“Die Heimat meiner Seele”: The Significance of Pfitzner’s *Palestrina* for Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*.¹

Ein fabelhaft deutsches, eigenherrliches und gedankenvolles Werk, etwas Spätes und Letztes aus der wagnerisch-schopenhaurischen, der romantischen Sphäre, die eben doch eigentlich die Heimat meiner Seele ist.²

The Italian town of Palestrina lies between Buchel and Pfeffering in the symbolic structure of Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*. With the Manardi family Adrian Leverkühn finds his first surrogate home, before returning to Germany to find a mirror image of his native Buchel in Pfeffering outside of Munich. Hans Mayer and others have noted the extent to which Palestrina is imbued with associations for Mann (Mayer 297-298). Here Thomas and his brother Heinrich worked on their earliest masterpieces, *Buddenbrooks* and *Die kleine Stadt*, cementing the association of this town with artistic endeavour and the young men’s decision to become writers.³ The town itself represented a continuity of European culture from its ancient foundations, predating Roman Praeneste as a site of the goddess Fortuna Hygeia, becoming the medieval Penestrino, home town and fortress of the Colonna family whose fates were bound up with the history of the Papacy and the Empire, referred to by Dante in Canto twenty-seven of the *Inferno*, and late nineteenth-century Italian “kleine Stadt,” the setting of brother Heinrich Mann’s novel about the stresses of modernity in a traditional, popular democracy. The great papal composer Pierluigi Palestrina, saviour of medieval polyphony, adopted the name of his birthplace, and the late romantic German composer, Hans Pfitzner, who would exert a powerful influence on Thomas Mann at the time of the First World War, based his most successful work, the opera *Palestrina*, on the figure of the composer. In Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* Palestrina supports important narrative functions: Adrian finds his first home away from home with the Manardi family, works on his first mature work, the opera buffa *Love’s Labours Lost*,

¹ I would like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Camargo Foundation, as well as my own University of Western Australia for supporting the research for this article.

² Thomas Mann to Paul Amman, 27th August 1917, Mann 2004: 206.

³ Mann discussed the Palestrina period by telephone with his brother at the time of writing chapter 24, presumably to refresh details of the visit for *Doktor Faustus*, Wysling 569.
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and is visited by the Devil in Palestrina.

Gunilla Bergsten identifies two types of reference in Mann’s literary technique, “open citations,” marked for identification, and “hidden citations,” which will go unnoticed by the naïve reader. Among these hidden citations Bergsten counts the references to events and personages from Mann’s own life, which will be recognized only by those readers who have consulted the various metafictional sources such as *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus*, the diary entries, the essays and other writings in the spirit of Mann’s parody as a set of self-referential tools mirroring the essential modernist theme of art and life (Bergsten 15-16). Hans Rudolf Vaget has devoted an article to the influence of Strauss and Pfitzner as “hidden chiffres” in Bergsten’s sense in the novel. While Pfitzner’s presence is “diskret, beinahe anonym,” he nevertheless belongs “auf eine bisher kaum geahnte Weise zu diesem Roman und zwar ... zu seinem thematischen Zentrum” (Vaget 1993: 74-75). For Vaget, Pfitzner’s Palestrina represents for Mann the central problem of inspiration in music at the end of the nineteenth century, a problem which Adrian Leverkühn overcomes through his pact with the devil. Vaget is most certainly correct in pointing to the hidden importance of Pfitzner for Mann in *Doktor Faustus*. However his comparison of Palestrina’s tired and unwilling act of epigonal creativity with Leverkühn’s leap into the avant-garde takes no account of Mann’s reflections on Pfitzner and Palestrina throughout his life, most importantly in the essay on the opera included in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*. A closer analysis of the relationship between Mann and Pfitzner leads us to quite different conclusions regarding the significance of the hidden references to the latter and his opera, Palestrina, in *Doktor Faustus*.

Given his involvement with Pfitzner towards the end of the First World War, the powerful influence on him of Pfitzner’s opera, Palestrina, and the long essay devoted to it in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, it seems surprising that Mann makes no open reference to either the composer or his work in *Doktor Faustus*. On reflection, however, we can discover a logic to Mann’s silence. It is a silence born of irresolution and it goes to the heart of the novel. In the Palestrina-essay we can identify the origins of the set of problems regarding the artist which Mann works through to radical conclusions in *Doktor Faustus*, and which are codified through the hidden reference to Palestrina. My aim in this essay is
to follow up the hidden references to Hans Pfitzner and the opera *Palestrina* as a preparation for the identification and elucidation of one of the most puzzling aspects of the novel, namely Mann’s own relationship to the artistic praxis of his fictive composer, Adrian Leverkühn.

Mann met Pfitzner through his friend Bruno Walter at the time of the first performance of *Palestrina* in Munich in 1917. He compared the work to Wagner’s *Parsifal*, as “ein fabelhaft deutsches, eigenherrliches und gedankenvolles Werk,” and congratulated its author on his conservatism, artistic piety (“Kunstfrömmigkeit”) and Germanness” (Mann 2004: 206). A detailed analysis and appreciation of *Palestrina* was published in the *Neuer Rundschau* of October 1917 and was included with minor alterations in the *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, published shortly before the German defeat in 1918.

Mann’s *Palestrina* essay, like the *Betrachtungen* as a whole, is a response to the crisis of the war, and is far from exceptional in the context of contemporary German thought. For Mann the value of *Palestrina*, lies in its “Germannness,” its fortified “Innerlichkeit,” and its rejection of the world of politics at a time of crisis and decline. It is a more appropriate work in this context than Wagner’s *Parsifal*, which represents the “machtgeschützte Innerlichkeit” of the Second Empire. “Unser Reich ist nicht von dieser Welt!” writes Mann, and the intention of the *Betrachtungen* is to recreate an empire of German attitudes and beliefs as the catastrophe approaches (Mann XII: 379). Essential to this is the creation of a “holding myth,” a means of separating word and world, idea and reality. Pfitzner’s “musical legend” serves this purpose.

In Pfitzner’s opera, the Papal composer, Palestrina, ageing and tired in the face of political and cultural change, looks inward to find the inspiration to save Catholic polyphony from the iconoclastic fundamentalism of Pope Pius IV and the melodic futurism (atheism) of the Florentine Camerata. Palestrina’s act is at once regenerative and conservative: in a period of decadence and embellishment with the inessential, he restores the essentiality of the musical language and – in the legend, thereby reclaims the popularity of church music.

Pfitzner’s work implies a revival of the separation of art and world. The alienation of the
German *Bildungsbürger* in the early years of the new century, from the role of relative social involvement of the nineteenth century, is palpable in this work where neither the fundamentalist (feudal) Pope, nor the progressive (modern) Florentines provide the answer, and where the creative conflict occurs between the timeless internal world of art and the *Realpolitik* of Borromeo’s Counter-Reformation. Palestrina feels no connection to this sphere which represents merely the superficial world of political change and practical politics.\(^4\) Mann responds to the radical separation of the political and the non-political in the opera. German cultural greatness will survive not as a result of the machinations of the political world, but as a result of the turn inward to purify, protect and perpetuate its culture. Mann expresses this recognition in strikingly personal, emotional terms: he refers to his great “good fortune” in encountering this work at this time. It has little new to say to him, but it provides resolution and redemption from the polemics of the day (Mann XII: 407). It has become an object of “love” and of “feeling,” against which everything else is revealed in its transitory emptiness:

> Mir bedeutet dies Werk, gerade jetzt, nicht mehr und nicht weniger als ein großes Glück. Es macht mich positiv, es erlöst mich von der Polemik. Ein Gegenstand der Liebe ist gefunden, an den mein Gefühl sich schließt, und von dem aus gesehen, das Widerwärtige in wesenlosem Scheine liegt. Sie werdens begreifen … Ich konnte mich der Thränen nicht erwehren. (Thomas Mann to Ernst Bertram, Mendelssohn 1975: 1111)

*Palestrina* is a work which consciously celebrates the end of the German tradition of Schopenhauer and Wagner, Dürer and Faust. It is self-consciously epigonal, still attached to the greatness of the past, but no longer rebelling at the fact of decadence. Ernst Bertram, who had accompanied Mann to the opera on June 23\(^{rd}\) identifies the importance of this opera in relation to Mann’s earlier reception of Wagner:

> “Gestern also *Palestrina* … (mit Thomas Mann zusammen …) … (Stimmung ‘Kreuz, Tod und Gruft’) … Das Ganze ein Bekenntnis dieses Wissens, ein Letzter zu sein … Das Werk mußte auf ihn mit dem Zauber einer inneren Identität und Schicksalsgemeinschaft wirken; seine Liebe dafür ist … im Grunde die Wagnerdenkart seiner Jugend in einer ethisch reineren, reiferen, zugleich pessimistischen und milden Sphäre. (Ernst Bertram to Ernst Glöckner, Mendelssohn 1975: 1111-1112.)

\(^4\) Cf. the discussion of this segment by Williamson 204-205.
On the day after the performance Mann wrote to Bruno Walter that the work was interesting to him in as much as it brought together everything problematic in his love of German art. The ethos of romantic asceticism and the union of music with pessimism and humour are, he writes, exactly what he needs at the present moment:

Wie sehr dieser ‘Palestrina’ mir am Herzen liegt, kann ich nicht sagen. Das Ja! mit dem ich unmittelbar auf das Werk antworte, stammt aus der Liebe und umfaßt alles, was man in artistischer Hinsicht etwa problematisch daran finden könnte. Mit seiner metaphysischen Stimmung, seinem Ethos von ‘Kreuz, Tod und Gruft,’ seiner Vereinigung von Musik, Pessimismus und Humor (womit zusammen ich den Begriff der Humanität definiere) kommt es meinen tiefsten, eigensten Bedürfnissen entgegen, ja, sein Erscheinen eben jetzt bedeutete mir nicht weniger als ein großes Glück … (Thomas Mann to Bruno Walter, Mendelssohn 1975: 1112.)

Palestrina suggests a way forward that is neither progressive-modernist nor reactionary-neo-feudal. Pfitzner’s opera turns inward in an act of epigonal purification of the triadic world of Wagner before the extreme subjective and atonal experimentation of Tristan in particular. This mixture of epigonalism, conservatism and self-consciousness (or humour or irony in Mann’s terms) provides a resolution of Mann’s own problematic recognition of the crisis of the late war years. Art provides a revived unity where that of the world has been lost:

Die Kunst aber ist stark an und für sich und bezwingt auch solche, die den geistigen Willen, welchem sie dient, verpönen würden, wenn sie ihn verstünden. (Mann XII: 408)

Palestrina is thus not naïve art: it is self-conscious and parodic. It chooses epigonalism and familiarity. And hence it does contain something new for Mann, the self-consciousness of irony, which is a form of aesthetic morality:

Diese archaischen Quinten und Quarten, diese Orgellaute und Kirchenschlüsse – sind sie nichts als Mimikry und historische Atmosphäre? Bekunden sie nicht zugleich eine seelische Neigung und geistige Gestimmtheit, in der man, fürchte ich, das Gegenteil einer politisch tugendhaften Neigung und Stimmung erkennen muß? (Mann XII: 408)

The artist, Palestrina, exemplifies an ethics of art which is different to that of politics or aesthetics: it is the trueness to the work of art itself before philosophy, ideology or even aesthetics. The work of art remains true to its origins: it is not a means of making history or
confirming trends:

Ob nicht die Aufgabe unserer Zeit, anstatt die Sechsteltöne zu suchen, in rasendem Tempo vorwärtsstürmen zu wollen, jedes Errungene einem Neuen zuliebe vernichten zu wollen – ob nicht vielmehr die Aufgabe unserer Zeit eine liebevolle Besinnung wünschenswert erscheine ließe auf das, was entstanden ist und was gegenwärtig entsteht, und zwar nicht nur auf das, was an der Oberfläche schwimmt? Der Irrtum herrscht zu jeder Zeit vor, aber er hat immer eine andere Färbung. (Mann XII: 415)

Palestrina’s era is Pfitzner’s and his own: art should fulfill the function of a conservative, not a radical-progressive force, where conservatism involves re-evaluation and re-validation of the achievements of the past, not simple epigonalism.

However in the environment of the war, Pfitzner’s artistic ethos gains a political aspect: in exemplifying trueness to German culture, it becomes a political force. The communal aspect of this text becomes clear in the opposition between Palestrina and the Florentine Camerata (Busoni and the musical “futurists”), expressed in the song of Silla, his pupil who will leave Palestrina and Rome for the new music of Florence:

Welch herrlich freier Zug geht doch durch unsre Zeit!
Ist’s nicht bei dem Gedanken schon
Ans heitere Florenz,
Als dürfte sich mein eignes Wesen
Vom dummen Joch der Allgemeinheit lösen,
Und die höchste Stufe erklimmen.
Wie in meiner lieben Kunst die Singestimmen,
Abhängig von jeher, erbärmlich polyphon,
Sich dort befrein zu Einzelexistenz. (Mann XII: 416-417)

Polyphony is the credo of the Gemeinschaft, against which the new monody of the secular opera is the voice of the individual and of individual freedom – a movement which Palestrina/Pfitzner and Mann see as politics disguised as art:

Denn Befreiung, individualistische Emanzipation in ideellem Zusammenhang mit unendlichem Menschheitsfortschritt, das ist Politik, das ist die Demokratie (Mann XII: 417)

This art is abstract, theoretical, and ignores the verities and profundities of culture and identity:

Nun haben Dilettanten in Florenz
Aus heidnischen, antiken Schriften
Sich Theorien künstlich ausgedacht,
Nach denen wird fortan Musik gemacht. (Mann XII: 417-418)

By contrast his art is “ironic conservatism,” the self-knowing art which chooses to stay faithful to the individual and group past, rather than set off on a journey of self-fulfilment and group betterment which is determined by the goals of Enlightenment teleology:

So steigt gewiß in stetigem Befreien
Die ganze Menschheit noch zu ungeahnter Höh! (Mann XII: 417)

However this ironic conservatism is not maintained in the hope of renewal, but in the melancholy recognition that the era of greatness is over. Completion, not renewal, is the task of the artist. Self-reflexive melancholy is the note which Pfitzner strikes in this figure and which impresses Mann so strongly:

Wenn Palestrina krank ist in seiner Seele – und das ist er wohl –, so ist seine Melancholie doch mit einem Selbstbewußtsein verbunden, das ihn aus dem Munde der ‘Vorgänger’ die Worte vernehmen läßt:
Der Kreis der Hochgestimmten ist voll Sehnen
Nach Jenem, der ihn schließt: Erwählter Du! (Mann XII: 419)

While Pfitzner had completed most of Palestrina before the outbreak of war, Mann, in 1917, recognizes the truth of Pfitzner’s melancholy: the era of German greatness which was expressed in music as the German art par excellence and which reached from Bach through Beethoven to Wagner, is over. Pfitzner’s melancholy derives from the recognition that he is an old man at the end of an era, who does not have the power to recreate himself:

Ich bin ein alter, todesmüder Mann
Am Ende einer großen Zeit.
Und vor mir seh’ ich nichts als Traurigkeit –
Ich kann es nicht mehr zwingen aus der Seele. (Mann XII: 419)

Palestrina’s response to the demands of the new era is shared by Mann in 1917. Over the following decade, in the face of the recognition of the inescapability of politics, Mann will change his views. But here he shares Palestrina’s rejection of the new as the product of consciousness alone, unaided by the generative powers of the unconscious:

Ihr lebten stark in einer starken Zeit,
Die dunkel noch im Unbewußten lag
Als wie ein Korn in Mutter-Erde-Schoß,  
Doch des Bewußtseins Licht, das tödlich grelle,  
Das störend aufsteigt wie der freche Tag,  
Ist feind dem süßen Traumgewirk, dem Künste-Schaffen;  
Der Stärkste streckt vor solcher Macht die Waffen.  (Mann XII: 420)

For Mann, Palestrina’s melancholy is the only appropriate answer to the times: “Palestrina ist der Mann des pessimistischen Ethos” (Mann XII: 420). To oppose this would be to espouse “optimistisches Pathos,” and thereby to bend art towards politics, forcing it to serve a set of restrictive ideas:

Wenn die Welt in einer Richtung ‘fortschreitet,’ an die man durchaus nicht glaubt, obgleich man solchen Fortschritt als notwendig und unabwendbar anerkennt und selbst von Natur nicht umhinkam, ihn zu fördern: dann ist es unmöglich, pathetisch zu sein; der Sinn der Zeit nimmt persönlich-ethischen Charakter an, es gilt ‘dein Erdenpensum’; es gilt dein’ Gestalt vollkommen zu machen; es gilt auszuhalten, - ich sage nicht durchzuhalten. (Mann XII: 420-421)

Melancholy becomes the ethically right position of the artist, and in adopting this stance the artist becomes a hero:

Was immer er nun auch sei, - Palestrina findet die Kraft es zu sein’ und indem er das notwendige Werk schafft, das nur er seiner Natur und zeitlichen Stellung nach zu schaffen vermögend ist, die Messe, welche neuzeitlich entwickelte Kunst mit ‘kirchlichem Gefühl’ vereinigt, wird ihm zugleich das poetische Glück, die Figural-Musik vor der Flamme zu bewahren, - er wird zum ‘Retter der Musik’ durch eine erhaltend-schöpferische Tat. Er weiß nun, was er ist, wohin er gehört und wohin nicht, oder doch, wie weit er hierhin und dorthin gehört; er kennt sein Schicksal, seine Ehre und seinen Platz, und er ‘will guter Dinge und friedvoll sein.’ (Mann XII: 421)

And yet, even here in the midst of his advocacy of Pritzner/Palestrina’s conservatism, a note of concern is audible. Mann is worried by the negativity of this stance, by the adoption of melancholy retreatism as an answer to the “necessary and incontrovertible progress of history.” 5 Mann recognizes the artifice of Pfitzner’s “versöhnlicher Fabel-Schluß” by which Palestrina becomes the culture-hero and the saviour of church polyphony. However

5 Lepenies passim. Robert Merton’s category of “retreatism is translated as “Rückzugsverhalten” in Lepenies’ study of the relationship between cultural manifestations of melancholy and socio-historical development, Melancholie und Gesellschaft.
the weight of Palestrina lies in the romanticism and the sympathy with the past:

Ihre Sympathie gilt nicht dem Neuen, sondern dem Alten, nicht der Zukunft, sondern der Vergangenheit, nicht dem Leben, sondern -. Ich weiß nicht, welche Scheu mich abhält, das Wort zu Ende zu sagen, das Formel und Grundbestimmung aller Romantik ist. Aber hat man bemerkt, daß die Frauengestalt des Werkes, Lukrezia, nicht dem Leben gehört, daß sie nur ein Bild ist und ein Schatten? […] Aber das ist eine besondere Art von Trübehheit und Leere, fruchtbarer augenscheinlich also manche Helligkeit und Fülle, denn Palestrina’s höchstes Werk geht daraus hervor, und die Geschiedene ist es, die es ihm einflüstert. Hätte die Lebende es vermocht? (Mann XII: 421-422)

In working through his beliefs, identifications and thoughts in the Betrachtungen, Mann begins the process of clarifying and in some cases of freeing himself from them. Here we can find the origins of the changes which would lead to Mann’s fundamental rethinking of his national, cultural and political attitudes. The expression, “Sympathie mit dem Tode,” which Mann adopts as a trope of his creativity from this period onwards, originates in early plans for Der Zauberberg, but finds resonance in Pfitzner’s use of the same expression in an early meeting of the composer and the writer (Mann XII: 423-424). In his discussion of this theme Mann comes to a point of speechlessness, where he can go no further without endangering his argument. At this point he comes to consider the nature of music as a medium of expression of ideas and is obliged to recognize his ambivalence towards the nature of the Pfitzner’s leitmotif in the opera.

Mann’s problems of interpretation begin arise in relation to the figure of Palestrina’s dead wife and muse, Lukrezia. Mann’s line of questioning repeatedly ends with the unsayable – or rather with what he does not want to say: “Ist der inspirierende Genius dieses Künstlers überhaupt das Leben und nicht vielmehr –” (Mann XII: 422). His line of thinking is clear. Love and romanticism signify death – at least in as far as it can be put into words. At this point Mann turns for the first time to the musical as opposed to the verbal text, identifying the most striking musical theme of the opera, the enigmatic cadence which is linked to Palestrina’s creativity:

Es gibt in der Palestrina-Partitur ein Thema – es ist wohl eigentlich das wichtigste von allen […] dessen Bedeutung nicht ohne weiteres klar und das nicht so geradlin bei einem Namen zu nennen ist […] Es ist eine melodische Figur von außerordentliche Schönheit, bestehend aus zwei gleichsam mit wehmütig wissenden
Mann identifies the points at which this cadence originates and re-emerges throughout the opera, structuring the events in relation to the central theme of romanticism, death and creativity: in the prelude, following the archaic motive associated with Palestrina, accompanying both Borromeo’s command to Palestrina to compose “das erhaltende und krönende Werk” and the inspirational words of the dead masters during the process of composition of the Missa Papae Marcelli, and forming “unwagnerisch-untheatralisch, den ruhevoll-resignierten Abschluß des ganzen Gedichtes.”

Es ist das Symbol für einen Teil seines Wesens oder für sein Wesen in einer bestimmten Beziehung: das Symbol seines künstlerischen Schicksals und seiner zeitlichen Stellung, das metaphysische Wort dafür, daß er kein Anfang, sondern ein Ende ist, das Motiv des ‘Schlußsteins,’ der Blick der Schwermut, der Blick zurück … Aber ich sagte noch nicht, an welcher Stelle dies Thema noch ausgesprochen wird: dort nämlich, wo vom Abscheiden der Lukrezia die Rede ist, - wahrhaftig und unverkennbar! es bildet die symphonische Unterströmung zu jenem Worte Ighinos: ‘Da ward es trüb in ihm und leer’; es ist also zugleich das Symbol des seelischen Zustandes, in den Palestrina durch den Tod seines Weibes versetzt wurde, das Symbol seiner rückwärts oder vielmehr hinab, zum Schattenreich, gewandten Liebe, die sich in jener schöpferischen Wundernacht als inspirierende Kraft erweist; es ist, alles in allem, die zauberhaft wohlklingende Formel für seine besondere Art der Produktivität, eine Produktivität des Pessimismus, der Resignation und der Sehnsucht, eine romantische Produktivität. (Mann XII: 422-423)

The cadence supplies the missing verbal signifier, “death,” but combines the opposing meanings of death and creativity, romanticism and life for Mann. In music, that is, Mann can find expression of the ambivalence which he does not (yet) find in words. The word, “death,” is too narrow and too final for the creative impulse which the cadence expresses. The disjunction between musical motive and verbal signifier is striking. Mann has come upon the contradiction which he will engage with again on a personal and a national level in Doktor Faustus. He will resolve this contradiction through the creation of an artistic alter-ego, a composer, who, a decade younger than he, is able to reject tonality, romanticism, and all that it represents. Thomas Mann already in 1917 both understands that romanticism is a dead-end, and that he remains enthralled to it in spite of this knowledge.
He solves this problem in the essay by reverting from words to music: by refusing to speak the word which is the end-point of his logic, and instead turning to the musical text which also avoids identifying the morbidity of this romanticism, imbuing it instead with a powerful musical pathos.

In the final paragraphs of the essay Mann turns his attention to Pfitzner’s cultural chauvinism in the context of the late stage of the war and the likely defeat of Germany.


Is Pfitzner’s nationalism itself, he asks, a form of romantic death-wish, a final statement of German loyalty and truthfulness to self in the face of defeat and destruction? To this image of Pfitzner Mann opposes western political “Tugend,” the grouping of political, social and cultural values which he resented as an insult to German culture, and which had become the focus of his bitter split with his brother Heinrich. Thomas had read Heinrich’s Zola essay of 1915 in the following year, and the Palestrina-essay and the Betrachtungen were written in response to Heinrich’s pro-French cultural politics. Political “Tugend” is defined as:

die unbedingte und optimistische Parteinahme für die Entwicklung, den Fortschritt, die Zeit, das ‘Leben’; es ist die Absage an alle Sympathie mit dem Tode, welche als letztes Laster, als äußerste Verrottung der Seele verneint und verdammt wird. (Mann XII: 426)

Thomas’ resentment is directed at the European left, which betrays its own identity in favour of a mechanistic and superficial doctrine of progress and of life. Relating this opposition of political Tugend and cultural loyalty to the figures of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, healthy optimism and sickly pessimism, he rejects the former as a possibility for Germany. Germany is a late birth, “mit einem natürlichen Beruf zum Zweifel, zur Ironie und zur Schwermut.” The Nietzschean optimism of the west does not sit well with this late culture. The life, health, political “Tugend,” Enlightenment and progress
(Zivilisation) of the West are opposed to morbidity, sickliness, authenticity, Romanticism and conservatism (Kultur) of Germany. The former is related to Nietzschean affirmation of life and the latter to Schopenhaurian pessimism and enduring. This reversal to the Künstler/Bürger opposition of his earlier works, in particular Tonio Kröger and Death in Venice, is perhaps surprising, but is already indicative of an uncertainty in Mann’s argument, which has been lingering throughout his discussion of Pfitzner’s “Sympathie mit dem Tode.”

In his refusal to name the unnameable, his turn to the non-discursive form of music to deal with the outcome of his “Sympathie mit dem Tode,” and in his final ambivalent image of Pfitzner’s German nationalism as sacrifice and redemption in one, Mann’s uncertainty becomes clear. Already at this stage we can identify in the discussion of Palestrina a contradiction between his artistic-political stance of ironic conservatism, and the emerging recognition of with the morbidity of this artistic-political worldview. The German romanticism, encapsulated in all its problematic ambiguity in the figure of Pfitzner and the opera, Palestrina, continues to represent something, which even as he advanced to become an opponent of everything that the Beobachtungen stood for, – melancholy, retreatism, inwardness, and their corollary political irresponsibility, hero-worship and surrender of the political sphere to barbarians – he could not entirely surrender: namely the pathos of late tonal music, with its necessary romanticism and “Sympathie mit dem Tode.”

On the one hand Mann identifies with the German content of Pfitzner’s message at this time of crisis, but on the other hand, the commitment to disengagement, pessimism and melancholy contains an unresolved moment. The refusal to name the unnameable in this unfolding of the sequence of logic of Palestrina’s “Sympathie mit dem Tode” cannot mask the fact that this is a philosophy of death. Such a philosophy can be transposed into a past where its message is not immediately relevant to the present and can be turned into a “legend” in which political disengagement and artistic ethos change the world. However Mann was not blind to the dangers of either Pfitzner or Palestrina as artist figures, let alone as figures of national renewal. Retreatism, melancholy and inwardness are oriented towards the past, to death and the realm of the non-living (imagination). As he had recognized much earlier these values cannot be the only ones of the artist. The bohemian Adalbert, whose
horror of spring is ridiculed in Tonio Kröger, is an example of Mann’s early disaffection with the pose of nineteenth-century decadence. What then is behind the idealization of Pfitzner and Palestrina in addition to the powerful loyalty to national culture at a time of crisis? Mann’s jump in thinking from words to music at the point of naming the unnameable reveals the answer to this question: it is the power of the music, of the romantic, the unconscious, the instinctual which he cannot surrender to a bloodless “Tugendhaftigkeit.”

The cadence which he identifies so acutely in Palestrina is immensely powerful, making use of the most sophisticated techniques of late romantic harmony to suggest a mixture of contradictory human impulses which cannot be reduced to logical abstractions. It is difficult to listen to this work and not be moved powerfully by this theme which demands and achieves such a complex resolution. Mann’s loyalty beyond that to Germany and its culture, is to a romanticism which must be accepted and accommodated as a part of the human experience, and which finds expression in music, in the concept of resolution and ending, in thanatos. This idea, of course, is far from original in the context of fin-de-siècle decadence or even Freudian theory. However it is important for Mann in the Palestrina-essay in as much as it finds expression as music and romanticism in a form which he was powerfully affected by, and it continues to represent something which even as he advanced to become an opponent of everything that the Beobachtungen stood for – melancholy, retreatism, inwardness, and their corollary political irresponsibility, hero-worship and surrender of the political sphere to barbarians – he could not entirely surrender, namely the pathos of music, with its necessary romanticism and “Sympathie mit dem Tode.”

Mann’s Götterdämmerung did, of course, take place. The war was lost, the Second German Empire was finished, and life went on, even under the difficult conditions of the early Weimar Republic. Mann began the long and difficult process of coming to terms with the complexity of the relationship of art and politics over the following decade in Der Zauberberg and the essays in which he championed the cause of Weimar Republican politics. However his commitment to the German tradition of romanticism remained

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6 Cf. the harmonic analysis of the cadence, its variations and final resolution in Williamson 136,174-182.
resilient. His attempt in the essay “Von deutscher Republik” (1922) to turn the love of Novalis and German romanticism into the support for Enlightenment values and political democratisation is deeply unconvincing, if moving, as a testimony to the conflict between ethno-cultural identity and the recognition of the necessity of rational western-democratic political institutions for Germany. This latter commitment found expression in the essay, “Bekenntnis zum Sozialismus” of January 1933:

Sozialismus ist nichts anderes als der pflichtmäßige Entschluß, den Kopf nicht mehr vor den dringendsten Anforderungen der Materie, des gesellschaftlichen kollektiven Lebens in den Sand der himmlischen Dinge zu stecken, sondern sich auf die Seite derer zu schlagen, die der Erde einen Sinn geben wollen, einen Menschensinn. (Mann XII, 681)

1933 marked a breaking-point, in which the figure of Pfitzner re-emerged, this time as Mann’ enemy. In early February Mann had delivered a shortened version of the essay, “Leiden und Größe Richard Wagners,” to an appreciative Munich audience. Here Mann had brought his critical faculties to bear on Wagner’s romanticism and “Politikfremdheit,” and had criticised those who misused Wagner’s romantic nationalism in the name of contemporary politics. Shortly afterwards, in April that year, a coalition of powerful figures from the Munich music establishment, led by Pfitzner and Knappertsbusch, and including the “kecke[s] Sonntagskind,” Richard Strauss, put their names to an outraged, highly politicised and, for Mann, dangerous document, entitled, “Protest of the Richard-Wagner-Stadt-München,” in Die Münchner Neuesten Nachrichten of the weekend of the 16/17th of April, 1933.7 This attack on Mann’s political stance obliged the writer to take stock of his personal situation. As a direct result of Hans Pfitzner’s vicious response to what he saw as Mann’s betrayal of his culture and fatherland, Mann became a refugee from Nazi Germany.

Mann had voiced his criticisms of German romanticism throughout the twenties as he advanced to become the pre-eminent German spokesman against Nazism. Yet in 1928 he revised and republished the Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen with the Palestrina chapter largely intact. He had deleted some of the more wounding remarks about his brother, Heinrich and the Zola-essay which had caused such personal trouble. But the analysis of

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7 In chapter 19 of Doktor Faustus Adrian Leverkühn attends the premiere of Strauß’s opera, Salomé in Graz (Mann VI: 207-208). A fuller account of the “Protest der Richard-Wagner-Stadt München” is to be found in Mendelssohn 1992: 137-145.
*Palestrina* was retained with relatively few changes for republication at a time when Mann had already become the leading spokesman against Nazism and for the Weimar Republic. Within three years, as Klaus’ diary entries show, the family would be considering the possibility of political exile.\(^8\) The love of German romanticism, eschewed by the public persona, retreated to the private sphere of the writer’s inner life, like the homosexuality and the secret objects of his love with which it is strongly associated. The conflicting demands of heart and head, of the romantic-Wagnerian tradition of Germany and the democratic-cosmopolitan tradition of the West, while resolved at one level in the essays and cultural and political speeches, remained unresolved at a deeper level until the last great work, *Doktor Faustus*, in which the final confrontation had to take place.

Pfitzner remained true to the philosophy of retreatist *Innerlichkeit* and romanticism propagated in *Palestrina*, becoming a supporter of Nazism and of extreme nationalist cultural politics. In *Doktor Faustus* a veiled allusion is made to Pfitzner and others at the time of the Weimar Republic, as members of the Kridwiß circle, and as the “nationalistisch-wagnerisch-romantische[...] Reaktion, wie sie in München zu Hause war” (Mann VI: 515-516). After the war, Pfitzner became an embittered and ridiculous apologist for Nazism, for Mann a bizarre reminder of this obsolete and catastrophic worldview. Yet even in 1947, when Mann had finished *Doktor Faustus*, he retained an ambivalence regarding Pfitzner. On the one hand he remarked to Hermann Hesse and Bruno Walter on the eccentricity of Pfitzner’s behaviour in sending a telegram of support to Hans Frank shortly before his execution; on the other, he noted in the *Entstehung* the admiration for Pfitzner’s *Palestrina* expressed by the important émigré composer, performer, musicologist and teacher, Ernst Toch. Toch had commented that atonality had gained an exaggerated importance, and referred to the “eternally romantic” aspect of music:

> Gespräch mit Döblin und Ernst Toch über dessen Musik. Überraschend seine Bewunderung für Pfitzners ‘Palestrina.’ Zu viel Aufhebens werde gemacht von der Atonalität. Sie sei unwesentlich. Das Ewig-Romantische der Musik...’ (Mann XI: 177)

In spite of his own fundamental rethinking of the Schopenhaurian-Wagnerian-

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\(^8\) On 25th May, 1931 Klaus made the first of several entries regarding the family’s discussions of “die Notwendigkeit, Deutschland zu verlassen” (Mendelssohn 1992: 108).
Nietzschean tradition in which he had developed as a writer, and despite the (often exaggerated) influence of Adorno in the writing of *Doktor Faustus*, the figure of Hans Pfitzner continued to remain laden with significance for Mann.\(^9\) Twenty-five years after his first encounter, and decades after his final break with Pfitzner, Mann remained susceptible to one aspect of Pfitzner’s creativity: his powerful romanticism. More than Wagner, Pfitzner reminded Mann of his spiritual “Heimat” in the “Dreiklangwelt des *Ring*” (Mann XI: 208) and of his inability to make a full commitment to modernism in music. That corner in Mann’s heart, which could not abjure this tradition, that “Heimat seiner Seele,” exists in *Doctor Faustus* in the hidden figure of Pfitzner through the hidden musical, cultural and historical symbol of *Palestrina*.

The hiddenness of the *Palestrina* complex is indicative of its problematic nature for Mann even at this late stage of his life. The two sides of the writer remain in latent conflict, and in the final great work this conflict becomes a central theme: the conflict between Mann and his alter ego, Adrian Leverkühn as the conflict between the German artist steeped in the German tradition and the German artist willing and able to discard that tradition. Where Leverkühn has stepped forward out of the triadic world of the *Ring*, Mann remains with one foot in Hollywood and one foot in Kaisersaschern, unwilling and unable to go back (as did Pfitzner, ending up as an object of contempt) or to go forward (as does Adrian, reflecting the trajectories of Schoenberg and Adorno), rejecting the western triadic tradition and stepping into a new deterministic and modernist universe. In reflecting the tragic political directions of the twenties must Adrian’s art share the moral opprobrium of those developments, or is it capable of both representing the reality – foreshadowing and accompanying these developments - *and* maintaining moral distance? Is Adrian damned by his pact with the devil in *Palestrina* – or is he saved by it?

Adrian Leverkühn, Mann’s alter-ego, is capable of separating structure and feeling, consciousness and unconsciousness in his modernist search for individuation. He is able,

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\(^9\) The identification of Adorno as the devil in chapter 25 of *Dr. Faustus* has recently been questioned. Maar: 113-130 suggests the composer, Gustav Mahler, as the more likely influence for the physical characteristics of the devil as composer and music-critic. Be that as it may, the figure is probably a composite of both characters. Cf. also Vaget 2004: 237.
that is, to reject the romanticism that Mann in 1917 cannot, and which migrates inward under the pressure of social and political events of the Weimar and Nazi period. At the end of his life, after completion of *Doktor Faustus*, Mann would remain strongly aware of the paradox of his alter-ego: that Adrian Leverkühn has rescued music through the opposite strategy to Palestrina. For Adrian Leverkühn eliminates that which has proven so dangerous, the romantic “Sympathie mit dem Tode,” which, for all its expressive beauty has become for him just meretricious theatricality. Mann cannot go so far. He remains in thrall to the “Dreiklangwelt des *Ring*.” And yet, as long as this attraction remains, the attraction to the possibility of resolution and therewith of redemption through art, symbolized in the tonic-dominant relationship of western music, the possibility remains of its attendant decline and morbidity, with the inwardness, anti-politics, the surrender of the political realm and the re-emergence of the barbaric, the instinctual and the primitive. Pfitzner and *Palestrina* continued until the end of his life to signify this troubling and contradictory affection for him, even long after Pfitzner himself had become a contemptible dupe of the Nazis and a figure of ridicule in the post-war era.

The ambiguity inherent in Serenus’ description of the ending of *Dr. Fausti Weheklag* poses the question: does the new system represent a final break with tonality, which will become a relic of the past and of past problematics? Or is the new system a temporary deviation from the path of humanity, something necessary, determined by the time, but so extreme as to be unique – and hence a historical *non sequitur*, like the Nazism which it accompanied? Is the sense of familiarity and ‘at homeness’ with the tonal world of the *Ring* and *Palestrina* an expression of an essential humanity which has been stretched beyond its capacities by the history of the twentieth century, but which retains a validity beyond the immediate history of Nazism? Or is it something that has finished in the cataclysm of the Enlightenment, eternally discredited by the breakdown of European civilisation, no longer able to function as a mode of human expression, as Adorno would have it?

These are questions which remained with Mann even after finishing *Doktor Faustus*. As is documented in the *Entstehung* and elsewhere, Mann came to depend on Adorno for the theoretical underpinning of the novel’s musicology. However Adorno was not the only figure from whom Mann sought possible alternative cognitive structures. The focus on
musical “futurism,” Schoenberg, Adorno and the twelve-tone system in interpretation of the novel has left questions regarding Mann’s earlier, musical attachments and dispositions. The emigré musicologist, composer and teacher at the New School for Social Research, Ernst Toch advocated ways to modernity in music other than through atonalism and its corollary, twelve-tone serialism, albeit less brilliantly than Theodor Adorno in Die Philosophie der neuen Musik, the manuscript of which Mann read and used for Doktor Faustus. Toch’s interpretations of modernity appeared to provide for Mann the possibility of rescuing the triadic system from the drastic surgery of Adorno and Schoenberg. Toch’s comments, related in Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus, provided the impetus for alternative approaches to art and modernity, which, if ultimately subordinated to those of Adorno, nevertheless reflect Mann’s doubts and irresolutions regarding the latter’s sweeping judgements.

Who was right? Toch or Adorno? And what did this mean for Mann’s own love of tonality and ongoing fondness for that unnameable cadence in Palestrina? Was he a relic of the nineteenth century? Or did his parodic vision justify his elevation to the pantheon of modernism, alongside Joyce, Kafka and Proust? Mann’s preoccupation in the late diary entries with Harry Levin’s verdict on his modernist credentials indicates his unease with his transitional position in literary history between realism and modernism, mimesis and parody. Would the non-parodic new become the norm, leaving him a figure of the transition from the classic-romantic era? Or would his parodic style become the new norm, the recognition of the attraction and the danger of romanticism, the attraction and the distance, the pathos and the irony, which is the hallmark of his style?

In renouncing the German humanist and romantic tradition, Adrian Leverkühn leaves his friend and countryman, Serenus – and his creator, Mann – far behind, still hoping for redemption through art. Serenus has not begun to grasp the extent to which his attitudes have been responsible for the situation in which he finds himself at the end of the novel, the destruction of Germany by Nazism. Mann recognizes the lines of genesis and development of Nazism in Kaiseraschern, but cannot bring himself to believe completely in the modernism that is the consequence of this recognition. His art remains at the point of transition from realism to modernism, showing two faces both as a late nineteenth-century
Künstlerroman and as a piece of parody so thorough in its texture as to foreshadow postmodernist techniques of the end of the twentieth century.

Adrian, a decade younger than Mann, is willing to sacrifice the past. After the Teufelsgespräch in Palestrina, at the point where Adrian Leverkühn abjures parody as the end-point of modern art and goes on to discover artistic originality and creativity in new forms of inspiration drawn from the reality around him in his final works, he surpasses Mann himself, for whom parody remained the epitome of modern art. Mann creates in Adrian Leverkühn an alter ego who can bid farewell to the past; but he himself cannot follow in the footsteps of his radically modernist creation. Mann could not abjure his love of the harmonic triad, even in its death throes from Wagner to Pfitzner, for the sake of the twelve-tone system of composition. With his origins in the “Dreiklangswelt des ‘Ringes’” he is not able to turn his back on the tradition that had been so productive and had provided him with so much inspiration. Hence the significance of Pfitzner and Palestrina in the novel. In the Palestrina-theme is preserved Mann’s admiration for and ongoing love of the work of Pfitzner in spite of everything – his contempt for the man, his loathing of the politics and his recognition that this cultural tradition was complicit in the birth of Nazism, even an accessory to it. Hans Pfitzner and his opera accompany Thomas Mann from 1917 until the end of his creative life and function as a hidden symbol of the Mann’s ambivalent feelings about the creativity of his protagonist, alter-ego, and counter-ego, Leverkühn. He cannot accompany his younger countryman into the modernist future with its outright rejection of tradition in favour of innovation, and its refusal of redemption and resolution in favour of description and understanding (Erkenntnis). Pfitzner remains Mann’s nemesis until the end.

Works Cited