple and defiance of God is condemned, for

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2 For a brief summary of the events of the novel, see Appendix.
man was given everything and only asked not to question the higher power. Since the temptation and subsequent fall of man, we have struggled with the burden of the knowledge chosen and begrudged Adam and Eve for their desire to know more than what was originally given. In the Promethean canon, there are two versions of the myth still well-known today: Hesiod’s recording in his *Works and Days* (which is the first known work about Prometheus) and Aeschylus’s in his tragedy *Prometheus Bound*. Hesiod’s Prometheus is a trickster god who calls down the wrath of Zeus upon humanity by repeatedly defying the chief god. Zeus punishes man for these acts, first by depriving mortals of fire and second by introducing Pandora to men, as she brings woes and the problem of women in her wake. In contrast, Aeschylus has his Prometheus clearly cast as a hero and set up as a defiant subversive actively fighting against a flawed leader. In this version, it is Zeus who punishes man undeservedly by taking away the knowledge of fire, and Prometheus who gives it back and suffers for this transgression in the place of man. In this version, there are two godlike figures and the higher one is also the less benevolent. Prometheus acts as a mediator between mortals and the gods, as he intercedes between Zeus and humanity to create a caring middle man that is absent from the myths of Adam or Faust. As the benevolent figure, Prometheus makes the decision that the addition of fire will benefit men’s lives, but he also has to pay the price for subverting Zeus’s wishes. Each of these tales, from Adam to Faust, takes a different approach to confronting the moral questions that crop up when humans reach for divine knowledge. In all three of these stories, mortals must grapple with the idea that some knowledge is denied them by a higher power, and whether or not this is a just denial depends on the individual interpretation.

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Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* continues this theme, with the main character Adrian Leverkühn seen by those around him as an artist without humanity, devoid of relationships with others in the hope of creating the music that can culturally define his nation and era. Judging by Leverkühn’s fate at the end of the novel and his parallel with Nazi Germany, neglecting emotions to develop a profession is not a choice that Mann promotes. He is not the only condemned character in the novel, however, and it is more than just reaching for higher knowledge that Mann moralizes against. The Rodde sisters, friends in the social circle of Zeitblom and Leverkühn, give into passion without any consideration to rationality, and they also meet disastrous ends. In this thesis, I argue that Thomas Mann crafts a novel in which passionate love and intelligent judgement cannot exist devoid of one another without catastrophic results. In an increasingly precarious world in which World Wars, nuclear weapons, and power standoffs are in play, one ideal or the other, or rather, just love for society and morality or just progress and objective knowledge, is not enough. Mann creates scenarios in the text in which neither those characters who fail to temper their intellectual conquests with human compassion or those who passionately devote themselves to another without proper judgement can lead full lives but instead are generally subject to disastrous early deaths or reprehensible actions. If such choices are made on a larger scale, as Mann demonstrates with his link between Leverkühn and the Nazis, the results can be catastrophic. When the ideas of knowledge and love are allowed to come together to create a new objectivity that is not outside the purveyance of morality, the individual and world can move forward knowing that both culture and society is protected in the balance.
Narrator and Friend

Mann uses the classic script of striving for knowledge outside the realm of mortals popularized by Adam, Prometheus, and particularly Faust to set up his own variation on the consequences that are incurred when man reaches outside his boundaries. In his *Doctor Faustus*, the two main characters, Zeitblom and Leverkuhn, are presented in such a way that they are exposed as mirrors of one another. Mann sets up basic differences between the two early in the text, and these differences are then magnified by Zeitblom, perhaps in an attempt to defend himself from paralleling the life and fate of Leverkuhn. However, the contrasts between the two are offset by the similar roles they play throughout the text. The distinction Zeitblom first advocates sets up different styles of personality, and Zeitblom describes his own identity as “a thoroughly even-tempered man, indeed, if I may say so, a healthy, humanely tempered man with a mind given to things harmonious and reasonable, a scholar [. . .] not without ties to the fine arts (I play the viola d’amore), but a son of the muses in the academic sense of the term, who gladly regards himself a descendant of the German humanists.”

Leverkuhn, on the other hand, is described as a “genius,” a term loaded with the implication “that the demonic and irrational have a disquieting share in that radiant sphere, that there is always a faint, sinister connection between it and the nether world” (6). Zeitblom’s assumptions that he and Leverkuhn have fundamentally different natures and views of the world obscures the fact that the only Leverkuhn the reader knows is the Leverkuhn who is seen through the eyes of Zeitblom. Leverkuhn’s only original words in the text are the letter describing his meeting with Esmeralda and the transcript about his conversation with the devil, and even these passages are framed before and after with Zeitblom’s

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views on the events that transpire within Leverkühn’s own writing. Further obscuring the
distinction between the two characters is the way in which Zeitblom’s life is taken up with his
obsession for his childhood friend. The novel is as much about him as it is about Leverkühn, and
yet we see very little of his life that is not consumed by the composer. He is a husband, a
teacher, and a father, and yet whenever the narration focuses on Zeitblom, it is only in the
context of his feelings for Leverkühn, his opinions about Leverkühn’s life, or analyses of their
mutual companions. The only digression from this pattern is when Zeitblom takes a break from
the narration in order to discuss the progression of World War II after Leverkühn’s death, but
even then he speculates on how his friend would have reacted and whether they were able to see
these events coming. The two main characters are thus so intertwined that they do not exist on
their own; Zeitblom is a function of Leverkühn and Leverkühn is a function of Zeitblom. In
paralleling these two men with opposing viewpoints, one who is a firm humanist and philologist
and the other whose focus is on theology and music, on understanding the eternal and ideal but
never on people, Mann exposes the flaw in using one difference to make a distinction between
men. Zeitblom and Leverkühn’s viewpoints oppose each other, but our view of each man is so
conditioned by the other that it is difficult to draw a hard and fast division between the two.
Mann only showcases the two world views in characters that run parallel to each other, so we are
forced to conclude that no ideological standpoint can stand on its own; or rather, each standpoint
is strengthened by being compared and intertwined with another. In this way, Mann makes a
philosophical statement in which one ideology alone is never a full view of life. One must
embody the principles represented by both Zeitblom and Leverkühn in order to maintain a stable
and balanced existence.
LOVE AND ITS COMPLICATIONS

Mann pits his two main characters against each other ideologically to create a tension between Zeitblom and Leverkühn that troubles any reading of them as either the same person or diametric opposites. When considering Mann’s interpretation of the forbidden knowledge trope as a pull between compassionate society and desire for knowledge above the means of the human, it is easy to fall into the trap of reading Zeitblom, because of his humanist stance, as the one who stands for compassion whereas Leverkühn forsakes even his soul in a quest to create something beyond the scope of man. Because of their interlocking positions in the novel, however, it is not difficult to quickly liberate the characters from their respective pigeon holes. Leverkühn, despite his retreat from human society, has an abiding love for the eternal or divine, which may set him apart from society but brings him closer to God. His studies of both theology and original composition break him away from the idea of one able to forsake the world for his own goals, as he is very focused in his devotion to create music that honors the divine and lingers in human consciousness eternally. In this way he makes Zeitblom seem a bit shortsighted with his focus on humanity. Zeitblom’s love for the mortal man seems as though it overlooks the idea of God and eternity in a narrow commitment to the ephemeral realm. In this respect, both men can play the part of Faust, as Leverkühn is the one striving for knowledge and Zeitblom is the one forsaking God for a “better” understanding of the world. It has been argued that it is in fact Zeitblom who is the Faust in the tale: “The demonic parallel is more appropriately drawn, if at all, with Serenus, for Serenus’s biography resembles that of Goethe’s Faust. He is the humanist doctor who has an affair with a lower class woman and later marries Helen, and he sees
the devil in his friend as well as German politics and culture”. The fact that one cannot discern which man occupies which role only strengthens Mann’s conviction that love and knowledge work together to further a society. There is no Doctor Faustus without its narrator, and there is no novel without the main character. Similarly, divinity and humanity, creation and compassion must be respected in order to create a world that is not doomed by such things as the Nazi party and fascist doctrine.

**Mothers and Caretakers**

In Mann’s Faustian universe, there are consequences not just for striving for knowledge generally reserved for the divine, but also for neglecting knowledge in the face of human passions. However, Mann includes examples of those who are able to balance these two traits and create viable lives that benefit society and their own intellectual goals mixed in with the examples of those who fail in this endeavor. Those who are able to make passion into a positive attribute fall toward the side of compassion, in that they nurture others without succumbing to devotion to one person over others, society, and ideals. Two women, specifically, fulfill this role in different and yet complementary ways for Leverkühn. Both Frau Schweigestill and Jeannette Scheurl are positive presences in Leverkühn’s world for much of his adult life, and they fill the positions of both mother and strong supporting friend respectively. These women possess the curiously similar trait that both are mentioned time and again for their soothing presence on the outskirts of the action, but they never stay in the focal view of the story for very long after their introductions. Towards the end of the novel, when Leverkühn’s life is starting to take a turn for the worse and Schwerdtfeger and Echo are dying or dead, we are told by Zeitblom that all of

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those that Leverkühn loves are doomed because of his curse. However, there are those in Leverkühn’s life that are not undone by his demonic pact: “Serenus would like us to believe that after sealing the pact by having sex with Esmeralda, Adrian violated its terms by loving Rudi Schwerdtfeger and Nepomuk Schneidewein, thereby causing their deaths. Similarly, Serenus mystifies Adrian’s failed marriage proposal to Marie Godeau. But since Adrian is in fact capable of loving others, including Jeannette Scheurl, without causing them harm, there is clearly a problem with Serenus’s narrative.”

Scheurl serves as the main example of one loved by Leverkühn who remains unharmed by the pact, as she fulfills the role of nurturing female companion and intellectual friend all in one. Her position in the novel, though on the periphery, is distinct in that she can love and be loved by Leverkühn without negative repercussions.

Frau Schweigestill is another who provides support for Leverkühn throughout the novel. She constantly cares for the composer, especially when he starts to confine himself to Pfeiffering to focus on his later works while suffering from extended migraines. Though she could easily get tired of her finicky, sickly, and ornery artistic guest, she instead takes the time to understand how best to help him and cares deeply for him, and she provides the last words of his biography before the epilogue: “‘Clear out, all of you! You haven’t the least understanding, you city folk, and there’s need of understanding here. He talked a lot about eternal grace, the poor man, and I don’t know if it reaches that far. But real human understanding, believe me, that reaches far enough for all!’” (527). In Leverkühn’s greatest time of need, it is not his humanist companion or any of his other city friends who come forth to help him. It is his substitute mother who treats him with compassion despite the frightening relation of the transcript in which he converses with

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the devil that took place previously. A simple country woman, as she is generally described, probably would have abandoned Leverkühn for such ramblings, but she instead calls for understanding and stands firm in helping Leverkühn in the way she best can, eliciting grace from those who may not react favorably to such a strange outburst. Both Frau Schweigestill and Jeannette Scheurl exemplify the idea that love informed by knowledge creates the positive manifestation of passion and builds a love that endures. Scheurl is an intelligent woman (indeed, she has to be in order to garner respect from Leverkühn) who also provides the loving support of a good friend, while Frau Schweigestill, though seemingly less educated than many of the other characters, proves with her words and actions that she has accumulated much wisdom through her role as a frequent caretaker. These women have a large capacity for love and have garnered wisdom, as unconventional as some of it may be, through their roles as members of society. Together, this care and rationality strikes the right balance for the characters to prosper.

**The Dark Side of Passion**

From their positions in the periphery of the text, Scheurl and Frau Schweigestill provide a constant stream of love for Leverkühn. However, there is another form of passion in the text, one that leads the characters who abandon wisdom to their eventual destruction. This form of unleashed desire is best exemplified in the form of the Rodde sisters, both of whom are undone by their obsessively focused love coupled with sexual passion and unmodulated by judgement. For Clarissa, acting is her obsession, but this focus becomes misplaced when she gives in to a sexual encounter during her struggles to make it big. She eventually tries to move past acting to create a family inside the bounds of traditional society when “That juridical scoundrel, to whom she had given herself in a weak moment, blackmailed her with his one and only victory. Henri’s
family, Henri himself, would learn of his relationship with her if she did not bend to his will once again” (402). Her act of unchecked sexual desire with a man against her better judgement spawns more unmitigated crimes of passion until her life is consumed by these dramatics and cannot swing back to moderated forms of love. Clarissa kills herself because she cannot escape the dramatic lifestyle, a life in which she can only act out conventions but cannot follow them herself. She is bound to her infatuations without any ability to judge whether or not the profession or the man in question are worthy of herself. Unlike Jeannette Scheurl, who is able to care for another by showing compassion but can still build her own life, Clarissa loves until it consumes her being because she knows no other way. She is unable to objectively evaluate her situation because of her dependency on passion for her entire life, and therefore she creates an explosive situation that is only resolved, in her eyes, in death.

Similarly, her sister, Inez, is controlled by passionate sexual desire which leads to her own destructive outcome. She marries well but her love is focused not on her husband but Rudi Schwerdtfeger, a talented violinist and an incorrigible flirt who engages in an extramarital affair with her only to later break it off. Inez, however, is unable to redirect her desire into compassion for her family in favor of her obsession with Schwerdtfeger. She is eventually driven by her overwhelming desire to murder Schwerdtfeger after he becomes engaged to another woman:

   Shots erupted in the car— even, sharp, cracking detonations, one after the other, three, four, five, with wildly deafening rapidity, and across the way Schwerdtfeger, his violin case between his hands, sank first on the shoulder and then lap of the lady sitting to his right [. . .] Together with me the two gentlemen who had been standing the isle hurled themselves at Inez— much too late of course. We did not have to
“wrest” the revolver from her; she had dropped it, or rather thrown it away, in the direction of her victim. Her face was as white as a sheet of paper, with sharply edged bright red spots on her cheekbones. Her eyes were closed and her pursed lips formed a crazed smile. (471)

The portrait of Inez given when she murders Schwerdtfeger is not one of a rational woman. Any attempt at thinking clearly about the matter would result in a more favorable action than the one taken, but the Inez here, with a “crazed smile” on her lips and no attempt to deny or hide her crime, is not even in the realm of rational being. She has been reduced to animal passions, giving solely to a love driven to hate instead of considering the many negative implications that come along with public murder. Inez has to kill in order to give an outlet to her pent-up addiction for Schwerdtfeger, unbalanced as it is without any regard to thought. Both Inez and Clarissa stand in the text as examples of those who cannot control their own desires, and this outpouring of misguided love turns to harm these women and their communities. With the examples of the Rodde sisters, Mann creates a contrast to Leverkühn’s caretakers, the women whose love is informed by the demands of society and the wisdom that is borne of truly caring for another instead of merely being obsessed with the idea of that other. In providing examples that contrast compassion and obsessive desire in the text, Mann demonstrates that there are negative aspects of love that, if allowed to run unchecked, can destroy rather than nurture.

**The Case of Rudi Schwerdtfeger**

Between compassion and uninhibited desire stands Rudi Schwerdtfeger, the violinist killed by Inez because of his inability to keep his flirtatious behavior moderated. Schwerdtfeger is a close friend and confidant to many people in the novel, most conspicuously Adrian
Leverkühn. Their friendship seems to be based on a mutual love for music, Schwerdtfeger’s generally amiable demeanor, and many dogged attempts on Schwerdtfeger’s part to devote himself to Leverkühn because of the man’s musical genius. The two become quite close during a trip they take together, and Schwerdtfeger becomes the only person outside of Zeitblom, whom Leverkühn has known since early childhood, who Leverkühn addresses with informal pronouns. However, Mann himself acknowledges there is something that Leverkühn cannot control about his relationship with Schwerdtfeger. He calls the violin concerto Leverkühn writes for Schwerdtfeger “Adrian’s ambiguous gift to overfamiliarity”⁸ and their later conversation about wooing Marie Godeau “an enigmatic affair with diabolic elements lurking in the background” (210). Zeitblom and Mann both do not trust the intentions of Schwerdtfeger, and the entire relationship between Schwerdtfeger and Leverkühn is shrouded in mystery at least partially because Zeitblom is not physically present for many of the interactions between the two men. Schwerdtfeger has a history of using flattery and little manipulations to get his way, and Zeitblom is always afraid that Leverkühn is merely a pawn in Schwerdtfeger’s schemes for himself rather than his true friend. It is this very history of flirtatiousness and flattery, in fact, that eventually leads Schwerdtfeger to destruction. Though his love for Leverkühn mostly seems compassionate and mutually beneficial, his relations with women cause nothing but trouble and, eventually, his own death. He is not overcome with love for Inez Institoris, by any means, but he is unable to stop himself from conducting an affair with her because of his history as a cad. He woos Marie Godeau because he always chases the women around him, and even though he does not truly seem as though he wishes to marry her, he goes along with the plan because he does not

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know how to disengage. He is unable to do anything but bow to the whims of the women around him, and for this lack of control and judgement he is doomed. Schwerdtfeger seems as though he has his own desire controlled better than the Rodde sisters, but he is still unable to resist the pulls of passion and is led to his downfall all the same.
KNOWLEDGE AND ITS COMPLICATIONS

In taking on the Faustian legend, Mann must, at some point, confront the idea of forbidden knowledge. Leverkühn, with his lifetime quest for creative success and his piece *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, brings this and the specific Faustian tradition to the forefront of the novel. Indeed, the turning point of the story is the passage in which the devil tells him what he must give up for his art: “Love is forbidden you insofar as it warms. Your life shall be cold—hence you may love no human” (264). Though Leverkühn counters this by claiming there is love in his work, the ultimatum is clear: he has given up human warmth for the cold sterility of genius. He is devoted solely to his creative journey, without any room for tenderness in his life. Leverkühn occasionally reaches out to others and tries to engage in society, but all of these interactions that go beyond a platonic, cordial relationship end up lost because Leverkühn does not understand even the basic formalities of love. His first attempt at a passionate encounter is his relationship with his Esmeralda, which is only a parody of a normal sexual relationship. Because she is a prostitute, she is herself not so much an agent of desire than one forced into mere acts of passion by necessity. Their encounters are so far from interactions that operate within societal norms that they end up creating the madness that calls up the devil and eventually kills Leverkühn. After this, it is nearly impossible for Leverkühn to create a working relationship with another. He is a function solely of his art, sacrificing normal human connections for a life distant and cut off from most of those who care for him, instead preferring to spend his time with intangible ideas and concepts rather than attempting to understand others. Leverkühn is led to a Faustian doom because of his lack of comprehension of human life.
Sterile Knowledge and the Nazis

Despite Zeitblom’s reverence toward his genius friend he nevertheless makes the parallel, through the juxtaposition of time periods throughout the book, of Leverkühn and the Nazi party. Though Leverkühn is an artist and creator and the Nazis are a vehicle for social transformation, the two are similar in that neither has the capacity for human compassion. Mann uses Leverkühn to represent Germany in order to reconcile his feelings between his love for his country and his horror at what it has become. *Doctor Faustus* becomes a tool for Mann to express these complex feelings to the world: “Leverkühn’s fate marks Mann’s despair over the redemptive qualities of art in the face of fascist totalitarianism. Instead of acting as a bulwark against the socio-political realities of German National Socialism, the aesthetic shows itself to be thoroughly contaminated by the ideological. [. . .] Mann asks a very postmodern question about the potential of art to resist the dominant social order.” ⁹ Mann asks, specifically, whether Leverkühn’s idea of removing himself from society and the ethical conventions humans follow paves the way for a society removed from ethics. And fascism itself exists outside of the sphere of humanity: “[its] only moral yardstick is the prowess of the race, of the nation, of the community. They claim legitimacy by no universal standard except a Darwinian triumph of the strongest community.” ¹⁰ It is people as a whole, not people as individuals, who matter to fascist leaders, and therefore those who are not seen as “fit” in the values promoted by the Nazis are ignored or destroyed outright in order to better the idealized vision of the world. In this sense, the value of ethics and society are lost in a competition to create the best theoretical version of man possible.

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Leverkühn attempts to live outside of the world of society, abandoning traditional morals and ideas in order to devote himself to what he perceives as a higher calling. Leverkühn is one individual, but when enough people feel the need to abandon morality because they perceive themselves to be outside of it, the Nazi party or something similarly sinister is born. Like Leverkühn, the Nazis create their own idea of morality and abandon conventional ethics because they feel devoted to something greater than the established society. Both abandon the humanity they claim to be bettering and therefore both become part of a larger tragedy by denying their own stakes in the community: “Through his self-imposed isolation from society, Leverkühn symbolizes the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and, by extension, embodies modernity’s investment in autonomous subjectivity.”

The concept of “autonomous subjectivity,” however, does not exist in practice, as one is always influenced by outside forces and by relations to others and therefore complete autonomy is never achieved. This is why both Leverkühn and Nazi Germany are doomed to failure: they subscribe to an ideology that cannot be sustained in life and moreover abandons most of society. Only a philosophy that combines morality with ideology can properly balance all the considerations of life.

**Balanced Intellectuals**

As Mann has made clear in his interpretation of Faust, anyone who forsakes either his/her humanity or intellectual pursuits is equally doomed. However, there are characters in *Doctor Faustus* who exemplify the ability to function within the confines of both society and creativity. The perfect example of this is Schildknapp, Leverkühn’s friend known for his writing and laughter. Schildknapp is very much an intellectual in the novel, caught up in his work and

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always good for a discussion. He is serious about his craft more in theory than in practice, however: “He wrote poetry in free verse, critical essays, and short stories in a tidy prose style. But then— partly out of economic necessity, partly, too, because his own production was not exactly gushing forth— he shifted the burden of his endeavors to translation, in particular from his favorite language, English” (178). He is, in some ways, a failed writer because of the ease with which he abandons his true craft, however Schildknapp is very much a man of his work and therefore driven by it, just not always by original writing. This is the type of knowledge that neither Leverkühn nor the Nazi party have mastered; it is a tempered craft, working within the framework of modern society. One could go so far as to say that by failing at his pursuits Schildknapp is actually setting an example, for he knows he can create a life working with translations whereas original writings will always exist as a fantasy. It is Leverkühn’s attempt to live his composing fantasy that brings him to his downfall. Schildknapp labors faithfully at a craft that at least engages his mind, and he can live with himself and with his community because he is practical in knowing he cannot live in society on his original writings alone. In some mannerisms, antisocial tendencies similar to Leverkühn’s emerge, namely in the way “he proved his independence to himself and others by fundamentally refusing to be accommodating— which meant that when you needed him, he was definitely not to be had” (181). Schildknapp asserts his devotion to the intellectual rather than human sphere, as, if he were more open to others, he would make himself available as needed instead of reserving his company as a function of his independence. However, this minor antisocial habit is still created inside a framework of interacting with others, as opposed to removing himself from society almost completely in the extreme isolationism of Leverkühn. With this small but distinct difference, Schildknapp moves
himself to the periphery of the tragedy in that he has chosen to live a life of knowledge but can adequately function within a loving society. For this reason, he is allowed to live and becomes a spectator rather than a spectacle.

The Gender Divide

As we look back on this reading of *Doctor Faustus* thus far, we can determine that, with the possible complication of Rudi Schwerdtfeger, there is a strict gender divide between those driven by compassion or desire and those driven by creativity or learning. Why does this gender divide exist, and who is recording it in the description of Leverkühn’s life? I wish to argue that it is Serenus Zeitblom, our hopelessly biased narrator, who introduces this troubled gender equation, and it is not a function of Mann’s own beliefs. Zeitblom provides the reader with more than ample proof of his own troubled views on gender. Much of the text is given to moralizing on the role of women, in which Zeitblom digresses from discussing the events in the lives of the women of the text and instead comments on his general stereotypes of female behavior: “Indeed, a man tends to behave here with more generous tolerance than does a woman, who usually casts a very jealous eye at any member of her own sex from whom she learns that she has set a man’s heart aflame, even when she herself feels only indifference for that heart” (313). When this text is viewed as a biography of a friend, a male friend, moreover, who never married and had presumably only one person with whom he engaged in sexual encounters, the idea of spending long passages contemplating the place of women seems quietly absurd. Why is Zeitblom so concerned by the actions of women, if women should only have a minor role in the story of Leverkühn’s life in the first place? The answer, perhaps, lies in the adoration with which he views his childhood friend. Zeitblom cannot bring himself to give Leverkühn equal
blame in his encounter with Esmeralda, so therefore it is Esmeralda who is damned. She too
stands for the corrupting sexual passion that taints the Rodde sisters, as she is another character
who destroys with desire. Zeitblom attempts to rationalize Leverkühn’s feelings for the
prostitute, and he claims he is “always consoled to some degree by the thought I welcomed
before, the thought of choice, the thought that something resembling the bond of love reigned
here, lending some shimmer of human soul to the union of this precious young man with that ill-
fated creature” (164). Zeitblom tries hard to understand the choices of his friend, but in the end
he cannot help but blame Esmeralda for all of the problems in Leverkühn’s life. Even when
Zeitblom refers to Leverkühn and Esmeralda while discussing their relations, he calls them
“precious” and “that ill-fated creature” respectively, creating a distinction between the two even
subconsciously. Because Leverkühn is the center of Zeitblom’s personal world, the gender
divide is created around Leverkühn’s own lack of passion and social function, so men have the
roles of intellectual creators of science and art with a possible side effect of emotional disconnect
and ethical dissolution. The exception of Schwerdtfeger exists to temper Zeitblom’s jealousy of
the man, the only other character in the novel who can rival Zeitblom’s place with Leverkühn.
Because Schwerdtfeger came to an early grave for his dalliances with women, Zeitblom counts
him among those destroyed by ardor. Consider, however, the parallel between Leverkühn and
Schwerdtfeger. Both are young, extremely talented musicians, famous for their works, and both
die young because of their affairs with women. And yet somehow Leverkühn is known for his
artistic creations, and Schwerdtfeger his relationships and death? This is Zeitblom’s doing, in
that Schwerdtfeger is seen as the one undone by passion whereas Leverkühn is a tragic hero,
tempted in a moment of weakness but otherwise a masculine ideal of knowledge before all else.
Ironically for Zeitblom, however, holding Leverkühn to this ideal is the expectation that destroys him. It is his coldness, rather than an excess of flirtatiousness like Schwerdtfeger, that causes his death, but the end result is the same. Zeitblom, always jealous and always attempting to protect Leverkühn, creates the gender difference in order to better rationalize his view of the world and Leverkühn’s life specifically, even though it can do nothing to protect his dying friend.
CONCLUSION

As Mann has made clear over the course of *Doctor Faustus*, to forsake human life in the quest for forbidden knowledge is deadly, but just as detrimental is ignoring wisdom and judgement in favor of passionate devotion. Though the gender divide is a function of Zeitblom, the strain between extreme focus on thought or emotion comes not only from the flawed narrator but flows from Mann himself, who was trying to reconcile the Germany he knew and loved with the Nazi regime. The kind of moral decay seen in the characters in the novel and in the Germany of World War II comes without balance, and therefore one must balance dedication to art and ideology with care for other human beings in order to create a life and a world that is beneficial to the self and community at large. The idea of this tension was not new when Mann picked it up and adapted it for the problems pertaining to the World War II era, and two works that had a major influence on this text were concerned with highlighting the problems that come from the discord of thought and emotion. Both Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung* cycle started a discussion about the balance of emotion and thought that Mann developed into his *Doctor Faustus*.

Knowledge and Love Outside of Mann

Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* is a retelling of the Biblical Adam story, and therefore it relates the temptation of forbidden knowledge and eventually the fall of man. Through the fates of Satan and Adam and Eve, Milton asserts that the love for the deity should come before any lust for knowledge, power, or another mere human. When Eve has fallen and is tempting Adam to join her in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam rationalizes, “So forcible within my heart I feel/ The bond of nature draw me to my own,/ My own in thee, for what thou art is mine;/ Our state
cannot be severed, we are one;/ One flesh; to lose thee were to lose myself.” Adam’s fatal error is to choose the desire for Eve over the love of God, making Adam into a figure similar to Inez or Clarissa Rodde, or perhaps even Rudi Schwerdtfeger, those who choose passionate love and all-consuming devotion over the rational understanding of love and obedience to God. However, Milton writes his epic through the eyes of the fallen man—namely, everyman, as all of humanity exists in a post-fall state of existence and therefore cannot comprehend the paradise that came before the apple. In this sense, he is writing of the love of God and its precedence over any other idea, but he is writing about it from the perspective of one who has chosen something other than God. Milton highlights the differences between his modern world and the Paradise in the text through the explanations Eve gives of her new experience of discord: ‘‘for I this night,/ [. . .] have dreamed,/ If dreamed, not as I oft am wont, of thee,/ Works of day past, or morrow’s next design,/ But of offense and trouble, which my mind/ Knew never till this irksome night’’ (5:30-35). Something so simple as troubled dreams, a common occurrence today, has to be explained by Eve, for it is an anomaly in Paradise. In our state of sin and imperfection, exposed by these differences between pre- and post-Edenic man, mortals put values unknown to Paradise before the love and humility to God. Humanity, science, and creativity all become factors into human life for a people no longer living in a controlled Paradise. Theoretically, Milton knows that obedience to God should be the number one priority of human kind, but in practice and in his epic he claims we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of our ancestors and have considerations other than those of pre-fall Adam and Eve. He contrasts the necessary love for the divine with the caveat that, for fallen man, love for humanity and progress are also

important considerations. In this he gives mortal man an excuse for the imperfect choices we make but also allows us to continue to reach for Paradise once again.

Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung* cycle is an epic about the lives and death of the gods who ruled the world before man in the Germanic and Scandinavian traditions. The operas confront the themes of the greed for power that takes precedent over compassion, as Alberich, a Nibelung, renounces love to steal the gold of the Rhinedaughters. In the quest to have the power of the gods, to rule the world, Alberich disdains the idea of love altogether. Much of the cycle focuses on attempts to win the ring, despite this heavy cost, by Wotan and Alberich alike. In this conflict, Wagner is pitting two basic desires against each other: that for love and respect against the power to have control. *Götterdämmerung* is the final opera in the cycle when the reign of the gods gives way to the reign of humanity, and the greed and power on display in the earlier operas gives way to the freedom of love seen in the human race. The opera ends with Valhalla in fire and the ring returned to the Rhinedaughters, so there is hope created for a world free from the power struggles borne from the ring. At the same time, however, Wagner condemns the pettiness, jealousy, and overheated passions that come with an era driven by love.

*Götterdämmerung* displays the fall of the gods to the race of men— but so too it tells of the death of the hero and heroine of the play, both betrayed and undone as only volatile humans can be:

Hagen: And so no weapon can harm him [Siegfried]?

Brünnhilde: In battle, no! But—

if you struck him in the back.

[...]

Hagen: And there my spear shall strike him!
Gunther: Deceiver I— and deceived!

Betrayed I— and betrayed!  

Siegfried is betrayed by those he thought were closest to him, other mortals who are driven partially by the greed of the ring and partially by their own passionate emotions, especially Brünnhilde, who is revenging her lost love. The new dispensation of mortals is fraught with dangers, warns Wagner, and the ideal of freely given love comes only with the uncertainty of never knowing how another will respond in such a volatile society, put on display by the death of Siegfried even as he helps solidify mortal man’s rule of the world. Wagner promotes humanity as the pinnacle of the new world order, but he also acknowledges that there are many pitfalls to the reign of mortals and all could be destroyed in such an unpredictable world. Though Wagner and Milton craft different stories around the choices of free will that come with an era centered on humanity, they and Mann all agree that the path to a civilized world order is far from easy and can only come about with sacrifices from ideas about humanity and the gods alike.

Science and Faust

Though the idea of the struggle between morality and discovery seems like a sweeping and dramatic concept useful only in novels, epics, and poems, the ideas presented in Prometheus, Adam, and Faust, Wagner, Milton, and Mann are all relevant to many major issues in society today. Since the detonation of the atomic bomb and the mechanization of warfare seen in the World Wars, the threat that human discovery is entering the realm of destructive knowledge has manifested itself in disturbingly real ways. And unfortunately, as scientific development

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continues to command the attention of the world and nations compete for who can produce more science-minded scholars, the idea of moral development has been left behind. It is easy to neglect philosophy and religion in the face of science in the modern world, especially since scientific study is currently the golden ticket to the job market and economic success on a global scale. But to overdevelop scientific practices without equal consideration to how they are being implemented on the individual and societal level can and has led to tragedy. This is not to say that science should be viewed with suspicion and horror at what it can accomplish, but it is unrealistic to assume that every scientific discovery is beneficial to humans at large. Therefore there should be some type of component that monitors the costs and benefits of major discoveries in order to assess how they can aid in society. The idea currently being promoted is that scientific “study” is a separate entity from scientific “application” and the two are kept as distinct entities. However, “we should heed [Francis] Bacon’s caution about believing we can easily separate contemplative or pure thought from its application to our lives. Our current scientific institutions do not succeed in doing so. The history and theory of patent law reveal that its essential function is to encourage the wide commercial exploitation of salable discoveries rather than to restrict and protect new knowledge.”

Though it sounds easy in theory to research as much as possible but control what is applied to human life, it is generally difficult to make a line between what is known and what can be used. This problem came to a head right when Mann was writing *Doctor Faustus*, in the development and implementation of the atomic bomb. J. Robert Oppenheimer became characterized as a Faustian figure who took most of the blame for the fallout after the detonation: “It was Oppenheimer, [. . .] who sold his soul to the devil—

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not the rest of us, who can stand complacently aside and look on raptly as the tragedy unfolds itself before the security board of the Atomic Energy Commission. The frequent allusions of this sort, in any case, betray a pronounced awareness of the American scientific community’s discomfort with the wages of the sin of knowledge.”\footnote{Theodore Ziolkowski. \textit{The Sin of Knowledge: Ancient Themes and Modern Variations.} Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. 156.} The use of Faustian rhetoric, though it can create a scapegoat rather than diffuse the blame that belonged to the scientific community and American government at large, also brings forth the idea that morality was pushed aside for progress and discovery. In making Oppenheimer a Faust, there has to be a soul to forsake and a devil with whom to deal, and thus the conventions of morality are introduced once again into a world promoting scientific research before all else. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the denial of all scientific progress and blind belief in religious texts despite the lack of practical application, which is another movement present today and just as detrimental to human society as scientific innovation untempered by ethics. As with the case that Mann makes of Leverkühn and the Rodde sisters alike, moving too far in one direction, whether toward scientific discoveries or religious edicts, causes the community and the world to become unbalanced in potentially disastrous ways. This is an important consideration for today, when scientific progress continues to move our world forward, but can sometimes forsake the good of society for theoretical intellectual pursuits. We must continue to keep in mind the examples of Faust and Oppenheimer to know that, though scientific pursuits are usually beneficial to society, there is a line dictated by morality that we should be careful to find and abide by if we wish to prevent future tragedies.
Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* brings forward the balance of love and knowledge in an effort to explain and then overcome the evil that was Nazi Germany. In exploring this tension, the novel also embodies it. *Doctor Faustus* is, on one level, a haunted story about a friendship, the documentation of a life by one who loved the subject deeply. In this way, Zeitblom is the passionate lover, a man devoted to his friend above any rationality, even despite the fact that Leverkühn has sold his humanity for his music. On another level, however, the novel is a deeply analytical study of music, philosophy, classical literature, Christian beliefs, and fascist ideology. Long passages in the book forsake the plot in order to develop these intellectual pursuits, and they often take precedence over character sketches or building suspense for the events in the novel. Even on this structural level, Mann ties together the two fundamentals of human life—our love and humanity on one side, and our knowledge and theoretical ideas on the other. We watch this tension continue to the present day, as science struggles to make discoveries and morality attempts to reign them into a progress that can benefit humanity. The love for one another, for a higher power, and respect for all humans continues to develop with our constant need to move forward, and Mann’s novel serves as a searing warning of what happens when the scales tip too far one way or the other. Life is a precarious balance between learning and trusting, and Mann’s examples should be confirming what we already know about constructing human life. As we move into the future, we must never stop looking back at the examples laid out for us of the problems of moving too far in one direction. We must keep the scales in balance or we will perish in the discord.
APPENDIX

Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* centers on the life of Adrian Leverkühn, a troubled and intense genius who directs his creative drive into musical composition. The tale is not an objective view of Leverkühn, but instead a study by one of the few people allowed close to him — one Serenus Zeitblom, a friend from early childhood who eagerly watched and now documents his old friend’s life. Zeitblom is writing the “biography” after the death of his longtime friend in war-ravaged Germany during World War II. His beliefs about Germany during the war intersperse his descriptions of Leverkühn’s life until the two fates become intertwined. As readers, we watch Leverkühn and Zeitblom grow up together in a small and rather old-fashioned German town. We meet Leverkühn’s family and mentors, particularly his instructor Kretzschmar, who convinces Leverkühn through his lectures and eventually private study to focus his intellectual gifts into musical study and composition. Zeitblom and Leverkühn grow close through this time, and though Zeitblom continually denies his closeness to Leverkühn, saying he was more of an observer than close friend, he cannot and in fact does not deny that he is one of the few people that Leverkühn addressed with familiar pronouns (du versus Sie). In college, Leverkühn originally studies theology and Zeitblom studies philology, and with the other theologians, they engage in debates and conversations exposing the mindset of young German thinkers, mainly to highlight the sentiments of an idealistic and moralistic society in Germany pre-World War I. Partway through college, Leverkühn moves to Liepzig, where he continues to study with Kretzschmar and gives up theology for composing once and for all. Zeitblom does not follow his friend and instead joins with the German army for a time. Through Leverkühn’s letters, Zeitblom learns of an encounter with a prostitute known in the novel as
Esmeralda, and this encounter comes to define Leverkühn’s later life in Zeitblom’s eyes. Leverkühn is fascinated and drawn in by this woman, and in engaging with her he contracts the syphilis that eventually kills him. This is Leverkühn’s deal with the devil, made all the more apparent through a written transcript of a literal encounter with a devil that takes place in Palestrina, Italy, where Leverkühn was on a trip with his longtime friend Rüdiger Schildknapp. Though the trip was supposed to be a peaceful experience for Schildknapp to work on his translations and Leverkühn to write his opera, *Love’s Labour Lost*, the trip takes on a new meaning to Zeitblom when he realizes that Leverkühn must have crafted this transcript about selling his soul to the devil in exchange for artistic inspiration at this time. This period is now cast in a horrific light, as Zeitblom looks back upon the time in which he regards his friend as lost.

After the formation of this pact, Leverkühn works to create his two greatest masterpieces, *Apocalypsis cum figuris* and *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, while the lives of those around him are increasingly filled with turmoil. Though the pact delivers to Leverkühn his inspiration in the form of these pieces, he finds himself many times in bouts of illness in which he cannot tolerate any forms of light or much food. While his life is tainted by illness, it is also marred by certain tragedies that occur around him. Clarissa Rodde, a woman in the social circle of Zeitblom and Leverkühn, attempts to break into the acting business but instead ends up blackmailed and, rather than face this, she commits suicide. Her sister, Inez’s, fate is more complex and intertwined with the fate of another friend: Rudi Schwerdtfeger. Schwerdtfeger became a close friend and confidant to Leverkühn, for Leverkühn’s standards at least, but he is brought to an early death after breaking off an affair with the married Inez. Inez, unable to
accept the ending of the affair and Schwerdtfeger’s subsequent engagement to Marie Godeau (a woman who Leverkühn himself wished to woo), shoots Schwerdtfeger and thus brings both herself and her former lover to tragedy. After all of this, Leverkühn confines himself to his country home in Pfeiffering and temporarily takes in his nephew, Nepomuk, while his sister is treated for her health. Leverkühn and everyone around him are taken by the child, nicknamed “Echo,” and Leverkühn’s world is rocked when Echo is diagnosed with meningitis and then quickly succumbs to the disease. After this final tragedy, Leverkühn throws himself back into his work despite his failing health, and he gathers his friends to preview *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*. At the time when he was supposed to debut the music, however, he relates the transcript about his encounter with the devil crafted in Palestrina and then collapses. He remains in a vegetative state, mostly taken care of by his mother, until his death in 1940, the timing of which cements the parallel between the life of Leverkühn and the subsequent rise of the Nazi party and beginning of World War II. The rise of the Nazis and the death of Leverkühn come together to amplify Zeitblom’s horror at the course in which his friend’s life and his country’s fate have followed.
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