Political Ambiguities in *Under Western Eyes* and *Doktor Faustus*

The political novel requires the writer to reconcile the personal themes of literature with the general concerns of politics. Because political postulates are narrowly systematic and try to offer absolute answers, they are at odds with literature which is intentionally complex and which often demonstrates the illusory nature of definite solutions. The political novelist's task is to harmonize these contradictory tendencies. Although, in non-fictional statements, Mann and Conrad voice ideological biases, *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes* present a balanced picture of the political situations in Germany and Russia. Mann and Conrad solve the problem of the political novel by transcending personal prejudices in order to preserve the more ambiguous and complex vision of art. They achieve this balance by using a hero who is representative of his country without being a political manipulator like Dostoevskij's Peter Vergevonskij or the victim of an oppressive system like Büchner's Woyzeck or Orwell's Winston Smith. Leverkühn and Razumov are special in that they are victims of a political system with which they are to a large extent in complicity. But this approach leads to a difficulty in that Mann and Conrad do not spell out at what point this complicity becomes morally suspect, becomes an ambiguity whose implications appear particularly critical when the individual fate is also the national fate. Thus, by structuring their novels around the parallel between hero and country, Mann and Conrad are to some extent forced to play devil's advocate. By not only condemning but also saving their heroes, the authors do at times suggest that it is possible to find some form of justification for the despotism of the German and Russian power structure. At the same time, the parallel between hero and country offers advantages which counterbalance and sometimes even exploit this weakness. The device of the representative hero keeps the reader interested in individualized characters, and, more to the point, it helps to preserve the complexities of socio-political dilemmas. The technique creates ambiguities that do not permit the reader to side with one political system without making concessions to others, compelling him to appreciate both the strengths and the weaknesses of political alternatives. So the reader, allowed to
sympathize with the self-destructive heroes, is ultimately bound to respond with some compassion to the doomed nations they represent. We are thereby effectively prevented from morally condemning Germany and Russia without also appreciating their grandiose ambitions.

Leverkühn and Razumov are essentially apolitical men. Since Mann and Conrad are more interested in a political milieu than a particular ideology, it is important that Leverkühn and Razumov do not embrace political doctrines. Leverkühn enjoys the artist’s socially privileged position where he is not expected to exhibit any social or political conscience. Zeitblom imposes on himself the task of guarding Leverkühn’s hermetically sealed world against outside intrusions. Only Leverkühn’s aesthetic theories act as commentary on political attitudes while the composer himself seems unaware of his symbolic role. Whenever Leverkühn is present at political dinner conversations, he is consistently described as an indifferent spectator. But where the artist Leverkühn can afford to ignore politics, an average person like Razumov is only too aware of political realities. Conrad shows how Razumov initially avoids all political commitments because he is afraid of running afoul of unpredictable political forces. When Haldin’s visit imposes on him the choice between two equally unattractive political alternatives, Razumov, who had earlier rejected both autocrats and revolutionaries, now becomes a double agent acting in both interests. Making decisions only to save his skin, Razumov in fact avoids making a political commitment in spite of the political nature of his actions. Leverkühn and Razumov have to be unwitting political actors because otherwise their actions would be coloured by their political convictions and the picture of a political situation would lose some of its complexity. Moreover, since the reader tends to identify ‘apolitical’ with ‘neutral’ and ‘neutral’ with ‘objective,’ he will be inclined to suspend his critical judgment to accept the authors’ words as unbiased observations.

Their apolitical stance makes Leverkühn and Razumov political symbols of a special kind. They have no direct or intentional bearing on a political situation and speak for it only because it transects their lives. Through Leverkühn Mann wants to understand the mentality of Nazi Germany just as Conrad uses Razumov to elucidate the Russian character around the time of the Revolution. Mann indicates that he wants to deal with Germany ‘rein psychologisch’ in order to unveil ‘das Rätsel im Charakter und Schicksal dieses Volkes’ and Conrad echoes this aim when he states that his novel ‘was an attempt to render not so

1 Thomas Mann, ‘Deutschland und die Deutschen,’ Gesammelte Werke (Frankfurt: S. Fischer 1960) xi, 1121
much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself. Their intention is more moral than political. Leverkühn and Razumov are therefore political heroes only because their moral attitudes are typical of their country. Mann and Conrad make the symbolic connection between hero and country particularly strong. Mann explains this connection by resorting to the concept of 'mythic identification' which he borrows from Freud and Jung. 'Mythic identification' means that a person lives someone else's life as a 'weihevolle Wiederholung,' a process made possible because each human being is a combination of 'formelhaften und individuellen Elementen.' This concept permits Mann to present Leverkühn as the latest reincarnation of Faust in a line that includes Luther, Beethoven, and Nietzsche. Leverkühn now takes his place as the epitome of German culture, as a man who is Germany. In Freud und die Zukunft,' Mann's discussion of how Napoleon identified with Charlemagne illuminates Leverkühn's special relationship with Germany:


Mann sees in Faust an appropriate paradigm for the German national character because 'ein einsamer Denker und Forscher, ein Theolog und Philosoph in seiner Klause, der aus Verlangen nach Weltgenügs und Weltherrschaft seine Seele dem Teufel verschreibt' is symptomatic of the Nazi period 'wo Deutschland buchstäblich der Teufel holt.' Conrad explains Razumov's relationship to Russia in surprisingly similar terms, although there is no evidence that he was aware of 'mythic identification' as such. Like Mann, Conrad accounts for political circumstances by citing innate qualities of the national mind. Since Razumov is an orphan, Mother Russia becomes his only parent, and he alludes to his special relationship with his country by exclaiming: 'I don't want anyone to claim me. But Russia can't disown me. She cannot! ... I am it.'

3. Mann, 'Freud und die Zukunft,' Gesammelte Werke ix, 494
4. Ibid., 492
5. Ibid., 496
6. Mann, 'Deutschland und die Deutschen,' 1131
7. Conrad, Under Western Eyes, 209. All further references to this novel will appear in parentheses in the text.
between hero and country in *Under Western Eyes* and *Doktor Faustus* goes deeper than a mere political sympathy and touches the innermost fibre of the individual and the collective mind.

In both novels the hero’s personal fate speaks in a more than incidental way for the national experience. Although the parallel between hero and country cannot extend to Leverkühn’s or Razumov’s every action and thought, it must no doubt be taken very seriously. The argument that a property which is affirmed or denied of a whole must be affirmed or denied of each of its parts is of course a well-known fallacy. But the analogy may be valid for most points of the comparison. In *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes* we must be ready to accept certain ambiguities in the equation because art represents those contradictions of life which are inaccessible to science or logic. However, since the question of the hero’s guilt and exoneration is central to the meaning of *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes*, we must ask ourselves if the political reasoning goes beyond the limits of aesthetically justified ambiguities. The answer to this problem must be sought in the arguments Mann and Conrad advance to accuse and then to justify Leverkühn and Razumov.

Razumov and Leverkühn are presented as sinners who are eventually saved because they successfully negotiate a moral night journey. Razumov double-crosses both the autocratic establishment and the revolutionary movement because in a country where a man’s future is ‘menaced by the lawlessness of autocracy — for autocracy knows no law — and the lawlessness of revolution’ (p. 77), he must protect himself as best he can. Razumov experiences Haldin’s unexpected visit as an irrational event which disrupts his ‘normal, practical, everyday life’ (p. 10). He first considers saving Haldin but then betrays him because ‘as long as this man lived and the present institutions endured’ (p. 25) he could not feel safe. Razumov’s betrayal is an act he would normally consider morally reprehensible. His guilt is compounded when, in an unforeseen twist, the revolutionaries assume that he was Haldin’s accomplice and Razumov leaves them in this belief. Like his foes, Razumov now turns into an evil, scheming actor who manipulates others. At this point, he adopts the methods of the political powers who victimize him. However, even during Razumov’s darkest hours, Conrad does not allow us to forget that his hero deserves our pity, especially since he longs for ‘independence from that degrading method of direct lying which at times he found it almost impossible to practice’ (pp. 279-80). His guilt is mitigated by the fact that he is the pawn of irrational forces beyond his control and by his obvious distaste for his actions.

Razumov is eventually transformed into a man of superior moral fibre
because of his confession to the revolutionaries. His confession is the result of a second irrational event in his life, his unexpected love for Natalia Haldin. Conrad hints at Razumov's moral salvation when he has him betray himself 'back into truth and peace' (p. 358) and classifies his self-destructive act as a release 'from the prison of lies' (p. 363). Punished by the revolutionaries, Razumov ends his days as a deaf cripple. But his life takes on a new significance: he becomes a voice of wisdom, a shrine to which even those who have destroyed him make regular pilgrimages. No matter how ironic and perhaps unconvincing the image of Razumov as a sage may be, it is obvious that Conrad wants us to see his character's irrational self-destruction as a triumph of good over evil. Betraying Haldin has initiated a moral night journey which now ends with confession and promise of salvation for the sinner.

The paradox of the 'holy sinner' is even more pronounced in *Doktor Faustus* where Leverkühn makes a pact with the devil because he believes that irrational forces are needed to break the dominance of sterile reason. Unlike Razumov, Leverkühn is not guilty of immoral actions but of ideas with dangerous political implications. Although Leverkühn's aesthetic theories are a direct attack on Germany's cultural heritage, they also suggest mental attitudes which could be applied to social and political phenomena. Leverkühn advocates a dialectical process whose aim is to transcend the sterile present by first destroying the existing order of things. Citing Kleist's essay on marionettes, Leverkühn argues that civilization must be regenerated by means of a night journey:

Und dabei ist nur von Aesthetischem die Rede, von der Anmut, der freien Grazie, die eigentlich dem Gliedermann und dem Gott, das heißt dem Unbewußtsein oder einem unendlichen Bewußtsein vorbehalten ist, während jede zwischen Null und Unendlichkeit liegende Reflexion die Grazie tötet. Das Bewußtsein müße ... durch ein Unendliches gegangen sein, damit die Grazie sich wiedereinfinde, und Adam müsse ein zweites Mal vom Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen. 8

Civilization has reached such an unhealthy state of self-consciousness that 'auf fromme nüchterne Weis, mit rechten Dingen, kein Werk mehr zu tun und die Kunst unmöglich geworden ist ohne 'Teufelshilf' (p. 498). Selling his soul, Leverkühn eventually achieves the desired aesthetic breakthrough in music. Fully conscious of the consequences his pact with the devil will have for him, Leverkühn accepts demonic help because he

8 Mann, *Doktor Faustus* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer 1971) 309. All further references to this novel will appear in parentheses in the text.
believes that his self-sacrifice will save art without affecting anything outside it. But Mann, having explored the relationship between art and life throughout his writing career, suspects that even the most abstract ideas may have practical consequences. He therefore introduces political discussions, duly commented on by Zeitblom, whose main line of argument parallels Leverkuhn’s theory of music. The Winfried students, for instance, believe that a new primitivism must replace Germany’s sophisticated culture if a political regeneration is to be achieved. Both Leverkuhn and the Nazi ideologists also contend that ‘interessantere Lebenserscheinungen ... haben wohl immer dies Doppelgesicht von Vergangenheit und Zukunft, wohl immer sind sie progressiv und regressiv in einem’ (p. 194). Moreover, the combination of extreme formal organization and demonic spontaneity characteristic of Leverkuhn’s masterpiece ‘Dr. Faust Weheklage’ reappears in the political contention that ‘dämonische Kräfte stecken neben Ordnungsqualitäten in jeder vitalen Bewegung’ (p. 125). Intellectually neither Mann nor the reader can condone these arguments. But emotionally the reader is on Leverkuhn’s side because Mann makes him watch the composer’s physical agony and moral self-accusations over Echo’s death. Indeed, by the time ‘Dr. Fausti Weheklage’ signals Leverkuhn’s artistic success, the reader is prepared to accept that the composer had concluded an unholy pact out of despair and tragic necessity.

Like Razumov, Leverkuhn is promised salvation at the end of the novel when he faces physical deterioration and descends into madness. Mann suggests that Leverkuhn deserves to be saved because he is a superior human being who sacrifices himself for an aesthetic ideal. The end therefore justifies the means. But Leverkuhn is exonerated even on a purely moral or religious level. Early in Doktor Faustus Mann prepares the paradoxical ground on which Leverkuhn will be saved:

Die contritio ohne jede Hoffnung und als völliger Unglaube an die Möglichkeit der Gnade und Verzeihung, als die felsenfeste Überzeugung des Sünders, er habe es zu grob gemacht, und selbst die unendliche Güte reiche nicht aus, seine Sünde zu verzeihen, — erst das ist die wahre Zerknirschung. (p. 248)

In a dramatic scene following the first performance of ‘Dr. Fausti Weheklage’ Leverkuhn meets the condition of this ‘proud contrition’ because he rejects salvation ‘nicht aus formaler Treue zum Pakt und weil es “zu spät” ist, sondern weil er die Positivität der Welt, zu der man ihn retten möchte, die Lüge ihrer Gottseligkeit, von ganzer Seele verachtet’ (pp. 489-90). Leverkuhn actually considers his sins so monstrous that no forgiveness could ever be possible. It turns out that, in the paradoxical
world of Doktor Faustus, Leverkühn may not have to pay the price for his bargain with the devil after all; for, when Zeitblom notices in Leverkühn’s traits ‘etwas Vergeistig-Leidendes, ja Christushaftes’ (p. 482), we are meant to understand that the transformation from sinner to saint is complete.

In each novel, then, the hero is exonerated by suffering and the attainment of some higher state of consciousness. The reader is at least conditionally prepared to give Leverkühn and Razumov the benefit of the doubt, to accept their transgression as a necessary part of their greatness. Are we to conclude from these individual experiences that the political sins of Germany and Russia can be excused along the same line of argument? The parallel between hero and country should perhaps not be taken to its logical conclusion. Mann and Conrad could never be accused of intentionally wanting to justify the kind of despotism that destroyed so many lives in Germany and Russia. But the exoneration of Razumov and Leverkühn nevertheless suggests a parallel exoneration of Russia and Germany. The suspicion that the device of the representative hero offers a structurally motivated justification for Germany and Russia finds some further support in the picture Mann draws of Germany and Conrad of Russia. In certain fairly direct statements about the two countries, Mann and Conrad argue that Germany and Russia are superior to other Western nations. On some level, then, Mann and Conrad invite us to consider the possibility that some form of despotism may be an inevitable side-effect of highly desirable national qualities.

Conrad defends Russia by comparing it to Switzerland. Although Razumov is generally hostile to the Russian political scene, this hostility is often mitigated by his love for the mystical Russian people and by his dislike for Switzerland. The ‘orderly roofslopes’ of Geneva appear, to Razumov as ‘comely without grace, hospitable without sympathy’ (p. 141), in short, as cold and mediocre. Russia is superior to Switzerland because, like Razumov, it recklessly risks perdition in its search for exceptional greatness. The complacency of the West, its ‘bargain with fate’ (p. 114), cannot, in the final analysis, compete with Russia’s quest for ‘some better form of freedom than an artificial conflict of parties’ (p. 106). Conrad makes the same point again when he contrasts Razumov and the teacher of languages in terms of temperament and value system. Unlike Razumov, the narrator is a passive and mediocre person who describes himself as ‘old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way’ (p. 143). He is a tolerant spectator who is reluctant to take any active part in the events played out before his eyes so that he produces even on himself ‘the effect of a dumb helpless ghost, of an anxious immaterial thing that could only hover about without the power to protect or guide by as much as a
whisper' (p. 126). What is more, this British citizen, who resides in
democratic Switzerland, tends to shake his head not only at Razumov's
apparently unwise, destructive, and morally reprehensible actions but
also at Geneva's 'prosaic virtues' (p. 336) and 'desolation of slumbering
respectability' (p. 335). In comparison with the mediocrity of the liberal
humanistic tradition, Russia's turbulent and demonic political ex-
periments gain some merit.

Like the language teacher in Under Western Eyes, Zeitblom is a
representative of liberal humanism who functions as a contrast to
Leverkühn. By temperament and education Zeitblom is a reasonable and
cautious man who believes that it is better 'der Welt Vertrauen ein-
zuflößen, als ihre Leidenschaften zu erregen' (p. 292). Although he
generally approves of his friend's artistic accomplishments, he is always
uneasy about their political implications. But, like the language teacher,
Zeitblom is attacked not only for his mediocrity but also for his ineffi-
ciency. In spite of his intellectual insights and his ability to analyze
Leverkühn's theories politically, Zeitblom remains a passive spectator of
the fateful steps leading friend and country to self-destruction. And, like
the language teacher, Zeitblom eventually suspects the value of his own
tradition and, by offering the faint hope that good will come out of evil,
he hesitantly endorses the course of action taken by Leverkühn and Ger-
many. As 'Dr. Fausti Weheklage' ends on the high G of a cello, Zeitblom
comments:

Dann ist nichts mehr, — Schweigen und Nacht. Aber der nachschwingend im
Schweigen hängende Ton, der nicht mehr ist, dem nur die Seele noch nach-
lauscht, und der Ausklang der Trauer war, ist es nicht mehr, wandelt den Sinn,
steht als ein Licht in der Nacht. (p. 490)

At the moment of the Allied invasion, this shimmer of light in
Leverkühn's dark masterpiece finds an echo in Zeitblom's final
recapitulation of Germany's ill-fated destiny:

Deutschland, die Wangen hektisch gerötet, taumelte dazumal auf der Höhe
wüster Triumfe, im Begriffe, die Welt zu gewinnen kraft des einen Vertragtes,
den es zu halten gesonnen war, und den es mit seinem Blute gezeichnet hatte.
Heute stürzt es, von Dämonen umschlungen, hinab von Verzweiflung zu Ver-
zerflüchtung. Wann wird es des Schlundes Grund erreichen? Wann wird aus letzter
Hoffnunglosigkeit, ein Wunder, das über den Glauben geht, das Licht der
Hoffnung tagen? Ein einsamer Mann faltet seine Hände und spricht: Gott sei
eurer armen Seele gnädig, mein Freund, mein Vaterland. (p. 510)
These two passages seem to suggest that both Leverkühn and Germany qualify as 'holy sinners' whose salvation is made possible through 'proud contrition,' a hope beyond hopelessness.

Although 'mythic identification' reinforces the connection between hero and country, the parallel between personal and national fate in *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes* should not be considered on a strict one-to-one basis. Mann and Conrad know that the parallel must break down before its logic leads to an approval or justification of despotism. At the same time, it would be short-sighted to deny the logic of the parallel whenever it suggests attitudes we feel uncomfortable with or which we do not wish to impute to Mann and Conrad. In the end, we have to accept that the treatment of politics in *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes* is highly ambiguous. In their attempt to justify conservative values, Mann and Conrad could nevertheless not accept the horrors of despotism. But, forced to repudiate the values they cherished, they could not embrace their alternative for the very reason that democracy or socialism brought with them the spectre of mediocrity. This ambiguous political commitment appears not only in their novels but also in their non-fictional writing. On the one hand, Mann and Conrad clearly sympathize with liberal humanism; their actions demonstrate a consistent belief in first principles. Conrad made England his adopted country because he admired the British love of freedom, respect for the individual, and enthusiasm for human dignity. Mann proved his support for similar values through his painful self-exile at the threat of National Socialism. But, on the other hand, Mann and Conrad also aired conservative preferences that were often expressed in openly anti-democratic form.

Mann and Conrad were particularly hostile to democracy in the early parts of their careers, reaching a qualified approval of its principles only later in life. Believing that culture survives best in a hierarchically organized society, Conrad considered equality an impossible and perhaps even a dangerous dream. He associated 'the day of universal brotherhood' with 'despoilation and disorder' and with 'the ruin of all that is respectable, venerable and holy.' Stressing that he is 'not a peace man, not a democrat,' Conrad would have liked to dismiss '[I]l'idée démocratique' as a 'très beau phantôme, [sic]' and the notion of 'international fraternity' as an illusion which 'imposes by its size alone.'

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10 Ibid., 268
11 Ibid., 269
life, Conrad still opposed the Boer war because it was 'undertaken for the cause of democracy.' And, finally, in his reactions to the Polish question, Conrad's anti-democratic bias surfaced once again. His initial solution for Polish independence from Russia was the reinstatement of monarchy. Abandoning this antiquated notion, he proposed another one by arguing that 'England and France ... should guarantee a Polish state with semi-colonial status.' However, in spite of his obvious conservatism, Conrad did eventually warm to the idea of democracy. In a letter written in 1920, he conceded: 'For the only sound ground of democracy is that unselfish toil in a common cause.' And, during the General Election of 1922, Conrad even applauded the establishment of the Labour party as the official opposition. At the same time, he was much gratified that Labour had not won a majority. Like de Tocqueville and Nietzsche, Conrad had misgivings about democracy because he feared its levelling effects on cultural excellence.

Mann opposed democracy for much the same reasons as Conrad. Above all, he was afraid that social and political equality would first destroy individualism and then art. In Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen, the young Mann presented a concentrated attack on democracy, progress, and internationalism. His main objection to democracy had its source in Nietzsche:

_Ehre als Lebensreiz gibt es überhaupt nur, wo es aristokratische Ordnung, Distanzkultur, Hierarchie gibt; demokratische Menschenwürde ist im Vergleich damit_  

12 Ibid., 284

13 Avrom Fleishman, _Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad_ (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 1967) 17


15 The Labour party has attained by its numbers to the dignity of being the official Opposition, which, of course, is a very significant fact and not a little interesting. I don't know that the advent of class-parties into politics is abstractly good in itself. Class for me is by definition a hateful thing. The only class really worth consideration is the class of honest and able men to whatever sphere of human activity they may belong – that is, the class of workers throughout the nation. There may be idle men; but such a thing as an idle class is not thinkable; it does not and cannot exist. But if class-parties are to come into being (the very idea seems absurd), well then, I am glad that this one had a considerable success at the elections. It will give Englishmen who call themselves by that name (and amongst whom there is no lack of intelligence, ability and honesty) that experience of the rudiments of statesmanship which will enable them to use their undeniable gifts to the best practical effect. For the same reason I am glad that they have not got the majority.' Aubry, _Joseph Corad: Life and Letters_, Vol. 2, 285.
He rejects 'demokratische Moral' as cowardly because it strives without imagination for 'Sicherheit, Ungefährlichkeit, Behagen, Leichtigkeit des Lebens...'. But, like Conrad, Mann later in life modified his anti-democratic stance because, under the threat of National Socialism, he eventually realized that his conservative position was no longer tenable. He came to understand that, far from endangering cultural pursuits, democracy was the only system capable of ensuring their continuation. However, to the very end of his life, there remained in Mann a nostalgia for the aristocratic past. In *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus* (published in 1949), there are still traces of his old scepticism toward democracy. Speaking of some letters he had received in America, he explains:


It seems that democracy was for Mann a compromise rather than a conviction. Stephen Spender once concluded about conservative men of letters — Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Lawrence, Lewis — that 'their politics only shows that they care less for politics than for literature.' The same could no doubt be said about Mann and Conrad.

The political ambiguities in *Doktor Faustus* and *Under Western Eyes* thus originate at least partially in Mann's and Conrad's own political uncertainties. They are also an almost inevitable consequence of the parallel between individual and national fate that controls the structure of the two novels. The device of the representative hero permits Mann and Conrad to preserve the complexity of a problematical political situation. It allows for an ironic vision which Muecke qualifies as romantic in Schlegel's sense:

Romantic irony is not negative; it does not, for example, negate subjectivity by objectivity, the imaginative by the critical, the emotional by the rational, ...

16 Mann, *Gesammelte Werke* xi, 481
17 Ibid., 492
18 Mann, *Gesammelte Werke* xi, 188
19 Stephen Spender, 'Writers and Politics,' *Partisan Review* 34, 3 (1967) 373
Schlegel's meaning is that irony does not take sides but regards both sides critically.\textsuperscript{20}

In view of their deep, personal involvement with the politics of Germany or Russia, Mann and Conrad must be admired for the high degree of objectivity and the successful avoidance of reductionism in their novels. The two authors portray the trade-off between increased vitality for irrational behavior and increased mediocrity for rational actions without losing sight of the most subtle intricacies. The result is a complex evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of political alternatives. But, where the conservative tendencies both Mann and Conrad betray in their non-fictional writings are often tendentious, the novels are never guilty of simple dogmatism. The difference between a personal and a fictional appraisal of Russia or Germany must be attributed to the power of fiction to transform reality. It is often argued that art permits men and women to shape reality so as to create meaning out of meaninglessness, Mann had to find, or perhaps create, an explanation for the fact that National Socialism could grow out of a people so highly praised for its cultural achievements. Similarly, Conrad had to come to grips with Russia and the Slavic temperament at large in order to understand himself. The need to understand, however, leads the honest artist into irreconcilable contradictions and ambiguities. But, where life cannot cope easily with contradictions, art thrives on them and is nourished by their dynamic tensions.

\textit{The University of British Columbia}

\textsuperscript{20} D.C. Muecke, \textit{The Compass of Irony} (London: Methuen 1969) 200