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Humanist Discourse in Mann's *Faustus*: Rereading the Novel in light of the Refugee "Crisis" in Europe

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## Abstract

Thomas Mann's 1947 novel, *Doctor Faustus* tells the story of a composer who sells his soul to the devil in exchange of twenty four years living as the "genius of music." Often read as an allegory to Nazism, the novel asks the question of what defines a culture as "good" or "bad" by focusing on the difference between medieval Humanism and German Humanism; the latter emphasizes the importance of human beings and supports dissent. However, not long after WWI, as German nationalism gained support, the movement lost its purpose; as a result, the seeds of National Socialism were planted. According to Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Germany would risk losing German culture and Humanism if it embraced the French ideals of supporting homogenous views of liberty. The purpose of this research is to understand the relevance of reading *Doctor Faustus* today by examining how organizations in Germany support refugees to contribute to German culture through literature, music, culinary arts, etc. As a part of the research, organizations that provide such opportunities for refugees and aid in their integration are observed. It is anticipated that parallels between the "German question" - that lies at the core of *Doctor Faustus* - during WWII and in the midst of the refugee "crisis" today will be drawn. Reading *Doctor Faustus* makes clear the dangers of losing a culture which accommodates different and multiple voices; the novel is relevant today in the current political situation in Germany because it sheds light on the importance of aiding refugees in becoming part of German culture.

Keywords: English, German, Humanism, Literature, Doctor Faustus, Thomas Mann, WWII, Diversity, Germany

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Refugee "Crisis" in Europe

Thomas Mann wrote his last major work, *Doctor Faustus* in 1947, attempting to convey the downfall of the true purpose of German Humanism. It was written from both inside and outside Nazi Germany as Mann, as a German citizen, wrote the novel in exile during the last two years of WWI. The movement of Humanism emphasizes the importance of human beings and rational thinking, rather than the power of the supernatural. German Humanism influenced the works of several German writers including Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. However, as German nationalism gained support and the seeds of National Socialism were planted, the literary movement lost its true purpose. According to Mann's reflections in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, German art and literature became increasingly homogenous. Mann states that the movement which supports a homogenous culture is medieval Humanism as opposed to German humanism which stresses the potential of human beings. As the National Socialist party gained power and ordered countless books to be burned to make sure that literature of the German *Volk* not contain any works that deify the ideologies of the regime, we can identify that what Mann had feared would indeed occur.

When reading *Doctor Faustus*, one must be wary of the narrator, Serenus Zeitblom's narration and identify Adrian Leverkühn's views through his music. According to Zeitblom, his

friend who had sold his soul to the devil is a portrayal of Germany embracing Nazism. However, by examining Leverkuhn's opinion on the redemption of culture and recognizing the similarities with Mann's own views on humanism in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, we can infer that Leverkuhn is not a reflection of Germany during the Second World War. Rather he is a Humanist through whom Mann attempts to explain how German culture could have developed in order to prevent its downfall. Leverkuhn's views warn against actions that would potentially cause the destruction of culture in the future.

One of the questions explored in this research is how a 20th century German political novel, such as *Doktor Faustus*, is relevant in contemporary Europe in the midst of the refugee crisis. Investigations have been done previously in the fields of refugee studies as well as literature of the Second World War. However, this research specifically examines how a novel which was written out of the horrors of WWII is relevant in the present political atmosphere in Europe. Just like Leverkuhn composes an opera in which all of the notes contribute to the overall musical piece, many organizations in Germany help refugees contribute to German culture. This has the potential to serve everyone in Germany.

### **Mann's views on politics**

Thomas Mann was one of the few authors who spoke out against National Socialism. Following the National Socialist German Workers' Party's (NSDAP) success in the 1930 Reichstag election, Mann gave an anti-Nazi speech in the Berlin Beethoven Hall. The event was shut down by the *Sturmabteilung* (SA). In February 1933, Mann and his wife Katja went on a lecture tour to several European countries but did not return to Germany as the nation's government was a threat to them. The Manns first settled in France before moving to Küsnacht

near Zürich. In a Swiss newspaper called *Züricher Zeitung*, Mann openly declared his dislike of NSDAP. As a result, his remaining properties in Germany were confiscated. In 1938, Mann and his family move to the United States of America. He received a guest professorship at Princeton University. During the outbreak of WWII, Mann was in Sweden where he made political broadcasts on BBC and called for resistance against Hitler. He also wrote texts for political leaflets.

Since *Doktor Faustus* is a political novel, it is important to consider Mann's own view on politics. In *Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, which Mann wrote at the end of WWI, he attempts to define the term "politics." Mann states that the historically the accepted definition of politics is "a practical behavior, including the rules derived from it, which, whether it be on the part of government, particular groups of people, or even individuals, sets as its goal of the maintenance or the reformation of existing state" (160). He asserts that in the aftermath of the Great War, however, this definition is outdated. He writes that more appropriate definitions of politics for the time period would be "opposite of aestheticism" and "salvation from aestheticism" (160). To illustrate the concept of aestheticism, he quotes "intellectuals" who support aesthetic movement and criticizes them. Mann claims that Arthur Schopenhauer's views belong to a cult of aestheticism. He quotes Schopenhauer's ideas on work and action who states:

The main difference is that actions are transitory while works remain. The most noble *action* still has only a temporary effect; the work of genius on the other hand lives and has beneficial and uplifting effect through all times. Only the memory of the actions remains, which becomes weaker and weaker, more distorted and indifferent, and must even gradually disappear if history does not take it up and transmit it in a petrified state to

posterity. Works, on the other hand, are themselves immortal and can, especially the written ones, live through all times. (163)

Mann disagrees with Schopenhauer's claim as he explains that in a culture, a work cannot exist in an intellectual vacuum. Whatever work an artist, a thinker, or a politician creates must serve the people of the society in some way. In essence, a work should be able to perform an action--a service to citizens. This refutes Schopenhauer's claim that a certain action is only beneficial to society for a limited amount of time. Mann suggests that if an action performs a duty to humanity, it is just as significant to society as a work produced by an intellectual. He asserts that this type of acceptance of aestheticism in politics would lead to the downfall of culture. By 1933, with the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), what Mann had feared occurred; German humanism was eradicated as the National Socialists attempted to make German culture homogenous.

### **The 1933 Book Burnings**

Following the end of World War I, many university students opposed the Weimar Republic and considered supporting the NSDAP as a means to express their discontent with economic instability. Hence, leaders of National Socialism, like Joseph Goebbels, found an ally in the National Socialist German Students' Association (*Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* or *NSDStB*) as it was a supporter of the rise of German nationalism and harbored anti-Semitic views (Sauder 15).

Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany, ordered members of the regime to bring German culture in line with the goals of National Socialism. Government officials began to purge artistic organizations of Jewish culture and of anyone whose works the

National Socialists deemed to be “degenerate” or “dangerous” (Lischeid 57). On May 10, 1933, in thirty four university towns across Germany, German students and faculty consigned several books to flames because the texts opposed the ideologies of the regime. The goal of the book burnings was to make German culture compatible with Nazi ideologies and to remove any literary work which would influence individual thought. Interestingly, the students who took part in the book burnings were inspired by a previous book burning event which took place in 1817. On the 300th anniversary of Luther’s 95 Theses, the *Burschenschaften*, or German student association demonstrated for a unified country and burned anti-national and reactionary literature which they considered to be “un-German” (Sauder 42). This demonstrates that in addition to political significance, the burning of texts has a historical meaning for groups like the *Burschenschaften*. Later, on April 8, 1933, the German students’ association drafted its own twelve “theses” which were “declarations that described the fundamentals of a pure and national language and culture” (43). In essence, they made robbed German culture of individualism which Mann considers to be dangerous to a society.

Other than the works of Thomas Mann, the book burnings also destroyed the texts of socialists like Bertolt Brecht and August Bebel, Karl Marx -- the founder of communism, Jewish authors like Franz Werfel, Max Brod and Stefan Zweig, as well as foreign authors like Ernest Hemingway, Jack London and Helen Keller. The German students’ association also burned several works of Heinrich Mann, T. Mann’s elder brother and literature of female authors such as Annette Kolb and Irmgard Keun.



The *Burschenschaften* burns books that oppose the ideologies of Nazism in 1933.

### **The Cultural Politics of Nazi Germany**

As a result of the 1933 book burnings and censorship of diverse voices in literature, officials of the NSDAP aimed to curate literature which would only contain “elite” European literary works. Since the mid 1930s, the Nazis emphasized the idea of cultural unity, known as Europeanism, is an integral part of their politics. Goebbels created a campaign in order to establish Nazi Germany as the center of European literature by giving German literature a sense of superiority. In October 1941, he launched a web of new German-dominated, trans-European institutions for intellectual exchange across the Nazi occupied territories. His goal was to include traditional German literary elements with a basis of anti-Semitic nationalism and a notion of German supremacy. Goebbels insisted that National Socialism was the key to European cultural unity and renewal. As a result, he engaged non-German scholars, writers, composers and artists

to create the European Writers' Union. Because many of the writers had liberal or socialist views, the Nazi officials demanded that the writers reorder their ideas (Martin 492).

In order to gain complete control of European literature, Germany needed to take over the literary leadership from France as it was considered the center of European literature during the interwar period. Under the French literary leadership, a work of literature was worthy of being "European" if it contained certain values relating to the Enlightenment such as ideals of reason and conscience (494). This helped restore cultural unity across Europe, which was lost during WWI. Nevertheless, this literary model deprived writers of their autonomy because the standard for Parisian literature was the type of supranational modernism which rejected individual cultural values. As a result, writers lacked both thematic and stylistic choices for their texts.

After Paris fell to Nazi occupation, Goebbels believed that Germany was entitled to seize the cultural and literary leadership that France had held during the interwar period. On October 24, 1941, writers from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland were invited - in Weimar - to form a new European Writer's Union (494). Goebbels demanded that in their works, the writers depict National Socialism as the ultimate catalyst in unifying European culture.

### ***Doktor Faustus: An explanation***

After WWII, literary critics viewed *Doktor Faustus* as a condemnation of German culture. At an address in the Library of Congress, called *Deutschland und die Deutschen*, Mann states that *Doktor Faustus* attempts to convey that "evil Germany is merely good Germany gone astray" (Vaget 223). However, Mann asserted that the barbarism which enabled Germany to

embrace National Socialism was not inherently engrained in German culture. Rather, the nation went through a process of perversion which was previously unknown to the humanistic aspect of German culture. Hence, *Doktor Faustus* is not a condemnation of German culture itself. It is Mann's way of explaining how culture can be harmed by cultural aestheticism.

### **National Socialism as the Devil**

Zeitblom tells the readers that Leverkuhn makes a faustian pact with the Devil based on a "document" he finds in his friend's belongings. Zeitblom claims that the Devil promised Leverkuhn fame as a composer for twenty-four years. From closely analyzing the document, one can easily identify that Zeitblom's claim is an outright and deliberate lie. Rather, the Devil in chapter 25 represents the rising fascist sentiment in Munich in 1919. Leverkuhn presents these views as demonic because he considers them to be destructive to German culture. In her book *Overturing Dr. Faustus*, Frances Lee states that "the Devil is the personification of National Socialism" (198). Leverkuhn is aware of this potential danger to German politics that he attempts to reason with the Devil. The Devil says to Leverkuhn:

Certain things are no longer possible. The illusion of emotions as a compositorial work of art, music's self-indulgent illusion, has itself become impossible and cannot be maintained--the which has long since consisted of inserting preexisting, formulaic, and dispirited elements as if they were the inviolable necessity of this single occurrence. Or put the other way round: The special occurrence assumes an air as if were identical with the preexisting, familiar formula. For four hundred years all great music found contentment in pretending such unity was achieved without a breach, took pleasure in conventional universal legitimation, which it endeavours to confuse with its own

concerns. My friend, it will work no more. Criticism of ornament, of convention, of abstract generality--they are all one and the same. What falls prey to criticism is the outward show of the bourgeois work of art, an illusion in which music takes part, though it produces no external image. (DF 257)

In essence, the Devil asserts that art should not provoke individual thoughts or emotions.

Historically, all types of art, from Picasso's Cubist works to Monet's Impressionist paintings evoked some type of emotion in the viewer. Hence, the artists attempt to convey a message that the viewer interprets and is allowed to criticize. The Devil says this practice is "no longer possible." One must keep in mind that the NSDAP banned all works of art that they considered "degenerate" which were art that did not depict the ideologies of the regime. The type of art which the Nazis praised were simple and realistic in appearance which depicted how Nazism wanted society to develop. For instance, in Hitler's personal art collection, there were paintings of peasants saying their prayers, nude women smoking and Greek hero-like figures posing.

These artwork cannot be interpreted in any other way other than what it visually presents. This helped the National Socialists express to their audience what they considered the "ideal" way of life in Germany looks like. By mentioning that "what falls prey to criticism is the outward show of the bourgeois work of art," it is implied that the Devil thinks that art should be reserved for the cultural elite. Leverkuhn disagrees with this view as he desires to make his music available to all of society.

Leverkuhn challenges the Devil's ideas by explaining the significance of objective freedom. He says to the demonic figure, "one could know all that and yet acknowledge freedom again beyond any criticism" (DF 257). He implies that in order for equality to exist, one must be

able to criticize a given art. Mann chose his diction intentionally when Leverkuhn states that “one could raise the game to a yet higher power by playing with forms from which, as one knows, life has vanished” (DF 257) The forms here represent the notes in his music. In his composition, he makes his music open to criticism and different interpretations by using the twelve-tone system instead of the five-tone system.

### **Leverkuhn’s Musical Breakthrough**

Through his music, Leverkuhn attempts to illustrate the meaning of freedom. In *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Mann claimed that freedom is similar to subjectivity. Thus it eventually becomes indefensible and requires the support of objectivity (Lee 90). This does not mean that the subject in question will therefore lack freedom. Quite on the contrary, the purpose of objectivity, or laws and rules associated with a certain subject, is to protect, not suppress individualism. This concept is supported by Leverkuhn’s stance in an earlier chapter where he expressed his thoughts on Kierkegaard’s suggestion that the church is no longer necessary.

Leverkuhn states:

“I am aware that the most talented among you who have read your Kierkegaard, locate truth and even ethical truth, entirely in subjectivity and reject with horror collective life in the hard. But I cannot join you in your radicalism--which as the license of students, by the way, won’t last long--in your Kierkegaardian separation of Church and Christianity. I still see in the Church--even in her current state as a secularized creature of the bourgeoisie--a citadel of order, an institution for objective discipline, a system of ditches and dams for the religious life, which otherwise, would run wild, deteriorate into

subjectivistic numinous chaos, to a world of fantastic eeriness to a sea of the demonic.

(91)

Leverkuhn describes the importance of diverse views and dissent in society. The same principle is applicable to both politics and music. That is, absolute subjective freedom cannot be achieved without sacrificing equality. Mann would argue that this was the problem with Rousseau's ideals of the Enlightenment. Rousseau claims to be arguing for freedom but supports subjective freedom, or freedom which benefits a small number of citizens, over equality. In turn, the ideals of the Enlightenment censor dissenters resulting in a dangerous situation for a society.

Through his music, Leverkühn wishes to make music compatible with equality. He claims that without "organization," producing music is not possible. He mentions Beethoven to explain this idea. Frances Lee states, "Beethoven achieved freedom through the use of the variation. The variation in music is the elaboration of a simple theme, giving it a specific character. There are infinite possibilities of variation, often resulting in passages that are not immediately recognizable as being based on the same simple theme. It is the individualization of the general, expressing the general through the specific" (91). Leverkühn cites this characteristic of Beethoven's music as a metaphor for German humanism. German humanism stresses the importance of individualism which makes it different from medieval humanism which defines "culture as a unit" (91). In medieval humanism, culture is homogeneous. Adrian continues by stating that in the generation after Beethoven, Brahms turned variation into a fixed, objective rule. According to Lee, Mann is "making a parallel between Brahms and Bismarck here, in the parallel of the development of music with the development of nineteenth century German political culture" (91). Leverkühn is creating a new type of music in the 20th century which is a

metaphor for the way he wants German politics to develop; the nation should adopt a modern, liberal democracy rooted in German humanism. Leverkuhn comments on Brahm's music:

With him, the music dispenses with all conventional phrases, formulas and residues and, so to speak, recreates the unity of the work at any moment, out of freedom. But this is precisely where freedom becomes the principle of all-round economy, which leaves nothing contingent on music and still develops the outermost diversity of identically recorded materials. (DF 255).

He continues to explain that historically, the different elements in a piece developed independently and arbitrarily. As a result, the elements which were more developed depreciated the elements which had not developed as well. This is a direct parallel to society: before Bismarck's unification and even in the beginning of the Kaiserreich, the lower classes were considered "underdeveloped" and not given the opportunity to participate in politics. In essence, Leverkuhn is advocating for a modern, liberal democracy which would include all of society through a musical breakthrough. At first, he attempts to do this with five tones, his key-word h-e-a-e-es, the motif for transparent structure. However, Leverkuhn soon realizes that the five tone system is too limited and transparency is not enough. He then decides to use the twelve-tone technique.

Mann's views on politics and culture are shared Leverkuhn. Unlike his "intellectual" circle, notably the people in the Kridwiß Kreiß apartment, Leverkuhn does not embrace aestheticism. It is clear that the narrator, Zeitblom, misinterprets his friend's music. He believes that Leverkuhn is composing a piece which is only reserved for the perceived "intellectuals" like the Kridwiß circle. He thinks that his friend supports the ideologies of aestheticism and is

conveying this message through his music. However, reading Leverkuhn's views, one can identify that he composes his work using the twelve-tone system as a metaphor for how German culture should develop. Leverkuhn explains to Zeitblom that he wishes to create a "breakthrough" which would redeem music by freeing it from aestheticism. He says:

Whoever might achieve the breakthrough out of intellectual coldness into a risk-filled world of new feeling, that person would be called art's redeemer...funny, isn't it, how for a long time, music saw itself as a means of redemption, and all the while, like all art, it needed redemption, that is, needed to be redeemed from a solemn isolation that was the fruit of culture's emancipation, of the elevation of culture to ersatz religion--needed to be redeemed from being left alone with a cultured elite, known as the 'audience,' which will soon no longer exist, which no longer exists, so that art will soon be all alone, alone to fade away and die, unless, that is, it should find a way to the *volk* or human beings. (DF 339)

In short, Leverkuhn explains the process in which aestheticism destroys culture. If art exists in an intellectual isolation, it will not be able to transfer from generation to generation. As a result, it will disappear. In turn, the culture would lack art which is harmful to society. Leverkuhn attempts to prevent this from happening. He wishes to make his music available to all of humanity and not just reserved for the intellectual elite so that his work will live long after he composes it.

Outside the novel, the 12 tone-technique was developed by Viennese composer Arnold Schoenberg. The system makes sure that people hear all twelve notes of the chromatic scale as often as one another. In short, all of the notes contribute equally to the overall musical piece. In

the novel, the notes represent characters like the Jewish individual, Fitelberg, the prostitute Hetera Esmeralda and Frau von Tolna who belongs to the working class. They are characters who are scorned by the members of the Kridwiß circle but both Leverkuhn and Mann believe that they play a pivotal role by contributing to German society.

### ***Love's Labour's Lost* as Leverkuhn's Opera**

Leverkuhn uses the Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* as one of his opera's libretto. His choice of text is significant because one of the main themes of the play is that it is one cannot gain wisdom without having contact with humanity. The King of Navarre and his three men decide to cut off contact with women and the pleasures of life in their quest for wisdom. When the Princess of France and her maids visit Navarre, the King and his men fall in love with their visitors and eventually break their pact. To teach the men a lesson, the French ladies do not reciprocate their romantic advances, at least for the time being. Rosaline, especially, demands that Berowne care for the sick with laughter for twelve months. She says, "You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day / Visit groaning wretches; and your task shall be, / With all the fierce endeavor of your wit, / To enforce the pained impotent to smile" (5.2.923-926). Her demand illustrates that serving others in society is an integral part of gaining wisdom and becoming cultured. This, in short, is also Leverkuhn's view.

### **The Kridwiß Circle**

The narrator Zeitblom claims to be disappointed by German politics following the fall of the monarch at the end of World War I. However, he joins the Kridwiß Circle which is a group of "elite" academics in Munich hosted by Sixtus Kridwiß. The members of the Kridwiß circle exchange ideas about politics, culture and the role of aestheticism in society. From Zeitblom's

description of the members, it appears that he harbors personal animosities towards several of them but agrees with their discussions on politics. He mentions:

It was an old-new, revolutionarily atavistic world, in which values linked to the idea of the individual were sapped of every strength and cast aside, or by having been wrenched free of pale theory, had at least taken on a very different meaning from that given them over the last centuries and, now relativized and red-blooded, were made applicable at the much higher level of violence, authority, the dictatorship of belief--not in some reactionary way that looked back to yesterday or the day before, but in a way that was tantamount to humanity's being transferred, along with these new ideas, back into the theocratic situations and conditions of the Middle Ages. That was no more reactionary than the path around a sphere--which, of course, leads around or back around it--can be termed regressive. There you had it: regress and progress, the old and the new, past and present--all became one, and the political right coalesced more and more with the left. Unbiased research and free thought, far from representing progress, belonged instead to the boring world of those being left behind. Freedom had been giving to thought in order to justify force, just as seven hundred years ago reason had been free to discuss faith and prove dogma; that had been its purpose, and that was the purpose of thought today, or would be tomorrow. Research, to be sure, had its premises--indeed it did! And those were the force, the authority of the community--premises so axiomatic that it never entered science's head that it might not be free. They were thoroughly subjective--within an objective restraint so natural and ingrained that was in no way felt to be a shackle. In order to see clearly what lay before us, to ban every foolish fear of it, one need only recall

that the unconditionality of specific premises had never been an impediment to the imagination and to individual boldness of thought. On the contrary, precisely because the intellectual uniformity and closed world provided by the Church had seemed absolutely self-evident to medieval man, he had been far more a man of imagination than any citizen of the individualistic age, had been far more a man of imagination than any citizen of the individualistic age, had been to surrender himself individually to the powers of his own imagination with that much less worry, that much more security. (388)

Reading his description of the Kridwiß Circle closely, it is clear that he is an active participant in the discussions in the group, not just an observer. When he states, “It was far better for me to observe and explore those new ideas with the rest of the guests and, instead of presenting my sterile and actually quite boring opposition to them, to shape my own ideas to conform to the flow of the discussion and use its framework to envision myself for the world that was coming” (387). From this statement, one can identify very clearly that Zeitblom does, in fact, support the ideologies of the then-developing party, NSDAP. He wants to adopt the lifestyle of the supporters of the aesthetic movement so that he is accepted in the party. Zeitblom values objective freedom as he criticizes the need for objectivity. The members of the Kridwiß Circle are supporters of antiquity as it is evident from Zeitblom’s description that the group advocated for “an old-new, revolutionarily atavistic world.” Outside the novel, supporters of National Socialism like Hitler or the composer Richard Wagner also alluded to antiquity as the basis of creating a “master” race. Zeitblom then mentions that the society the members of the Kridwiß are imagining would value regress and progress. Mann himself would assert that this is dangerous to German politics, especially since in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, he advocates for a

modern, liberal democracy which allows all of society to participate. This means that he would disapprove of a society which supports regress. Throughout his description, Zeitblom deems individualism as unimportant to culture; this challenges the views associated with German Humanism as the movement stresses the importance of individuals and individual thought.

Throughout the novel, Zeitblom suggests that it is his duty to “take care” of Adrian whose quest for musical knowledge has brought him “illness.” Zeitblom states, “it is beyond dispute, and I thank a friendship that brought me great sorrow and dismay, but always filled me with pride, for the insight: Genius is a form of the life force that is deeply versed in illness, that both draws creatively from it and creates through it” (374). Nevertheless, Adrian never mentions that he is looking for something which will make him the “genius of music.” He is simply attempting to create a breakthrough--a musical composition that serves all of society and is a metaphor for the way he wants German culture to develop. He wished that his music evokes emotions in the audience and attempts to start a conversation about what the technical aspects of the composition say about a culture. It is clear that Zeitblom believes that Adrian’s work is demonic stating “the horrors that have just been heard are now transported, with fully different instrumentation and restructured rhythms, into a totally different register by this indescribable children’s chorus” (398). By suggesting that Adrian’s music is “horrifying,” Zeitblom implies that it should not belong to German culture. Furthermore, describing the piece as a “children’s chorus” is degrading. This foreshadows that the National Socialists would perceive the works of minorities.

## **Characters as Vessels of Cultural Exchange**

### **I. Hetera Esmeralda**

Zeitblom claims that Leverkuhn contracts syphilis from a woman--Leverkuhn calls her Hetera Esmeralda. Leverkuhn first meets her at a Leipzig Bordello. A year later, he tracks her down at her new residence in Pressburg, which is modern day Bratislava, Slovakia. According to Zeitblom, Esmeralda is dismissed from the Leipzig Bordello because of her syphilis. However, there is no evidence for his claim. Syphilis was one of Hitler's rhetorics in describing the supposed danger of the East. Hitler expressed that people from the East "contaminated" German culture. Similarly, Zeitblom depicts Esmeralda as dangerous claiming she will "infect" Leverkuhn. The diction which Mann uses shows that Zeitblom dehumanizes her. He asserts that Leverkuhn gave in to the temptation as there was a "shimmer of human soul to the union of this precious young man with that ill-fated creature" (DF 164). Zeitblom writes that Esmeralda is a "creature" indicating that she is more of an animal than human. Furthermore, by describing Leverkuhn as "precious," Zeitblom is creating a hierarchy for the two races by implying that the blood of the important, German man would be contaminated by woman who is an outsider from the East.

It is unlikely that Leverkuhn's interaction with Esmeralda was even sexual in nature. Examining Leverkuhn's views on music and culture closely, one can identify that it is possible that he simply wanted to gain cultural inspiration for his music. One must keep in mind that Esmeralda is not even the character's real name; Leverkuhn calls her this Spanish name because of the Spanish jacket she wears. The jacket is worn over a closely fitted bodice and fasted down the chest in the front. It makes Esmeralda appear distinct which suggests that she represents individuality. Furthermore, Hetera Esmeralda is the name of a butterfly which is transparent in appearance. It takes on the color of its environment which means that it can adapt well with its

surroundings. It may be because of these reasons that Leverkuhn visited Esmeralda in Pressburg as he later mentions that art needs to adapt. Esmeralda's traits helped him develop his music. Zeitblom finds a sexual motivation for the visit and believes that Esmeralda is "infecting" his friend's mind.

## II. Fitelberg

The National Socialist German Workers' Party was founded in 1920. In response, Mann wrote an essay in 1922 called "Das Problem der Freiheit." In the essay, Mann states that one achieves morality by overcoming egotistical isolation and cooperating with one's community. The activities he describes one can perform are similar to the actions Adrian takes in the chapters of *Doktor Faustus* during the same time period.

Contradicting Zeitblom's claim, Leverkuhn does not compose his music studying in complete isolation from society. Leverkuhn's letter to Kretzschmar in the beginning of his study serves as evidence of his desire to cooperate with the musical community. As Leverkuhn prepares to go on the music tour in Switzerland, Zeitblom attempts to persuade the readers that the character Schwerdtfeger convinces him to go on the trip. However, if analyzed closely, one can identify that it was actually the Jewish character Fitelberg who encourages Leverkuhn to participate in the music tour.

Fitelberg is an impresario who organizes the international avant-garde music scene in Paris. Zeitblom depicts Fitelberg's musical organization as the Devil's temptation. Mann makes Zeitblom believe that Fitelberg is Mephistopheles in the form of a Jew. He describes Fitelberg as aesthetically unpleasant, like he does with all of the characters who are scorned by the members of his so called "intellectual" circle. Zeitblom specifically mentions perceived unattractiveness

when he describes any Jewish character. A specific anti-Semitic trope that Mann brings attention to is depicting characters who come from the East as inferior or even dangerous. Fitelberg, like Leverkuhn's supposed syphilis which he contracted from Hetera Esmeralda, comes from the East.

Fitelberg's story of his own intellectual and cultural development parallels Leverkuhn's life. Fitelberg came from a small town and studied philosophy at the University of Sorbonne. He then however left his study of philosophy to study metaphysics instead because he found philosophy to be too abstract. This is similar to Leverkuhn's case as he withdrew his study of theology to study music instead. Both Leverkuhn and Fitelberg believe that music and metaphysics respectively would serve society more than theology and philosophy. By making Fitelberg's background similar to Leverkuhn's, Mann is showing that Fitelberg deserves to perform in and be a part of the same cultural sphere as Leverkuhn. Likewise, Leverkuhn believes that cultural exchange with Fitelberg is necessary for German culture to thrive and develop in the 20th century.

Zeitblom repeatedly implies that Leverkuhn found Fitelberg's views on culture to be distasteful. Rather, it is Zeitblom himself, not Leverkuhn, who opposes Fitelberg's views. At the time of their meeting--1923--German nationalism was gaining support in the midst of the Weimar Era. Fitelberg says to Zeitblom and Leverkuhn:

Now, I am a Jew, you should know--Fitelberg, that is a patently Jewish name. I have the Old Testament in my bones, and that is no less a serious matter than Germanness--it basically leaves little predisposition for the sphere of the valse brillante. To be sure, it is a German superstition that there is nothing but valse brillante in the world outside, and

seriousness only in Germany. And yet, as a Jew one is basically skeptical of the world and inclines toward Germanness, though, of course, such an inclination brings with it the risk of a kick in the pants. German, that means above all else: popular, national, *volkstümlich*--and who would believe that of a Jew? We Jews have everything to fear from the German character...We are quite aware of the difference between Gounod's and Goethe's *Faust*, even if we do speak French, even then... (Mann 427)

Fitelberg is pointing out the issues of German nationalism and what an outsider would potentially face if nationalism gained support to a dangerous extent. He indicates that contrary to what supporters of nationalism believe, outsiders like himself can bring culture to German society when he mentions "we are quite aware of the difference between Gounod's and Goethe's *Faust*." It is Zeitblom who dismisses Fitelberg's views, not Adrian. Zeitblom then deliberately lies to the readers and says that Adrian will not be participating in cultural exchange with Fitelberg's organization. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for Zeitblom to know what transpired between Leverkuhn and Fitelberg as Zeitblom himself mentioned that he will not be with Leverkuhn after Fitelberg's visit. He has no evidence to tell the readers what occurs when he is not in the company of Leverkuhn. Both Leverkuhn and Rudi travel to Switzerland accepting Fitelberg's invitation where they meet Marie.

### **Leverkuhn's Defeat**

In Chapter 47, wishes to perform *The Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* for the academics and "intellectuals" of Munich, including members of the Kridwiß circle. Zeitblom narrates that this is Leverkuhn's confession to the audience about making a faustian pact. In reality, however, *The*

*Lamentation of Dr. Faustus* is Leverkuhn's final warning against the rise of fascism and downfall of German humanism. Leverkuhn describes the political climate of the time:

It is an age when no work is to be done in pious, sober fashion and by proper means, and art has grown impossible sans the Devil's aid and hellish fire beneath the kettle...Yes, ah yes, beloved fellows, that art is stuck fast and grown too difficult and mocks its very self, that all has grown too difficult and God's poor man in his distress no longer knows up from down, that is surely the guilt of the age. (DF 524)

He then "confesses" how he has been participating in cultural exchange in support of the Weimar Republic. Zeitblom views this as demonic. Leverkuhn especially mentions how he has gained inspiration from his meeting with Hetera Esmeralda. He says:

For it was a mere butterfly, a gaudy thing, Hetera Esmeralda, that charmed me by her touch, the milk-witch, and followed after her into the dusky shade, the which her transparent nakedness loves, and where I snatched her, who in flight is like unto a wind-blown petal, snatched her and dandled with her, spite of her warning, and so was it happened. For as she charmed me, so did she work her charm and yielded to me in love--and I was initiative and the promise sealed. (522)

His interaction with Esmeralda is considered a "cultural" exchange. She brings diverse views and ideas. There is no evidence that their meeting is sexual in nature and it is more probable that Leverkuhn received intellectual inspiration from Esmeralda. Since, she is from the East, she has been dehumanized by the Kridwiß Circle. Hence, Leverkuhn feels that he needs to "confess" his discussion with Esmeralda.

Zeitblom describes how Leverkuhn eventually falls and perishes. He tells the readers, “bending over the instrument, he spread his arms wide as if to embrace it and suddenly, as if pushed, fell sideways from his chair to the floor” (DF 527). Zeitblom attributes his friend’s death to his supposed syphilis and consequent madness. However, it is more than likely that just like Rudi, Leverkuhn was shot by someone who supported National Socialism.

### **Representations of Conflict in *Faustus* and Contemporary Media**

One incident in the novel which clearly illustrates that Zeitblom is deliberately lying is Rudi’s murder. Zeitblom invents a Shakespearean Esque story saying that Leverkuhn sent Rudi to his death. According to Zeitblom, Leverkuhn sent Rudi to woo Marie on his behalf. Rudi, however, asked Marie to marry him instead. What’s more ludicrous is Zeitblom claiming Ines is the one who shot Rudi out of jealousy. Zeitblom states that apparently Leverkuhn knew exactly how the incident would transpire.

A more probable reason why Rudi is killed would be that he is leaving Munich and severing his friendship with the members of the Kridwiß circle and “intellectuals” of the city. The fellow members of his orchestra do not want him to leave. In essence, Rudi refuses to be a part of their fascist ideologies. Rudi is shot on a crowded streetcar. Zeitblom says that when the shots occurred, the ticket collector moved right in front of him blocking his view. Hence, Zeitblom was not able to see where the shot came from. When Rudi falls to the floor, Zeitblom sees Ines at a distance in a state of shock. There is no evidence that Ines was the one who shot Rudi as she is not holding the gun; the gun was not even in close proximity to her. The shooter, was more likely someone in the crowd; it was someone who supports the ideals of National Socialism since the political atmosphere in Munich at the time was violent. Ines was declared

mentally ill after the incident. By killing Rudi and declaring Ines mad, the National Socialists removed two important individuals who would be able to speak out against the party's ideologies.

Zeitblom, in essence, is acting like a propaganda minister. He presents his observations, or lack thereof, in a way that sways his readers to believe his own views. In modern day, media works in the same manner. According to Andrea Cerase's article, "From racial hoaxes to media hypes: Fake news' real consequences," racial hoaxes are a strategy to disguise racism in media (333). Cerase states that the concept of racial hoaxes "has been mainly used in US legal and criminological fields, aimed at exploring the connection between racial stereotypes and related practices in policing, and shifting criminal responsibility from a white offender to a fictional black predator" (333). Although the article mainly focuses on racial hoaxes in the US, the concept can be applied to media globally. In Europe, any news regarding immigrants, refugees and minorities will most likely trigger a chain of reactions among the public and political spheres. Cerase mentions that "traditional media grab people's attention on certain events" and "social media are the field to express outrage, public discontent, and even manifestations of blatant racism" (335). The article also states that "media play the role of guardians of public interests, articulate public discontent, attract audiences, and establish publicly their agenda setting power" (335). In essence, it would be very easy to spread propaganda through media, which is dangerous. This circulation creates a discourse which vilifies refugees when they are not involved with a certain incident or when other groups are involved and equally responsible for an incident.

The number one incident which comes to mind when discussing if refugees pose a threat to natives is the New Year Eve sexual attacks in Germany. Most of the media expressed outrage not at the sexual violence which are horrific crimes but at refugees living in Germany in general. Right-wing parties and xenophobic movements like Pegida used the sexual attacks committed against women on December 31, 2015 to bolster their own agenda instead of bringing attention to the problem women in Germany have been facing for years. Some German women even mentioned that the attacks should not become a “political football” and focus on only non-German suspects because it is highly possible Germans were involved. Furthermore, most media outlets depicted refugees as the sole perpetrators of the crimes. They fail to mention that there were two American men among other foreigners involved in the groups. In addition, this xenophobic discourse neglects to mention that some refugees spoke out against sexual violence following the New Year Eve attacks. These refugees should not be praised for protesting because condemning sexual assault should be seen as normal. However, this nuanced discourse in media would have prevented right wing parties from gaining support following these horrific crimes.



Syrian refugees speak out against sexual attacks toward women. Image from *Süddeutsche Zeitung*

### **Reading *Doktor Faustus* Today**

A particularly question among the general population that is often brought up when discussing works of Goethe, Schiller, Kafka or Mann is “what is the significance of reading such texts in the present?” A novel like *Doctor Faustus* is relevant today because it influences one to think about what Humanism constitutes now. The messages regarding culture in Mann’s novel is significant when discussing Germany’s role in contemporary issues, particularly policies regarding refugee integration.

Even before millions of refugees poured into the EU in 2015, general migration had always been a highly politicized issue in Europe. Right wing parties in Europe used the migration of refugees in 2015 as a rhetoric to create anti-European, anti-immigration politics. Fabrizio Tassinari’s article “The Disintegration of European Security” states that “because of this politicization, the ballooning migrant and refugee crisis has gradually moved the signposts and changed the standards of what is acceptable to say or do in Europe today to address it” (71). This means that discourses which were considered racist and xenophobic in the past became acceptable to the right wing parties in light of the situation regarding refugees. Tassinari continues, “Policies and words that were taboo only a few years ago are now a constituent part of the lexicon and policy repertoire” (71). Anti-immigration sentiment has been rising for the past three years in Austria, Germany, and Italy among other EU nations.

In recent years, the European Union has faced many challenges including Brexit, Putin’s involvement over the Baltics, refugees crossing the Aegean and Mediterranean, growing support for populist anti-European parties and rise of right-wing parties. EU’s most common responses to these issues are to have a more integrated Europe, create an European Defense Union and have

“greater cooperation in the management of external borders of the Union and more integrated asylum and refugee policies” (Hix 71). After an estimated 2.2 million refugees entered the EU in 2015, right-wing parties began to gain more support. Originally, populist parties like Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands, the Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party) and the Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) harbored anti-European sentiments. This meant that they didn’t favor EU regulations but rather supported national policies. However, after the influx of millions of refugees in 2015, the primary platform that these parties used to gain support was their anti-immigration policies (75).

From a political perspective, Germany had opened its borders to refugees in 2015. Millions of refugees have poured into the country since then. Chancellor Angela Merkel opened the nation’s borders as she repeatedly told Germans “*Wir schaffen das!*” meaning “We can do this!” As a result, the country experienced a *Willkommenskultur*, roughly translating to “welcoming culture.” However, one of the biggest challenges of the situation is the integration of refugees. Unfortunately, there are no concrete policies to aid in integration and assimilation. Many organizations like Students4Refugees, Give Something Back to Berlin and Writing On not only give aid to refugees but actually provide opportunities for them to contribute to German society culture. For instance, Give Something Back to Berlin allows refugees to teach how to cook their native dishes. Similarly, Writing On helps refugee writers to publish their texts both in German as well as their native language. All of these cultural traits become a part of German culture.

## **Conclusion**

*Doktor Faustus* is not a condemnation of German culture itself. Rather, it conveys a message of how a culture will be doomed if it only serves a few so-called intellectuals instead of all of humanity. The ideas which Mann provide the readers through the novel are still relevant in contemporary political situations, namely the refugee ‘crisis’ in Germany. While reading *Doktor Faustus*, one must ask why Mann is making us read the novel through Zeitblom’s perspective. The simple answer is to make aware of the difference between subjectivity and objectivity. Zeitblom presents his views in a way which sways the readers, who read the novel in surface level, to believe his narration. The lesson here is to value objectivity. Even though he doesn’t admit it, Zeitblom belongs to the cult of aestheticism which would go on to support fascism. He invents “observations” which depict his friend as the antagonist. These are some of the reasons why a reader needs to analyze the text beyond Zeitblom’s narration

Finally, readers must keep in mind that Mann intended to write this novel as an explanation of how Germany went astray to an evil side. In doing so, he warns readers that these types of atrocities happen when freedom exists for only a small number of people rather than all of society. When freedom becomes subjective, culture becomes increasingly homogenous. Unfortunately, right wing populist parties in Europe and globally express that only certain groups’ cultural activities should be protected by suppressing dissent and diverse voices. This action, in turn, leads to the downfall of culture. The humanist discourse in *Doktor Faustus* is that a society thrives when it serves everyone by giving its people the opportunity to contribute to its culture. In modern day Europe, there should be such opportunities for refugees.

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