

*Carlotta von Maltzan***The author, his work and his critics: an outline and evaluation of the controversy surrounding Klaus Mann's *Mephisto*****Abstract**

The novel *Mephisto* by Klaus Mann published in 1936 has more often than not been interpreted as a *roman à clef*. This paper examines the reasons why the novel was interpreted as such by looking at the relationship between Klaus Mann and Gustaf Gründgens on whose life the characterisation of the protagonist of the novel, Hendrik Höfgen, was based. The interpretation of the novel as a *roman à clef* had consequences for its publication record in Germany. Furthermore this paper critically assesses how and why critics reacted to the novel in a seemingly biased manner and what effect the reception of the novel had on Klaus Mann. In tracing these questions the main themes of the novel are discussed and compared to the film version by István Szabó of 1981. In outlining and evaluating the controversy surrounding Mann's novel, the final section of the paper examines the reasons why the "Mephisto"-theme was met with such interest and enthusiasm in West Germany in the early 1980s.

1. *Mephisto* - a *roman à clef*?

Ich bin genötigt, feierlich zu erklären: Mir lag *nicht* daran, die Geschichte eines bestimmten Menschen zu erzählen, als ich *Mephisto*, *Roman einer Karriere* schrieb. Mir lag daran, einen *Typus* darzustellen, und mit ihm die verschiedenen Milieus (mein Roman spielt keineswegs nur im "braunen"), die soziologischen und geistigen Voraussetzungen, die solchen Aufstieg erst möglich machten (Mann, 1981:VIII).

This extract stems from a letter which Klaus Mann wrote to the editor of the newspaper *Die Pariser Tageszeitung* in 1936. The newspaper formed a forum for exiled German writers and was about to publish the novel in a series. It had advertised the novel as a *roman à clef*, namely as a novel in which living persons appear under feigned names. This was definitely neither in Klaus Mann's interest nor did it reflect his intention.

Notwithstanding Klaus Mann's strongly worded declaration, the novel has more often than not been interpreted as a *roman à clef* (Andrießen, 1986; Hühnerfeld, 1986; Lohmeier, 1987). Subtitled "Roman einer Karriere", *Mephisto* is the story of a talented, but vain and ambitious actor who starts off with minor roles in the Hamburg Art Theatre and eventually rises to the pinnacle of success and a position of immense power and influence in the Third Reich. He achieves this often at the expense of other persons whom he uses as stepping stones to further his ambitions. It is also the story of a person whose complete lack of integrity and astounding opportunism is displayed by the chameleon-like change in his views and political outlook before and during the Third Reich. Whereas before the takeover by the Nazis he would fervently call for a revolutionary theatre to mobilise the

working class which incidentally never gets off the ground, he quickly adjusts his views to the new power so as not to endanger his acting career.

2. Klaus Mann's relationship with Gustaf Gründgens

The original and continued controversy over the novel originated from the description of the main character, Hendrik Höfgen, who undoubtedly bears a resemblance to the actor and director Gustaf Gründgens. In September 1925 Klaus Mann, then 18 years old met the 25 year old Gründgens for the first time. In 1935 Mann worked on the first draft of his *Mephisto*, which finally was published by Querido in Amsterdam in 1936. During this period which was initially characterised by a close mutual friendship and admiration, their ways parted: Klaus Mann went into exile where he became a central figure in the literary struggle against National Socialism; Gustaf Gründgens remained in fascist Germany where he was appointed director of the state theatre in Berlin in 1934, thus becoming the leading figure in German theatre. In 1936 Gründgens was given the title of "Preussischer Staatsrat" by top Nazi leader Hermann Göring whose protégé he became.

At first sight Mann and Gründgens were not at all unlike each other. From early on both aimed at public recognition. Klaus Mann, eldest son of famous author Thomas Mann noted in his diary as a 14 year old: "Ich muß, muß, muß berühmt werden..." (Mann, 1976:95). As a thirteen year old he had published his first prose piece. The seven year older Gründgens on the other hand did not have a famous father and had to build his acting career on his own strength, but nevertheless, he had the same aim: to become famous one day.

Both Klaus Mann and Gründgens were homosexual, both had a tendency for selfstylistation. Both were very prolific - Klaus Mann in terms of publications, and Gründgens in terms of performances and productions of plays. Both found their niche in organisational capacities: Klaus Mann as the editor of two exile literary magazines and Gründgens as a theatre manager. Both had a tendency to take drugs, both died of an overdose of sleeping pills - Klaus Mann after five unsuccessful attempts at committing suicide. Klaus Mann died on 21 May 1949 in Cannes and Gründgens on 7 October 1963 during a journey while in Manila. The author strove in his life and work for the ideal of "Reinheit" and Gründgens, the theatremanager for "Klarheit" (Spangenberg, 1986:8). Strangely enough both shared a theme that determined their work and life: art and power. That both their lives turned out to be so different is, among other things, probably due to the different social position of an author and an actor at a specific moment in history. To have a political view is one thing, but to take the consequences and leave the country and thus deprive oneself of one's livelihood would have been in many ways more difficult for Gründgens than for Klaus Mann since Gründgens as an actor depended on the German language as a means of expression.

3. *Mephisto* - the novel

When Klaus Mann set out to write his novel it was directed against the careerist, "gegen den deutschen Intellektuellen, der den Geist verkaufen und verraten hat" (Mann, 1969:53). He chose Gründgens as a model "nicht, weil ich ihn für besonders schlimm gehalten hätte (er war vielleicht sogar eher besser als manch anderer Würdenträger des dritten Reiches),

sondern einfach, weil ich ihn zufällig besonders genau kannte" (Mann, 1976:385). Mann then continues to explain that especially in view of their close friendship earlier on, Gründgens' change seemed so phantastical, so curious and unbelievable that in itself this provided sufficient reason to write a novel.

In the novel *Mephisto* by Klaus Mann, the career of the protagonist, Hendrik Höfgen, is described as the story of an extraordinary betrayal. This manifests itself in his alliance with the new power, which is portrayed as a pact with the devil. Höfgen's brilliant performance as Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust* twists an ironic metaphor - for as an actor Höfgen sells his soul to achieve immortality in art.

The novel covers the timespan 1926 to 1936, a point in time when Höfgen realises that he has become "merely the monkey of power, a clown to entertain murderers" (Mann, 1988:254). This development was not necessary, as the author portrays the protagonist as having had a genuine choice: in 1933 during Hitler's takeover Höfgen finds himself outside Germany working on a film set. Here he has the time and is given the chance to take an informed decision, whether he should go into exile or return to his native country. While he is in Paris pondering on this decision he sees his wife Barbara sitting in a street café among a group of emigrés all of whom had decided for a life in exile unhesitatingly. When Höfgen had first met his wife to be, he had believed that "she could be my good angel" (Mann, 1988:72). Barbara who personifies the motif of the good angel becomes the counterpart of the motif of the pact with the devil. Whereas Barbara, "the good angel", who goes into exile represents political morality, the pact with the devil represents power. Höfgen the artist oscillates between these poles, and finally decides for the pact with the power mongers. However, the whole motif of the pact with the devil can only be fully grasped within the context of other characters in the novel and their respective decisions. Höfgen's career is portrayed within the milieu of the theatre world of Hamburg and Berlin. It is within this seemingly secluded art world that he is confronted with various political positions none of which he really identifies with. His interaction with his colleagues serves to illustrate his shifting political outlook and provides a basis for the reader to assess Höfgen's development which eventually leads him to take part in the power structures of the Third Reich. On the one hand there is the communist Otto Ulrichs who is portrayed as an honest and decent character. Höfgen's repeated assurance to jointly organise a revolutionary theatre turns out to be no more than an empty promise. In 1933 Ulrichs is taken to a concentration camp. He is released after Höfgen has used his influence with his mentor, the Nazi general. Even then Ulrichs does not give up illegal resistance work and eventually gets murdered during a torture session by the Gestapo. On the other end of the spectrum we find Hans Miklas who believes in the *Führer* even before he has come to power, who sees in him the saviour of a rotten regime as represented in the Weimar Republic. After an altercation with Miklas, Höfgen forces the management of the Hamburg art theatre where they both work, to dismiss Miklas. After the takeover by the Nazis Hans Miklas sees all his hopes betrayed, as the movement does not turn out to be the populist one that he imagined. As he is considered to be too rebellious, he eventually is shot by his previous allies. Last but not least Lotte Lindenthal plays an important role in Höfgen's life. Even though he considers her to be a bad actress, he does everything to win her favour, because she is the girlfriend and later the wife of the Nazi general, whose protection he manages to get mainly with her help.

An omnipotent narrator in the novel leaves the reader in no doubt how the actions of various characters should be morally assessed. Whereas the communist Ulrichs and

paradoxically also Miklas are both portrayed as having a strong sense of morality and personal integrity, Höfgen has to be assessed in a different light. While he is not a staunch or even convinced fascist at all, but rather sees himself purely in terms of his role as an actor, he opportunistically changes face like a chameleon, even outside the theatre world. Therefore the pact with the devil points to a deep similarity between Höfgen and the new power system: disguise and lying are essential characteristics of both. Not only Klaus Mann used this technique, but it was a common strategy amongst anti-fascist artists to portray fascism as a theatrical (*komödiantisches*) system, in which denial of one's identity and roleplay become essential for survival. Novels like Lion Feuchtwanger's *Der falsche Nero* (1936), Heinrich Mann's *Lidice* (1943), and Charlie Chaplin's film "The great dictator" come to mind.¹

In the novel *Mephisto*, Nazi leaders such as Göring and Goebbels are caricatured. The portrayal of fascist high society shows how "bloodthirsty" bourgeois society has become. In as much as Höfgen represents the artist's betrayal of beauty and morality, fascism represents for Klaus Mann the historical stage where bourgeois ideals and forms of life have been finally undermined. Therefore the satirical effects of the novel arise out of the reinterpretation of literary traditions of the bourgeoisie. One example is the description of the Nazi general's 43rd birthday party which serves as the introduction of the novel. Here the motif of the fest or party, as often found in the realistic novel, is satirised. In spite of the satirical portrayal of the power elite in Nazi Germany, the main emphasis of the novel is on the unfolding profile of the actor, who decorates their regime with his art. Höfgen can very easily be interpreted in terms of what Adorno (1973) has described as the authoritarian character. Seen from a sociopsychological point of view he must therefore be considered as that type of person who was prone to fall for fascism and form part of its mass basis. Klaus Mann (1969:53) elaborates on the nature of Höfgen's personality: "Ich versuchte es, seinen fürchterlichen Ehrgeiz aus Minderwertigkeitskomplexen - die teils soziale, teils erotische Ursachen haben - zu erklären." From a sociological point of view Höfgen represents the type of a petty bourgeois upstart. His rise to wealth and his exhibitionism which culminates in the purchase of a mansion which he calls "Hendrik Hall" can be interpreted as a compensatory action, as he always felt belittled and inadequate in the company of the family of his wife Barbara. From a sexological point of view Höfgen can be seen as a masochist who uses his relationship with the black woman dancer Juliette as a springboard to success in his career. To him she is "the dark source of my strength" (Mann, 1988:261). To be whipped by the socially inferior Juliette causes pleasure and fear, but paradoxically provides him with the strength that he needs in order to pursue his career. The reason for this is that even though he seems to be the slave in this relationship, he is really the master, in that he decides how the masochistic scene should be enacted. Beyond that Juliette's presence evokes in him the powerful image of an almighty god of a jungle who is feared as well as loved by his subjects (Mann, 1988:52). For Höfgen this image becomes essential as he really sees himself in the same position, namely as an actor *vis-à-vis* his audience, who cheer and admire him.

¹ It is interesting to note that in theoretical essays on fascism the NS dictatorship was also viewed as a theatrical performance. Walter Benjamin (1980) for example analysed in his essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" the tendency to aestheticise political life during fascism. Bertolt Brecht (1976:558-568) described in an essay entitled "Über die Theatralik des Faschismus" how means of deception and theatrical play become instrumentalised.

The climax of the anti-fascist stance in the novel is the appearance of a nameless underground resistance fighter at the end. Höfgen who has killed his conscience in favour of his career is confronted by this resistance fighter who resembles an outer conscience. He confronts the traitor Höfgen with the assurance that the just anti-fascist forces will win. He also brings greetings from Ulrichs and his comrades. Höfgen is dumbfounded, yet furious, miserable and frightened at the realisation that after all he may have backed the wrong horse. When the mysterious man vanishes he shouts after him: "I am absolutely indispensable (...) The theater needs me. Every regime needs the theater. No regime can get along without me" (Mann, 1988:260). Left alone, and in spite of his attempt to justify his actions, Höfgen is vehemently struck by the empty shell of his present life. The novel then ends with his words: "What do men want from me? Why do they pursue me? Why are they so hard? All I am is a perfectly ordinary actor" (Mann, 1988:263). Klaus Mann commented that even though he called this last part of his novel "Die Drohung" (The threat), this heading was referring to Höfgen's perception. If one saw it from the point of view of the reader though, the chapter might as well have been called "The promise" (Mann, 1969:54).

4. The novel *Mephisto* and its critics

Seen from today's perspective this last chapter of the novel becomes particularly interesting because the implied exclusion of people like Höfgen from society after victory over fascism in fact did not happen. This had consequences for Klaus Mann personally, for the assessment of the novel by critics and last not least for the publication record of the novel in Germany.

The reception of the novel *Mephisto* by contemporaries was mixed even though the majority opinion was favourable. Doubts expressed concerned the characterisation of Nazi leaders who were seen as being portrayed too unrealistically but doubts particularly referred to Klaus Mann's tendency to draw on real people when developing his characters. This aspect led to the understandable but rather distracting search for real life people in the novel by contemporary readers. It was this similarity, particularly the one between Höfgen and Gründgens, which prevented the novel from being published in post-war Germany. Klaus Mann who had fought on the side of the Allies in the American army was one of the first to return to occupied Germany as a reporter for the magazine *Stars and Stripes*. He was highly disillusioned by what he saw and experienced. His first impressions were published in that magazine on 13 May 1945 in which he wrote: "Die Deutschen zeigen nicht die Spur einer Empfindung von Verantwortung, noch weniger ein Gefühl von Schuld. Sie begreifen nicht, daß ihre momentane Misere die direkte, zwangsläufige Konsequenz dessen ist, was Deutschland, als Kollektiv, der Welt angetan hat, während der vergangenen fünf Jahre" (Naumann, 1984:121). As a result Klaus Mann decided against settling in Germany but hoped that he could exercise literary influence from a distance. But already in 1947 he deplored the omission by the English and American occupying forces not to have published any books by authors who had lived in exile (Naumann, 1984:125). None of his own works were published during his lifetime in post-war Germany.

Instead works by writers who had belonged to the so-called inner emigration, i.e. who had remained behind in Germany but had distanced themselves from the regime by not fulfilling any function within it, were widely distributed. In addition artists who had been favourites of the propaganda ministry during the Nazi era were making their public

appearance. Among them were Emil Jannings, Heinrich George, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan and also Gustaf Gründgens. The latter managed very quickly to resume his position of stardom that he had had before and during the Nazi era. His importance and newly regained influence then also became the reason for the novel *Mephisto* not being published after all, even though Klaus Mann had already been given a contract for publication. His publisher who had originally lived in Berlin had moved to Bavaria where Gründgens played an influential role which in his opinion could have harmed his position and reputation as a publisher. Klaus Mann received news of refusal for the publication in May 1949 (Spangenberg, 1981:VI). This incident, as one may speculate, could have been one of the reasons why he chose to commit suicide only a couple of weeks later. In the novel Höfgen's angry scream after his nightly visitor that every regime will need him, proved to be only too true in real life.

In Germany the novel *Mephisto* was published for the first time by the East German *Aufbau Verlag* in 1956. In late 1963 a West German publishing house also announced its intention to publish the novel. In early 1964, half a year after Gründgens' death, Peter Gorski, adopted son and heir of Gründgens instituted proceedings against the publisher to prevent the novel from being published in West Germany, claiming that it was defamatory of Gründgens' character. This was the beginning of what one could call one of the most interesting trials around a literary work. Even though the work was allowed to appear for one year before it was finally banned in 1966, the editor had to preface each edition with a declaration that no people existing in real life were portrayed in the novel. The ensuing dispute around the novel has been subsequently called the "duel of the dead" (Reich-Ranicki, 1986:225) as both duellants had passed away by the time when court proceedings were finally instituted. In 1981 the publishing house Rowohlt decided to make the novel available for distribution in spite of the continued ban which by then was only perceived as a formality. The first edition of 30 000 copies was sold out within a few days. For several months the book was number one on the bestseller list of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*.

5. *Mephisto* - the film

1981 was also the year when the film version of *Mephisto* was released. It was shown at the Cannes Film Festival and received the award for the best filmscript. It was also awarded the price of the International Film Critics, and in addition won the academy award for the best foreign film in 1982.

The film version by István Szabó keeps fairly closely to the plot of the novel, but the film differs radically from the novel when it comes to the ideological implications. The most strikingly erotic idiosyncracies of Höfgen appear to have been erased as they might lend themselves to being seen as erotic deviations. Szabó explains: "Gewissermaßen umgewertet haben wir auch die Figur von Juliette, der Freundin von Höfgen. Im Film ist sie keine Prostituierte wie im Roman, sondern eine intelligente Frau, für die die sexuelle Beziehung zu Höfgen ebenso wichtig ist wie für den Mann, die aber gleichzeitig ein sensibler und klarsehender Mensch ist" (Máté, 1986:277). By reinterpreting the relationship between Juliette and Höfgen he hopes to close off a (psychological) escape route to the viewer because he believes that the viewer may well argue as follows: "Die Nationalsozialisten und ihre Mitläufer hatten sexuelle Schwierigkeiten, waren pervers. Ich habe keine Schwierigkeiten, also bin ich auch nicht vom Faschismus gefährdet" (Gruber, 1986:277). However what remains of the relationship between Höfgen and Juliette as

represented in the novel is an exotic and not very clearly motivated extramarital affair with some background music, which eventually is shifted to Paris. In the novel the amazing rise in Höfgen's career is essentially linked to this relationship which Höfgen has to give up precisely at the moment when he is integrated into the power structures of the Third Reich. In the novel it becomes clear that the masochistic relationship forms a precondition for Höfgen's success, that his entire strength to ruthlessly follow his aim is drawn from Juliette. This forms a precondition for his political career. What the masochistic relationship serves to illustrate is the lack of a well defined identity. And it is this lack of an identity, the ability of a person to exchange one master (namely Juliette) for another (namely the Nazi general), which characterises the authoritarian personality who is prone to fall for the fascist ideology. In the novel it becomes clear that Höfgen reaches a point where he realises that the power dynamics within the fascist regime are beyond his control: on the one hand his almost infantile reaction to the nightly visitor, who utters the threat which frightens Höfgen so much and on the other hand his appeal to no-one in particular is explained in the last scene of this novel: he is nothing more than an ordinary actor. It is the lack of taking responsibility for one's actions, the attempt to justify oneself retrospectively in view of the full horror of the regime and the personal consequences ensuing from this realisation which Klaus Mann exposes so well in the character of Höfgen. This not at all unfamiliar attitude already points to the whole question of guilt and responsibility with which the ordinary German citizen was confronted at the end of World War II.

But there are also other aspects in which Szabó's film and Klaus Mann's novel differ. In the film neither the artistic circles in the Hamburg Art Theatre nor the background and milieu of the well established family Bruckner are given much room. Furthermore the conflicting and various political positions in the Weimar Republic are not very clearly defined. These are represented by the communist Otto Ulrichs, by the various a-political actors and the important prototype of the idealistic national socialist Hans Miklas. All these character are only very sketchily presented in the film as they are provided with very little space to act out their roles. Similarly the whole milieu which the film hopes to outline is not clearly presented. These themes are pushed into the background in favour of the central character Hendrik Höfgen. The only relationship that is given more scope in the film is the one between him and the Nazi general. The entire action in the film moves and centres around this relationship. As a result other characters are forced into the background. Szabó comments: "Das sind zwei große Schauspieler, die voneinander begeistert, ja fast ineinander verliebt sind" (Thissen, 1986:280). In the novel Höfgen ponders about the decision whether he should follow his friends into exile or whether he should use the help of the Nazis to pursue his career. In the film this moment of hesitation is there but the confrontation with his erstwhile friends is omitted. Only once Höfgen has been appointed as director of the state theatre in Berlin does he meet Barbara in an almost empty café in Paris. Therefore the novel's treatment of the question of whether or not to choose exile in preference of staying behind in Nazi Germany is omitted in the film.

The simple onedimensionality of the film-Höfgen Brandauer, who only lives for the theatre and his career, who forms an alliance with the Nazi general to ensure success, has very little in common with the novel. Neither is the film-Höfgen plagued in any way by his conscience nor is the motif of the pact with the devil taken up. One's actions seem to be determined by fate; actions appear to be dependent on circumstances, not on personal agency. It is therefore not surprising that Szabó comments: "Die Geschichte spielt jemandem eine Rolle zu, für die er entweder geeignet bzw. dazu bereit ist oder nicht. Wir

möchten einen Charakter darstellen, der sich einer Rolle, die ihm von der gesellschaftlich-politischen Situation angeboten wurde, anpassen will" (Máté, 1986:277). As a result one is not surprised to find that the most important political events in Germany do not have any effect on the film-Höfgen: he does not take note of the Nazi takeover because he is making love to Juliette; nor does the burning of the Reichstag have much effect on him, as he is in Hungary busy making a film.

The German literary critic Alexander von Bormann points out that the image of Mephisto stands for the expression of subjection to evil. The image of Mephisto also stands for a temptation, namely to disregard one's moral values in favour of worldly goods. Similarly bourgeois writers in exile explained the fascination that fascism held for the masses in the image of Mephisto: "Als dämonische Verführung, als Verschiebung und Uminterpretation der Bedürfnisse, so daß sich ein Selbstverständnis (des faustischen Deutschen) herstellen konnte, das anderen, nicht ihm selber diente" (Von Bormann, 1986:277). It is precisely this aspect which forms one of the basic factors of national socialist domination which Klaus Mann illustrated so well in his novel.

Undoubtedly the analytical basis of the novel exposes the nature of the authoritarian personality, prone to submit to fascism. The novel also exposes traits of the actor Gustaf Gründgens who remained in Germany. Brandauer who acts Höfgen in the film admits in an interview that he wanted to promote the image of Gründgens: "Ich wollte für die Figur des Gründgens werben" (Gliewe, 1986:284). As a viewer of the Mephisto-film who is familiar with Gustaf Gründgens' performance in Goethe's *Faust* one indeed wished him back to the stage.

In the film Szábó blocks out all sound that is not directly related to the characters on which each scene concentrates. An example is the 43rd birthday party of the Nazi general which is held in the state theatre. Whereas an enormous visual space is created the viewer of the film only hears the voices of the characters on which the camera focuses. The reduction of aural space in the film manages to compensate to some extent for the narrowed perspective of the material used from the novel. However it is doubtful whether the viewer who is not familiar with the novel will be able to assess the various minor characters and their role within the context of the Nazi regime except in as much as they serve to illuminate Höfgen's actions.

The novel ends with Höfgen finding himself crying in the lap of his mother immediately after he had received the nightly visit by the stranger who had uttered the threat. The stranger's visit forces Höfgen to realise that he may have backed the wrong horse by aligning himself with the Nazi power. By contrast the film transfers this scene from a private to a public sphere. The final scene of the film shows how the Nazi general takes Höfgen to the Berlin olympic stadium where he is chased around by most blinding spotlights. Here he becomes insignificantly small within the total power structure. No nightly visitor appears here to confront Höfgen with his role within the Nazi regime, but the Nazi general himself shows Höfgen the limits of his game with the power structures, to demonstrate who really is in power. This last scene of the film is very powerful when looked at in isolation. However it constitutes a radical break from the plot as developed in the rest of the film. Not only is Höfgen/Brandauer presented throughout as such a versatile and convincing actor that he seems to be able to inspire even the Nazi general with his acting techniques but throughout the entire film Höfgen never seems to question the rightfulness of his approach to the regime. Yet in the end Höfgen who has been

attracted like a moth to the spotlights of the stage seems to realise for the first time how blinding this light can be. Strange though, because according to the unfolding logic of the film one would have expected that Höfgen/Brandauer through his acting would have been able to render the whole regime as harmless.

6. Enthusiasm about the Mephisto-theme in the early 1980's

In 1981 when the novel by Klaus Mann and the film by István Szabó hit the public, this was the start of a whole "Mephisto"-wave in Germany. One may well ask why both the book and the film met with such interest and fascination, why the Mephisto-theme became so topical. Eberhard Spangenberg (1982:293) who has researched the history of the novel *Mephisto* and has outlined the background of the making of the film suggests that a young generation of Germans who has not been informed sufficiently by the parent generation, looks at the Third Reich impartially. Klaus Mann's novel offers a problem which has been denied and withheld for a long time: not only does one find there an answer to the question of the relationship between art and power but also an answer to the question of how far one is allowed to go along with the "system". There are also other reasons why the Mephisto-theme was so topical. In the early eighties the younger generation did not identify with the model state called the Federal Republic of Germany which was offered to them by their parents: they looked back critically at fascism. Comparisons between the present and the last years of the Weimar Republic were "in". The reason for this was not always a detailed knowledge of history but rather fear of fascism and war. The slogan "no future" scribbled on many walls is an indication of this. Secondly the discussion about Hitler and the Nazis started anew and on a different level. The American TV-series *Holocaust* brought home the terror of a totalitarian strategy of destruction. Films like *Cabaret* and *Lilli Marleen* were reminiscent of the glitter and glamour of the thirties. Thirdly a new interest in exile literature which had been shamefully neglected in the Federal Republic started to emerge. Last but not least the success of *Mephisto* was due to the person of Klaus Mann himself. He was an outsider. His effort to establish an identity beyond his father's image, his political involvement, his creative restlessness, his use of drugs and finally his longing for death (*Todessehnsucht*) made him attractive for many young readers (Spangenberg, 1982:294). In the few years that he was alive after World War II he warned emphatically against nuclear warfare and the nuclear armaments race between the two great powers. His suicide was brought about by fears of a nature which many young people in the early eighties could identify with.

7. The effect of the Mephisto-revival

Finally I would like to look at what effect the revival of the Mephisto-theme had on the retrospective assessment of the author Mann and the actor Gründgens, both dead for many years. Has Gründgens' image which was the reason for the novel to be banned for such a long time changed or suffered? On the one hand the banning of the novel over such a long period is a sign of the restorative tendencies after the war and on the other hand exposes the tendency by the German nation to repress its national socialist past. The publication of the novel started a process of looking at the role of intellectuals and of the state theatre in Berlin in a new light. In addition Gründgens' function during the Nazi rule was reassessed. In the post-war years Gründgens had not only been attributed with having saved the image of the theatre *per se* over the time but also with having provided a haven for actors who

would have been otherwise endangered by the Nazi regime. In the early 1980s the assumption that the image of the theatre as it had existed before 1933 had been preserved due to Gründgens was questioned. Against the background of a completely controlled cultural atmosphere in Germany between 1933 and 1945, the artistic standing of the state theatre in Berlin was probably better than any other one in Germany. This may have been the cause for the myth which arose and remained around the figure of Gründgens. Today one knows more about him and a more objective assessment of his person without the legendary aspects is possible. Taboos which had hampered the search and exposure of historical truth or evidence, are on the decline. One of them is the issue of homosexuality, which can be openly discussed now. The Third Reich situation of Gründgens whose homosexuality formed a basis for blackmail by the Nazis can be understood better now. This is in spite of the fact that he had adapted to the system to an extent which is difficult to understand today. The fact that Klaus Mann did not portray Höfgen as a homosexual but as a masochist was due to reasons beyond artistic considerations. As Klaus Mann was a homosexual himself he did not want to defame homosexuals nor did he want to denounce Gründgens to the Nazis because of this disposition.

In conclusion it can be said that the events of the past are reinterpreted through the conflicting tension of the novel and the "real" biography of Gründgens. Without the novel the actor and director Gustaf Gründgens would only be a part of the history of theatre and without the life model Gründgens and the banning, the novel *Mephisto* by Klaus Mann would only be part of literary history.

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