Myth

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Abstract and Keywords

Mythology was of great interest to Mann and allusions to well-known myths appear in many guises across his works. It is also of interest in terms of narrative time. This chapter takes a selection of works in which Mann toys—to varying degrees of subtlety—with mythic tales, and explores the way in which nods to well-known mythological tales affect the subjective flow of time. I explore the different models presented in Felix Krull, Blood of the Walsungs, and Doctor Faustus, and compare these to Günter Grass’s The Tin Drum, a work that engages closely with Mann’s writing. This analysis illustrates the temporally stagnating effect of mythological repetition—at the level of both plot and story—as well as the instability caused by divergence from expectation.

Keywords: mythological repetition, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Günter Grass, history, metaphor, expectations and derailment

what we have before us is a phenomenon we might call imitation or devolution, a view of life, that is, that sees the task of individual existence as pouring the present into given forms, into a mythic model founded by one’s forefathers, and making it flesh again.
Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*¹

(...eine Erscheinung [liegt] vor, die wir als Imitation oder Nachfolge bezeichnen möchten, eine Lebensauffassung nämlich, die die Aufgabe des individuellen Daseins darin erblickt, gegebene Formen, ein mythisches Schema, das von den Vätern gegründet wurde, mit Gegenwart auszufüllen und wieder Fleisch werden zu lassen.)

Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder*²

Mann had a huge interest in myth, and employed mythic plots and parallels to varying degrees of overttness in many of his works. For him, myth could be moulded as a political tool, used to reflect upon historical circumstance and social change. In purely narrative terms, moreover, mythic structures have a significant effect on the passage of time within these works. Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that although there may exist many versions of a given myth, there is no such thing as the ‘true’ version: ‘On the contrary, we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; to put it otherwise: a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such.’³ Such an assertion foregrounds the events of the story. But in modernized myths, (p.128) the way in which the plot is transposed onto a contemporary setting has a significant effect on the construction of temporal experience. Mann’s last two novels, *Doctor Faustus* and *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*, and his early novella, *The Blood of the Walsungs*, all transpose mythic tales into modern scenarios. One of Mann’s major literary successors, Günter Grass, also toyed with myth in his 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*. This is also fitting as a comparison with Mann because it alludes to *Doctor Faustus* and *Felix Krull* in various ways. But the distinct narrative voices and perspectives in these four works alter the temporal effects of the employment of myth. In *Felix Krull*, the narrator takes a well-disguised mythic tale and presents it as autobiography. By contrast, the narrator of *Doctor Faustus* openly twists ostensible biography into a mythic story. *The Blood of the Walsungs* depicts characters who deliberately align themselves with mythic figures, while the third-person narrator reflects their perspectives. *The Tin Drum* creates an overtly unreliable narrator who perceives mythic allusion in erratic patterns. The different degrees of both reader and character awareness affect the temporal import of these mythic moulds. In *Felix Krull*, for example, we must read the
entire narrative before we can discern its mythic structure. Similarly, *Doctor Faustus* may explicitly present itself as a modern version of the Faust myth, but when we consider the work as a whole, it becomes evident that the mythical aspects are actually rhetorical impositions on the part of the narrator rather than functioning as genuine parallels with the life of the protagonist. In *The Blood of the Walsungs*, the artifice of the mythic allusions is emphasized through the presentation of Wagner's music drama and the repeated allusions throughout the novella to the protagonists' own penchant for theatricality. In *The Tin Drum*, the reference to myth often *appears* to form a pattern but is in fact so erratic as to be unpredictable. There is also a certain mythical logic to the selection of these works.

Considering myth in these works highlights the distinction between story and plot. *Felix Krull* exhibits a mythic plot, but this is not reflected in the story, and is therefore never made explicit. The opposite phenomenon occurs with *Doctor Faustus*, which purports to be based on myth, but the Faustian shape is only identifiable in Zeitblom's telling of Adrian's life and remains barely palpable in the fineries of plot. *The Blood of the Walsungs* mixes these two aspects. Due to its short novella form, it constructs mythic repetition through both story and plot. And *The Tin Drum* subverts the pattern completely. A discussion of these aspects therefore primarily involves a macroanalysis, foregrounding for a moment the wider structure of the works over the micro-consideration of the individual words, descriptions, dialogues, images, and so on, on any given page. This represents the wider structure of the narrative architecture. While the individual words employed at any given moment, as discussed in the preceding chapters of this book, propel time—albeit at varying speeds—inexorably forward, the mythically informed plot structures of these works also create a temporal flow in the opposite direction. This then emphasizes a delineation between story and plot, while adding a further degree of complexity to our understanding of narrative temporality. Each of these works exhibits a different example of mythopoeia and so, for the sake of clarity, it is worth dealing with each in turn.

Plot repetition: *Felix Krull*
Unlike the clear allusion in *Doctor Faustus* or *The Blood of the Walsungs*, it is not clear from the title or any explicit comments from the narrator that *Felix Krull* also offers a modern twist on a well-known myth. Many critics have discussed the overt mythological allusions in *Felix Krull*, but such discussion focuses largely on the ramifications for the protagonist’s personality—Felix as the figure of Hermes. But when we consider instead the specifics of plot, it becomes apparent that Mann includes a subtle but arguably more central allusion to the myth of ‘The Judgement of Paris’, taking his cue from Goethe’s *Poetry and Truth*. Although it is initially barely perceptible, this mythic mould does nevertheless have an effect on the subjective temporality of the novel. In *The Blood of the Walsungs* and *Felix Krull*, it is not simply prior knowledge of mythical components, but also the internal structures of the works that have the effect of slowing subjective time, repeatedly and subtly shifting the reader backwards. It is first worth laying out the argument for the central mythical architecture of *Felix Krull*. 
In the second half of Felix Krull, the protagonist becomes attracted to, and eventually is forced to choose between, three women: Zaza, Zouzou, and Dona Maria Pia (Frau Kuckuck). These three women resemble the three goddesses in ‘The Judgement of Paris’. In this myth, Zeus asks Paris to bestow Eris’ golden apple upon the most beautiful goddess, telling him to choose between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Unable to make a qualitative distinction between the three women, Paris resorts to taking bribes. Hera offers geographical reign, Athena offers skill in battle, and Aphrodite offers the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Troy. He opts for the last before discovering that she is already married to King Menelaus, and so he embarks on a quest to steal her from her husband, thus sparking the Trojan War. In Mann’s novel, Felix’s three love interests become associated with ‘bribes’ that bear a striking resemblance to those of the three goddesses. Felix’s friend, the Marquis de Venosta, cannot bear to leave his lover Zaza for a year, and so it is for her sake that Felix assumes the Marquis’s identity, with its wealth and noble status, and in this guise he embarks on a world tour. This affords him a geographical reign akin to Hera’s bribe. But we know from Felix’s location at the time of writing and Mann’s plans for the novel that this freedom to roam and reign would have been short-lived and he would eventually end up in prison. Next, Felix encounters Zouzou, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Zaza, making their aesthetic qualities—like those of the mythical goddesses—indistinguishable. With Zouzou, Felix plays tennis, but despite his manifold abilities to assume identities, don disguises, shift social spheres, or fake proficiency in a plethora of foreign languages, he is unable to simulate sporting prowess on the tennis court. This acts as a playful, modernized version of the battlefield—and indeed Shakespeare likened the sport to battle in Henry V, where he repeatedly employs it as a symbol for combat and brands tennis balls ‘gunstones’ (I. i. 282). Dona Maria Pia (Frau Kuckuck) then appears on the scene. As Zouzou’s mother, she is also superficially similar to Felix’s previous two love interests. And much like Aphrodite’s bribe of Helena, Dona Maria Pia offers Felix nothing other than her adulterous love. Similarly libidinous in character to the mythic Paris, Felix also elects to enjoy the love of a beautiful woman as opposed to the presumably more useful and less fractious offerings of Zaza and Zouzou.
Although Felix’s likeness to the mythical Hermes is specifically mentioned in the novel, the work’s parallels with the myth of Paris are initially far less evident. Indeed, they only become apparent by the end of the novel. Ricoeur’s understanding of Aristotle’s muthos (plot) relies on a sense of completion, meaning ‘an action’ that has ‘a beginning, a middle, and an end’. Our mythic reading of Felix Krull needs to consider the plot in its entirety. That is, we cannot anticipate the ways in which the novel may correspond to ‘The Judgement of Paris’ before or while reading the novel, unlike our experience of the tangible mythic ramifications of Doctor Faustus or The Blood of the Walsungs. And yet its mythic structure does affect the narrative’s temporal flow. Felix Krull, like The Blood of the Walsungs, presents a mythological tale that corresponds to Lévi-Strauss’s theory of structural repetition, with the effect of slowing the sense of time within the work rather than having a purely retroactive function when we have read the novel in its entirety.

Lévi-Strauss addresses the question of ‘why myths, and more generally oral literature, are so much addicted to duplication, triplication or quadruplication of the same sequence’. Internal repetition of key plot elements emphasizes the thematic character of the tales, and ‘repetition has as its function to make the structure of the myth apparent’. This creates what he calls the ‘synchro-diachronical structure of the myth permitting us to organize it into diachronical sequences […] which should be read synchronically’. We may thus read myths from left to right—in other words, chronologically—or from top to bottom—that is, through their ‘bundles of relations’. According to Lévi-Strauss, these bundles are ‘the true constituent units of a myth […] and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce meaning’. Although Lévi-Strauss’s reading requires the separation of chronology and theme, a consideration of Felix Krull and The Blood of the Walsungs indicates that the repetition highlighted by this vertical ‘synchro-diachronical’ thematic approach also has a notable impact on the subjective sense of temporality. In particular, the recurrence of key plot elements and the creation of circular structures appear to slow the pace, recalling Northrop Frye’s assertion of myth, that ‘[t]he fundamental form of process is cyclical movement, the alternation of success and decline, effort and repose, life and death which is the rhythm of process’. 
I argue above that the second half of Felix Krull resembles the Greek myth of ‘The Judgement of Paris’. But what of the preceding portion of the novel? Felix’s Bildung, with its varied and frequent erotic encounters, is, according to Frederick Lubich, primarily an ‘éducation sensuelle’. And when we consider the novel as a whole, a pattern across these seemingly disparate sexual experiences begins to emerge. It is furthermore a pattern that anticipates the later mythic significance of Felix’s world tour. The novel presents three triads of Felix’s love interests, evenly repeating this shape throughout. Felix’s early education in sex and romance is supplied first by the Krull’s family maid, Genovefa, then during his time in Frankfurt he passed through ‘Rozsa’s naughty school of love’ (117) (‘Rozsas schlimme Liebesschule’ (140)), and finally he enjoys a night of passion with the hotel guest, Madame Houpflé. The third triad, as discussed above, involves Zaza, Zouzou, and Frau Kuckuck. Between these two sets, there is another discernible trio that completes the pattern, although this second group of the series may at first appear somewhat tentative. It entails the young and love-struck hotel guest Miss Eleanor Twentyman, the lonely Scottish aristocrat who wishes to employ and adopt Felix, Nectan Lord Kilmarnock, and finally I would suggest that the combination of the Marquis de Venosta and his mother complete this triad. In assuming the Marquis’s identity, Felix gains the love—platonic rather than sexual in this instance—of another mother figure, and they embark on an affectionate epistolary exchange. For the sake of clarity, it is worth laying this out in a table (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Mythic repetition in Felix Krull

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social exchange, parental prohibition</th>
<th>Skill, erotic, professional, sporting</th>
<th>Married, mother figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instant gratification, erotic skill</td>
<td>Genovefa (maid)</td>
<td>Rozsa (prostitute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Houpflé (writer, hotel guest)</td>
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</table>
These ‘bundles of relations’ can be read along different axes. Chronologically we read this table from left to right, but it can also be viewed along two different thematic lines. The first group of Felix’s love interests, formed of Genovefa, Rozsa, and Madame Houpflé, represents instant gratification. In each case, Felix quickly and easily seduces or is willingly seduced by the women. Moreover, through these three women, Felix claims to develop his abilities as a lover, at times explicitly treating it as an ‘education’. In the second set, Eleanor Twentyman, Lord Kilmarnock, and the Marquis make Felix life-changing offers, which require some time for deliberation. All three are ‘upper-class’ hotel guests, whose offers of union (in varying senses) represent significant changes in social situation and geographical location for Felix. The last triad prove to be a more protracted challenge for Felix, for the first time indicating longer-term desire that does not meet with immediate fulfilment. He pursues Zouzou with some difficulty, (questionably) seeing her as Zaza’s ‘double’ (287) (p.133) (‘Doppelgängerin’ (332)), and thus by proxy she acts also as a belated version of Zaza. In the meantime, he concurrently develops a strong attraction for Zouzou’s mother, Frau Kuckuck, a desire that is only satisfied after a prolonged period. As groups, each triad represents a more drawn-out phase than the last, creating the sense of an increasingly slow subjective temporal experience for our hero.

<table>
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<th>Married, mother figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short-term deliberation, social ascent</strong></td>
<td>Eleanor Twentyman (hotel guest)</td>
<td>Lord Kilmarnock (hotel guest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protracted longing, beautiful women</strong></td>
<td>Zaza (symbolically associated with hotel, world tour)</td>
<td>Zouzou (world tour)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Time furthermore appears to slow within each set as well as across the novel as a whole. The balance between discourse time and story time undergoes a subtle alteration within the triads. In the first, although Felix, as a character, experiences instant gratification with each of his lovers, as the narrator, he spends an increasingly large amount of time relating the episodes. With Genovefa, Felix’s narrating self presents a falsely coy and decorous front, suggesting, ‘I am far from inclined to go into details about an episode that is too common to be of interest to a cultivated public’ (47) (‘Ich bin weit entfernt, mich ausführlich über eine Episode verbreiten zu wollen, die zu gewöhnlich ist, als daß ihre Einzelheiten das gebildete Publikum fesseln könnten’ (61)). He then proceeds to recount the memory, opening with the temporal marker ‘in brief’ (‘kurz’), and indeed this sets the tone for his ensuing concision. With his next lover, Rozsa, Felix employs what Genette terms the ‘iterative’ narrating instance: ‘a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event’. Genette suggests that ‘in the classical narrative […] iterative sections are almost always functionally subordinate to singulative scenes, for which the iterative sections provide a sort of informative frame or background’. But in the mythic repetition within Felix Krull, Felix does not narrate a ‘singulative scene’ to which his ‘iterative’ utterance is subordinate. He opens his recollection of his relationship with Rozsa with ‘briefly summarized’ (113) (‘Knapp zusammengefaßt’ (135)), which, in the German original, suggests a somewhat, but not considerably, lengthier account than that of Genovefa. He simply and euphemistically states ‘that for a number of months, until my departure from Frankfurt, I was on intimate terms with Rosza’ (116) (‘daß ich durch mehrere Monate, bis zu meinem Aufbruch von Frankfurt, mit Rozsa in enger Verbindung stand’ (138)). With the third person in this first set, Diane Houpflé, Felix devotes significantly more narrative time to recounting their relationship. Where Genovefa was consigned to a paragraph, and months with Rozsa are told in three or four pages, the couple of hours Felix spends with Diane Houpflé consume eleven or twelve pages. Where his narrating self promised ‘short’ (‘kurz’) and ‘brief’ (‘knapp’) accounts of his previous two sexual encounters, Felix as narrator appears to relive the impatience and anticipation in the wait for Diane Houpflé, telling the reader:
At what hour she returned to her room I did not learn. One time, however, it must have been eleven, at which hour service was maintained by one lift only, while the operators of the other two had the rest of the evening off. Today I was one of them. (171, adapted)

(Zu welcher Stunde sie in ihre Zimmer zurückkehrte, blieb mir verborgen. Einmal aber mußte es elf Uhr werden, um welche Stunde der Dienst zwar weiterging, während die Führer der beiden anderen Feierabend hatten. Ich war heute einer von ihnen. (201))

Although this is told in the past tense by the retrospective narrator with all his accompanying powers of hindsight, the older Felix nevertheless injects his speech with the emotional experience and temporal uncertainty of his younger self. The hour of Houpflé’s return remains hidden—apparently—from his older as well as his younger self, the end of his shift is in the almost fairy-tale-like precarious future of ‘one time’ (the German original, ‘einmal’, is the traditional fairy-tale opening as in ‘once upon a time’), and the day is described as ‘today’. The pattern of gradually expanding time, elongating the relationship between discourse time and story time over the course of the triad, repeats itself within the second and third triads as well. Felix spends an increasingly long time on each of his deliberations concerning Eleanor Twentyman, Lord Kilmarnock, and the Marquis de Venosta. The climactic moments of his relationships with Zaza, Zouzou, and Dona Maria Pia also increase in intensity, and this increase is reflected in the form of narration.
A further sense in which this mythic structure subjectively appears to stall time pertains to Aristotle’s theory of *muthos*. We know that *muthos* refers not only to the general plot structure of a given story, but also to the ways in which these plot elements connect to one another. That is, the beginning leads into the middle and the middle to the end: as Ricoeur puts it, ‘it is only in virtue of poetic composition that something counts as a beginning, middle or end’.\(^{14}\) When we deconstruct *Felix Krull* into its individual mythic constituents, as outlined in Table 4.1, we can also perceive the relations between each triad. The last component in each group also signals the move onto the next component: Diane Houpflé bridges the gap between Felix’s young, impulsive, erotic experiences and his new position as a hotel employee, and the Marquis de Venosta marks (p.135) the end of the hotel period and the beginning of the world tour. We can then mark three distinct but interconnected periods with multiple repetitions internally and externally. Moulding itself not only on the broad plot elements of ‘The Judgement of Paris’ but also on the wider mode of telling myths through structural repetition as outlined by Lévi-Strauss, *Felix Krull* constructs a cyclical narrative. Despite the appearance of forwards narrative momentum through Felix’s ever-widening experiences and movements through space, the mythic architecture of *Felix Krull* in fact subtly drags the novel backwards. Whether or not we are aware in advance of the novel’s mythical parallels, we are influenced on the level of subjective temporal experience by its mode of presenting the modern myth. Despite the startling regularity of its structure, *Felix Krull* is of course unfinished. Perhaps recognizing the pattern could help anticipate the direction in which Mann was taking the work, or perhaps the pattern only pertains to this first book and would have been disrupted with completion. But an awareness of the structure does nevertheless help point to the reason for the tacit sense of temporal stagnation that the book elicits.

Plot repetition and story repetition: *The Blood of the Walsungs*
Mann’s novella *The Blood of the Walsungs* employs myth far more explicitly than does *Felix Krull*. But again the way in which Mann transposes Wagner’s *The Valkyrie* onto a contemporary setting involves the repetitive pattern that Lévi-Strauss suggests is a central element of myth. This means that *The Blood of the Walsungs*’s depiction of myth has both an anticipatory effect—as with *Doctor Faustus*—and a stalling effect—resembling that observed in *Felix Krull*. The mythic shape of *The Blood of the Walsungs* intertwines story and plot. Not only do the characters attempt to correspond to their mythic namesakes, but they also repeatedly draw attention to their own theatricality. In this sense, the repetition of the *Valkyrie* myth can be found just as much on the level of language as it can on the level of events. As a novella, with its condensed form and tight structure, *The Blood of the Walsungs* is forced to emphasize its structure through both overt repetition of plot and less obvious repetition of language. While reading therefore—and not purely with pre-existent knowledge or retroactively gained hindsight—this repetitive architecture creates a slowed sense of temporal pace, much like in *Felix Krull*. 
The Blood of the Walsungs does of course exhibit clear repetition at the level of plot. The protagonists, Siegmund and Sieglinde, are obviously named (p.136) after the main characters in Wagner’s music drama. Where Sieglinde is unhappily married to Hunding in The Valkyrie, Mann’s Sieglinde is reluctantly engaged to von Beckerath. Kunz, the brother of Mann’s protagonists, playfully makes explicit both the tension between the twins and von Beckerath, and its mythic resonance by tapping out ‘the rhythm of the Hunding motif’ (adapted, 297) (‘den Rythmus des Hunding-Motivs’ (439)) on the dining table. Wishing to spend time together before Sieglinde and von Beckerath’s impending marriage, Siegmund and Sieglinde insist on attending a performance of The Valkyrie. They then return home and re-enact the incestuous consummation of Wagner’s twins. Mann clearly echoes the details of the mythic plot, but due to the constraint on space in the novella form, further repetition is to be found in language rather than structure. Rather than echoing the ‘bundles of relations’ from the original Valkyrie myth, the story instead resonates with the theatrical performance of Wagner’s music drama. The stalling effect discussed in Felix Krull’s repetitive structure is then achieved in The Blood of the Walsungs through the recurrent images connoting the performance of myth.
In the first part of the novella, the narrator describes the family dinner with von Beckerath and then follows Siegmund to his room in anticipation of the evening ahead at the opera. At this stage, the sounds, sights, props, and descriptions appear to have minimal bearing on the Wagnerian myth. But Mann increasingly sets the scene for a theatrical performance. In so doing, he creates the appearance of repetition in terms both of plot and story. Through the topography of mirrors, lighting, concealment, and revelation, *The Blood of the Walsungs* constructs seemingly endless reflections. This imbues the novella with a mythic sense of cyclicism and simultaneously a temporal stasis. Images, actions, and characters appear over and over again, thus undermining any forward momentum created through change. From the opening page of the novella, Mann couches the characters within emphatic theatricality. The dinner is announced with a ‘savage’ (‘wild’) drumbeat on a ‘tamtam’ (289) (‘Tamtam’ (429)), which is later echoed by the opening chords at the opera that sound in ‘wild pulsating notes’ (304) (‘mit einem wilden Akzent’ (448)). The protagonists enter the scene as if on stage: ‘Siegmund and Sieglinde came last, hand in hand, from the second floor’ (290) (‘Siegmund und Sieglind kamen zuletzt, Hand in Hand, aus dem zweiten Stock’ (430)). Mann lingers on the description of their appearances, treating their clothing as costumes and their jewellery as props. Siegmund subsequently spends hours preparing for the opera, drawing the curtains, and sitting before mirrors in theatrical lighting, almost anticipating the artifice of Müller-Rosé’s dressing room. Even his ‘polar bearskin rug’ (302, adapted) (p.137) (‘Eisbärfell’ (445)) becomes through association a theatrical prop, echoed by the ‘bearskin rug’ (305) (‘Bärenfell’ (409)) in the opera production. A dual time is thereby constructed with Mann’s characters preparing for the performance and the Wagnerian singers giving it.

On a more minute level too, Mann repeats certain motifs and words, thus situating the story within a wider tradition of mythological time. This constructs the mythic repetition observed in *Felix Krull* without requiring the space for multiple plot repetitions, and also subtly serves to make time appear cyclical. Images of curtains recur throughout the work, uniting the multiple dichotomies of lightness and darkness, inner and outer, nature and artifice, and the two sets of Siegmunds and Sieglindes. As daylight recedes early in the narrative,
Siegmund ‘drew the velvet curtains across the darkening panes’ (298) (‘zug die samtten Vorhänge vor die dämmernden Scheiben’ (441)) in his room. The artificial light bulbs are intensified through the reflection ‘from the liquid depths of the mirrors in the wardrobe, washing-stand, and toilet-table’ (‘von den wasserklaren Spiegeltiefen des Schrankes, des Waschtisches, der Toilette’) and as ‘it flashed from the polished bottles on the tile-inlaid shelves’ (298, adapted) (‘es blitzte in den geschliffenen Flakons auf den mit Kacheln ausgelegten Borden’ (441)). The curtain motif recurs on the way to the opera. In the carriage, Siegmund once more ‘drew the brown silk curtains across the polished panes’ (304) (‘zug [...] die braunseidenen Vorhänge vor die geschliffenen Scheiben’ (448)). Light again penetrates the darkness as ‘lights flew past behind the curtains’ (‘Lichter stoben hinter den Gardinen vorbei’). Not only is the action repeated, but so are the images of ‘panes’ (‘Scheiben’), ‘polished’ (‘geschliffen’), and ‘light’ (‘Licht’), as well as the topography of light and darkness, and nature and artifice. The act of drawing the curtain is then answered on the opera stage: ‘The curtain flew up as though blown by the storm’ (304) (‘Der Vorhang flog auf, wie vom Sturm auseinandergeweht’ (449)). Here the simile of the storm repeats the dichotomy between nature and artifice despite the overtly artificial setting. As Siegmund in the first two examples banishes the natural world by closing the curtains, in the theatre the natural world seemingly flings them open again. At the end of the first act, as Wagner’s Siegmund and Sieglinde are united, the curtain falls: ‘the curtain swooshed together as the music swelled into a roaring, rushing, foaming whirlpool of passion—swirled and swirled and with one mighty throb stood still’ (309, adapted) (‘der Vorhang rauchte zusammen, die Musik drehte sich in einem tosenden, brausenden, schäumenden Wirbel reißender Leidenschaft, drehte sich, drehte sich und stand mit gewaltigem Schlage still!’ (454)). Here too both the curtain motif, which emphasizes theatricality and shifts between concealment and revelation, and the symbolism of nature are linguistically echoed. The words (p.138) ‘swooshed’, ‘roaring’, ‘rushing’, ‘foaming’, ‘whirlpool’ conjure up a tumultuous natural landscape. Where Mann’s Siegmund repeatedly banishes the natural, outside world by closing the theatrical curtain, the narrator depicts Wagner’s music drama as being not only set within, but also subject to, wild natural forces. In effect, Mann ironically
indicates that the onstage drama appears more ‘real’ than the offstage drama of his own contemporary characters.

Similarly, mythic repetition is achieved through the motif of mirrors, both the actual objects and the metaphor. In presenting their entry onto the domestic stage at the start of the work, the narrator linguistically intertwines Siegmund and Sieglinde, describing them through alternating clauses:

She wore a velvet gown the colour of claret [...] He wore a grey jacket suit [...] His head was covered with thick black locks, forcibly parted on the side [...] In her dark brown hair, which was waved in long, smooth undulations over her ears, lay a gold circlet, which a large pearl—a gift from him—hung down upon her brow. Round one of his boyish wrists was a weighty gold chain—a gift from her. (290, adapted)

(Sie trug ein bordeauxrotes Samtkleid [...] Er trug einen grauen Jackett-Anzug [...] Sein Kopf war mit dichten schwarzen, gewaltsam auf der Seite gescheitelten Lokken bedeckt [...] In ihrem dunkelbraunen Haar, das in tiefem, glatten Scheitel über die Ohren frisiert war, lag ein goldener Reif, von dem in ihre Stirn hinab eine große Perle hing,—ein Geschenk von ihm. Um eines seiner knabenhaften Handgelenke lag eine gewichtige goldene Fessel,—ein Geschenk von ihr. (430–1))
In the final scene, as the pair are about to make love, Siegmund tells Sieglinde: ‘You are just like me’ (315) (‘Du bist ganz wie ich’ (462)). The movement in this scene once again intertwines the twins (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2 on Performance): ‘She kissed him on his closed eyelids; he kissed her on her throat under her lace camisole. They kissed each other’s hands’ (315, adapted) (‘Sie küßte ihn auf seine geschlossenen Augen; er küßte sie auf den Hals unter den Spitzten des Mieders. Sie küßten einander die Hände’ (463)). Initially, they are described with independent pronouns ‘she’ and ‘he’, but this eventually merges into the plural ‘they’ as they lose their individuation. They then form each other’s mirror images, and Siegmund also dwells on his reflection several times during the work, spending prolonged moments before various mirrors (Eng. 298, 302, 304, 313, 314; Ger. 440, 441, 446, 448, 460, 461). They are further reflected by the singers at the opera. Although the Wagnerian Siegmund and Sieglinde are notably blue-eyed and blond-haired, their appearances form mirrors by contrast to the black hair and black eyes of (p.139) Mann’s protagonists. As I discussed in terms of performance, Mann’s twins and Wagner’s twins become indistinguishable during the music drama as Mann’s Siegmund temporarily upstages the onstage Siegmund and the narrator blurs the distinct perspectives together through merged focalization.

The multiple repetitions of names, superficial plot (incestuous intercourse), motifs, and words, then construct what Lévi-Strauss suggests is a key aspect of mythic storytelling. Felix Krull repeats ‘bundles of relations’ that form key aspects of the plot. But in the condensed space of the novella, The Blood of the Walsungs creates repetition through more economical means, and this has a similarly stagnating effect on the work’s forward momentum. Russell West-Pavlov highlights a common philosophical consensus on how to mark time, namely through change:

All these dynamic processes of change: to ideas, to materials, to words and ideas as materials, to the person affected by words, ideas and materials, do not merely happen in time. More radically, as change, as transformation, they are the dynamism of time itself.15
A significant temporal effect of the mythic bases of *Felix Krull* and *The Blood of the Walsungs* therefore stems from the emphasis given to structural and linguistic repetition. Rather than straightforwardly imbuing them with a sense of mythical perenniality, the cyclicism and recurrence of the works has a stalling effect on the subjective experience of time. Where the narrative minutiae propel time forward by emphasizing change, dynamism, and progression, the overall modes of telling mythic tales instead stress continuity over time. The mirror metaphor in *The Blood of the Walsungs* symbolizes this: we may read seemingly different words or view things from different angles, but the stories continually tell the same thing in an apparently unending cycle. The story itself is of course also about propagation, and thus the cyclical continuation of life. These mythic moulds then work against the temporal grain of the rest of the narratives, contributing to the intricate and inextricable mesh of subjective time.

**Story repetition: Doctor Faustus**

Although *Felix Krull* does not at first sight appear to be about myth, we have seen that its structure not only resembles the myth of ‘The Judgement of Paris’, but also that across the novel it follows the mythic repeating pattern as discussed by Lévi-Strauss and Frye. And this structure has a stalling effect on the overarching plot of the novel, creating a structural circularity at odds with the forward momentum of the linguistic minutiae. Our experience of that narrative is informed by both the particular words and the structural formation of the story; in this instance, they appear at odds with one another. The individual words push us forward, while the plot structure pulls us back.
We observed that *The Blood of the Walsungs* follows this mode of mythic repetition at the level of plot and story, reflecting its condensed form. But if we consider the structure of *Doctor Faustus*, the pattern does not present itself so easily. On a superficial level, *Doctor Faustus* purports to be a modernized version of the Faust myth. Serenus Zeitblom tells the story of his lifelong friend, the composer Adrian Leverkühn. According to Zeitblom’s account, building on Adrian’s own sporadic (and questionable) claims, the latter deliberately contracts syphilis in order to benefit from twenty-four years of feverish creativity before falling victim to debilitating insanity. Zeitblom implicitly and explicitly shapes this story of creativity and decline as a satanic pact. Mann uses myth in this instance as an explicit temporal tool as Zeitblom emphasizes the parallels between Adrian’s apparently mythically demonic downfall and Germany’s pact with Hitler. (I discuss the ramifications for historical time in greater detail in Chapter 5 on History.) But if we separate story from plot, a different interpretative possibility emerges. As Karin Crawford puts it, ‘it is time we exorcize the devil from Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* because there is no devil in the novel’.16

Mann famously said of Adrian and Zeitblom that they need to hide ‘the secret of their identity’ (‘das Geheimnis ihrer Identität’).17 The key to this secret, I would argue, is that although Adrian and Zeitblom both have Faustian aspirations in different respects, neither actually represents Faust.18 Instead, we may see the Faustian aspects of the story as impositions by an embittered narrator. There are three key episodes in the novel that Zeitblom uses as evidence for Adrian’s Faustian proclivities, shaping him as a mythically evil figure: first, Adrian’s encounter with the prostitute Esmeralda, who subsequently infects Adrian with syphilis; second, Adrian’s jottings recording his apparent conversation with the devil; and third, his final speech presenting his masterpiece, *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus* (*Dr Fausti Weheklag*), where he ‘confesses’ to a satanic pact before suffering an irreversible mental and physical collapse. In each of these episodes, Adrian is afforded momentarily increased narrative authority. But what actually occurs at each point presents a very different story to the one suggested by Adrian and corroborated by Zeitblom. As discussed in Chapter 2 on Performance, Adrian is depicted more as a passive victim in the brothel, naïvely seduced by a dominant woman. The
imagery here shapes Adrian as a Gretchen figure, tempted both by the ‘jewellery’ of Esmeralda (emerald) and the shine and sparkle of the other women and the props in the brothel. Like Gretchen and her discovery of the ‘pretty box’ (‘schöne[s] Kästchen’) of jewels left by Mephistopheles, Adrian is at first scared and confused, and only on the second encounter with temptation does he submit.\textsuperscript{19} The devil later admits that he sent Esmeralda to seduce Adrian, recalling Mephistopheles’ deliberate designs on Gretchen. In the novel’s penultimate chapter, as Adrian ‘confesses’ to his friends and acquaintances, he suggests that his nephew Nepomuk (Echo) was in fact his son, conceived with Esmeralda, and that he died most horribly as a result of Adrian’s pact with the devil. Adrian brands himself a murderer, also claiming to have killed his friend Rudi Schwerdtfeger (725). This furthers the parallels with Goethe’s Gretchen, who is imprisoned and sentenced to death after killing her mother with an overdose of sleeping powder as well as her illegitimate baby, fathered by Faust. Just as Goethe’s \textit{Faust} ends with Faust attempting to rescue Gretchen from her prison cell, so too does this penultimate chapter of Mann’s \textit{Doctor Faustus} see Zeitblom manufacture an attempt to save Adrian from insanity, and the former equates madness with imprisonment in his comparison of a ‘prison’ (‘Gefängnis’) and a ‘madhouse’ (268) (‘Narrenhaus’ (368)).
But then who is Faust in this myth? And moreover, where is the satanic pact? Crawford observes that ‘[t]he demonic parallel is more appropriately drawn, if at all, with Serenus, for Serenus’s biography resembles that of Goethe’s Faust’. Serenus, like Faust, marries Helene, and admits ‘that the glowing young lady’s first name, Helene […] played a not insignificant role in my choice as well’ (12) (‘daß der Vorname des frischen Kindes, Helene […] bei meiner Wahl nicht die letzte Rolle spielte’ (21)). He also has an affair with a ‘lass from the common folk’ (157) (‘Mädchen aus dem Volk’ (215)), but cruelly drops her as he grows bored. Although these superficially suggest parallels with Goethe’s protagonist, David Ball notes deeper discrepancies: Serenus Zeitblom ‘immediately (p.142) contrasts [his wife’s] appearance with the mythical eternal beauty of Helen’, and, unlike Faust’s adoration of his Helen, ‘[t]he Zeitbloms’ marriage is drab and conventional’. Similarly, ‘Zeitblom enters [the affair with the working-class girl] not from “Heissblütigkeit” (hot-bloodedness) but from curiosity and from a wish to put into practice his “theoretischen Überzeugungen” (theoretical convictions)’. Furthermore, it is Zeitblom rather than Adrian who experiences the highs and lows of the satanic pact. It is Zeitblom who is unable to love, and Adrian makes this explicit in his assertion: ‘In my eyes, he really has nothing to do with matters of love’ (459) (‘Er hat nun einmal in meinen Augen mit Liebesdingen nichts zu tun’ (635)). It is Zeitblom’s work that remains for posterity—his narrative, Doctor Faustus, rather than Adrian’s cantata, The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus, survives to tell the tale (as it were). So Zeitblom implicitly has Faustian delusions and explicitly attempts to shape Adrian’s biography into a tale of mythically demonic proportions. But this does not match what actually takes place in the novel, which means that the mythic structure is no such thing and will therefore not have the same temporal effects as those of Felix Krull and The Blood of the Walsungs.
Doctor Faustus superficially corresponds to what Frye terms the ‘romantic’ tendency. That is, it ‘suggest[s] implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience’. Frye situates ‘romantic’ myth between the ‘undisplaced myth’, which is ‘generally concerned with gods or demons, and […] takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable’, and the ‘tendency of “realism”’ (a term he employs with reluctance), which ‘throw[s] the emphasis on content and representation rather than on the shape of the story’. But in this instance, it is the narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, who suggests the ‘mythical patterns’ rather than such patterns being inherent in the plot. Unlike Felix Krull and The Blood of the Walsungs, therefore, the myth in Doctor Faustus takes place at the level of the telling but not at the level of the action. This means that the mythic allusions have a very different temporal effect.

Zeitblom’s retrospective narration already involves two distinct time frames: that of narrating and that of what is narrated. But the parallels with the Faustian tale add a third temporal plane and moreover one of mythical proportions. This means that at any given moment, the reader is inhabiting—broadly speaking—three distinct temporal planes, which we may for the (p.143) purposes of clarity label as follows: Zeitblom’s time (in other words his narrating standpoint); Adrian’s time (the past story being told); and Faust’s time (the mythic imposition of structure and meaning). Doctor Faustus contrasts significantly with The Blood of the Walsungs by involving myth simply in the form of storytelling rather than, as in the novella, using particular words and images to reflect the mythic structure. This has the effect in Doctor Faustus of prioritizing the words over the plot. Because the parallel with the Faust myth only really occurs in Zeitblom’s telling of Adrian’s life, and not in terms of the actual events, the telling takes priority. As the events of the novel disappear into the shadow of Zeitblom’s narration, we are left with a precarious sense of time that exists only in an uncertain present and a fairy-tale past. Mythic time therefore constructs a multiply complex temporal flow, ultimately serving to emphasize the narrating standpoint.
Considering the three most obvious ‘Faustian’ scenes of the novel, which Zeitblom uses as evidence for Adrian’s demonic tendencies, it is possible to identify the novel’s multiple temporal levels. With Adrian’s letter about Esmeralda, his jottings about the devil, and his final soliloquy before his descent into madness, there exist several distinct temporal planes. These each form mise en abyme retrospective narratives as Serenus recalls and narrates Adrian’s narrated recollections. There are the times of original occurrence remembered by Adrian (the visit to the brothel, the conversation with the devil, and the formative events of his life); then exist the times at which Adrian narrates these memories as he writes the letter or the dialogue, and gives the speech to his audience; finally, there is the time at which Zeitblom recalls and narrates these moments. To this we may add two further ‘shadow’ times. That is, they exist only through implication and association, and in conjunction with the main narrative. The first and most obvious of these is the Faustian story that runs in parallel with Adrian’s life, and in particular in parallel with these three scenes. And the second is the Gretchen story, which is, I would suggest, a more compelling parallel in terms of plot and imagery.
Zeitblom’s mythic addition then complicates the temporal flow. Genette discusses the action of ‘[n]arrating n times what happened once’, suggesting that ‘certain modern texts are based on narrative’s capacity for repetition’ but ‘[o]n the other hand, the same event can be told several times not only with stylistic variations […] but also with variations in “point of view”’. He names this ‘repeating narrative’. Visible in Doctor Faustus is a convoluted version of the ‘repeating narrative’. By projecting a mythic form onto an otherwise innocuous and singular plot, Zeitblom creates simultaneous versions of the same event. That is, as we read Adrian’s letter, his ‘dialogue with the devil’, and his final speech, we inhabit not three basic time frames, but five. The different components of these scenes can be considered through the following categories: action (what happened to Adrian in the original experience), narration (as he recalls and tells the story himself), analysis (Zeitblom repeats it and frames it with his own interpretation, which leads to the next point), wider structure (the significance of the action and how it fits in with the overall plot), and imagery (symbolic value of images unrelated to plot). Each one of these categories entails a different time frame. The more or less simultaneous combination of these aspects creates multiple versions of a single event told only once.

This may of course meet with the objection that openness of character interpretation does not necessarily equate with a multiplicity of temporal experiences. But as the interpretative possibilities of character belong to the realm of myth (i.e. Faust and Gretchen), they each entail their own particular timeline in terms of the mythic stories to which they refer; and consideration of this timeline and anticipation of its future developments become unavoidable. After showing us Adrian’s letter, Serenus warns us that

There is no trace of the comic in that flight [from the brothel]—I can assure the reader of that, should he be inclined to find in it anything of the kind. The extrication was comic at best, in the bitterly tragic sense of its futility. In my eyes, Adrian had not escaped, and he himself, to be sure, had seen it as an escape only very temporarily. (158)
Zeitblom repeats his common technique of imbuing Adrian’s story with a sense of fatalism. In conjunction with the work’s title, we are led to believe at this juncture that Adrian’s encounter with Esmeralda signals his impending downfall. Like Faust’s seduction of Gretchen, Esmeralda—according to Zeitblom—is meant to symbolize Adrian’s path towards corruption. We cannot help but view Adrian both in terms of his own uncertain standpoint and in anticipation of these probable Faustian developments. Through his mythic shaping of Adrian’s biography, Zeitblom therefore creates a kind of prolepsis that warns of the rough arc of events to come.

(p.145) But if we ignore Zeitblom’s extradiegetic addresses to the reader and the foreboding title of the novel, then it becomes clear that the plot does not signal anything of the kind. Indeed, as discussed above and analysed in Chapter 2 on Performance, the plot and imagery of this scene shape Adrian as Gretchen. On another level then, Adrian in these three episodes and across the novel appears to be a naïve victim yielding to everyday temptation. Michael Beddow rightly observes that ‘[m]ost readers find it hard to see why Leverkühn should be in danger of damnation, analogical or literal, in the first place’.27 Although the allusion to Gretchen may not be immediately clear (and is certainly not intended to be as palpable as that to Faust), the imagery and plot dynamics of Adrian’s experiences—particularly in these three scenes—are at odds with the Faustian timeline onto which Zeitblom projects his story.

Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes between the temporal direction of detective fiction and that of the thriller:

At the base of the whodunit we find a duality [...] This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. [...] The first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins.28
Whereas in the case of the thriller:

We are no longer told about a crime anterior to the moment of the narrative; the narrative coincides with the action. No thriller is presented in the form of memoirs: there is no point reached where the narrator comprehends all past events, we do not even know if he will reach the end of the story alive. Prospection takes the place of retrospection.\(^\text{29}\)

But as Currie observes, ‘this difference is not easy to uphold’. He suggests that this model is useful for any narrative which involves an interplay between narrated time and the time of the narrative, where the time of the narrative functions as the site of self-conscious reflection both on past events and on the nature of writing about them.\(^\text{30}\)

This ‘double time’ is clearly visible throughout Doctor Faustus. But Zeitblom’s addition of the mythic outline effectively places the narrative between the models of the whodunnit and the thriller as proposed by Todorov. Simultaneously, we follow Adrian’s uncertain story like a thriller, not knowing the direction it will take, while also having an awareness of the alleged Faustian parallels, which mould it into a kind of ‘howdunnit’; we (p.146) know from knowledge of the Faust myth the rough path and outcome of Adrian’s life, and the only unknown factor is exactly how this apparently Faustian tale will play out in the modern setting. The subtler allusions to Gretchen serve to unsettle the Faustian trajectory, while implicitly offering a more accurate prolepsis of events to come.

Illusory, erratic repetition: The Tin Drum

In Felix Krull, a surprisingly rigid mythic structure is visible, which as we have seen has a subtle but significant effect on the reader’s temporal experience by creating a sense of stagnation through repeating plot cycles. Günter Grass’s The Tin Drum is also a mythopoeic work, alluding to a myriad of mythic figures, events, and images. The novel contains three separate books, and is usually regarded as the first in a trilogy, both of which suggest a reasonably even structure. Susan M. Johnson moreover argues that
The most striking, and as yet undocumented, feature of Grass’s sexual episodes in *The Tin Drum* is their mathematically precise distribution that fairly begs for attention and collective interpretation. Grass has arranged nine major sexual episodes throughout the three books of his novel.  

This not only suggests a startling affinity with the nine erotic episodes visible in Mann’s *Felix Krull*, but also in its own right indicates a structure of thematic repetition, which is so important in the theory of myth outlined by Lévi-Strauss and cited above. According to Johnson, the shape of the novel’s erotic structure is as follows: *(p.147)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book I:</th>
<th>(1) <em>Die Vier Röcke</em> (The Four Skirts)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <em>Der Pferdekopf</em> (The Horsehead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) <em>Die Niobe</em> (The Niobe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book II:</td>
<td>(1) <em>Das Brausepulver</em> (The ‘Bromoseltzer’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <em>Frau Greff</em> (Mrs Greff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) <em>Roswitha Raguna</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book III:</td>
<td>(1) <em>Im Kleiderschrank</em> (In the Closet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <em>Schwester Dorothea</em> (Sister Dorothea)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|  | (3) *Lankes und Schwester Agnes* (Lankes and Sister Agnes)*32*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book I:</th>
<th>(1) <em>Die Vier Röcke</em> (The Four Skirts)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <em>Fernwirkender Gesang vom Stockturm aus gesungen</em> (Long-Distance Song Effects from the Stockturm)—Jan and Agnes’s Thursday assignations in hotel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(3) <em>Kein Wunder</em> (No Miracle)—Oskar aroused by statue in church</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(4) <em>Der Pferdekopf</em> (The Horsehead)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(5) <em>Die Niobe</em> (The Niobe)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book II:</td>
<td>(1) <em>Das Brausepulver</em> (The ‘Bromoseltzer’)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) <em>Sondermeldungen</em> (Special Communiqués)—Oskar interrupts Maria and Alfred having sex</td>
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</table>
Although Johnson’s article offers a useful analysis of the metaphorical function of sex in the novel and its changing character overtime, it is rather selective in what it considers to constitute a ‘major sexual episode’. I would suggest that rather than only nine episodes there are in fact fifteen identifiable erotic incidents in the work. Some of these are less significant than those discussed by Johnson, but others are certainly on a par in terms of the importance for character and plot. As Book I of Johnson’s list suggests, these are not purely Oskar’s sexual experiences, and as Book III of this list indicates, they are not only reciprocal sexual experiences shared by a couple, but also include, for example, Oskar’s masturbation in Sister Dorothea’s closet. We could therefore re-envisage the list as follows:

So the structure according to the spacing of sexual episodes still appears fairly regular with five scenes per book. It is also possible to discern some thematic links across these episodes. We may therefore place the events in a synchro-diachronic table according to the ‘bundles of relations’ as well as the chronology of action, following Lévi-Strauss’s model; see Table 4.2.
### Table 4.2. Sex in *The Tin Drum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food spaces</th>
<th>Triangular relationships/affairs</th>
<th>Arousal at statues</th>
<th>Sex to calm and comfort</th>
<th>Inanimate aphrodisiacs</th>
<th>Passivity and force</th>
<th>Nurses and nuns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato field</td>
<td>Jan and Agnes in hotel</td>
<td>Oskar aroused by Jesus statue</td>
<td>Jan calms Agnes after eels</td>
<td>Maria and the Brausepulver</td>
<td>Affair with Lina Greff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Herbert mounts Niobe</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Oskar interrupts Maria and Alfred</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comforts Roswitha during bombing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Painter’s orgasm at muse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orgy in the onion cellar</td>
<td>Drumming in Sister Dorothea’s cupboard</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dorothea and the coconut rug</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lankes with Sister Agnes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
(p.148)  (p.149)  Reading left to right then top to bottom illustrates the chronological order of events, while the columns highlight the thematic links between them. Some of these scenes could of course go in multiple columns: Lankes having sex with Sister Agnes also represents an affair as he is engaged to the muse Ulla, and this episode is associated too with static images and objects as he wishes to solidify the scene in a painting. So too does Roswitha Raguna become reduced to a giant portrait after her death, the sight of which provokes tears in Oskar. These two moments therefore have links with each other and with Oskar’s arousal at the statue of baby Jesus, Herbert’s desire for the statue of Niobe, and the painter Raskolnikoff’s sexual excitement at the static sight of his muse, Ulla, by intertwining sex and static objects.

This structural breakdown by no means discloses such a straightforward echo of a well-known mythic tale as did a synchro-diachronical analysis of Felix Krull. But it does indicate that the seemingly idiosyncratic and apparently unique events in The Tin Drum in fact have subtle echoes across the work. Purely in terms of sex and romance, the indistinct repetition of themes means that time does not simply progress forwards but is also always quietly pulled backwards by recalling earlier moments of the narrative. This returns to Mann’s argument posited in Freud and the Future (Freud und die Zukunft) that myth shows that the idea of the individual is a modern fiction and actually each character is part of an endlessly repeating cycle of archetypes.  

Sex is of course not the only major theme to recur in The Tin Drum. John Reddick observes that compared to the relatively low number of births, the novel has a particularly high number of deaths. Reddick argues that this is hardly surprising given the wartime context, but that ‘this does not begin to explain the position in The Tin Drum, for death figures so prominently and insistently in Grass’s first novel (in sharp contradistinction to Dog Years) that it acquires the dimension of a major symbol’. Although ‘any particular individual’s death is a barely reckonable quantity in the gross infinitude of the cycle as a whole’, these deaths are far from being just exemplary or metonymic of wartime mortality; they are either in form or significance highly singular. Also suggesting a regular pattern, there are twelve major deaths in the novel. These are as follows:
(1) Joseph Koljaiczek—disappears beneath a raft
(2) Agnes Matzerath—poisons herself with fish
(3) Herbert Truczinski—impaled while mounting Niobe statue
(4) Sigismund Markus—driven to suicide by Nazi persecution
(5) Kobyella—shot in post office
(6) Jan Bronski—executed by the SS
(7) Albrecht Greff—suicide with intricate weighing contraption
(8) Roswitha Raguna—blown up by a bomb
(9) Alfred Matzerath—chokes on Nazi Party pin and is shot by Russian soldiers
(10) Ferdinand Schmuh—hound by a swarm of birds, crashes car
(11) Bebra—dies of natural causes (!)
(12) Sister Dorothea—murdered and dismembered by love rival

It is possible to construe all manner of thematic links between the deaths in the novel, and yet these links remain either uselessly general or else highly tenuous. Some of the characters commit suicide, others are murdered, some are hounded to the point of accidental demise, other deaths remain ambiguous. Oskar feels culpable for some, and is in close proximity during several others, often appearing directly after the act. The number twelve alone holds all sorts of associations: the twelve apostles, the twelve Olympian gods, the twelve zodiac signs, and so on. And Grass plays with these allusions with his multiple references to Christianity and Greek and Egyptian mythology. Some of the deaths recall particular tales, with Oskar’s grandfather Joseph disappearing beneath the ramp into the ‘underworld’ of Hades, Agnes’s death by fish suggesting the work of the Greek god Poseidion, the birds chasing Schmuh to his death echoing Prometheus’ death by birds, Greff’s death with the home-made weighing contraption recalling the Egyptian god Anubis, who weighed the hearts of the dead to determine whether or not they could enter the next world. But none of these allusions fully works across the novel. What then does the apparent regularity combined with thematic erraticism do for the experience of time?
T. S. Eliot said of myth in Joyce’s *Ulysses* that ‘it is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history’. But what we see in Grass’s *The Tin Drum* is precisely a lack of order. Jane Curran has said that Grass conjures Medusa in the horse’s head swimming with eels, Diller points out that Oskar’s character as a trickster aligns him with Hermes, Heracles, Odysseus, and Loki among others, and there is also an Apollonian ring to the figure of Vittlar reclining in the apple tree at the end of the novel—to name just a tiny subset of the multifarious mythic nods in the work. Individual moments and particular character traits cast the novel as mythopoeic, and we also see a repetitive episodic structural pattern. But the erraticism of the episodic structure means that we cannot anticipate what is yet to come nor do we experience a sense of stagnation. In *Felix Krull*, the structure is startlingly regular, but this only becomes fully apparent in retrospect when analysing the novel with hindsight. While reading, the tacit sense of repetitiveness with Felix’s continuous stream of admirers and love interests subtly slows the pace of the novel by halting the feeling of forward progression; it is as though the set surrounding each triad changes in the background while the basic plot format remains the same. In *Doctor Faustus*, the mythic character of the novel is not visible on the level of plot but instead, I argue, it is imposed by the malevolent narrator. This, as shall be discussed further in Chapter 5, recalls the reader repeatedly to the time of narrating in the relative present and away from the action of the past. Because the past lacks the mythopoeic repetition in terms of the ‘bundles of relations’, it does not share the structural stasis of *Felix Krull*. In *The Tin Drum*, however, we have a mixture of these divergent architectures: there is indeed some subtle repetition, but it is not regular enough to become predictable; instead, we occasionally have the sense that we have seen ‘something like this’ before. Just as Leo Schugger appears to reappear in the guise of Willem Slobber, apparently singular events recur in different forms across the novel. The reader, like Oskar, is continually dragged backwards towards the past, but the structural erraticism means that this is not a failed *Bildung* in Felix’s sense (where he seems strapped to an endless cycle of repetition). Instead, Grass constructs a slow and unwieldy *Bildung* that is repeatedly preoccupied with what has gone before, while
nevertheless slowly attempting to negotiate an as yet uncertain future. This lends *The Tin Drum*—a novel that is about history, specific times and places, and national crimes—a sense of timelessness, of recurrence. And yet, this sense of timelessness does not remove the culpability or [p.152]overshadow the specifics of this particular point in history. It indicates that it is at once unique and part of a wider human cycle that is always in danger of being repeated.

**Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter is in some ways narrower than that of the others. I have argued in the preceding chapters that all literary works involve locations in space and characters always participate in social performances, and to an extent too the dialogues created across a single work and between works (as discussed with reference to symbols) are visible in most narratives, By contrast, works that allude explicitly or implicitly to mythic tales are far more limited in number. The range of texts considered here has been restricted to *Felix Krull, The Blood of the Walsungs, Doctor Faustus*, and Grass’s *The Tin Drum*. Modern retellings of ancient myths are to be found in other works, such as *Death in Venice* and the *Joseph* novels, as well as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*; yet many works do not engage in this area. So the analysis of myth might at first appear to be a topic with a rather specific and narrowly defined focus and limited corpus of relevant literature. Even so, the analysis of myth raises some important questions for time and narrative beyond the scope of mythopoeic works.
Myth

The notion of prefiguration, which I explored with regard to symbolic images and motifs in Chapter 3, occurs on a much larger scale in narratives that explicitly echo well-known tales by foreshadowing known plot developments. But the case of Felix Krull shows too that mythic prefiguration can be far more complex. As I have argued here, this novel exhibits echoes of a famous myth, but it does this so subtly and discreetly that we may not be aware of the allusions while reading. The existence of the echo of the 'The Judgement of Paris', however, is in a sense less important than Mann’s use of the structure of repetition: it is the multiply repeated mould of the Paris plot that creates a sense of slowing and stagnation. This illuminates the importance of narrative structure in the discussion of narrative evocations of time. We have already explored the significance of considering particular words, sentences, and devices when analysing the creation of subjective time, but here we see all the more clearly the ways in which the structure of events in a narrative also has a significant effect on the sense of progression or stagnation. The way in which The Blood of the Walsungs exhibits repetition structurally and linguistically illustrates that the reader’s sense of time moving sluggishly in an otherwise gripping story may be influenced by a myriad of subtle repetitions occurring on multiple levels. Doctor (p.153) Faustus subverts the very notion of mythic prefiguration by calling out to the reader the significance of the Faustian plot, while in fact toying with the echo of its storyline and characterization. So here, despite the repetition of a well-known tale, we are kept in suspense in a way that is also instructive at the level of historical interpretation. The comparison with Grass’s The Tin Drum furthers the proposal that allusion, repetition, and subversion—be it structural, linguistic, relating to character or to plot—has a profound impact on the overall pace as well as the changing momentum as led by oscillating between the creation and confounding of expectation.
The discussion of narrative time in the light of stories that play with mythic tales thus draws our attention towards the importance of narrative structure and modes of emplotment, while also demonstrating how the pre-existing knowledge we may bring to a work plays a large role in our undulating temporal experiences in the reading process. This is perhaps all the more significant when the knowledge we bring to a text relates to actual historical events rather than the world of fiction. In Chapter 5, I explore this aspect by assessing the intertwined workings of collective historical time and individually experienced time. (p.154)

Notes:


(3) Lévi-Strauss, p. 435.


(5) Ricoeur, ii. 20.

(6) Lévi-Strauss, p. 443.

(7) Lévi-Strauss, p. 443.

(8) Lévi-Strauss, p. 431.

(9) Lévi-Strauss, p. 431.


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(14) Ricoeur, i. 38.


(16) Karin Crawford, ‘Exorcising the Devil from Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*’, *German Quarterly*, 76/2 (2003), 168–82


(19) Goethe, p. 118 l. 2783.

(20) Crawford, p. 168.


(22) Ball, p. 165.

(23) Frye, pp. 139–40.


(25) Genette, p. 115.


(28) Todorov, p. 227.

(29) Todorov, p. 229.

(30) Currie, p. 88.

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(33) Lévi-Strauss, p. 433.


(37) Reddick, p. 30.

(38) T. S. Eliot, ‘Ulysses, Order, and Myth’, The Dial, 75/5 (1923), 480–3
