

# On the contribution of adaptation to originality in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and the history of art

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## Abstract

This article assesses the manner in which the gesture of adaptation affects notions of *originality*. Through its fluctuations, the adaptive process can generate divergent thinking about the question of originality. Adaptation appears resourceful for the purposes of originality when it produces innovative works of art by modifying adopted sources. At the same time, any claim towards originality can be compromised whenever the exercise of adaptation turns out to be overtly dependent on the adoptive sources. To this extent, in the first part of the essay, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is deployed as a means of exploring whether the novel's bid towards originality is undermined by the adaptation of the Faust theme. What further limits the novel's effectiveness as an "original" is the possibility that the protagonist of the novel, Adrian Leverkühn, may be perceived as an adaptation of Friedrich Nietzsche's own biography. The second part of this study investigates whether the work, through the adaptation of recurring motifs in the history of art, can bring about original arrangements in works of art.

**KEYWORDS:** *adaptation, originality, literature, Thomas Mann, Doctor Faustus, history of art*

This article seeks to address the problematics that arise from the connection between adaptation and originality. Of its very nature, this marking connection opens up a highly fraught inquiry into the contribution of adaptation to the burdened question of *originality*. Friedrich Nietzsche answers the question "What is originality?" by arguing that it is the ability 'To see something that has no name as yet and hence cannot be mentioned although it stares us all in the face.'<sup>1</sup> 'The way men usually are,' Nietzsche observes, 'it takes a name

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science – With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. with a commentary by Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), Book Three, Aphorism 261, pp. 165-220 (p. 218).

to make something visible for them. Those with originality have for the most part also assigned names.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I adopt Nietzsche's argument about *originality* to broach the issue of how authors and artists handle the adaptive process to produce a new name to a work of art, a name that preserves the quest for *originality* by seeking to erase the traceability of the *adoptive sources*. In this context, the discussion concentrates on the issue of whether *originality* can be discussed only in terms of the implications of the processes of adoption and the adaptation of the borrowings themselves.

In the first section of the article, I refer to Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus – The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn* as told by a friend in order to gauge whether and to what extent Mann succeeds in employing the adaptive process over the adopted borrowings, without diminishing the claim of originality.<sup>3</sup> In *The Genesis of a Novel*, Mann confesses that in the process of preparing the novel, he had accumulated 'some two hundred half-quarto sheets: a wild medley of disordered boxed-in notes from many fields linguistic, geographic, politico-social, theological, medical, biological, historical and musical.'<sup>4</sup> In this accumulation of notes, Mann finds the necessary resources to compose his novel. Throughout what follows, the argument will focus on the question of whether *originality* consists only of the work of adaptation over the borrowings themselves.<sup>5</sup> Four major sources of borrowings appear to dominate the novel. The first one concerns Mann's decision to plot the novel on the Faust story – on the premise, therefore, that in some way the story of the protagonist of the novel, the composer Adrian Leverkühn, had to resemble the fate of the original Faust, a restless character dissatisfied 'with the God-given limits to human knowledge' which leads to his downfall, a pact with the Devil and a lamentation over his deeds.<sup>6</sup> Mann's second source of borrowings comes from Nietzsche's own biographical details. These Nietzschean borrowings serve Mann to continue giving body to the character and life of his novel's protagonist. The third and fourth sources of borrowings are derived from Theodor Adorno's phi-

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2 Ibid., pp. 165-220 (p. 218).

3 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus – The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn* as told by a friend, trans. by H. T. Lowe Porter, (London: Penguin Books in association with Martin Secker & Warburg, 1968).

4 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 26.

5 I treated in detail how Mann adapted some of the Nietzschean sources to his *Doctor Faustus*, in my Master of Arts Degree dissertation, *The Theory of Art in Doctor Faustus* (July 1996), which I submitted at the University of Malta, in Section 1.1: 'How Mann adapts Nietzsche's philosophy of art in *Doctor Faustus*', pp. 28-42.

6 In *The Genesis of a Novel*, Mann claims that he referred to 'extracts from the Faust chap-book', (p. 22), for the story of *Doctor Faustus*. J. W. Smeed in the 'Introduction: The Development of the Faust Legend from the sixteenth century to the present day', in *Faust in Literature*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1987), repr., claims that the 'true history' of the Faust story is attributed to *The Historia von D Johann Fausten*, published by Johann Spies at Frankfurt on the Main in 1587, pp. 1-13, (p.2). One can also refer to *The History of Doctor Johann Faustus*, recovered from the German by H. G. Haile, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965). Since this article does not cover the adaptations of Faust in literature, readers who wish to follow such context can read E. M. Butler, *Fortunes of Faust*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). See also J. W. Smeed, *Faust in Literature*, p. 2.

losophy of music, as well as from Arnold Schönberg's twelve-tone system.<sup>7</sup>

Of his own admission, Mann transferred these borrowings to his novel in a 'scrupulously unscrupulous' manner.<sup>8</sup> But how could he have handled these borrowings in an adequate manner *via* the adaptive process? Answering this question requires one to gauge whether Mann does manage to assert an *original* novel in the first place – a claim that would suggest that his exercise of adaptation has overcome the large, looming shadow that the borrowings could have cast over the novel. Is it possible at all to claim that *Doctor Faustus* manages to *efface* the traces of the borrowings? What story could Mann tell about *Doctor Faustus* that would captivate the imagination of his readers? Moreover, his adaptation warrants the loaded question of what the novel itself, as a genre, may be expected to perform. E. M. Forster answers this question by quipping to his reader, "Yes—oh, dear, yes—the novel tells a story."<sup>9</sup> May the novel's designation turn out to be, after all, that of another story reconstructed out of the various adaptations of borrowings from other sources – an argument that has been revisited several times over the twentieth century – and if so, what may the implications of this be in terms of Mann's own text?

By dint of its borrowings, Mann's *Doctor Faustus* becomes an intriguing literary work wherein the reader is forced to question, again and again, whether its borrowings obfuscate any question about how far the novel could sustain the claim to *originality*. Harold Bloom argues that authors produce 'great writing' in their works of art when they learn to tackle the pressing of the sources of other authors.<sup>10</sup> To this extent, for Bloom authors have to come to terms with how they take on the tradition of literature – with the manner, that is, in which they appropriate the sources of *great writing* by other authors. Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bloom argues that *great writing* consists of a particular form of rewriting evinced by an author's knowledge of 'how to borrow' from the sources of others.<sup>11</sup> His projection is that the presupposition of 'great writing', out of its unmistakable demand, produces a certain 'anxiety of influence' on both established and emergent authors.<sup>12</sup> For Bloom, the manner in which authors handle the *great writing* of others puts them on trial and sentences them as to whether they are of a *weaker* talent or otherwise endowed with the quality of *genius*.<sup>13</sup>

7 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 121 and *Doctor Faustus*, 'Author's note', p. 491.

8 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 121.

9 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the novel*, (San Diego: A Harvest Book · Harcourt Inc., 1927), p. 26.

10 Harold Bloom, Part 1: On the Canon, 1. 'An elegy for the canon', in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), pp. 15-41 (p. 11).

11 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.* Part V: Cataloging the Canon, p. 23. Elegaic Conclusion of Harold Bloom's text *The Western Canon* continues to consolidate his argument that 'great writing' only earns a work of literature a canonical status. But what exactly is 'great writing'? Bloom hints at the argument that great literature enlarges horizons of perception about our condition of life, it takes us to uncharted realms and because it does so it creates an unprecedented event. Bloom confirms this by referring to Shakespeare: 'Greatness in West's literature centers upon Shakespeare, who has become the touchstone for all who come before and after him, whether they are dramatists, lyric poets, or storytellers. He had no true precursor in the creation of character, except

Through the implication that adaptation leads to potentially *original* works of art, adaptation may appear to be a force that preserves the prevalence of creative diversity over originary notions of *sameness*.

## I.

An initial adaptive trope that manifests itself in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* occurs through the use of an epigraph taken from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*:

Now was the day departing, and the air,  
Imbrow'n'd with shadows, from their toils released  
All animals on earth; and I alone  
Prepared myself the conflict to sustain,  
Both of sad pity, and that perilous road,  
Which my unerring memory shall retrace.  
O Muses! O high genius! Now vouchsafe  
Your aid. O mind! That all I saw hast kept  
Safe in a written record, here thy worth  
And eminent endowments come to proof.<sup>14</sup>

Why does Mann choose to locate the body of this epigraph from Dante's *Hell*, Canto II, as a prominent preamble to his *Doctor Faustus*? And why does he decide to place this fraught stanza from a canonical work by a poet of *great writing* at the threshold of his own novel? Can an answer to these questions hint at the role of adaptation in the discussion of *originality*? On the one hand, authors are bound to quote, verbatim, the epigraph they are adopting – in this sense the epigraph appears as a body that resists adaptation, one that cannot or may not be changed. However, while authors transfer epigraphs from the sources of others in a binding manner, they are still able to adopt the epigraph and adapt it freely to indicate and foreground the motif of their work. Can the fiction of the epigraph itself compromise the novel's originary fiction, since in a profound sense it indicates beforehand to its reader what to expect in the subsequent text? Moreover, what dangers does such a borrowing provoke in Mann's memory? Could Mann – like Dante – invoke his own Muses in order for the force of adaptation to take charge at the time he wrote *Doctor Faustus* in Pacific Palisades, California, against the background of European sterility and the destruction of the Second World War?<sup>15</sup>

Let us take, as a starting point, E. M. Butler's claim that an encounter with Mann's *Doctor Faustus* entails an ability to contain 'a truism: had it not been

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for Chaucerian hints and has nature. His originality was and is so easy to assimilate that we are disarmed by it and unable to see how much it has changed us and goes on changing us.' Pp. 517-528 (p. 524). Weaker talents will create nothing eventful to change us, to enlarge our horizons of perception.

14 Dante Alighieri, 'Hell', Canto II, in *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by Rev. H. F. Cary, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1908), pp. 1-148, (pp. 5-6).

15 Thomas Mann, in *The Genesis of a Novel*, narrates how *Doctor Faustus* was completed after 'three years and eight months' (p. 183) of writing, from May 23, 1943 (p. 28) until January 29, 1947. Also, John F. Fetzer, '1: Reception, Reactions and Research' (1947-55), in *Changing Perceptions of Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus: Criticism 1947-1992*, (Columbia: Camden House, 1996), pp. 1-17, (p. 1).

for the Urfaustbook [the first Faust book] there would have been no *Doctor Faustus*.<sup>16</sup> In the first Faust book, Faust appears as a man 'who wants to explore the heights and depths of heaven and earth and decides to conjure up the devil to help him. Thus he acquires a familiar, Mephistophiles, who promises to answer all of Faust's questions and fulfill all his desires for twenty-four years in exchange for his soul.'<sup>17</sup> Butler answers her own question, 'What can the twentieth-century author offer to counterbalance [the first version of Faust]?' by telling us that Mann's version of Faust, 'differs from the original in the immeasurably greater spiritual pride and perverted heroism shown at the end. The hero of the Urfaustbook was in no such exalted and obdurate state of mind; the loop-hole left open in the sixteenth century was stopped up, it would seem, in the twentieth. But the idea that the body might redeem the soul by its agony took root in Mann's mind: salvation by suffering [...].'<sup>18</sup>

Though we may accept Butler's answer as settling the difference between the Faust version of the first Faust book and Mann's, what keeps baffling us about Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is whether we should consider it as having harnessed the first Faust version with a *new name* or whether it is merely another *expansion* of the original design of the first Faust book, as John Fetzer claims.<sup>19</sup> Since expansion also suggests an increase in scope, this may impart the impression that the literary borrowings for *Doctor Faustus* produce a protagonist who appears, like the first Faust, "damned to all eternity" after a pact with the devil. But if it is the case that Mann's novel does not generate any novelty beyond the original Faust version, then it could be plausible to argue that *Doctor Faustus* may be read as another literary work reconstituted out of adopted pieces. Mann possessed a thorough understanding that the borrowings had to be framed within the fiction of the story. But in order to produce a story wherein the fiction absorbs the reality of the allusions, intertexts and borrowings in such a manner that the reader no longer recognizes their presence within the novel – and thereby *effacing* them – Mann constantly needed to take account of the processes and mechanisms of adoption and its operation within his own text as he drafted it.

In the act of rewriting, therefore, Mann needed to possess the ability to discern the quality of *great writing* from other presumably more mediocre forms. In *The Genesis of a Novel* Mann declares a 'wholehearted contempt for mediocrity. The mediocre know nothing of excellence and therefore lead an easy, stupid life. To my mind, too many people write.'<sup>20</sup> He was so aware of the difficulties of taking the path which leads to excellent writing that he declared

16 E. M. Butler, *Fortunes of Faust*, Chapter xv, THE FIRST FAUST REBORN, 1947, pp. 321-338 (p. 338).

17 "The Phenomenon of Faust: The Faust Challenge: Science as Divine or Diabolic" by Shafer, Ingrid H., in *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science*; December 2005, Vol. 40, Issue 4, pp. 891-916, (p.898).

18 E. M. Butler, *Fortunes of Faust*, Chapter xv, pp. 337-338.

19 John F. Fetzer, '1: Reception, Reactions and Research' (1947-55), in *Changing Perceptions of Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus*, (p. 1).

20 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 62.

that he was prepared to 'reserve his own [work] for the dead'.<sup>21</sup> How could Mann write a novel that announces that something new is about to be articulated, when the opening is always bedeviled by a recurring, discouraging voice telling the author that what one is trying to articulate anew has already been pronounced beforehand by someone else? Why is it so difficult to find the 'virginity of the "yet unwritten page?"<sup>22</sup> What story could allow Mann to take charge of the borrowings and the allusions and yet remain faithful to the imperative of *originality*? Mann surely could not escape the equally great debt that *great writing* generates in the history of literature.

Any author will, sooner or later, needs to become habituated with and *within* this horizon of reference that *great writing* signals. Slavoj Žižek grounds Friedrich Hegel's notion of habit within a double reading strategy, wherein habit is perceived both as a 'force of death and the force of life'.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, habit is, on the one hand, 'the dulling of life, its mechanization [...] [and] thus appears to be the very opposite of freedom: freedom means creative choice, inventing something new, in short, precisely *breaking with (old) habits*'.<sup>24</sup> The habitual, for Mann himself, consists of this inescapable determinism – to always possess a 'necessity to till another's field', to look back into the sources of others.<sup>25</sup> But as Žižek observes, Hegel also emphasizes that, 'habit provides the background and foundation of freedom'.<sup>26</sup>

Mann begins to develop the character of Leverkühn, the protagonist of *Doctor Faustus*, by looking first into some Nietzschean sources. For example, in *The Genesis of a Novel*, Mann acknowledges the fact that for the diet menus of Leverkühn he referred to the letter by Nietzsche from Nice where the thinker writes about his nutrition.<sup>27</sup> In the novel, Leverkühn is described as having a delicate stomach and that such a condition requires a light diet which consists of, 'milk, eggs, toast, vegetable soup, a good red beefsteak with spinach at midday, and afterwards a medium sized omelet, with apple-sauce [...]'.<sup>28</sup> Mann could mount these borrowings in the novel *via* the 'montage principle'.<sup>29</sup> This principle, I believe, allowed Mann to register the first progress in the adaptive process, since it granted him the ability to freely adjust the position of the borrowings within any specific point of the novel's plot.

Mann's adaptation, in the novel, continues to elaborate Leverkühn's terrible feeling in the stomach, 'The stummick, my lord, it ain't mostly the stum-

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21 Ibid., p. 63.

22 Jacques Derrida, 'The Double Session' in *Dissemination*, Translated with an Introduction, Additional Notes, by Barbara Johnson, (United States of America: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 173-286, (p. 212).

23 Slavoj Žižek, Chapter 2: 'Discipline between two Freedoms – Madness and Habit in German Idealism' in *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* by Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 95-121 (p. 100).

24 Ibid., p. 100.

25 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 163.

26 Slavoj Žižek, Chapter 2, in *Mythology, Madness and Laughter*, pp. 95-121 (p. 101).

27 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 30.

28 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 249.

29 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 30.

mick at all, eh, it's the head, the pernickety, overstrained head, it works on the stummick, even when't ain't nothing wrong with it, like the way it is with the sea-sickness and sick headache aha, he sometimes has it pretty bad?'<sup>30</sup> Adequate nutrition allows the body to perform well by preserving the delicate balance between stomach and feeling. This factor echoes Nietzsche's thinking that the 'question of place and climate is most closely related to the question of nutrition.'<sup>31</sup> In the novel, Mann superimposes the Nietzschean source about ambience without any logical connection. By being overtly and self-consciously aware that the borrowings need not follow any predetermined pattern, Mann begins to mock the process itself of the imitation of the borrowings by creating the 'Abbot room' in the Schweigestill house for Leverkühn.<sup>32</sup> This room, with its particular climate of darkness, gave Leverkühn the chance to stay in the dark: 'night, black, especially no light in the eyes, that was the right thing.'<sup>33</sup> This type of environment helped Leverkühn tackle the strains of his suffering in order to compose his musical scores.

It is this creative charge of adaptation that allows Mann to modify the Nietzschean panoply of borrowings into new elements in the novel. Another example comes from Nietzsche's experience in the Cologne bordello, which Mann, in Chapter XVI of the novel, transforms into Leverkühn's own experience, which the protagonist communicates in a letter from Leipzig. The bordello in the novel becomes a place of 'nymphs and daughters of wilderness'.<sup>34</sup> Such adaptive tropes supply Mann's novel with a certain amount of distancing from the original borrowings themselves. The positioning of the new elements appears accidental, and the borrowings, as E. M. Forster argues are 'rolled over and over' in the plot, such that one experiences the "formidable erosions of contour" of which Nietzsche speaks. All that is prearranged is false.<sup>35</sup>

The more one reads into *Doctor Faustus*, the more one loses trace of the original arrangements of the borrowings of Nietzschean sources and allusions of other texts. The new arrangements of these sources within the novel convey an uncanny sense of the unexpected to the extent that within the self-contained context of the novel, it will be hard to find any logical connection with prior sources. The novel sets a panorama wherein the reader keeps experiencing novelty. For example, Mann in *The Genesis of a Novel*, admits that the triangular relation between 'Adrian, Marie Godeau, and Rudi Schwerdtfeger is a straight picture of Nietzsche's proposals to Lou Andreas through Rée, and to Fräulein Trampedach through Hugo von Senger (who was already engaged

30 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 249.

31 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *Ecce Homo*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann, Edited with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, (Vintage Books Edition, November 1989), *Ecce Homo*: 'Why I am so clever', Aphorism 2, p. 240.

32 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 248.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

35 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 101.

to her).<sup>36</sup> Mann continues to confess that this wooing exercise is effectively a 'Shakespearean reminiscence, a quotation from the sonnets, which Adrian has by him and whose plot – the relationship of poet, lover, and friend; the motif of the treacherous wooing, that is – is also a theme of several of the plays'.<sup>37</sup> In fact in the novel, Leverkühn had, on his desk, 'a little volume of Kleist, with the book-mark at the essay on marionettes; the indispensable volume of Shakespeare sonnets and another book with some of the plays – *Twelfth Night* I think, *Much Ado About Nothing* and, I believe, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*'.<sup>38</sup>

In *Doctor Faustus*, there is no room for fixed arrangements in the process of adapting material from the purportedly *original*. Mann himself has claimed that the 'writer (and the philosopher also) is a reporting instrument, seismograph, medium of sensitivity [...]' and that literature consists of this signaling.<sup>39</sup> For Mann, another crucial device, parody, becomes an important technique that allows him to constantly suspect the operation of adaptation itself – namely, that the latter is indeed changing his borrowings into something that has not been signaled before. Erich Heller argues for this rarefied function of parody by suggesting that whenever Mann used it in his works, it had to be:

dissociated from its usual connotations. It certainly does not mean simply 'travesty'. [...] The word may be regarded as denoting a typical literary manner of the latecomer within a tradition of writing, of an artist whose spontaneity is inhibited by an unavoidable element of self-consciousness and self-irony – namely, the suspicion that he may be working in a medium the possibilities of which are exhausted.<sup>40</sup>

Through parody, Mann constructs and treats the events of every chapter in *Doctor Faustus* as 'outlines for what could be sensed from the beginning, to allow [the story] more and more to assume form and presence'.<sup>41</sup> The outlines will serve to recast the original source material of the borrowings into the unrecognizable actuality of the story. Through the outline form itself, Mann manages to absorb the borrowings, take them back, and disjoin them, so that through his own *Doctor Faustus* he succeeds, to a significant extent, in casting a novel element in the tradition of the Faust story – the possible premise, namely, that art may be the devil's gift. Are not all the episodes in the novel, with all the conjurations that the borrowings might have effected, a crescendo to this destiny? This, Mann writes, is

'genuine inspiration, immediate, absolute, unquestioned, ravishing, where there is no choice, no tinkering, no possible improvement; where all is sacred mandate, a visitation received by the

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 115.

<sup>40</sup> Erich Heller, III 'The Embarrassed Muse' in *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 68–115 (pp.95–96).

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 60.

possessed on with faltering and stumbling step, with shudders of awe from head to foot, with tears of joy blinding his eyes: no, that is not possible with God, who leaves the understanding too much to do. It comes from the divel, the true master and giver of such rapture.’<sup>42</sup>

In Chapter forty-five of the novel, the devil’s gift of rapture allows Leverkühn to take back Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, representative of the good and the noble in its harmonic subjectivity, and compose the *Faust* cantata, the ‘Lamentation of Dr Faustus’.<sup>43</sup> The cantata will be based on polyphonic objectivity where ‘the degree of dissonance is the measure of its polyphonic value’.<sup>44</sup> The *Faust* cantata of Leverkühn reveals in its composition a ‘hope beyond hopelessness, the transcendence of despair – not betrayal to her, but the miracle that passes belief’.<sup>45</sup> And this is precisely what ‘passes belief’ in Mann’s adaptive tropes – that dissonance will in effect change its meaning, it becomes ‘light in the night’.<sup>46</sup>

Is not *Doctor Faustus* also a work that “passes belief”, in the sense that Mann had to overcome the difficulty of constantly evoking other sources while all the way through his text must appear as holding the dramatic effect of self-expression? It is the ‘unforeseen possibility, the gift for disorder’ that turns *Doctor Faustus* into a dramatic work that effectively succeeds in disguising the shifts of adaptation on its borrowings.<sup>47</sup> Who could ever intuit that Nietzsche’s biography, his thinking about art, even Adorno’s philosophy on modern music, and all the allusions to other works would in some way come to be, in Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, ‘greatly intertwined and infernally illuminated as they now are, [to] make the work a *summa demonologica* of Thomas Mann’s imagination’?<sup>48</sup> Is it not this same imagination which takes the reader of *Doctor Faustus* to experience shifts between contrasting and conflicting views, a randomness, or, rather, a carnivalesque element which ‘conveys the impression [that the author is] a spectator of his own contrivings; he is baffled and shocked, as we are meant to be, by the unfolding of events’ and that ‘At all times he keeps his distance from *backstage*’?<sup>49</sup> Mann heightens this dramatic effect by choosing the humanist figure of Serenus Zeitblom to tell the reader the story of the damned composer Leverkühn. Ironically, in *The Genesis of a Novel*, Mann admits that what he had to conceal throughout the novel, is the ‘secret of their being identical with each other’.<sup>50</sup> Another dramatic effect of the novel is that this story about the relevance of art and the aesthetic arrives to its readers amid the brutal culture of World War II. Serenus in fact laments

42 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 321.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 463.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 471.

46 *Ibid.*

47 George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 277.

48 Erich Heller, vii ‘Parody, Tragic and Comic’ in *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German*, p. 261.

49 George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, p. 277.

50 Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of a Novel*, p. 75.

that 'its hour had come; that a mutation of life would be consummated; the world would enter into a new, still nameless constellation.'<sup>51</sup>

Without the introduction of such dramatic effects, Mann ran the risk that the allusions imported into his text could have persisted in merely reproducing their source meaning. Any rigorous understanding of how Mann purported to author a novel expression for *Doctor Faustus* raises the inevitable question of whether there was, within the adaptive process, the actual dialectical transformation of the borrowings. By dialectics, one can understand, among other manifestations of this dynamic, the Hegelian notion of *aufgehoben*, wherein the identities of the borrowings and allusions are first cancelled from their original source and then transferred to the novel in order to be *preserved* and subsequently 'brought to an end' within the complete structure of the novel.<sup>52</sup> The teleological conception of adaptation may be seen to imply that it is a mechanical process that absorbs and erases the traces of the borrowings themselves. But can *originality* be reduced to such determining forces and absolute closures by adaptation? I believe that the role of a dialectical transformation of the borrowings is that it effectively generates a sense of 'culpability and self-questioning' on the author's part and, via the latter, the fiction of the newer work ultimately absorbs the originary actuality of the borrowings.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, if Mann did not create anything new, not only would have adaptation failed to contribute to the attainment of originality, but the despair of the night would have been exacerbated through his self-awareness as a ventriloquist echoing the voice of other geniuses and as such his work would also have, potentially, subjected itself to the accusation of great fraudulence. As Mann observes in the last line of his *The Genesis of a Novel*, as the earthly life of the novel begins, the story takes on its own concrete body and therefore forms its own individual spectre. In view of my argument on the labour of adaptation in Mann's own *Faustus*, the spectre of his novel may well turn out to be the highly individualized expression of Mann's text itself as it starts to exert its own "anxiety of influence" in turn on subsequent texts and emergent literatures.

There was indeed one composer – Arnold Schönberg – who did oblige Mann to append to his novel a *confession* which informs the reader that the twelve-tone system in Chapter Twenty-Two of *Doctor Faustus* owes its origin to the composer's *Harmonielehre*.<sup>54</sup> This note, unlike the body of the epigraph, is a real note – it stands apart from the novel, it contributes nothing to the *fiction* of the novel, and as such it remains there to remind the reader that at times the entire trajectory of the adaptive process could be subverted, and that the relation between the adaptive exercise and the question of the (re) production of *originality* promises to remain a fraught and troubled one.

51 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 340.

52 Erich Heller, V 'The Artist's Journey into the Interior: A Hegelian Prophecy and Its Fulfillment' in *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and other Essays*, (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 101-170 (p.170).

53 George Steiner, 'Two Cocks' in *No Passion Spent – Essays 1978-1996*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 361-389 (p. 377).

54 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, p. 491.

## II.

According to Jacob Bronowski, the creative personality of artists is charged by the principle that things should not stand as they are. This principle compels artists to look at the 'world as fit for change and [at themselves] as instruments of change.'<sup>55</sup> The application of Bronowski's argument to the context of our discussion about the role of adaptation in the formulation of an "original" raises the further question of how *the new* or *newness* may be created when various art forms continue to be haunted by trite motifs and clichéd thematic. This argument needs to be discussed in terms of the processes through which adaptation may effect performative exercises that, potentially, may bring about unprecedented thought-structures. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, a structure has to find 'its measure in itself and measures itself by nothing outside it.'<sup>56</sup> Through this line of thinking, adaptation can be perceived as operating in a broader context than the limited dynamic of the intra-structural operation of art forms and individual products.

What dynamic is at work in the *origin-ality* that may be perceived as resulting from the adaptive process? In *Grammars of Creation*, George Steiner tells us that art history, 'teaches us that several hands have been at work on numerous paintings.'<sup>57</sup> How may an artist, in Wassily Kandinsky's words, "have something to say"? According to Kandinsky, the goal of the artist is not to conquer form 'but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning.'<sup>58</sup> What conversation has the artist to conduct in order to acquire this *inner meaning* of form? Artists are perennially in dialogue with the already established structures of the histories of art and ideas, in an anxious dialogue with previously conceived structures. Newness enters the world through structuring lacks of symmetry, and adaptation allows artists, through its disproportionate premises, to reverse the already established arrangements of other structures. Individual expression manipulates form, it endows form with the disquietude evinced by new *inner meanings*. This is one reason for why *new* elements of art arrive to us as a surprise, as a discovery within an adventure, as an unexpected spectacle. It is this uncanny spectacle that turns the artist into what Gertrude Stein has termed the *contemporary* – even then when one's contemporaries do not yet know it.<sup>59</sup> It is the delight that the exercise of adaptation finds in its own structuring asymmetricality, one that keeps entertaining and producing fresh structures. This is why one can argue, together with Forster, that, via the adaptive process, novelty in art forms is necessarily premised upon the heightening of the known, and therefore 'leads to larger existence than was possible at the time' of its conception.<sup>60</sup>

55 Bronowski Jacob, *The Origins of Knowledge and Imagination*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 123.

56 Hans-Georg Gadamer, First Part: The question of Truth as it emerges in the experience of art, II The ontology of the work of art and its hermeneutical significance: 1. 'Play as the Clue to Ontological Explanation', (B) 'Transformation into Structure and Total Mediation' in *Truth and Method*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), pp. 99-108 (p. 101).

57 George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 179.

58 Wassily Kandinsky, 'Art and Artists' in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. with an introduction by M. T. H. Sadler, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1977), pp. 53-55 (p. 54).

59 Gertrude Stein, *Picasso*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1938), p. 50.

60 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 169.