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Agnaldo Rodrigues da Silva Taisir Mahmudo Karim

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1. Literatura - 82

2. Linguística - 81



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Av. Tancredo Neves, 1095 - Cavalhada - Cáceres - MT - Brasil - 78200000 Fone/Fax 65 3221-0023 -www.unemat.br - editora@unemat.br

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TEXTOS EM PORTUGUÊS/INGLÊS





ADRIAN LEVERKÜHN'S MUSICAL JOURNEY OUTLINED IN THE NOVEL DOCTOR FAUSTUS, BY THOMAS MANN

A TRAJETÓRIA MUSICAL DE ADRIAN LEVERKÜHN DELINEADA NO ROMANCE DOUTOR FAUSTO DE THOMAS MANN

Beatriz Schmidt Campos¹ Sidney Barbosa²

ABSTRACT: In this article we intend to analyze Adrian Leverkühn's musical journey outlined in the novel Doctor Faustus by Thomas Mann, covering several aspects: Adrian's musical influences when composing a new musical style, Theodor Adorno's real musical reviews of compositions, which were used by the author throughout the novel, the style of real composers who influenced Adrian in composing his own musical work, demonstrating how the musician deeply values the relationship between music and speech. Therefore, among these references from the musical world in the fictional universe, we can highlight the embryonic process of his rigorous composition inspired on Arnold Shöenberg's dodecaphonic music. This rigorous composition is the reason why Mephisto chooses to buy Adrian's creative time and it also constitutes a metaphoric representation of aspects present in German mentality that shows an ambivalence between the humanistic culture and the appeal of the Faustian pact.

KEYWORDS: Dodecaphonic music; Music and speech; Mephisto; Music in the fictional novel; Thomas Mann's Doctor Faustus.

RESUMO: Neste trabalho, pretendemos analisar a trajetória musical da personagem Adrian Leverkühn, delineada no romance Doutor Fausto de Thomas Mann, sobre vários aspectos: as influências musicais do personagem para compor um novo estilo musical, os comentários críticos-musicais de composições reais feitas por Theodor Adorno, presentes em todo o romance e o estilo de autores reais que Adrian escolhe para compor sua obra no interior do romance, evidenciando uma grande valorização por parte do músico na sua relação com a música e com a fala. Destaca-se, entre essas referências do mundo musical no universo ficcional, o processo embrionário de sua "composição rigorosa", inspirada na música dodecafônica de Arnold Schöenberg. Essa "composição rigorosa" é a razão pela qual Mefisto o escolhe para comprar-lhe seu tempo criativo e

Adjunct Professor III in the Department of Literary Theory and Literatures in the 2 University of Brasília. E-mail: sidneyb@unb.br



Master Student in the Department of Literary Theory and Literatures in the Univer-1 sity of Brasília. E-mail: bialitflute@gmail.com

constitui uma representação metafórica de aspectos da mentalidade alemã que demonstram uma ambivalência entre a cultura humanística e o apelo ao pacto fáustico.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Música dodecafônica; Música e fala; Mefisto; Música na ficção romanesca; Doutor Fausto, de Thomas Mann.



Composer Adrian Leverkühn's story, narrated in the novel Doctor Faustus, by Thomas Mann, would be a rather common one if the main character were not the creator of a new musical style, which he used to call "rigorous composition" and finds its counterpoint in Arnold Schöenberg's dodecaphonic music. In addition, there is the unusual aspect of the main character making a pact with the devil.

Adrian Leverkühn was born and raised in the Buchel farm in Germany. Having been influenced by his uncle, he started to study piano with musician and teacher Wendell Kretzchmar, in a neighboring village called Kaisersaschern. Kretzchmar was responsible for all his musical training. After giving up studying theology, Adrian moves to Laipzig in order to continue studying with Kretzchmar. But, besides piano classes, he also starts to study composition, harmony and orchestration. Right after moving to the new town, Adrian sends a letter to Serenus Zeitblom, his childhood friend and narrator of the novel, in which he tells his friend of his musical progresses, his first contact with the devil and with his mistress, Esmeralda. Leverkühn composes his first piece, which still presents romantic features. The author comments this piece Phosphorescence of the sea through the Serenus character: [...] "was in my eyes a very remarkable instance of how an artist can give his best to a thing in which he privately no longer believes, insisting on excelling in artistic devices which for his consciousness are already at the point of being worn out" (MANN, 1978, p. 148).

A year after sending this letter, once more, Adrian goes after his mistress Hetaera Esmeralda (name he gave her based on a type of butterfly his father collected). Inspired by his mistress' name he develops a new musical practice based on [...] "the simbolysm of numbers and letters" (p. 151). Her name was Hetaera Esmeralda, and out of the letters of her first name, he created a sequence with the notes h (B), es (E flat), e (E) and a (A). We can find this sequence as an "thematic archetype" in Adrian's different compositions.

Leverkühn writes his compositions based on texts and poems written by different authors such as Shakespeare, Brentano, Verlaine, William Blake, Klopstock, *Gesta romanorum*, as well as lyrical poetry and Catalan poetry, Italian poems, the visionary summit of The Divine Comedy and biblical texts. This demonstrates the character's strong relationship with the written text, as well as other great composers. His musical influences are Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Carissimi, Buxtehude, Shütz.



Shortly after the beginning of the First World War (chapter XXI), Adrian is visited by the Devil while he is living with the Manardi family at their house in Palestria. In a long dialogue, Mephisto (He) explains to Adrian why he chose him, starting at the beginning of his existence: his father's relationship with his profession, Adrian withdrawing from studying theology, his fascination with butterflies, his meeting with Esmeralda, the death of all the doctors Adrian had sought when he was taken ill and, above all, his intelligence and musical brilliancy. Adrian sells him his time: twenty-four years in exchange for prodigious musical production.

Afterwards, the composer moves to Pfeiffering, living at the house of the Schweigestill family, and continues to intensely work in his musical production. His pieces are played in Weimar, in Prague (in the Society of Contemporary Music), in the musical gatherings in Ambruch, at Ehrbar Hall, in Vienna and in Frankfurt.

Finally, in 1924, Rudi Schwerdtfeger, Adrian's friend and violin virtuoso, premieres the musical piece: Concert for violin that Adrian wrote as an homage to him. Shortly after that, Rudi plays the piece in Berna and Zurich, where the musician and the composer meet Marie Goudeau. Adrian falls in love with Marie and asks his friend to intercede for him in his intention of marrying her. However, Marie is actually attracted to Rudi who is also in love with her, when something tragic takes place. After one of Rudi's concerts, Ines, an old friend of Adrian's, who became Rudi's lover kills him out of jealousy.

Adrian, nevertheless, continues to compose intensively, but he is becoming more and more recluse. After this tragic incident, Adrian goes through an experience that makes him suffer a great deal: he receives, at his household, his nephew who is recovering from a serious disease. Adrian becomes quite found of the child, but he ends up having a final relapse and passes away.

At the end of the Second World War and after all these fatal events, Adrian begins to write his master piece, in which he gathers all his technic and musical style using what he entitles as rigorous composition: The Lamentation of Doctor Faust.

Afterwards, he invites all his friends and acquaintances to listen, at first hand, to some passages of the recently concluded choir and symphonic piece. During this event, he confesses his relationship with the harlot Esmeralda, who bewitched him and concluded his pact with the devil. For this reason, Adrian confesses his responsibility in all the dread-



ful things that happened around him: the death of his friend Rudi and of his beloved nephew.

Adrian spends the rest of his life living with dementia until his death

His musical work marks a new period in the History of Western Music. With his compositions a new style of music is born, and at the same time, we have a new way of hearing and understanding music, thus, transforming the artistic and philosophical paradigm. It is important to highlight that the author emphasizes in his novel the success the composer's work found, which is as a metaphor of the rise of Germany's power and, at the same time, the destruction of the country is represented by the character's humanization and regret.

In order to create his story, Mann bases his narrative in Arnold Schöenberg's dodecaphonic music to describe Leverkühn's new style of composition. Schöenberg was an Austrian composer who was born in 1874 and died in 1951. In the novel, Adrian uses his mistress' name "Hetaera Esmeralda" to symbolically explain that out of the letters of her name (h-e-a-e-es, in German) are formed the musical notes (B, E, A and E flat) and the first indication of the creation of the "rigorous composition" or dodecaphonic music derives from this melodic construction.

Dodecaphonic music was a rupture in the system of tonal musical. This system prevailed approximately between the end of the Middle ages until the end of the 19th century. In the tonal system, music presents a defined tonality, there is a hierarchy between the notes, a musical organization based on a specific note. In dodecaphonic music, on the other hand, the twelve notes of the chromatic scale form a series. In this series, it is mandatory that all twelve notes of the scale appear in the order chosen by the composer and no note can be repeated until the series is formed. After the order of the notes is established, the series can be played in its original form and in three other possible serial ways. These variations are called: retrograde (the original series played backwards), inverse (the original series played with inverted intervals), and retrograde inversion (the inverted series played backwards).

In order to hear this musical metaphor extracted from Mann's novel, in which Adrian chooses the notes from Hetaera's name to compose a new style, we can imagine, after the explanation above, the notes high B – low E – low A – High E flat as a small series. Their variations would then be: E flat – A – E – B (retrograde); Low B – High E – Low A – Low



E flat (inverse) and Low E flat – High A – High E – Low B (retrograde inversion).

So that we can go in depth in the difference of the two musical styles mentioned above, the tonal system and dodecaphonic music, we can reflect on the comparison presented by Leonard Meyer, theorist who contributed major works in the fields of aesthetic theory in music. Sarath indicates that:

> Leonard Meyer has identified two categories of basic elements in music: Syntactic parameters include harmony, melody, and rhythm. Non -syntactic parameters include dynamics (volume), density (amount of note activity - form highly sparse to high dense - in a given passage), tessitura (high or low range), duration, timbre and silence" (SARATH, 2010, p. 4).

Based on this distinction, we can notice that tonal music includes both the syntactic as the non-syntactic parameters. In a tonal composition, the dynamic, the density and the tessitura are used in the sentences. We also have the timbre of each instrument and the duration of the notes and pauses are marked through the rhythm. However, on the one hand, the entire process in tonal music is based in a harmony that guides the main melodies and the counter-melodies. On the other hand, in dodecaphonic music and all the styles that came after it in Classical Music, after romanticism, just as serialism and contemporary music, the non-syntactic parameter became the key element to understand compositions under a new perspective.

Apart from these changes in hearing parameters, the philosophical point of view regarding music, from the romanticism period to the post-romanticism and later on leading to atonal music and more precisely to dodecaphonic music, has gone through a series of transformations. According to Adorno, philosopher from the Frankfurt School and music critic, "[...] with dodecaphonic music, Schönberg developed a conceptualization that represented an evolution in the process of rationalization of European music" (ADORNO apud BARRETO FERNANDES, 2007). According to Juan Carlos Paz:

> The technique of dodecaphonic composition consists in an attempt of logical, consequent and effective restructuring since, at the end of an extensive trajectory, the music of Western civilization, after the progressive wearing out of its most basic elements - tonality and resulting



forms -, undertakes the slow, continuous and mandatory task of overcoming them with other more advanced, more necessary and more effective resources (PAZ apud EIMERT, 1973:7 apud KOZU, 2000, p. $1)^{3}$.

This new style contrasts with what Moisés affirms to be the romantic style: "[...] refusing the rules, the model and the norms, the romantics fight for total creating liberty" (MOISÉS, 1999, p. 463).

Taking into account the analysis presents above and according to Kraus:

> Theodor W. Adorno is a prominent figure in this partial autobiography of the years Mann spent writing *Doktor Faustus* in Los Angeles. [...] Mann needs Adorno for his knowledge of music, in particular. [...] It is clear, then, that a good portion of the theoretical commentary on music in Doktor Faustus comes from Adorno (KRAUS, 2008, p. 170).

Mann uses Adorno's comments in his musical analysis throughout the novel, for instance, in chapter eight in which Kretzchmar, Adrian's teacher, analyses Beethoven (this analysis is possibly an analysis and an opinion made by Adorno):

> And in just that very way Beethoven's art had outgrown itself, risen out of the habitable regions of tradition, even before the startled gaze of human eyes, into spheres of the entirely and utterly and nothing- but personal- an ego painfully isolated in the absolute, isolated too from sense by the loss of his hearing; lonely prince of a realm of spirits, from whom now only a chilling breath issued to terrify his most willing contemporaries, standing as they did aghast at these communications of which only at moments, only by exception, they could understand anything at all (MANN, 1978, 54).

According to Kraus, "Mann has a traditional view on artistic expression, despite accepting some of Adorno's modern ideas. This resistance towards Adorno is consistent in Mann and Schoenberg's view of what artists do" (KRAUS, 2008, p.170). Although the musical analysis above is referring to Beethoven's work, we can notice that Mann uses in his commentaries on Adrian's work terms such as "expressivity" and "emotion", which relates to the Romantic Period. As stated by Adorno, a dodecaphonic composition excludes any possibility of subjective feelings. However, this was not Mann's point of view when he presented the works composed



by the character Adrian. This is what happens, for example, in chapter XLIII in which Serenus analyses Leverkühn's String quartet:

> The first part, inscribed moderato, is like a profoundly reflective, tensely intellectual conversation, like four instruments taking counsel among themselves, an exchange serious and quiet in its course, almost without dynamic variety. There follows a presto part as though whispered in delirium, played muted by all four instruments, then a slow movement, kept shorter, in which the viola leads throughout, accompanied by interjections from the other instruments, so that one is reminded of a song-scene. In the 'Allegro con fuoco' the polyphony is given free rein in long lines. I know nothing more stirring than the end, where it is as though there were tongues of flame from all four sides, a combination of runs and trills which gives the impression of a whole orchestra (MANN, 1978, p. 438- 439).

We notice in this analysis that although this piece is one of the more mature pieces composed by the character, therefore, probably an essentially dodecaphonic piece, the author of the novel analysis and interprets it as a piece containing subjective and emotional elements, opposing the idea in which, according to Tamar Rabelo de Castro, "Such music intents to talk to the brain and not the heart, it is rational music not sensitive" (CASTRO, 2004, p. 14).

Adrian studied theology and having chosen music as a carrier he is influenced by renascence composers such as Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Carissimi, Buxtehude. Despite the renascence style being a clean musical style, less fanciful and less emotional, the author, still opposing Adorno's ideas, analyses these composers' work as [...] "a music of emotion, [...] treated the Bible world with astonishing human freedom, with a declamatory expressiveness, and clothed it in a boldly descriptive instrumental garb" (MANN, 1978, p. 173). We have the impression that Mann is referring to a more fanciful type of music, such as the romantic school or even the baroque style, but not renascence music, since it presents less emotional elements just as classicism or Adrian's dodecaphonic music. In this new style of music, Leverkühn somehow comes back to a form of expression that has no subjectivity, and therefore is closer to the classical and renascence style than the ornate and the exaggeration of the baroque or the romanticism.

In spite of this, the poetry and text used by Adrian in his compositions are from authors of the 19th century such as Verlaine and William Blake. It is important to highlight that, although the composer's character



was the creator of this new, more rational and logical music, that sought other hearing "tensions", the author used romantic texts, which would not exactly be contemporary with the style the character was creating.

Adrian really values the text in his music and in the novel he offers an important reflection on the relationship between music and speech

> "Music and speech, he insisted, belonged together, they were at bottom one, language was music, music a language; separate, one always appealed to the other, imitated the other, used the other's tools, always the one gave itself to be understood as substitute of the other. How music could be first of all word, be thought and planned as word, he would demonstrate to me by the fact that Beethoven had been seen composing in words. 'What is he writing there in his notebooks? it had been asked. 'He is composing'. "But he is writing words, not notes' Yes, that was a way he had. He usually sketched in words the course of ideas in a composition, at most putting in a few notes here and there" (MANN, 1978, p.159).

Adrian addresses this topic that obviously fascinated him. According to the character:

> "It was very natural that music should take fire at the word, that the word should burst forth out of music, as it did towards the end of the Ninth Symphony. Finally, it was a fact that the whole development of music in Germany strove towards the word-tone drama of Wagner and therein found its goal" (MANN, 1978, p. 159).

The permanent use of the word or the text in music, according to Arnoldo Guimarães de Almeida Neto (2008) derives from an ancient musical tradition in the West, in which poetry and music were a part of the same poetic exercise. The author also affirms that in the study of the *melopoetic*, term that means *melos* = chant + poetic, subject proposed by the Hungarian literature professor and musician Steven Paul Scher, by theorist Calvin Brown and widespread by Professor emeritus of UFMG Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira (2002), we can classify the relationship between text and music in three categories: "music and literature" in which text and music coexist, such as in a song, *lieds* or opera; "literature in music," which has its origins in the romantic period in pieces such as the symphonic poem (an example would be Richard Strauss' Don Quixote, in which each character is represented by an instrument); programmatic



music (music imitates the sounds of daily life and of nature); and "music in literature", which corresponds to the imitation of musical sounds using the resources of the verbal language and the acoustic feature of words, this also refers to the literature of existing or imagined music scores.

Music in literature also divides itself "[...] by the metaphoric use of music in texts, by the presence in the narrative of the character who is a musician and in any element whose nature is originally musical that contributes to the construction of the literary text". (OLIVEIRA apud ALMEIDA NETO, 2008, p. 18).

In this case, the literary work **Doctor Faustus** would be one of the best examples of this last classification, because the composer is the main character in the novel and it is filled with musical analysis. Besides this, the entire narrative gravitates towards the process of compositional creation.

Adrian, in the novel, uses the technic of music in literature because he chooses pre-existing texts to put music to, such as his composition based on texts from the book of stories and medieval anecdotes "Gesta Romanorum" in which he hides the singers and instead gives voice to puppets. Apart of several examples, the character creates together with his friend Serenus the libretto of William Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost (piece of lost loves), that tell the story of four friends that fall in love at the same time. Following the classification mentioned above, he also uses the idea of "music and literature" when he writes "lieds", which are German songs in which Adrian uses texts and poems of different authors such as William Blake, Verlaine and Brentano in his compositions. This last classification, "where speech and music complement each other mutually" (according to the character himself), is a part of the entire process of composition of not only classic, but mainly popular songs at the time and also nowadays.

By the end of the Second World War, in which "[...] after the shipwreck of his marriage plans, the loss of his friend, the snatching away of the marvelous child [...]" (MANN, 1978, p. 463). Adrian composes the work that would be "his last" and "utmost work" among those he composed (463), The Lamentation of Doctor Faust, and Serenus associates this piece to the fall of Germany: "Now only this can avail us, only this will be sung from our very souls: the *Lamentation* of the son of the hell[...]" (p.465).

Serenus carries on analyzing and commenting the piece:



"It does not lack significance that the *Faust* cantata is stylistically so strongly and unmistakably linked with the seventeenth century and Monteverdi, whose music- again not without significance- favoured the echo-effect, sometimes to the point of being a mannerism. The echo, the giving back of the human voice as nature-sound, and the revelation of it as nature-sound, is essentially a lament: Nature's melancholy'Alas!' in view of man, her effort to utter his solitary state. Conversely, the lament of the nymphs on its side is related to the echo. In Leverkühn's last and loftiest creation, echo, favourite device of the baroque, is employed with unspeakably mournful effect" (p. 466).

Afterwards, Serenus continues:

"This giant 'lamento' (it lasts an hour and a quarter) is very certainly non-dynamic, lacking in development, without drama, in the same way that concentric rings made by a stone thrown into water spread ever farther,[...] The creator of 'Fausti Weheklage" can, in the previously organized material, unhampered, untroubled by the already given structure, yield himself to subjectivity; and so this, his technically most rigid work, a work of extreme calculation, is at the same time purely expressive" (MANN, 1978, p, 467-468).

In the musical analysis made by the character, we can notice that the author reinforces his idea of maintaining the subjective elements in Leverkhün's work, though Adorno emphasized in his criticism in the real word that dodecaphonic music did not have these elements. At the same time, Mann associates Adrian's work to Monteverdi's, who was not exactly a baroque composer, but when his name is mentioned, Serenus is talking about a different type of emotion, a more restrained one: melancholia. And soon after that, he carries on saying that the piece lacks dynamism and drama, and concludes saying that it is Adrian's most expressive piece. We believe that this is a key moment in the novel, in which the author puts all his emotion. It is the moment in which he is experiencing Germany's fall and the transition of romanticism to this new style that lacks subjective emotion, based a logical and rational way of thinking that leads to this new music called rigorous composition.

Lastly, Adrian calls upon all his friends and confesses his sin:

I have suppressed it so long in me but will no longer hide it, that already since my twenty- first year I am wedded to Satan and with due knowing of peril, out of well- considered courage, pride, and presumption because I would win glory in this world, I made with him a bond



and vow, so that all which during the term of four- and - twenty years I brought forth, and which mankind justly regarded with mistrust, is only with his help come to pass and is devil's work, infused by the angel of death" (MANN, 1978, p. 477).

Soon after that, Adrian suffers from dementia until his death.

In this novel we have the perfect marriage between Literature and Music. It also provides a connection between Thomas Mann's work and the political, social and historical environment that German society was experiencing at the time. The context in which the novel was published was the context of the Nazi party's rise to power. With Mann's novel, we have the perfect example of art creating incredible and unexpected bridges between political reality and aesthetic message. It is not by chance that **Doctor Faustus** is seen as the master piece of a great novelist. Thomas Mann denounces and becomes the best interpreter of German tragedy in the first half of the 20th century that led to the disastrous and destructive Second World War.

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