

Judaism via Humanism: Readdressing Thomas Mann's Purview of Jewishness as Presented in *Doctor Faustus*

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Abstract

Thomas Mann (1875-1955) was a Nobel Peace Prize-winning author whose portrayal of Jewish peoples in his novels remains a point of great controversy. Scholars today contest whether all modes of his writing are rhetorically anti-semitic on the basis that, regardless of intent or level of irony, Mann employs stereotypes and hyperboles which representationally endanger the diaspora. Critically important as it is, scholars and critics pursue this focus at the expense of overlooking the author's reverence for Jewish culture, and by proxy, Judaism itself. This essay analyses evidence of this sentiment in Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947), developing a document-discursive analysis to capture new insights into Mann's idea of Jewish religion.

Keywords: Mann, Thomas ; Judaism; Humanism; bildungsroman; Schoenberg, Arnold; Chaim Breisacher; Goldberg, Oskar; Gematria; Völk.

To discuss this indispensable European cultural stimulus that is called Jewry, even today, and especially in Germany—which has such bitter need of it—in any kind of hostile and inimical manner, seems to me so coarse and tasteless that I find myself unfit to lend even a word to such a discussion.¹

-Thomas Mann

Introduction

Since its release in 1947, Thomas Mann's critically acclaimed novel *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn, Told by a Friend* has been met with a vast spectrum of reactions, ranging from praise, to rejection, to apology, and even perplexity. With such diversity of opinion, scholars and critics remain perpetually vexed by a particular duality: what the text contains, involves, and means, and what it does not. At face value, this issue may seem simple, standard practice, trivial even; still, the intentionality of this *bildungsroman* is muddled by its authorial context, namely: its post-Holocaust publication (being written by an exiled German author) and; its ambiguity on what extent it represents Mann's actual views, experiences, and personal connections.²

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¹ Thomas Mann as quoted in Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), pp. 192-193.

² The novel is published at an 'awkward' point in history, and was written across almost ten years, before the Holocaust's horrors became common knowledge. Aside from this issue, Thomas Mann himself has made this reality/fiction comparison difficult for his readers to make, both deliberately and incidentally: Lukas Hermann, 'Autonom Autobiografisch: Zu Thomas Manns Die Entstehung Des Doktor Faustus', *Arcadia*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2020),

The Christian, Classical, and Nietzschean concerns of *Doctor Faustus* are obvious and prolific, and remain touchstones of study in academic and critical receptions. Their *Judaic* counterparts, however, are not nearly as addressed in current literature, often treated in a strictly Judeo-Christian pairing. This gap is due in part to Mann's emphasis on Lutheranism and Catholicism, particularly in the biographical makeup of his narrator and protagonist, and his subsequent de-emphasis regarding where Judaism 'ends' and Christianity 'starts'. Mann makes little to no attempt to distinguish Judaism from Christianity, regarding the latter as an 'organic' continuation of the former. This is a lacuna subject to considerable scrutiny in many examinations of the text. Aspects of Jewish identity and religion are also overshadowed by Mann's liberal use of Jewish racial stereotypes, often (though not always) intended with an irony that is easily lost on contemporary readers.³ Nevertheless, embedded in *Doctor Faustus* with masterful subtlety is a subtextual moral questioning of *how* a Germany without Jewish influence could possibly exist, or rather, *why* that Germany is impossible. To defend this claim, this article blends literary formalism with religious studies document-discursive analysis, drawing upon the text's core features: intertextuality; linguistics, and; musicology, to resurface Judaic concerns. My argument avoids generating a hermeneutics of suspicion; it does not assume meaning is generated beyond the text *unless* otherwise explained, extrapolated, or academically noted (for example, when an input or effect of the text's reception is a given but not probably intended by Mann).

The first section defines the religious-studies methodology chosen. It will then outline the contours said-method entails and will conclude by justifying its role and purpose both in-article and in further scholarship. The second focuses on characterisations in *Doctor Faustus*, revisiting Leverkühn's and the Devil's archetypal functions in the novel. The third unpacks how - with Zeitblom acting as a mouthpiece for his and Leverkühn's lives - one basic cross-religious encounter is fictionalised.⁴ Proceeding after the Lutheran-Catholic concerns employed throughout the plot, this 'intersection' into Jewishness is the foremost religious dimension of the text. This argument does not justify Mann's beliefs or rhetorical choices; rather it re-evaluates his authorial intent in alignment with his written record, a longstanding tradition in Mann scholarship.

Design and Role of Document-Discursive Analysis

pp. 85-86; Sean Ireton, 'Between Autobiography and Fiction: Thomas Mann's Die Entstehung Des Doktor Faustus: Roman Eines Romans', *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies (Toronto)*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2008), pp. 211-212; Redner, 'Doctor Faustus: The German Faust', p. 205; Susan Von Rohr Scaff, 'The Religious Base of Thomas Mann's World View', *Christianity & Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1993), pp. 757-789.

³ Academic literature repeatedly explains how this rhetorical antisemitism is deeply problematic: Mark H. Gelber, 'Thomas Mann and Antisemitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1983), p. 31; Franka Marquardt, "Difference and Demeanor: Literary Anti-Semitism in Thomas Mann's Joseph Novels," *The Germanic Review* 80, no. 3 (2005), p. 253; Dan Webb, "If Adorno Isn't the Devil, It's Because He's a Jew": Lyotard's Misreading of Adorno through Thomas Mann's Dr Faustus', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 35, no. 5 (2009), pp. 520, 524, 526.

⁴ Veronica Cibotaru, 'Interreligious Dialogue: A Challenge for Phenomenology', *Religions*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2023), p. 302; Andreas Nehring, 'Camouflage of the Sacred: Can We Still Branch Off from Eliade's Comparative Approach?' in *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology: Comparison Revisited*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 95-109; 95-96.

The primary mode of analysis in this article falls under the banner of document-discursive methodology. Locating examples of Jewish theology and, to a lesser extent, Kabbalah, and rabbinic tradition in the chosen text, this research design combines principles of document analysis with those of discourse analysis (both formal-social and minute-linguistic).⁵ Guiding my argument are the following precepts: Identifying a text's intended function and its "multifaceted" application are capstones of pre-analysis;⁶ Textual receptions vary widely, irrespective of and/or in reaction to authorial intent;⁷ Rhetorical techniques involving syntax and semantics characterise the broader authorial context, and vice versa;⁸ a prerogative of this method is to avoid mischaracterising the subject's purview;⁹ a text's authorial context is fundamental to knowing its effects, and;¹⁰ textual contemporaries reveal discursive correlations that the source-in-question cannot reveal alone.¹¹

Not only does this research design optimal for finding religious material where narrative style, voicing, and (mis)representation obscure said-material, it also fills gaps and critiques oversaturations of scholarship on *Doctor Faustus*. Wary of how hegemonic and pervasive the influence of antisemitism was in German policy-building, institutions, and cultural consensus, scholars continue to grapple with Mann's idea of Jewishness. Interestingly, separate from reading Mann's works, this 'barricade' of influence has been discerned through reflexive academic writing on the very object of hegemonic discourse analysis. To quote Titus Hjelm: "even when the variety of alternative interpretations is being suppressed within discourse, the discourse itself cannot fully tell us how it is discussed, reinterpreted and resisted in practice."¹² There are two inferences from Hjelm's insight which are imperative to examining Jewishness in *Doctor Faustus*: firstly, all researchers (myself included) are at the behest of whatever sources are available for contextualisation. No matter how they are approached - be it as primary or secondary materials - most sources are not 'self-aware' by design. *Doctor Faustus* is no exception, even though its narrator and deuterologist, Zeitblom, is writing a reflective account with high modality. The text cannot be read in isolation from its ideologically-charged purpose but rather *in* and *amidst* this purpose and *alongside* other texts. In other words, Mann expects his audience to understand the novel's references and compare them to whichever texts and movements they derive from. Moreover, readers after Mann's death have greater insight than prior, due to later releases of personal writings. Secondly, in conjunction with the previous point, how Thomas Mann perceived

⁵ Not to be confused with formalism: a mode of literature analysis regarding the form and content of a text. A dual-method was recommended by Hjelm vis-à-vis his reading of Fairclough: Titus Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 143.

⁶ Grace Davie and David Wyatt, '2.2 Document Analysis', in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, eds Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 152.

⁷ Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', p. 145.

⁸ Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', p. 143.

⁹ Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', p. 145.

¹⁰ Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', pp. 134-5.

¹¹ Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', p. 145.

¹² This statement discusses real-time conversations but the insights apply to text and literature (which the author states earlier on). The former page features a succinct definition of hegemonic discourse, whereas the latter contains the quote used: Hjelm, '2.3 Discourse Analysis', pp. 142-145.

his own understanding of Jewishness and how his understanding reads are two separate issues. Research indicates that Mann shows neither a consistent nor diverse understanding of how hegemonic (systemic) antisemitism has impacted his own novel-building, relationships, or understanding of Jewishness in general.¹³ It is conjecture to suggest this is a result of hatred, though an ignorance is present.

This article will shift focus, alternating from document-reliant to discourse-reliant principles to yield as much information on Judaism in *Doctor Faustus* as possible. What distinguishes this use of document-discursive analysis from others found in current academia is its angle. *Doctor Faustus* will be treated as a ‘document’ or ‘repository’ capturing religious information via external textual and discursive influences. My objective is to resurface the Judaic dimensions of this text, and give clarity on what Judaism ‘meant’ in Mann’s self-proclaimed Humanist purview. As to how literary analysis applies in this article, in order for Judaic information to be exhumed from the text, analysis on Mann’s literary style must take place. In other words, Mann techniques are *how* the information is incorporated, the novel is *where* the information is incorporated, and Jewish religion makes up part of *what* this text contains. This principle engages the first precept disclosed (working a text as it was purposed), which follows suit in light of the text’s taxonomic function, as *Doctor Faustus* challenges its reader to source meaning not cover-to-cover, but through a piecemeal re-structure of semantics, grammar, metaphorical interplay, and context.¹⁴

Context, Characters, and Callous Descriptions: Judaism as ‘Biblical Religion’

Mann’s treatment of Jewishness can be summarised as this: what Mann knows about Jewish religion derives firstly from his biblical knowledge, and subsequently, from his interpersonal life. Via Zeitblom, he dubs Judeo-Christian religious content: “biblical religion.”¹⁵ Only recently has this notion been brought to the forefront of scholarship by Peter Eagles who states that Mann frequently employs dogmatic parts of the mainframe of this ‘biblical religion’ to charge Leverkühn with a quasi-religious providence.¹⁶ To the deficit of his reader however, Mann makes no effort to signpost which of these references he knows to be significantly Jewish in origin, bar a handful of cross-religious encounters and reflections. Instead, it is up to the critic to distinguish one from

¹³ Yahya Elsaghe, ‘La Rosenstiel’ and Her Ilk: Jewish Names in Thomas Mann’, *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, vol. 80, no. 1 (2011), pp. 53-54; Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, pp. 188-189; Perloff, ‘Wars of the Émigrés: The Doctor Faustus Controversy Revisited’, pp. 820-821.

¹⁴ I have drawn this point in connection to the text’s genre, the *bildungsroman*. See Swales, *The German Bildungsroman, From Wieland to Hesse*, pp. 161-162.

¹⁵ This term appears in the text verbatim just once, but Mann clearly explores the overarching concept for both Christianity and Judaism throughout the novel: Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage International, 1999), p. 99.

¹⁶ This author specifically addresses the German-Christian expression, not the Jewish one: Peter Eagles, ‘Heresy And Orthodoxy: A Textual Variant in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*’, *German Life and Letters*, vol. 77, no. 2 (2024), p. 177.

the other. Thus, another notion must be introduced: ideas belonging to Judaism are present in this novel, intended or unintended, known or unknown.

Archetypal Function: Adrian Leverkühn Revisited

Much of the efforts of academics have been devoted to unpacking the archetypal function of key characters in *Doctor Faustus*. The most discussed and well-understood of these is the protagonist. Scholars mutually agree that Leverkühn is not just the ‘ultimate’ German; he is the embodiment of intellectual and cultural consensus in the ‘Motherland’.¹⁷ On autopsying what makes Leverkühn identical with German culture, however, several scholars have read the novel myopically. The protagonist is, Josh Torabi notes: “a surrogate composer for Mann’s contemporary Schoenberg and his ilk.”¹⁸ Thus, Leverkühn’s archetypal identity is, in no small part, culturally Jewish. Jewish culture is predominantly informed by its ethno-religion, Judaism, of which Thomas Mann was keenly aware. Mann believed that Jewish culture played a vital role in cultural and artistic progression. Moreover, one of Schoenberg’s known key musical influences was Judaism. The composer held a career-long fascination with Mosaic law, the Hebrew Exodus, and their parallels with Classical Zionism.¹⁹ Most of his compositions incorporate religious text and thematically revolve around Judaism: the Psalms, the Talmudic tradition, the Yom Kippur vows of renewal (Kol Nidrei), to name a few examples.²⁰ Mann’s scholarship draws the historically established connection of Leverkühn to Schoenberg as a composer, and scholarship on Schoenberg examines his intrigue into Jewishness, but little scholarship has pointed out that Leverkühn’s composing techniques (which are Schoenberg’s) are Jewish in inspiration. It is important to note that, as Dragana and Molnar eloquently explain: “Adorno never really wanted to understand [the] close interrelatedness between Arnold Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic project and his endeavors to go ‘back to the roots’ of Judaism.”²¹ Enjoining this fact to the fact that Mann was taught these musical concepts from Adorno (not directly from Schoenberg) gives one explanation as to why this connection has not been made prior.

To prove that Jewish musicality is fundamental to Leverkühn’s archetype, it is necessary to compare Mann’s prose to Schoenberg’s musicality, not just the composer’s musicology. Studying quotes on Leverkühn’s musicology is the first step of this comparison, because Mann expresses (or at least, parrots) the complexities of Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic technique through

¹⁷ There are innumerable iterations of this. For example, Torabi claims Leverkühn’s embodiment is a triffecta of Nietzschean aesthetics, specifically Apollo the novelist and Dionysus the composer; the Faust myth (culturally iconic to and of Germany), and; Leverkühn’s demise as allegory to Germany’s: Paul Eisenstein, ‘Leverkühn as Witness: The Holocaust in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*’, *The German Quarterly* vol. 70, no. 4 (1997), p. 336; Hedges, *Framing Faust: Twentieth-Century Cultural Struggles*, p. 45; Josh Torabi, *Music and Myth in Modern Literature* (Oxford: Routledge, 2021), pp. 164-167; Von Rohr Scaff, ‘The Religious Base of Thomas Mann’s World View’, pp. 75-76.

¹⁸ Torabi, *Music and Myth in Modern Literature*, p. 164.

¹⁹ Cecil Bloom, ‘Arnold Schoenberg and Judaism’, *Midstream*, vol. 59, no. 1–2 (2013), p. 48.

²⁰ Bloom, ‘Arnold Schoenberg and Judaism’, pp. 48-50.

²¹ Jeremic-Molnar Dragana and Aleksander Molnar, ‘Adorno’s Marxism versus Schoenberg’s Judaism: Ideological foundations of Adorno’s sociological approach to Schoenberg’s dodecaphonic music’, *Sociologija*, vol. 51, no. 1 (2009), p. 45.

a dialogue between Leverkühn and Zeitblom. During this discussion on building the *Love's Labour's Lost* sonata, the composer divulges his concept of musical freedom:

in the song 'Oh sweet maiden.' It all comes from one basic figure, from a row of intervals capable of multiple variation, taken from the five notes B-E-A-E E-flat- both the horizontal and vertical lines are determined and governed by it, to the extent that is possible in a basic motif with such a limited number of notes. It is like a word, a key word that leaves its signature everywhere in the song and would like to determine it entirely. It is, however, too short a word, with too little flexibility. The tonal space it provides is too limited. One would have to proceed from here and build longer words from the twelve. steps of the tempered semitone alphabet, words of twelve letters, specific combinations and interrelations of the twelve semitones, rows of notes-from which, then, the piece, a given movement, or a whole work of several movements would be strictly derived. Each tone in the entire composition, melodic and harmonic, would have to demonstrate its relation to this predetermined basic row. None would dare recur until all have first occurred. No note would dare appear that did not fulfill its motif function within the structure as a whole. Free notes would no longer exist. That is what I would call a strict style.²²

The avid fan of Mann's may spot inferences of Adorno's pedagogy, particularly in the example of "Oh sweet maiden" mentioned at the beginning of Leverkühn's monologue.²³ The similarity to Schoenberg's parlance however, is striking. In an exegesis on choral harmonies, Schoenberg characterises final cadences and chords in "basic patterns" as being "predetermined."²⁴ On the preexisting philosophy of "strict style", Schoenberg retorts: "tonality is no natural law of music."²⁵ The paradoxes Schoenberg's music make epitomise what Leverkühn calls the "dialectic reversal" of "[f]reedom."²⁶ In both its logic and modal versatility, the guaranteed effect of this dodecaphony is an unending chordal dissonance, sounding unresolved, unfamiliar, and unsettling; the listener is assumed to not know or predict the 'tonal direction' that the music takes.²⁷ Schoenberg used this technique in three ways: to evoke the awe-factor found in biblical sagas; as an act of introspection on the 'personal chaos' of being Jewish, German, and once Christian, and; to emote the horrors Polish Jews underwent in the Shoah in his composition *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947).²⁸ Where biblical Judaism was the central subject of his music, Schoenberg would also use specific key signatures such as G minor, which derive from conventional forms of Jewish ritual chanting, styled

²² Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 205.

²³ Geoff Boucher, 'Adorno and the Magic Square: Schönberg and Stravinsky in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*', in *Reading Adorno*, ed. Amirhosein Khandizaji (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2019), p. 184.

²⁴ Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 300-307.

²⁵ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 205; Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 8.

²⁶ "Freedom always has a propensity for dialectic reversal" is the original quote: Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 203.

²⁷ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 203.

²⁸ These are the most famous and repeated examples. Naturally, there are many others: Kenneth H. Marcus, *Schoenberg and Hollywood Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 164-167.

in choruses of two (to name one example).²⁹ For Leverkühn, key signatures (as commencing tonal centres) are also deliberate rather than probabilistic:

In sum, despite being taught by Adorno, Mann's description of twelve-tone serialism in *Doctor Faustus* is accurate to the Judaism-inspired musicality of Schoenberg, scope and rationale included. It was so accurate, in fact, Schoenberg accused Mann of plagiarism.³⁰ Mann may not have apprehended how much Schoenberg incorporates Jewish religious aesthetics into compositional techniques, but this knowledge gap -however sizeable- does not override the facts at hand. If anything, it bolsters the author's sentiments about the necessity, the "bitter need" of Jewish culture.³¹ Leverkühn's multifaceted character, personality and body alike, can be reevaluated as a syllogism: he embodies all things excellent about Germany; his musicality (his most important attribute) derives from Jewish influence; his music is an exemplar of German culture; hence, Germany is imbued with positive Jewish influences. Working from this paradigm, the protagonist's representational function is not singular and should not be read as such. Leverkühn is an archetype whose semblance of historical figures constantly shifts, sometimes embodying two or more personages in the same instance.³²

The Devil and His Duplicity. The Challenge of Deciphering Jewish Music from Demonic Influences

Revisiting the Devil's archetype is paramount to mapping Mann's vision of musicality, Judaism, their overlap, and their distinctions. More precisely, this revision counters: the potential to read the Devil as Jewish, intrinsically or partially, and; the possibility of problematising Leverkühn's musicality as 'ailing' in alignment with Nazi-driven ideas of Jewish racial-genetic inferiority.³³ Like Leverkühn, Zeitblom, and the overarching narrative, the Devil is a dual construct. Where Adrian Leverkühn's archetypal function extends beyond his personality and meets its central purpose in his corporal existence, the Devil figure of *Doctor Faustus* holds both a biological and spiritual presence that perverts Leverkühn. This duality is frequently misread, as scholars and readers misplace the crux and, subsequently, the order of events in *Doctor Faustus*.³⁴ In Chapter

²⁹ Wiebe Koopal and Joris Vlieghe, 'Music Education as Faustian Bargain', in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 54, no. 4 (2020), pp. 101; 105; Marcus, *Schoenberg and Hollywood Modernism*, pp. 167-168.

³⁰ Perloff, 'Wars of the Émigrés: The *Doctor Faustus* Controversy Revisited', p. 819.

³¹ Thomas Mann as quoted in Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, pp. 192-193; Torabi, *Music and Myth in Modern Literature*, p. 4; 167.

³² Peter Eagles, 'The "Dunkelmänner" Of *Doktor Faustus*: Humanists Versus Theologians', *German Life and Letters*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2022), p. 98.

³³ Hannah R. Johnson, 'Stories People Tell: The Blood Libel and the History of Antisemitism', *Law and Literature* vol. 28, no. 1 (2016), pp. 11-12; 15; 23; William I. Brustein and Ryan D. King, 'Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust,' *International Political Science Review*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2004), pp. 35-37; Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 78-80; Richard Weikart, 'The Role of Darwinism in Nazi Racial Thought', *German Studies Review*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2013), pp. 539; 547.

³⁴ See for example Boucher, who finds loopholes in his and Cobley's readings of the text: Boucher, 'Adorno and the Magic Square: Schönberg and Stravinsky in Mann's *Doctor Faustus*', pp. 185-189; Evelyn Cobley, 'Avant-Garde

twenty-five, the vision of the Devil ‘appears’ to the protagonist. It is this symbolic figure which scholars identify as either the Devil’s sole or primary presence, in line with the traditional Faust myth. Yet in the novel, the Devil has already arrived in the form of syphilis, foreshadowed as the “Hetaera esmeralda” butterfly (sharing its name with the prostitute Leverkühn has intercourse with) in its “bizarre precision” and with its characteristic “duplicating little impurities.”³⁵ Thus the ‘deal’ of the Faust tradition has already taken place. The Devil merely makes himself and the deal known through a hallucinogenic episode. This is where the plot of *Doctor Faustus* deviates from the Faust myth. The author relies on the object-subject relationship and associated verb-phrases surrounding disease in circulation in romance languages and European cultural imagination as synonymous with a spiritual-cultural malign. In the presence of disease, every part and function of the body is subject to damage. Diseases pass onto a host silently, they inhabit, they override, they are fatal.

The progression of Nazism in Weimar Germany historically matches this generalised process of infection. Nazism found its host in German national consciousness, inhabiting it with rapid momentum and overriding the institute, the academy, the Church, and the government before proving ‘fatal’. As a malign on the health of Germany, the Nazist disease runs implicitly- or as the text expresses it tautologously, with “transparent nakedness.”³⁶ Due to its fleeting appearance, Nazism is met in Weimar Germany with complicitness. Noting that the Devil is a figure of Christianity- the primary religion of Germany, Mann’s pitting of this ‘Devil-disease’ against Leverkühn- the Germany’s cultural-ideological tapestry (of which Jewishness is fundamental) mirrors the Nazist *demonisation* of Jews (in the literal sense) against the *völkisch*.³⁷ Inverting this logic, Nazism -in all its passive and active forms- is the disease and the Devil.

From the metaphoric flexibility Mann achieves with his word-play of syphilis, the parallel between Nazism and infection extends in several other directions. Zetiblom’s disclaimer that “the document knows no date” (where Leverkühn recalls the Devil’s visit) reflects how it is unclear when the demise of Germany began.³⁸ Leverkühn’s own description of his experiencing the Devil “*in eremo*” (Latin: literally meaning ‘in the desert’ or ‘in isolation’) further amplifies this degree of fascist rhetorical subterfuge.³⁹ These quotes jointly infer how the time of disease entry is a given, but the actual timeline of degradation is far more difficult to track. Further substantiating this corporal analogy is the ‘oneness’ of the mind-body: whilst a body can survive without certain limbs or organs, or with compromised function, only so much of the body can be separated from

Aesthetics and Fascist Politics: Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Theodor W. Adorno's "Philosophy of Modern Music", *New German Critique*, vol. 1, no. 86 (2002), p. 43; Evelyn Cobley, 'Decentered Totalities in Doctor Faustus: Thomas Mann and Theodor W. Adorno', *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2005), p. 189.

³⁵ The former page reference pertains to the quotes. According to the protagonist's letter on the latter page reference, he contracted syphilis somewhere between late 1904 and early 1905: Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, pp. 18; 149; 151-152.

³⁶ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 18.

³⁷ Inez Hedges, *Framing Faust: Twentieth-Century Cultural Struggles* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), p. 44; Hannah R. Johnson, 'Stories People Tell: The Blood Libel and the History of Antisemitism', *Law and Literature*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2016), pp. 11; 24.

³⁸ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 238.

³⁹ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 238.

itself until it ceases to function sustainably. The ‘intellectual-cultural-ideological organs’ and their functions which Mann has built into his protagonist do not suddenly capitulate, but degrade slowly, irreversibly, and with profound agony. The strongest and healthiest of physiques can be overcome by illness, and the body of Mann’s Germany exemplifies this notion. Leverkühn’s musicality is synonymous with his physical and intellectual health; they are his life-force, his *modus operandi*. The novel refers to Leverkühn’s health status as his “geist” or “ghost.” The text relates this to the reader:

‘An end is come, the end is come, it watcheth for thee; behold it is come. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land.’ These words, which Leverkühn has his testo, his witness and narrator, proclaim in a ghostly melody moving in steps of pure fourths and diminished fifths and resting atop stationary unrelated harmonies, words that then form the text of the daringly archaic responsory repeated in unforgettable fashion by two four-part choirs moving against one another- these words do not belong to the Apocalypse of John at all; they come from a different layer, from the prophecy of Babylonian exile, the stories and lamentations of Ezekiel, to which, moreover, that mysterious epistle from Patmos, written in the days of Nero, stands in very curiously dependent relation.⁴⁰

This is one of the few times in *Doctor Faustus* where intertextuality is outlined for the reader. Mann is performing the biblical allegorical exegesis (in the Patristic style of Alexandria for the reader), and is switching Zeitblom’s tone mid-monologue from anecdotal to didactic.⁴¹ It is also one of but a handful of instances where music and Jewish religion are compared.

The musical allusions are nuanced, each detail needing grammatical reversal to explain the subtext. As intervals, perfect fourths are interpreted in Western music as something of a tonal juxtaposition from diminished fifths, separated only by a semitone. In relation to the interval distances of the perfect fifth and the octave, the diminished fifth (alternatively referred to as the augmented fourth- useful to know for this concept) is a tritone known as the “devil’s chord.”⁴² Nota bene, this quote appears after Leverkühn meets his Faust. Describing the Devil’s chord as progressing in “moving steps” infers that the ‘Devil’ has manifested in the protagonist’s body, and is about to corrupt Adrian’s music.⁴³ Leverkühn envelops the tritone in an atonal scheme, imagined as: “resting atop stationary unrelated harmonies.”⁴⁴ Mann learnt of this chord progression through Adorno, who clearly learnt it through Schoenberg: “[o]nce he has mastered such arrangements he can then of course risk augmented or diminished intervals as well” (though this is not what

⁴⁰ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 376.

⁴¹ his patristic assessment is in character for Zeitblom, having studied Liberal Theology: Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 376;

⁴² This particular reference offers a brief explanation on how tritones are related to octaves, which defines a tritone altogether: Thomas Noll and Karst De Jong, “Embedded Structural Modes: Unifying Scale Degrees and Harmonic Functions,” in *Mathematics and Computation in Music*, eds. M. Montiel, F. Gomez-Martin, and O.A. Agustín-Aquino (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2019), pp. 147.

⁴³ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 376.

⁴⁴ Schoenberg devotes an entire chapter to the use of fourths, titled “Relationship to the Minor Subdominant”: Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 376; Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, p. 2.

Schoenberg intended with this theoretical step).⁴⁵ This excerpt serves as one explicit indication that Leverkühn's music has Jewish thematic inspiration.

With an adverbial intensifier, and supporting the text as a *bildungsroman*, the narrator instructs: "these words do not belong to the Apocalypse of John at all."⁴⁶ The passage which Leverkühn quotes is indeed Ezekiel 7:5-8. Referencing the Old Testament, and making the allegorical order clear to the reader, Mann is disparaging a comparison of Leverkühn to Christ (or any Christlike figure) which Zeitblom is encouraging, and places the protagonist squarely into the mythology of Biblical Judaism. The verb "proclaim" also evokes prophetic imagery, allowing the reader to entertain the protagonist's role as the 'messenger' or 'message' rather than the 'saviour'. "Babylonian exile" alludes to the wave of emigrés, most of whom were either Jewish (religiously or secularly), stood against anti-semiticism, or stood against fascism.⁴⁷ Critically, where Nazism and disease differ is intentionality. Having no meta-cognition, a disease does not choose what parts or functions it maligns, or how much it deforms or sickens its victim. Whilst Nazism nominated what is 'pure', 'true', 'superior', and 'German', the ideology did not succeed in maintaining these proponents in their entirety (or originality for that matter). Disease is not a victor, it is a tragedy, a natural evil.

The tension between musical objectivity and wellbeing is a figment of Leverkühn's imagination, a false dichotomy from a false transaction. The reader can discern this because Leverkühn is most coherent discussing his music prior to infection, as shown in passages discussed in the previous section. From these considerations, the 'deal' reads with greater nuance, where the Devil subverts Leverkühn's musicality, turning it against the composer's life force.⁴⁸ The payoff now presents as a pseudo-compositional excellence (or what is in fact neurological decay), as opposed to a rational, cohesive musicality. From Mann's perspective, Nazism too, offers false promises about a perfect Germany. Revision of this delicate construct readjusts not just how Mann viewed the cultural pertinence of Judaism (as biblical religion) in Germany, but how Judaism and Jewishness are characterised in the text overall. This re-reading impacts the framing of another area of text, where a cross-religious encounter between the Christians, humanists, and Jews occurs.

A Cross-religious Encounter in *Doctor Faustus*: Mann's Interreligious Encounters Reimagined

In in-text time, Zeitblom and Leverkühn are experiencing Jewish culture and religiosity in short but otherwise profound episodes. These episodes mirror Mann's own cross-religious encounters, and act loosely as evidence of such. Similar to its adjacent passages, Chapter 28 offers up cryptic meanings. An example of this lies in the introduction of the chapter's central character: "Dr Chaim

⁴⁵ Cobley, 'Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Fascist Politics: Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and Theodor W. Adorno's "Philosophy of Modern Music"', p. 46.

⁴⁶ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 376.

⁴⁷ Perloff, 'Wars of the Émigrés: The *Doctor Faustus* Controversy Revisited', p. 824.

⁴⁸ Eagles, 'The "Dunkelmänner" Of *Doktor Faustus*: Humanists Versus Theologians,' p. 98; Dominick LaCapra *History, Politics, and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp 151-152.

Breisacher ... played the role ... of the foreign leaven in the bread.”⁴⁹ Note the phraseology in this sentence: the words “foreign”, “leaven”, and “bread” all possess double meanings. Bread is a staple of German and European Jewish cuisines. Common breads from both these cultures share a multitude of similarities: recipe, ingredients, rise, and glossy finish to name a few, thanks to the prolonged influence of Jewish culture in Germany. Leavening is mandated in rabbinic and biblical Judaism. Whilst the religiosity of bread in Jewish culture may not have been apparent to Mann’s intended audience, the significance of bread in both cultural spheres was. The syntax of this sentence further expands Mann’s subtextual commentary of German culture and its proponents. Because the “bread” directly refers to Count von Reidesel’s salon guests, the preposition “in”, adjunct to what Zeitblom deems “foreign”, implies by negation that there is a polar opposite ‘local leaven’ or ‘national leaven’ in this same proximal space. From the names divulged throughout the chapter (explored in section one of this article), the reader is made aware that Breisacher is not the sole Jewish guest in attendance.⁵⁰ Thus, it is not religion, culture, or ethnicity that Zeitblom attributes to Breisacher’s ‘alien’ status, as select scholars have previously speculated.⁵¹ It is his overreach of authority on music, aesthetics, and ‘biblical religion’ later revealed in the chapter. All the while, Mann is tacitly characterising this ‘national leaven’, hinting at how immersed Germany is with Jewish influence, and endorsing, if not inviting this immersion.

Critical questions arise from this cryptic introduction to Breisacher and the moral direction it paves. Why does Mann make his reader work to locate meaning and validate Jewish existence this way? Why is this metaphor so slight in textual length and depth? Why does this passage (indeed like the rest of the text) circumnavigate the topics of Jewish diaspora and the Holocaust? The most important historical factor to consider is this: the value of Jewish influence is *a key* concern of *Doctor Faustus*, but not *the primary* one. This is one of the few points of consensus in academic readings of the text.⁵² The second most important factor is the historical reality behind the fiction of this character. Dr Chaim Breisacher is Mann’s fictitious insertion of Oskar Goldberg, a once prominent German-Jewish philosopher whose views on Judaism as a folkish religion in need of revival, and Jewish secularity as an impediment, transformed Mann’s opinion of him from admiration to disdain.⁵³ Without this context, this introduction and the rest of the chapter could easily be read as anti-semitic, an intended attack on Jewish religion. This is where historiographical studies of *Doctor Faustus* (which make up the bulk of the working literature) are most valuable: this novel cannot be read with integrity without external written material from Mann himself. Developing from these studies, three newer publications are pioneering a recontextualisation of Mann’s document-driven context.

Biographer Hermann Kurzke offers a comprehensive overview of Mann’s involvement in and amidst pre-war German Jewish life, factoring in primary evidence of the cultural landscape and its preoccupations: German nationalism (“völk” as Zeitblom incites it), racial supremacy, and

⁴⁹ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 294.

⁵⁰ Elsaghe, “‘La Rosenstiel’ and Her ilk: Jewish Names in Thomas Mann”, p. 54.

⁵¹ Eisenstein, ‘Leverkühn as Witness: The Holocaust in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*’, p. 332.

⁵² Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, pp. 188-189; 192.

⁵³ Perloff, ‘Wars of the Émigrés: The *Doctor Faustus* Controversy Revisited’, p. 816.

cultural consensus; he then retraces how these affected Mann, both publicly and privately.⁵⁴ As was the custom, a significant amount of Mann's communication within his circle was in the form of letters.⁵⁵ Thanks to certain scholars and the compilers of his recent dossier, it is clear that Mann exalted the Jewish bourgeois (artists and intellectuals), as more effective citizens than German gentiles, and as such, prized himself as akin to this 'exemplar' minority in their shared exclusion and distinction.⁵⁶ Furthermore, it is certain that Mann held some reverence for how Judaism 'sourced' Jewish culture and by proxy, its benefits to Germany.

Amongst the scholarship available, there is only one intensive analysis on the Breisacher/Goldberg figure. In the appendix of his 2017 release *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination*, Bruce Rosenstock forms a document-discursive analysis to evaluate how true-to-life Breisacher is to Goldberg. His specialisation in Goldberg's career and findings frame this analysis (and reframe contending scholarship) with much-needed context. Rosenstock explains how Mann thought Goldberg was mischaracterising Jewish religiosity since the time of Solomon as inauthentic, overly hellenistic, and heretical to 'true Judaism'.⁵⁷ Importantly, Mann treated Humanism as a 'post-religion' religion; the author championed this ideology, universalising it as the common ground of Europe.⁵⁸

This concern is subtextually present earlier in the novel, in Zeitblom's tangent on Liberal Theology. Mann argues through Zeitblom that: "moralism and humanism lack any insight into the demonic character of human existence."⁵⁹ Beyond the surface-level foreshadowing, his speech acts as a window into the role religion ideologically plays à la Mann. The advantage biblical religion has over non-religious ideologies is its concrete exposition and expectation of ethical depravity. Both Jews and Christians share this legacy. In the same passage, however, Mann performs a conceptual chiasmus, subverting the original statement: "[f]or by its very nature, theology, once it is linked with the spirit of Life Philosophy, with irrationalism, runs the risk of becoming demonology." Whilst Zeitblom's reflection revolves around Christian ideas, his axiom applies to any religion. In tandem with the novel's main allegory, Mann is suggesting that any religion can become the weapon of fascist exclusivism (not necessarily Nazism). Again, readers find this sentiment paralleled beforehand, during Leverkühn's explanation of musicality, as Zeitblom warns: "[n]o, you have nothing to do with the Devil. But it is clear to you, isn't it, that you've spoken much more as a humanist than as a theologian?"⁶⁰ Dramatic irony aside, the statement presents humanism as a post-Christian, post-Jewish religion. The solution Mann proposes is to avoid gatekeeping theology of any genre or faith. As a result of this conviction, Mann's issue with Goldberg's stance was humanistic-ethical in nature rather than theological. The author feared the

⁵⁴ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 41.

⁵⁵ This is a well-known and widely-discussed fact about the author in Mann scholarship: Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, p. 191.

⁵⁶ Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, p. 192.

⁵⁷ Bruce Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), p. 236.

⁵⁸ Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life*, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, 99.

⁶⁰ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 201.

implications this argument would have on re-dividing German people as ‘true Jews,’ ‘pseudo-Jews,’ and ‘true Germans’ on a religious pretense.⁶¹

Mann’s contest with Goldberg’s *völkisch* are dramatised across three topics: Modernism, music, and Judaism. Evocative language, biblical references, and allusions to European history are Breisacher’s weapons of choice. Readers are met with rhetorical repetition and a vulgar diatype: art being rendered to “simple clumsy primitivism,” and “an emasculation,” harmonic developments being called “an acquisition of barbarism,” and Jewish religiosity being degraded to “drivel,” “flabby theological excess” and “a degenerate notion of God held by the psalmists.”⁶² These statements are incendiary in tone, and operate in two different ways. On the one hand, Mann is fictionalising Breisacher as an ulterior threat to Germany, based on the facets Leverkühn embodies. On the other hand, Mann is criticising Goldberg tacitly. Breisacher’s appraisal of Bach’s “cool and sacred game of numbers”, for example, is both the character’s dig at dodecaphony and a reference to Goldberg’s obsession with *gematria*- his experiment with Kabbalist numericism.⁶³ Zeitblom’s analysis of the Pentateuch with its “disdain for animal sacrifice” is not just a rebuttal of Breisacher, it is a reference, albeit an incorrect one, to Goldberg’s countering of *Geopolitik*.⁶⁴ What Zeitblom gleans from this cross-religious encounter is skewed by Mann’s opinion of Goldberg. With clinical, crude language, Mann attempts to remove Goldberg from the gatekeep, calling him one of the “annoying specimens of the race”, before finally asking: “[c]an one hold it against Jewish sagacity?”.⁶⁵ Mann thus sees Judaism in the hands of its adherents, not instated in one particular, governing authority. There is of course, a great irony in Mann proposing such an idea, given his support of Jewish assimilation.⁶⁶ In sum, it is necessary to compare Mann’s literature to its external influences to understand the author’s placement of Jewish religion, no matter how accurate or ethical he is. Cross-religious encounters like this one can be either positive or negative, but nonetheless profound. Using the document-discursive model helps pair Mann to Goldberg, theory to fact, and idea to rhetoric. It demonstrates the aspects of Judaism (via Jewish culture and biblical knowledge) which Mann was accurate about, which aspects he was more ignorant of, and what parts he thought needed preserving.

Conclusion

This article performs a qualitative document-discursive analysis on *Doctor Faustus*, in that it

⁶¹ Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life*, xiv.

⁶² Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, pp. 294-297.

⁶³ Goldberg was enamoured with finding the number ‘26’ throughout Genesis, because Hebrew letters often substitute numbers in rabbinic literature, and the tetragrammaton ‘YHWH’ adds up to 26. The rabbinic technique Goldberg uses is called Gezerah Shavah: David Hoffmann and James Redfield, ‘Introduction to the Halakhic Midrashim’, in *Classic Articles in Early Rabbinic Culture and History*, ed. Christine Hayes (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 303-14. Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 296; Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life*, p. 60.

⁶⁴ Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life*, p. 114.

⁶⁵ Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 300.

⁶⁶ Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Life as a Work of Art. A Biography*, 188-9, 195; Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination*, 235.

singles out the prevalence of specific jargon and phrases, dissects their grammatical and syntactic applications, assesses their literary functions, and, comparing with primary material external to the text, determines what religious material is used, and what rhetoric on Judaism is produced. As disclosed in the introduction and methodology sections of this article, there are oversaturations in both previous and current scholarship on *Doctor Faustus*, particularly those involving historiographical approaches. Consequently, the text's exposition of Jewish cultural identity receives excessive attention whilst its exposition of Jewish religiosity goes under-addressed. Constructing a document-discursive model is an efficient way to re-examine and relocate Jewish identity as per *Doctor Faustus*, partly because the author's brief exposition of Judaic concerns, limited as they are, act as some literary evidence of his apprehension and showcase some degree of misinformation. This approach is a hybrid of scholarship on Mann (and the directions it follows), along with methodological precepts as per Titus Hjelm, Grace Davie, and David Wyatt. The findings of my approach are relevant to *Doctor Faustus* alone. For example, addressing musicology with regard to Leverkühn's essence, or explaining gematria with regard to Breisacher's polemic were necessities driven by text and the absence of certain correlations in Mann scholarship. At best, what the reader can glean from these exercises is cause for a textual exegesis ordered not thematically or chronologically, but in search of religious sentiment. The techniques I develop recover ideas which are subject either to hegemonic influences, a lack of self-awareness, or both. These techniques also suffice in explaining influences on the voice of one person (in this essay's case, it was Mann). For chains of discourse containing two or more persons, however, this analysis could dilute or contort the ideas developed, as its mode relies on an opinion as it was written, not as it changes. In other words, this approach offers a 'snapshot' of an author's ideas of Judaism; it forms one part of the picture of his opinions throughout his lifetime, to the exclusion of further influences or conversations post-text.

In this document-discursive analysis on *Doctor Faustus*, I offer new insights to the following areas of ambiguity generated from the novel: what aspects of Judaism (if any) are intrinsic to Leverkühn; and; what constitutes as biblical religion according to the author. Through the text's characters and their intellectual panderings, Mann manipulates binaries to demonstrate how moral relativism infiltrates the German cultural complex, namely its ideal of *völkisch*. Among these binaries are: objective/subjective; mind/body; Jewish/Christian; health/sickness; fascist/humanist, and; plot/subtext. *Doctor Faustus* portrays this infiltration as sly, subversive, overlooked, and hijacked. What this reading further elucidates is Mann's proximity to European Jewish culture and his nuanced (albeit crude) defense of it. In Mann's humanist purview, there exists a need to graduate from religiosity, though not at the expense of an identity, mythology, or cultural excellence. To Mann, Judaism is a precursor to Germany whose theology informs the motherland's most prized cultural assets. In both pre-war and mid-war Weimar Germany, Judaism is this 'biblical realm' held to impossible standards by fascists on both sides of the spectrum, objectified against its 'natural' influence in culture and the arts.

On the matter of limitations, this article could not avoid literary formalism; this method was requisite to and worked in tandem with the religious studies analysis. Acting on precepts of

document-discursive analysis involved working *Doctor Faustus* as a *bildungsroman*, written as a taxonomy, and read with the ability to unpack allegory, allusions, and intertextual references. I acknowledge that, though auxiliary and effective, this dual-method somewhat hinders the depth of phenomenological and religious findings. Stemming forth from this discussion, a new direction of research is forged: a phenomenological re-examination of Thomas Mann's cross-religious and interreligious experiences via his dossier. A more document-forward discursive analysis can be made from here as well. The Judaic information explored in this article is but a fraction of what the text provides. Mann's perspectives on the *völk*, humanism, and Catholicism can also undergo the same methodological approach. The findings of my essay substantiate working assumptions in the Studies of Religions field, including but not limited to: a need to record the phenomenology of interreligion, and; the principle of lived religion (religiosity is expressed in 'ordinary' circumstances, and in the most casual ways).