

Irony Ironised

by Roger Poole

‘I sate alone here, by my lamp, nigh to the windows with shutters closed, before me the length of the hall, and read Kierkegaard on Mozart’s *Don Juan*. Then in a clap I am stricken by a cutting cold, even as though I sat in a winter-warm room and a window had blown open towards the frost. It came not from behind me, where the windows lie; it falls on me from in front. I start up from my boke and look abroad into the hall, belike Sch. is come back, for I am no longer alone. There is some bodye there in the mirk, sitting on the horse-hair sofa that stands almost in the myddes of the room. . . .’

Such is the meeting of Adrian Leverkühn, the demonic composer of Thomas Mann’s novel *Doctor Faustus*, with the Devil, who has come to make the traditional bargain for a soul.¹

It is not by accident that Adrian Leverkühn is reading Kierkegaard’s essay on Mozart’s *Don Juan* in *Either/Or*. We might even hazard a guess as to which lines Leverkühn was reading when the Devil appeared:

‘When sensuousness appears as that which must be excluded, as that which the spirit can have nothing to do with, yet without passing judgment upon it or condemning it, then the sensuous assumes the form of the demonic in aesthetic indifference. . . . Don Juan consequently is the expression for the demonic determined as the sensuous; Faust its expression determined as the intellectual or spiritual, which the Christian spirit excludes.’²

The first half of *Either/Or* has without doubt its modern representative in Adrian Leverkühn, and the fact that he is reading Kierkegaard just before the central dialogue of the novel gives to the story a specific philosophical implication.

Adrian Leverkühn, the demonic composer, the ironic ascetic, who is devoted however to the most exquisite refinements of intellectual delectation through his chosen sensuous medium, music, steps straight out of the world so finely described by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*. Leverkühn as Faustus is indeed ‘the demonic determined as the intellectual or spiritual’, but he also shares in the other form of the demonic, the sensuous, insofar as his intellectuality is defined in terms of what Kierkegaard calls ‘immediacy’, music, and

¹*Doctor Faustus*, translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter, Secker and Warburg, 1959, page 223. All references are to this translation.

²*Either/Or*, translated by David and Lillian Swenson, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959, page 89. All references are to this translation.

music is 'immediacy' in its purest form for Kierkegaard. Leverkühn thus combines both forms of the demonic to their ultimate degree.

Enough has been said of Thomas Mann's irony before. Yet, is it without significance that in *Doctor Faustus*, Mann avails himself not only of the matter but even of the manner of a certain type of irony known to the historians of German literature as 'Romantic irony', and uses it precisely to come at a second intention: the posing of the question, inverted in itself and only fittingly set forth by an inverted method, as to whether the nineteenth century, or the twentieth, has been the most medieval, the most anachronistic, the most slave to demonic impulses? This second intention can be presented and understood perhaps only through an appreciation of certain techniques of the 'Romantic irony', and of its Kierkegaardian critique in *Either/Or*.

The 'Romantic irony', a literary mode which presented the further implications of the dichotomies and non-communications in the philosophy of Fichte, was particularly popular at the time of Kierkegaard, and Kierkegaard himself never tired of 'ironising' it in his own 'aesthetic' works. It seems very much as if Mann, in his trail of references throughout his novel to Kierkegaard, has adopted the ambiguous attitude which Kierkegaard had towards this type of aesthetic irony, and that we miss much of the meaning of Mann's question if we miss his dry wit in his literary references.

What then are the aspects of the Romantic irony which Mann avails himself of? Romantic irony is extremely obscure as a doctrine, and too closely tied to the philosophy of its time to disentangle completely, but there seem to be four or five aspects of it which interest Mann.¹

Firstly, the author, in recounting his story, detaches himself explicitly from the narrator. Secondly, the hero of the Romantic irony always rejects the world as being unworthy of him. Thirdly, this hero is often an artist or a creator. Fourthly, this artist-hero adopts an aesthetic which consists in annulling the ethics of the society in which he lives by privileged access to the world of art. Finally, the author often uses marionettes, puppets, figures from opera, semi-mythical figures, and in presenting these figures ironically or in a mixture of humour and sadness, avails himself of what I shall call a 'doubled-narrator' technique.

Is not the demonic nature of Adrian Leverkühn, which Mann insists upon so heavily in his novel, not the nature of such a Romantic hero? Is not the emphasis even too heavy for us to take Leverkühn's demonism as an account of the nature of creativity, whether that be at the time of Beethoven or at the time of Schönberg?

Leverkühn's creativity seems to belong to that turbulent Romantic landscape which produced Beethoven, Schiller and Heine, a

¹I have attempted a sketch of the 'Romantic irony' in connection with Kierkegaard's view of it, in *New Blackfriars* for February 1967.

Hölderlin and a Hegel, which has its literary home in the Jena of the Schlegels or the Berlin of Fichte. He fits all too well the popular vision of the 'Romantic' artist, inspired, unique, communing with the most high, spurning his class and his society, surrounded by a few uncomprehending but well-disposed friends, fighting against time and the disease which inevitably dogs him, having sold his soul to his art, and leaving this paltry world only too willingly behind him at the premature end.

Who could be better fitted to throw into relief the life of a demonic genius of the Romantic type than the good, sober and rather wooden humanist of the Weimar type, Serenus Zeitblom, Ph.D.? The ethical observer provides the perfect framework within which we can study the a-moral creator, and the author can be identified with neither. Zeitblom corresponds then to 'B' in *Either/Or*, Leverkühn to 'A'. Here then is one of the most striking devices of Mann's Romantic irony. By use of this 'filter' he ironises over his own creation in a perpetual exercise of non-identification.

The interplay of the demonic and genius in the novel can be reconstructed in two syllogisms, which are however to be understood ironically:

All genius is linked with the demonic
Adrian Leverkühn is a genius
Therefore Adrian Leverkühn is demonic,

and its cultural parallel, where the irony is ambiguous,

All German culture is linked with the demonic,
The second World War is linked with German culture,
Therefore the second World War is demonic.

The first syllogism is worked out in terms of Romantic affliction and Romantic isolation, coupled with a Romantic involvement with the diabolic, in the style of say Hoffman, plus a good dose of the fascination with the medieval characteristic of say Wackenroder, Clemens Brentano or Tieck. The second syllogism is worked out with specific reference to the history of German music, with special emphasis on cultural relativity.

Kierkegaard's view of man as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal is where these two syllogisms cross in the person of Leverkühn. Eternal time crosses the immediate of artistic composition. But the artist has no right to betray this knowledge in the demonic of aesthetic indifference. Adrian however commits this grave historical miscalculation.

From where does Adrian Leverkühn draw his demonic inspiration? There are at least three sources of first importance. Firstly from theology. He starts out as a theologian. He studies under the anachronistic Kumpf and the disturbing Schlepffuss who seems himself to hold intercourse with infernal powers. The theology is taught in 'good old German' which anchors and polarizes Leverkühn's

sensibility in a bygone age of German culture. He himself cultivates an old German style of speech, reads alchemy, pins up mystical diagrams on his wall and so on.

Secondly, Leverkühn draws his knowledge of the world from one of the denizens of its demi-monde, one of the 'butterflies' who flit around in the dimly-lit areas of social existence, the dark under-side of the brightly-lit contemporary world. Hetaera Esmerelda is for Leverkühn, as the Devil points out, the very condition of his inspiration: she is the experience of sensual love and the world of extended sensuousness described in the *Don Juan* essay of Kierkegaard. Without this single contaminating touch from the world of sense and decay, the music of Leverkühn could have no underlying negative principles, no vision into the depths of life as well as of its peaks. Hetaera Esmerelda is thus the condition of his writing music at all. The Devil, who refers to her as 'my little one', finds this very rich, very humorous, in his intellectual Leverkühn. The Devil says: 'Thus it was our busily prepensed plan that you should run into our arms, that is of my little one, Esmerelda, and that you got it, the illumination, the aphrodisiacum of the brain, after which with body and soul and mind you so desperately longed' (p. 248).

Leverkühn is to use the 'tone-row' of Hetaera Esmerelda's name in many of his works. References to the tone-row:

H E A E Eflat

occur at key points throughout the novel: with reference to 'the heart-piercing lied: "O lieb Mädel, wie schlecht bist du", which is permeated with it' (pp. 155-6) in the so-called 'Brentano Cycle'; a reference to the same motif in the same song at page 191; again at page 486, in the context of the *Lamentation of Dr Faustus* the "'magic square" of a style of technique' is illustrated with reference to the same tone-row in the 'strict style' of 'O lieb Madel'; finally, the same figure is to be found governing whole tracts of the *Lamentation* itself (p. 489). Thus throughout the novel, the inspiration of Leverkühn comes welling up from this source, Hetaera Esmerelda, the girl whom the Devil calls 'my little one'.

Thirdly, Leverkühn draws much of his demonic inspiration from his encyclopaedic knowledge of German history and culture, especially from the medieval period, from alchemy, from occult speculation, from German philosophy and above all of course from the field of musical theory itself. It is on this amazingly developed technical knowledge that the Devil is to play with such mastery, such plausibility, such cunning, such bad faith. Presenting the history of music from a corrupt but convincing angle, he will leave the actual synthesis to Leverkühn's own enormous intelligence. Leverkühn draws much that is bad and corrupt from the history of German music. Dominating his material intellectually, he still likes to play with risks, to indulge in daring speculations and combinations, to

tempt the tempter and seduce the seducer. That the Devil is better at this game than Adrian is in the long run going to be all too obvious. It is a tasteless and a cheap victory.

It is the Devil himself, then, who brings together the demonism of the first syllogism and the demonism of the second syllogism, when he moves from the discussion of Leverkühn's own interesting case to the discussion of German culture as a whole—and that includes for the Devil, who is something of a humorist, German theology—in its relation to the demonic, in its relation that is to say to himself.

He is himself German, the Devil: 'Speak only German! Only good old German without feignedness or dissimulation. I understand it. It happens to be just my favoured language. Whilst I understand only German' (p. 223). And again: 'That comes from my good sound German popularity' (p. 225). And with even greater emphasis: 'I am in fact German, German to the core' (p. 226). And it is the Devil who, in commenting upon the Opus 111 of Beethoven, introduces the connection between music and the demonic into the conversation: 'A genuine inspiration, immediate, absolute, unquestioned, ravishing, where there is no choice, no tinkering, no possible improvement . . . no, that is not possible with God, who leaves the understanding too much to do. It comes from the Devil, the true master and giver of such rapture (p. 237).

The Devil is an expert musicologist. 'Everything depends on the technical horizon. The diminished seventh is right and full of expression at the beginning of Opus 111. It corresponds to Beethoven's whole technical niveau, doesn't it?—the tension between the consonance and the harshest dissonance known to him. The principle of tonality and its dynamics lend to the chord its specific weight. It has lost it—by a historical process which nobody reverses. Listen to the obsolete chord; even by itself alone it stands for a technical general position which contradicts the actual.' (page 239).

But this is the Devil's irony. For in urging Leverkühn to go beyond the technical level achieved by Beethoven, a level characterized by the word 'obsolete', he urges Adrian to undertake a massive work of development in the history of German culture, and, precisely because the history of German culture has previously been defined as the demonic, Leverkühn is pushed into the Devil's domain by the very march of cultural history itself. But the irony occurs at the level of the Devil's superior position: he suggests that, even if Leverkühn is to go beyond the 'obsolete' tonalities of Beethoven, he will still be linked to the *condition* of all creation: the demonic.

Therefore Leverkühn has to sell his soul, for the simple reason that he wants so passionately to write music. But Leverkühn is not logically forced to accept the Devil's proposition that all genuine inspiration comes from the Devil. However, he does so, quite submissively. Railing against the Devil all the time, he still misses making the most important objection of all: that it is only by a *German* devil that

art has been defined as having its source in the demonic. To reject that suppressed nationalistic premiss would have amounted to the Devil's having no further purchase upon Leverkühn's soul. But Adrian is already convinced that the Devil is right. The Devil therefore plays on this established belief in Adrian's mind, a belief that he got from Kumpf and Schleppfuss and his theological studies, a belief in the ultimately demonic source of art. He would have been, furthermore, well prepared for this admission by what he was reading when the Devil appeared: Kierkegaard's essay on *Don Juan*.

The bargain is thus struck between Leverkühn and the Devil, by default as it were, for Leverkühn never openly accepts the Devil's conditions, and keeps on railing at him to the end. But he has already signed himself the Devil's by his relationship with Esmerelda, has already decided to devote himself to music at whatever cost. From Adrian's highly developed aesthetic point of view then, the Devil's actual appearance is sheer showing off, mere bad taste in a person who knows that he has already won.

There are, however, the inevitable conditions which Adrian has to agree to. The first is ill-health which he has brought upon himself. This physical pain, which is associated throughout the novel with the story of Hans Andersen's little Mermaid, consists of course in the migraines brought about by syphilis. Adrian cannot but accept this condition. But the second he refuses. The Devil says, in a single all-important phrase towards the end of the interview, 'Thou maist not love' (p. 248).

Adrian breaks out in exasperation:

'Not love! Poor devil! Will you substantiate the report of your stupidity and wear a bell even as a cat, that you will base business and promise on so elastic, on so ensnaring a concept as love? . . . What I have invited, and wherefore you allege that I have promised you—what is then the source of it, prithee, but love, even if that poisoned by you with God's sanction? The bond in which you assert we stand has itself to do with love, you doating fool' (p. 248).

This is indeed the weak point in the Devil's position. He has to ask Adrian to agree. 'What? That is new. What signifies the *clausula*?' asks Adrian. The two adversaries face each other. This is no longer a matter of strict logical entailment. It still lies within Adrian's power to refuse this *clausula*, and indeed he will twice take liberties with regard to it, firstly in his love for Marie Godeau, and secondly for the little boy, Echo. Both times the Devil will insist on his contract. Marie turns down Adrian's proxy proposal, and Echo is torn away from him by agonizing illness. Even those who shared any intimacy with Adrian will be destroyed. Rudi Schwerdtfeger, the only man who was permitted to call Adrian 'Du', is brutally shot.

In the *Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard writes: 'The demonical is shut-up-ness (*det Indesluttede*) unfreely revealed. The demonical is unfreedom, which would shut itself off. This however is an im-

possibility; it always maintains a relationship, and even when this has apparently disappeared it is there nevertheless. . . .’

The Devil then suggests that the state of being shut-up is a necessary *clausula*, for it is the demonic condition of artistic creativity. Leverkühn, who comes from a reading of Kierkegaard, points out the flaw in the Devil’s argument: ‘This however is an impossibility, etc’. Everything depends on the *will*, the demonic is the *will* to cut oneself off, to shut oneself in. But the will remains free, as Adrian points out. His communication, though, will in fact be revealed against his will, ‘unfreely revealed’ in his oblique attachment to Marie and to Echo. Adrian thus recognizes the psychological probability of his falling into the condition of shut-up-ness, without admitting its theoretical necessity, even indeed ridiculing the Devil’s attempt to make it appear as such.

It is all the more of a victory for the Devil, then, that Adrian does eventually have to comply with the demands of his own difficult and cold nature, does eventually have to observe even this condition. The coldness and hauteur of Adrian have been presented to us up to now as more or less involuntary; he is friends with Zeitblom, Schildknapp and others, he lives more or less in society, but from the moment of the encounter with the Devil, he has to realize that the psychological probability of his falling into the condition of shut-up-ness has in fact virtually the value of a logical necessity, the Devil is right in practice if not in theory. He now has to *will* to shut himself off, he has to choose the condition of creation in detachment and cold intellection and this intellection gets given form in the formal ‘tone-rows’ which is his ‘break-through’, his surpassing the technical level of Beethoven, Wagner and the Romantics. He leaves behind their fullness of emotion, and their over-ripe expressiveness, for the cold and arduous discipline of the tone-row.

No one is permitted into the personal space of the person who rejects communication. All this space is necessary for creation. Zeitblom is again and again rejected from that inner space which Leverkühn reserves for his thoughts and projects. Adrian is not willing to take part in the give and take of friendship. ‘The demonic consists precisely in this, that the man is not willing to communicate with the good through the experience of suffering’, says Kierkegaard. Here is the Romantic ironist: he treads down all ethical experience, all contact with ethical situations amongst men, in order to remain in his privileged kingdom of art undisturbed. Adrian will of course suffer. But he may let no one into his secret, no one may be allowed to alleviate his pain through the sweet experience of sympathy. He must suffer in a spiritual drought, in a desert of himself.

Such is the Devil’s *clausula*. Adrian finally has to see the psychological acuity of the Devil’s prediction. When Echo is slowly dying in agony, Adrian cries out: ‘Take him, monster! Take him, hell-hound, but make all the haste you can, if you won’t tolerate any of this either,

cur, swine, viper! I thought he would concede me this much, after all, maybe just this; but no, where should he learn mercy, who is without any bowels of compassion?' (p. 477). He follows this with the terrible words: 'I find that it is not to be.' The good Zeitblom understands nothing of this, forgetting perhaps the enigmatic words written above Beethoven's quartet: *Muss es sein?* For Adrian, it is not to be. For Beethoven, it was to be, and the *Es muss sein* of the quartet is followed by the *Ode to Joy* in the Ninth Symphony. Leverkühn is however vowed to non-communication, and joy is a communal concept:

'I find', he said, 'that it is not to be.'

'What, Adrian, is not to be?'

'The good and noble', he answered me; 'what we call the human, although it is good and noble. What human beings have fought for and stormed citadels, what the ecstasies exultantly announced—that is not to be. It will be taken back. I will take it back.'

'I don't quite understand, dear man. What will you take back?'

'The Ninth Symphony', he replied. And then no more came, though I waited for it (p. 478).

The final spiritual step taken by Beethoven in his treatment of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, the brotherhood of man which Beethoven longs for as man and as artist, this step is impossible for Adrian. Shut-up-ness has claimed him irredeemably for its own. Adrian has renounced the world, renounced man and the brotherhood of man. And because he may not express himself openly and freely even to his old friend Zeitblom, he refers in this obscure and schematic language to a greater defeat than he knows how to deal with. Zeitblom as 'second narrator' has not understood the essential either of the enterprise or of the defeat.

Beethoven as type of creativity which yet tends back towards union with man, towards hope for the whole race of man, is here a gigantic shadow which falls across the novel. For Beethoven himself did not have to find the condition of production in the demonic, even though to all intents and purposes he seems to be the very prototype of the demonic genius. Again Adrian has misjudged the historical issues, confused the temporal with the eternal. Beethoven's whole soul went into the longing for communication with his fellow man. He drew his inspiration from nature and from a simple piety. His shut-up-ness, his deafness, was not demonic, not willed—for Beethoven, it was the crowning tragedy, which made normal communication impossible.

Adrian now realizes that the demonic shut-up-ness has not even a firm basis in the psychology of the creator. What is 'obsolete' is not the diminished seventh of Beethoven's Opus 111, but the 'tone-row', the formalism, and the loveless experimentalism of the moderns, of Leverkühn. The original nature of music, as seen and described by

Kierkegaard, is extended and sensuous. Leverkühn had wanted to make it restricted and intellectual. This deep betrayal of the nature of music itself is the outer realization, the concrete proof, of his profound spiritual error, the error of wanting to change the nature of things, of wanting to turn music into mathematics, of wanting to turn human community into self-sufficiency.

In choosing the aesthetic as higher than the ethical, he errs at the deepest level of his creative nature. It is ultimately the aesthetic which casts him down, which refuses him, and this is the irony which Leverkühn finds too great to bear.

Kierkegaard had preceded him in the perception of this truth. The deeply *unaesthetic* nature of refusing ethical experience would have become evident to him if he had finished his reading of *Either/Or*. The fatal chapter of the interview ends: 'I was sitting in my summer suit, by my lamp, the Christian's book on my knee.' *Either/Or* thus encloses both at the literal level and at the spiritual, the entire interview and its meaning.

But there is another level to the interview, the theme of Adrian's 'Romantic' disease, the syphilis and the migraine headaches. This level is perhaps in the last analysis the most important of all, for it leads to the theme of cultural sickness and inherited guilt which, as applied to the German people, comprises our second syllogism and of course the implicit theme of the whole novel.

Is it mere coincidence that the essay which follows the *Don Juan* essay in *Either/Or* is an essay on inherited or 'aesthetic' guilt (syphilis) and the silence and non-communication which this necessarily lays upon the sufferer?

Much as one may deprecate the 'biographical' method today, it nevertheless remains an unfortunate necessity in those cases where the author has presented us with a personal experience in a public work. Such a work is *The Ancient Tragical Motif as reflected in the Modern*, the essay which follows both logically and in fact the essay on sexual experimentalization in *Don Juan*.

The fruit of sexual irresponsibility to the Romantic imagination? Of course the aesthetic punishment of syphilis which, while not a direct punishment of the perpetrator, is yet a punishment of the perpetrator through the son, 'aesthetically'. Such is the burden of *The Ancient Tragical Motif*. Unpleasant as it is as a reading of the essay, it is forced upon us. Without this single assumption, that Kierkegaard had, or believed he had, syphilis inherited from the sexual frivolities of the father, the essay remains indecipherable, meaningless. Everything is done to break the blow: the 'modern tragic hero' is a woman, called 'Antigone' in memory of her Greek predecessor, but the change in sex, though a very effective blind, cannot hide the fact that Kierkegaard is himself the 'modern tragic hero', bound to silence because indissolubly part of the tradition of 'family, state, and race'. It is filial 'piety' which binds the 'modern

tragic hero' to silence, for he dare not betray the secret of his father, which would be heinous. Neither may he marry, for fear of 'fatally transmitting his evil destiny to succeeding generations'. Once married, the tragic hero could not 'conceal his dowry from such an observer' as his wife. The situation is tragic, for good Aristotelian reasons, for good Hegelian reasons: 'for in order that the tragic collision should be really profound, the colliding forces must be homogenous.' They are, in fact; love for the father is in collision with love for the beloved. 'The colliding forces are so evenly matched that action becomes impossible for the tragic individual.' Kierkegaard thus seriously sets forth his personal destiny as 'ambiguous', aesthetic' and 'tragic'.

Or does he? For this essay is in the papers of 'A', and we have already said that Kierkegaard ironises the assumptions of the 'Romantic ironists'. Nothing would give him more pleasure, in fact, than to present the 'Romantic illness' par excellence in the style of the ironist, and then withdraw the entire thing at the last moment by reference to the theme of every single essay in *Either/Or*, the theme that 'the external is not the internal, the internal is not the external'.¹ We might be too easily taken in if we forgot this. The 'aesthetic guilt' is this doubly 'aesthetic'. Firstly in the sense of the first narrator, 'A', secondly in the sense of the narrator of the essay itself, who is called Soren Kierkegaard. The intricacies of this technique may not hold us up here. Suffice it to say that the Romantic illness, the disease which dogs the creative aesthete, whether it be consumption, syphilis or any other, is itself (insofar as it is 'inherited', thus 'ambiguous') submitted to the Romantic irony. We may not take it seriously as an account, even in Kierkegaard, of the necessary conditions for Romantic creativity.

But precisely the same technique of ambiguity is to be found in *Doctor Faustus*. The disease inherited from the too-free enquiries of the father fatally implicates the son. The father Leverkühn had tried to pry into the secret workings of the world of nature, carrying out experiments which were in fact acts of hubris. All this the Devil refers to in his parting lines: 'A general chilling of your life and your relations to men lies in the nature of things—rather it lies already in your nature; in faith we lay upon you nothing now, the little ones make nothing new and strange out of you, they only ingeniously strengthen and exaggerate all that you already are' (p. 249). Earlier he had been almost technically specific: 'I assure you, it is just as though certain of the little ones had a passion for the upper storey, a special preference for the head region, the meninges, the dura mater, the tentorium, and the pia, which protect the tender parenchyma inside and from the moment of the first general contagion swarmed passionately hither' (p. 233).

The Devil explicitly links the syphilis of Adrian with the experi-

¹*Either/Or*, page 3.

ments in 'osmosis' described in Chapter 3 of the novel. He continues: 'But our little ones could not reach into the inside, into the parenchyma, however much they are drawn, however much they longingly draw thither—without fluid diffusion, osmosis, with the cell-fluid of the pia watering it, dissolving the tissue, and paving a way inside for the scourges. Everything comes from osmosis, my friend, in whose teasing manifestations you so early diverted yourself.' (p. 235).

Is not the desire in Adrian which led him to seek out the occult experience with Hetæra Esmerelda the parallel of the 'aesthetic guilt' of the father Leverkühn who meddled in the occult and the metaphysical? Such is the Devil's implication. But again we may not accept it seriously. Even Adrian himself rejects this kind of facility, as we shall see. The Devil moreover implies that the drawing of the destructive microbes to the brain is to some extent *willed* by the artist, that the artist *directs*, or *chooses*, his illness, the illness which will lead him more quickly and more brilliantly to his goal.

That this was a myth which the Romantics themselves fostered is undeniable, and it has been given a certain amount of attention from certain Freudians in recent years. For the moment we are still far from being able to evaluate the scientific pretensions of this idea. It remains, in the novel at least, a kind of symbolic or alchemical doctrine which is in keeping with the medieval German frame of mind which the Devil possesses. The Devil instances the case of a certain Spengler (p. 232) who has never had this 'cerebral' form of the disease, and contrasts Spengler with Leverkühn, in a passage of particular brilliance: 'The space that is still allocated to him, for reading, quoting, drinking red wine, and idling about, it isn't we who have sold it to him, it is anything rather than genialised time . . . there was never any illumination, enhancing or enthusiasm, for it was not of the brain, not cerebral, you understand—our little ones in that case made no force of the upper and noble, it had obviously no fascination for them. . . .'

To give the last touch to his obviously ingenious theory of his own power, the Devil quotes Aristotle: 'tis the brain which gapes at their visitation and looks forward expectantly . . . as though it could bear at all to wait for them. Do you still remember, the philosopher, *De anima*, "the acts of the person acting are performed on him the previously disposed to suffer it". There you have it: on the disposition, the readiness the invitation, all depends' (p. 233).

This curious and devious interpretation of the interpenetration of physical and mental, the longing of the brain for its own illumination by disease, drugs, ecstasy, whatever it may be, in the case of the artist, rather in the manner that the soul is said to long for the coming of God in mystical experience, is particularly difficult to evaluate in Mann's novel, but there seems to be little doubt that we are meant to see in it an afflatus of a particular historical doctrine which was anachronistic in its own day as it is in ours. It is patently inadequate

to explain the connection of disease, even 'aesthetic' disease with artistic creativity.

It must be said in fairness to Leverkühn that he does not believe a word of the Devil's story nor of his interpretation of the syphilis involved. The Devil replies by pointing out that the fact that the two doctors Leverkühn had consulted gave only specific treatment necessarily implied that the infection towards the brain would be quickened, and that Adrian must have realized this (p. 234). This again Leverkühn denies. He does not seem to be too impressed by the Devil's doctrine of willed or controlled sickness, and generally detests the Devil's showing-off and academic pretentiousness. But on the matter of the shut-up-ness with which the Devil concludes, he is far less sure of himself, and indeed realizes that, in this matter, no word was said in jest. Again it is to the 'filter', Zeitblom, that we owe the confrontation which is decisive.

The confrontation is now overtly a question of the German 'break-through' to the world; we have, at last, reached the inmost box of this Chinese construction. The good and rather plodding Zeitblom is for once taken with an idea. This in itself pleases Leverkühn, but the idea itself does not please him, for he himself sees its anachronism. The two men have been talking about Kleist: 'a little volume of Kleist, with the book-mark at the essay on marionettes' (p. 305). Adrian was writing a 'suite of dramatic grotesques'. In this suite, 'the characters were not to be men but puppets (hence the Kleist)'.

It is Zeitblom who launches into a eulogy of 'the German break-through to the world', the problem which Adrian was never tired of considering, both in his own person and nationally. But he refuses to take Zeitblom's solution seriously. Zeitblom is touched to the quick:

'Get along with you', I cried, '. . . you understand very well what I meant about the German break-through to the world.'

'It would not help much if I did understand, for at present, anyhow, the crude event will just make our shut-inness and shut-offness more complete, however far your military swarm into Europe. . . .'

'The war will be short', I said in a suppressed voice, for his words affected me painfully. 'It cannot last long. We pay for the swift break-through with a wrong, an acknowledged one, which we declare ourselves ready to make good. We must take it upon ourselves.'

This is certainly one of the most important dialogues in the novel if we want to establish Adrian's true temporal citizenship. Zeitblom is carried off by the ideas of the time, and will surely suffer the penalties of the time. But Adrian, who knows what this 'wrong' implies, a 'wrong' which is none the less wrong for being 'swift', refuses to enter Zeitblom's temporality:

'And will know how to carry it with dignity', he broke in. 'Ger-

many has broad shoulders. And who denies that a real break-through is worth what the tame world calls a crime? I hope you don't suppose that I think small of the idea which it pleases you to chew over, in your straw. There is at bottom only one problem in the world, and this is its name. How does one break through? How does one get into the open?'

Immediately after this passage, Adrian refers again to Kleist and gives in a few words Kleist's vision of the break-through. Here, for once, he is sharply distinguished from the Romantic point of view. He speaks with the voice of reason, and it is the reasonable Zeitblom who, in adopting out-dated Romantic and visionary crusades as his own, betrays the proper advance of history.

Adrian has now moved his problem on to the level of the general, the philosophical. He is no longer a puppet in the whole play of puppets. 'There is at bottom only one problem in the world, and this is its name. How does one break through? How does one get into the open?'

To this timeless question, the too temporalized answer of Zeitblom seems irritating and artificial. With consummate bad taste and ill luck, Zeitblom manages to pose Leverkühn's problem in terms which, while recalling the diabolic interview at every word, yet manage totally to falsify Adrian's present view, and to suggest a political solution for a problem so difficult that it has already cost Adrian nothing less than his own soul:

'Craving to break through from bondage, to cease being sealed up in the odious—tell me that I am straw-threshing again; but I feel, I have always felt and will assert against strongly held opposition, that this German is *kat exochen*, profoundly German, the very definition of Germanism, of a psychology threatened with envelopment, the poison of isolation, provincial boorishness, neurosis, implicit Satanism. . . .'

Leverkühn's reaction is predictable, in view of what we said about the inversion of the puppets:

'I broke off. He eyed me, and I believe the colour left his cheeks. The look he cast on me was the look, the familiar one that made me almost equally unhappy, no matter whether myself or another were its object: wordless, veiled, coldly remote to the point of offensiveness, followed by the smile with closed lips and sneeringly dilating nostrils—and then the turning away.'

Is it not the fate of the poor Zeitblom to have put together too much of truth and falsity? Is not his description of Kleist an exact description of Leverkühn? And yet, Leverkühn could never accept Zeitblom's solution. Thus the wheel has turned full circle, and the narrator has become the narrated, and Mann himself has yet to give a value to his narration.

Leverkühn turns away in distaste, for the demonic has no truck with these small figures, these Privat-Dozenten, these academic

sheep to whom grandeur is unknown, these famuli like the Wagner of Goethe, who knows a great deal already, but would like one day to know everything. But the cost is quite unimaginable to them. Zeitblom's 'break-through to the world' will not release Germany from provincial boorishness, it will plunge her into it. The 'acknowledged wrong' of which he speaks so plausibly is itself a false infinity, an endlessly wrong detour.

The figure of Adrian Leverkühn is thus ultimately enigmatic, paradoxical, we can give no final correct evaluation to his creativity. For on the one hand, he rejects the Devil's case for the Romantic disease, he rejects Zeitblom's for the Romantic German crusade, he rejects the entire corpus of Romantic music in his desire to take a decisive step forward in German culture. But on the other hand, he accepts the conditions (as they have been presented to him) of creativity, he is more deeply at one with the German 'break-through to the world' than Zeitblom can ever be, Zeitblom who is momentarily infatuated, Leverkühn who is part and parcel of the whole German adventure.

But this dual nature that Adrian has, away from and yet towards isolation and shut-up-ness, defines him as a specific historical phenomenon, and it is evidently as such that Mann meant us to see him.

Insofar as Adrian ignored ethical communication with his fellow men, insofar as his music was esoteric, and written for his own private satisfaction with no regard to cultural communication, then he remains within the limitations of the Romantic irony of J-P. Richter, the Schlegels, Tieck, Kleist, etc. But insofar as some other part of him longed desperately for communication, longed to pose the problem of the German break-through to the world at its correct level, that is to say as a cultural problem which is international and in the last resort, human, then he transcends this historical limitation. The last attempt he makes to communicate at this level is the harrowing 'private audition' of *The Lamentation of Dr Faustus*, where what has become his deepest desire—to communicate with his fellow man—is cut short by the unseen blow which knocks him sideways from the piano into madness and death.

In view of the prevalent conception that the Romantic hero, and even in a sense the individual as such, is, as a working hypothesis, seriously out of date, Mann's ambiguous presentation of Adrian Leverkühn forces us to ask ourselves what contemporary creativity is, and what future anti-Romantic creativity will be like. We are moving into a new world, a world of which we know as yet very little, in which artistic expression is reduced more and more to an element in a social, psychological, economic, mythological or linguistic structure, and is subject to analysis in those terms.

But is creativity a structural element, or is it not rather the irreducible pre-condition of structural analysis? If it in fact springs

up within a cultural structure, but is yet not a part of that structure itself, following rather its own devious rationality to its own self-created ends, then Mann's problem has not for all that been relegated to the merely historical. In its intemporal form it remains even more difficult perhaps than it was when Mann laid down his pen. 'There is at bottom only one problem in the world, and this is its name. How does one break through? How does one get into the open?'

COMMENT (*continued from page 4*)

The return to school and the gathering of the bishops converge therefore on the new direction of our common efforts and on our relationships in the working out of this common task. The Bishop of Cuernavaca surely speaks for more than himself when he presents himself to his faithful as 'the educator of (their) faith and the *minister of the common discernment* of charisms'.

P.L.