Conclusion

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Abstract and Keywords
The Conclusion summarizes the main tenets of the book, which, first, aims to propose a new comprehensive approach to the analysis of time in narrative that takes account both of the linguistic minutiae of a text and its overall plot structure, and that may be applied to any literary work rather than purely to those that problematize the narration of time; and second, to offer new interpretations of several of Mann’s works both in the light of temporal analysis and in terms of his engagement with literature, myth, and history. The Conclusion argues that temporal analysis opens up an empathetic sphere that offers insights into the subjective experience of others more generally. In a world where constant public presence and worldwide accessibility has become the norm, the analysis of time and literature has become ever more critical.

Keywords: empathetic experience of time, human subjectivity, aims and conclusions, reading Mann, literary and temporal analysis

What is that you express in your eyes? It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life.

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass
In the course of the analysis undertaken here, it has become clear that time is not simply a way of measuring experience, but also an agent that impacts upon our experience. Time, in life as in literature, is a fundamental part of being human. St Augustine’s puzzlement cited in the Introduction as to how time may be explained will no doubt remain unresolved for the foreseeable future. I would suggest, however, that although we may be no closer to pinpointing what exactly time is than Augustine was nearly two millennia ago, considering how it operates in literature does bring us one step closer to understanding the workings of our subjective experience at the hands of time. As a mimetic representation of human experience, literature offers a powerful expression of how it feels to be a being in time. Indeed, it is perhaps for this reason that it is fruitful to explore literary works that do not treat time as a theme in any explicit way but that instead unsselfconsciously tell stories that simply and unavoidably operate within temporal parameters.

The empathetic experience of time
The contention of this book is that by exploring the words that make up sentences, the representation of characters in given scenes, the literary devices that operate within passages and across the text, the structural shape of events, and the wider historical context that informs the writing and reading experience, we may perceive why it is that we have a sense of time progressing in stories quite separate from our own lives. If a family member arrives home and declares: ‘I just bought some bread at the shop’, this is simply a statement; we do not immediately feel temporal empathy with their experience at the shop. If they then tell us about the long queue at the checkout, this becomes a story and we may get a sense of their (p.196) impatience. If they proceed to relate the conversation that they overheard between a couple in the queue, the overpowering smell of perfume of the customer in front, the painfully loud crying of a baby, this turns into an experience; they begin to convey for us the length of time the waiting consumed. If their telling of such images is reinforced by linguistic repetition, particular—possibly unexpected—shifts in tense, symbolic jumps forward and back foreshadowing the ending of the shop-trip tale, then this becomes what I would term an empathetic experience, where we empathize with the family member reporting the incident to such an extent that it is as though we were in the shop ourselves, waiting impatiently in the queue. There is no straightforward equivalent of the German ‘Mitgefühl’, which would convey the sense of ‘empathizable with’, but this is roughly what I mean: we can feel an experience as though it were our own because of the successful translation of subjective sensations into words. Where the narration of an experience might convey the speaker’s subjectivity, the creation of an ‘empathetic experience’ effectively doubles the subjectivity by rendering it phenomenologically available for the listener too. Such a story would not necessarily be ‘about time’ according to Mendilow’s definition, but it is in part the evocation of temporal experience that would make it ‘real’ for the listener.

An architecture of time
The aims of this book were twofold: first, to propose a new approach to narrative time that combines close linguistic analysis with a consideration of the broader plot structure and is applicable to narrative in general rather than only temporally problematic texts in particular; second, to offer new interpretations of several of Thomas Mann’s works both in the light of temporal analysis and in terms of his engagement with literature, myth, and history.

In Chapter 1, I considered time in terms of words and sentences through the thematic lens of space. This chapter explored the concept of ‘spatial form’, where critics have observed a shift from a realist attention to time to an increased emphasis on spatial description. In conjunction with this, I challenged the view that spatial description either in terms of ‘spatial form’ or in the ‘pictorial image’ unavoidably leads to the pausing of time. Instead, an exploration of Mann’s works demonstrates that time continues to tick even when setting becomes static. Comparing Mann to Kafka, I suggested that the movement back to spaces associated with times gone by can in fact act as a tool for propelling time forwards. Exploring time in the light of these aspects of space indicates that space and time are too often (p.197) erroneously thought of as opposites that nevertheless operate in such tight symbiosis that stopping one allegedly stops the other. They should indeed be discussed in union but this discussion requires more balance than the dichotomising stances often assume.
Next, in Chapter 2, I expanded the focus to the workings of time within a single scene, using the topic of performance as a way of exploring how different characters have different senses of time at the same time. Here I used performance as a way of raising the problem of simultaneity, suggesting that in literature it must be conveyed consecutively. In the section entitled ‘Stages of time’, I suggested that the overall experience of time fluctuates over a single scene according to the changing focalization of the characters, some of whom act as ‘performers’ (social or theatrical) while others form the ‘audience’. The section on ‘Sexual performance and performative sexuality’ was prompted by Mann’s repeated presentations of theatrical sex scenes that involve explicit role play or social artifice. These scenes demonstrate surprising role reversals, where the ostensibly dominant protagonist might by usurped by a strong lover, thereby shifting the balance between performer and spectator.

In Chapter 3, I argued that with symbols and motifs, the construction of time moves to a broader view still by linking disparate times across the text. I took as my cue Genette’s concepts of ‘prolepsis’ and ‘analepsis’ to suggest that symbols and motifs also shift the chronological order or temporal perspective out of turn. Building on Aristotle’s muthos, I proposed the term ‘meta-muthos’ to refer to temporally complex mise en abymes whereby we may see the entire plot structure of a given tale in one symbolically significant scene or image. Motifs repeated over time also have the power to link disparate times together as in Tonio Kröger. Symbolic repetition can also, however, disclose the temporal confusion of certain characters, such as Hans in The Magic Mountain, which I discussed in the section on ‘Webs of illusion’.
Then, with my consideration of myth in Chapter 4, my theory of narrative time expanded its sights further still, and proposed that the overall plot shape of the story affects the reader’s sense of time. In this chapter, I used *Felix Krull* as an initial model for the exploration of mythic repetition, suggesting that it demonstrates a startlingly regular triadic structure, which has the subtle effect of temporal stagnation. In *The Blood of the Walsungs*, mythic repetition was again visible—also supporting Lévi-Strauss’s theory—but this time it took place at the level of imagery and language rather than plot. *Doctor Faustus*, though ostensibly an emphatically mythic tale, did not show signs of mythic repetition either in language or plot; I proposed that this was because the Faustian allusions in the novel are in fact illusions. As a comparison, I then analysed the (p.198) mythic resonances in Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, establishing that there is certainly identifiable repetition but that it is so erratic as to be unpredictable; it thus presents a story of preoccupation with the past and uncertainty about the future.

Finally, moving out to the widest level, in Chapter 5, I explored the effect of historical context and literary engagement with history on our experience of time, suggesting that our knowledge of wider historical events impacts upon our reading experience, while reference to these historical events punctuates individual characters’ temporal perceptions. This chapter built on Todorov’s theories about the temporal drives of the thriller and the whodunnit, suggesting that these are complicated by the reader’s hindsight in works that engage with historical realities. Such works are further complicated by their allegorical attempts to reflect these historical realities, so time thickens and is dragged in multiple directions.

Reading Mann
Conclusion

In the course of my approach to Mann’s works in comparison with some of his influences, contemporaries, and successors, in the light of narrative time, I have disclosed and proposed new interpretations of several texts. The point of this approach was in part to set aside traditionally accepted and often superficial readings of Mann’s works and instead to delve deeper into what was actually produced by the words on the page. By applying this approach, I suggested that Mann’s *Tonio Kröger* is not only the modernized retelling of Storm’s *Immensee*, but that it is also effectively *Immensee* turned ‘inside out’; by echoing the plot but fleshing out his protagonist with interiority, Mann offers a symptomatic reading of *Immensee* and discloses the subjective undercurrents of the novella. In my analysis of *Felix Krull* in the light of Mann’s engagement with another of his influences, I argued that Mann took his cue from Goethe’s autobiography in deeper respects than have been previously assumed and moulded his trickster tale around the Greek myth of ‘The Judgement of Paris’. Not only does this further our understanding of Mann’s tribute to Goethe, but it also extends our knowledge of Mann’s grappling with recent history: I contended that the use of the Paris myth was an attempt to reappropriate a myth much employed by the Nazis and to write the story of historical stagnation. My close reading analysis of presentations of performance in *Doctor Faustus* led me to the conclusion that the ‘secret’ concerning the two protagonists, about which Mann spoke, pertains to the possibility that neither Adrian Leverkühn (with his overt pretensions to the Faustian legend) nor Serenus Zeitblom (with his personal attempts (p.199) to echo the Faust myth in his own life—marriage to Helena, affair with a working-class girl) in fact represent Faust. Instead, Adrian bears closer resemblance to the victim Gretchen, ruthlessly seduced by a satanically driven authority. This interpretation of course has ramifications for the widely accepted readings of Mann’s novel as exhibiting the facile mythologization of German history. My analysis of time in this project also attempted to consider the other works discussed here in a new light, giving greater space to close literary analysis rather than philosophical approaches, as has often been the focus of critics to date.
Conclusion

_The Magic Mountain_ is certainly best known for its intricate philosophical treatise on time, but considering a wider range of other texts demonstrates that Mann’s presentation of subjective experience in a temporal world is masterful (and hugely enjoyable) in innumerable ways beyond those superficially visible in extradiegetic discussions or overt fictional games with time. At times, merely with a single world, Mann indicates that the character focalization has shifted and with it too our sense of time (as in _The Blood of the Walsungs_). At other times, he playfully repeats an image using the identical language but spaces it several hundred pages apart so the majority of readers would—at most—have only a subtle feeling that they had ’seen this before’ (as in _Buddenbrooks_). He also exhibits great enjoyment in playing with myth while hiding the extent of his games from the reader (as in _Felix Krull or Doctor Faustus_).¹ His engagement with a wide range of other authors and his influence on his literary successors adds to the sense that Mannian analysis could continue indefinitely. Far from being a well-trodden canonical author who has been sufficiently explored, Mann’s range and depth, his literary skill, humanity, and humour mean that his subject matter continues to be relevant and his presentation continues to invite new interpretation.

Opening the door to subjectivity
So what is the point of all of this? In a world filled with cars, trains, and planes, where distance has been reduced by the speed of travel and spatial separation is an increasingly meaningless temporal concept, where we don’t just have phones and email, but Skype and smartphones, so we can effectively ‘be present’ with almost anyone at any time and for that (p.200) matter straight away, does the literary representation of time have any meaningful place at all any more? The irony of time in the world today, as Eva Hoffman observes, is that ‘even as we live longer than ever before, we seem to be suffering from endemic shortages of time’. Rather than, as in the pre-industrial days, being ruled by the rising and setting of the sun, changing weather conditions, the passing seasons, the occasional punctuation of religious holidays, today we seem simultaneously to have lost much of the concept of time and to be ever more slavishly dominated by it: with the Internet and emails, where we need to be ‘seen’ publicly to be omnipresent, and electronic card access to twenty-four-hour workplaces (even libraries!), there seems little excuse not to be constantly available and flexible with time. *Romeo and Juliet* might not have been quite as tragic in a modern world, where Juliet could just have sent Romeo a text message or posted an enigmatic clue on her Facebook page that her poison was only a temporary ruse, or perhaps Romeo’s exile would not have put quite such a strain on their relationship had they maintained contact over Skype. Is this to say that our sense of time is no longer as meaningful as it once was?
We still experience frustration when we miss the bus and are faced with a seemingly endless wait for the next, we still wait with anxious anticipation for a reply about a job application, we still feel the sting of separation when the Skype call ends or a friend moves abroad. The temporal parameters that govern our lives may have been irredeemably altered by technological advances, but we are still subject to the same powers of memory, anticipation, impatience, excitement, and regret as humans have been for millennia. And, as has been the thread of this book, it is precisely because our individual, subjective experience is governed by the regulations and whims of time that an exploration of time concurrently opens our eyes to subjective experience. Telling stories—unlike film, television, computer games, iPhone apps—is nothing new. Storytelling has existed as long as language has existed. It provides a link across time, showing us the perennial aspects of experience that have been felt by humans around the planet for generations. This is why literature is such a powerful resource: rather than a philosophical dissection of what it means to be human, or a scientific analysis of the workings of the brain, literature reflects, represents, and opens vistas onto subjective experiences that would otherwise be closed to us. It shows us what other humans think and feel—as authors, narrators, or characters—and it in turn becomes an experience for us. Because we exist in a temporal world and because we have unique experiences, exploring the changing, subjective fluctuations in literary presentations of time discloses Felix’s excitement about meeting Diane Houpflé, von Beckerath’s insecurities about the social niceties of the Aarenhold family dinner, Tonio’s alienation at returning to his hometown, Hans’s coy avoidance of Clawdia Chauchat’s portrait, and Zeitblom’s secret embitterment about his friend Adrian. It shines light on just how it is that words can convey deeply personal and emotional aspects of experience that in life remain hidden. This is why an analysis of time in literature cannot just be an analysis of time and literature. Instead, time as a fundamental component of experience and literature as a perennial expression of experience disclose aspects of what it is to be human. (p.201)

Notes:
(1) Karl Kerényi, an expert in myth and a good friend of Mann, wrote: ‘It is in accordance with the mischievous wish of the great hermetical master if I leave it to others to set off on the hunt for sources in my writings, and to find everything that made the transition from these into that high art of narration’. Mann and Kerényi, p. 15.