The Masks of Mephisto in Twentieth-Century Germany: Gustaf Gründgens, The Actor and the Legend

by

Jessica Crystal Green
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Preface

In the winter and spring of 2008, I was a dramaturgy intern at the Hans Otto Theater in Potsdam, Germany, where I was assigned to Uwe Laufenberg’s paired productions of Goethe’s *Faust I* and the stage premiere of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. In preparation for this work, I read both *Faust* and *The Satanic Verses* in English and German. I also read Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, and was particularly struck by Woland’s magic show at the Variety Theater in Moscow, in which the devil in disguise uses black magic to create illusions that expose the greed of the bourgeois spectators.

At this time, I was not sure of the exact topic for my thesis, but I was beginning to think about examining the devil, deception, illusion, and the role of the actor. During my internship, I was intrigued by the fact that Tobias Rott was cast as the devil figure in both plays (Mephistopheles and Saladin). I became fascinated with the theatricality of the devil and the demonic nature of the actor. How does an actor become categorized as evil? Is it through demonic roles or demonic behavior? The devil and the actor share a transformational ability and the potential to use illusion and deception for evil. I began to consider this as one of the potential reasons for the stereotype of actors as *always* acting.

In March of 2008, I spoke with Free University Professor Hanns-D. Jacobsen about my thesis ideas. He handed me a copy of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* and a VHS of Gründgens’ 1960 Hamburg production of *Faust*. These were what I had been looking for, he told me. I was overwhelmed by Gründgens’ performance of Mephisto, and felt
like I was hearing Goethe’s words the way I had imagined while reading the play. I was less impressed with the novel, finding it boring and poorly written, but it did raise some interesting questions. Although I knew that *Mephisto* was based on Gründgens’ life, I did not know why Klaus Mann had written it or what significance it had in Gründgens’ legend. I knew, however, that Gründgens’ Hamburg portrayal of Mephisto would become a part of my thesis as one of the Mephisto actors I would be studying.

Instead of looking at the devil in general, I began to zoom in on Mephisto, after realizing that he was the most famous devil in German literature. I interviewed several actors who were currently playing Mephisto in Berlin, to get some insight into the personal experience of taking on this famous role. In my interview with the legendary director and actor, Manfred Karge, he informed me that all actors would rather play Mephisto than Faust, because of Mephisto’s wit, charm, and human qualities. These interviews helped me to realize how important and beloved Mephisto was in Germany.

The year 2008 was the 200th anniversary of the publication of Goethe’s *Faust* I, and Berlin was filled with *Faust* productions, readings, and festivals. I saw ten remarkable productions of *Faust*, and celebrated a Faustian Easter at the Deutsches Theater. In celebration of the Easter festivities that convinced Faust not to take his life, I watched *Faust* I and II, lectures on *Faust*, and enjoyed a *Faust* menu for lunch based on foods mentioned in the play. I traveled to Leipzig to visit Auerbach’s Cellar, Goethe’s favorite wine bar as a student and one of the settings for Faust, and enjoyed a piece of Mephisto cake at the Mephisto Bar.
At Humboldt University, I attended a class on Faust and Music, and took a field trip to Weimar to see Goethe’s house, summer cottage, and the Goethe and Schiller archives. I watched my classmates strain their necks to see into Goethe’s library and stand reverently in front of Goethe’s death-bed at his final residence. At the archives, we were shown an original page of the Auerbach’s celler scene from Goethe’s *Faust*. The entire class let out an audible sigh, and we had to line up so each student could take his time looking at the single sheet of paper and taking pictures. I realized that this *Faust* fever I was seeing in 2008 was not a unique phenomenon, but that *Faust* was truly Germany’s national myth.

Upon returning to Wesleyan in the fall of 2008, I asked German Professor Ulrich Plass to sign my thesis tutorial form. In response to my subject, Professor Plass said, “Gründgens—he’s evil.” When I asked him why, he told me it was because he was a powerful figure in the Third Reich. When I told German Professor Iris Bork-Goldfield my subject, she referred to Gründgens as the great Mephisto performer, but was also quick to mention that he was evil for staying in Nazi Germany. Costume designer Leslie Weinberg was exposed to Gründgens through Szabó’s 1981 *Mephisto* film, and said she hated him for his rise to power and fame in the Third Reich.

Weinberg was certainly not the only one to base her opinion of Gründgens on the Klaus Mann novel. Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*, and its film and stage adaptations, are the only major sources about Gründgens translated into English. Gründgens is also mentioned in Klaus Mann’s autobiography, *Turning Point*, and English-language biographies about Klaus and Erika Mann. If one is an English speaker, the primary way to examine Gründgens’ life is through Klaus Mann’s side of the story. While
these depictions are not necessarily wrong, they are certainly one-sided and biased as a result of the personal relationship between these two men. The sources about Gründgens life in German are more varied, and show a multi-faceted and fractured image of a man.

I finally decided that Gründgens’ story was so rich and complex, that I could only do it justice by redirecting my entire thesis into a search for the real Gustaf Gründgens. Why do Germans consider him evil? Is it because Gründgens is known in Germany for being associated with the Nazi elite? Is it because Gründgens is famous for playing the character of Mephisto? How accurate is Klaus Mann’s depiction of Gründgens life? Why did Professor Jacobsen hand me a copy of Klaus Mann’s Mephisto and a VHS of Gründgens’ Hamburg performance as the key to answering my questions?
Glossary

Several words have been left in their original German, because they either have no direct equivalents in English or are idiomatic terms from the time of the Third Reich.

**Generalintendant** – Same official duties as *Intendant*, but higher rank. He is often the general manager and artistic director of all the municipal theaters in a city or of a *Schauspielhaus* and its affiliate stages, including *Kammerspiele*, opera and ballet houses.

**Intendant** – General manager and artistic director of a German theater. He is in charge of general administration, finances, repertoire selection, aesthetic of the plays and casting. From the French military term for quartermaster and administrative officer: *intendant français militaire*.

**Kammerspiele**– A small stage, literally meaning ‘chamber plays.’ In 1906, Max Reinhardt created the first *Kammerspiele* next to his Deutsches Theater to create a more intimate setting for his production of Ibsen’s *Ghosts*.

**Leiter** – Manager or director of a theater

**Staatsrat** – Privy council/ privy councilor

**Reichsdramaturg** – Dramaturg of the Reich, acting as chief theater censor

**Reichsfilm Dramaturg** – Film dramaturg of the Reich, acting as chief film censor

**Reichskulturkammer** – The Reich Chamber of Culture created on September 22, 1933 under the leadership of Joseph Goebbels. By November 1, professional artists who wanted to continue working in the Third Reich had to belong to one of the seven chambers: fine art, music, film, radio, press, literature or theater.

**Reichspressekammer** – Reich Chamber of the Press

**Reichstheaterkammer** – Reich Chamber of the Theater

**Schurke** – Attractive villain or scoundrel

**Staatsschauspieler**– The highest title of honor awarded to a stage actor with no monetary award. In the Third Reich, Goebbels awarded this title.

**Staatsschauspielerin**– The female word for *Staatsschauspieler*.

**Schauspielhaus** – Playhouse/theater. The main stage of a theater as opposed to the *Kammerspiele*. 
Chronology

German book and play titles are translated into English. Between the loss of sources and the inconsistencies in the dating of the available sources, several dates are uncertain. The source for all theater and film dates are taken from Gustaf Gründgens: A Documentation. These events and others are cited in the body of the text.

1899 Born in Düsseldorf (Dec. 2)
1909-1916 Student at the Comenius-Gymnasium in Oberhassel
1914-1918 World War I
1917 Reports as soldier on the Western Front (July); Engagement at the front theater Friedrichsburg bei Saarbrücken; Administrative work in the theater office
1918 Leiter of front theater; Debut as Philipp in Ludwig Fulda’s Friends of Youth (Oct. 2); Student in Goethe’s Faust I (Oct.)
1919 The Fronttheater moves to Thale (Harz) and is renamed Bergtheater; Recites first three scenes from Faust I as Mephistopheles in Hotel Ritter Bodo in Thale (Mar. 18)
1919-1920 Student at the Academy for Stagecraft at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus under Louise Dumont and Gustav Lindemann; Student in Frank Wedekind’s Music
1920-1921 Engagement at the Städischen Bühnen in Halberstadt; plays 25 minor roles: mostly old men. The old shephard in William Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale, Pastor Manders in Henrik Ibsen’s Ghosts
1921-1922 Engagement at the Vereinigten Städtischen Theater in Kiel. 35 roles
1921-1923 Weislingen in Goethe’s Götz von Berlichingen, Mephisto in Faust I; Fred O’Brixor in Heinrich Mann’s Vaudeville; Marinelli in Lessing’s Emilia Galotti
1922-1923 Half a year at the Theater in der Kommandantenstraße in Berlin; Sabud in Adolf Paul’s The Language of the Birds and an ensemble role in Alexander Zinn’s Schlemihl; Cabarett Megalomania -“Birds of Passage” sketch
1923-1928 Engagement at the Hamburger Kammerspiele; Changes spelling of first name to Gustaf
1924 Albert Becher in Paul Apel’s Hans Sonnenstösser’s Descent into Hell (Apr. 16), Duke in Frank Wedekind’s Franziska (Aug. 14)
1925  Christian Maske in Carl Sternheim’s *The Snob* (Aug. 21); Director and role of Jakob in Klaus Mann’s *Anja und Esther* (Oct. 22)

1926  Marries Erika Mann (July 24); Sawin in Alfons Paquet’s *Storm Surge* (Sept. 25)

1927  Director and role of Allan in Klaus Mann’s *Four in Revue* (Apr. 25);
       Title role in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Oct. 15)

1928  Director and role of Danton in Georg Büchner’s *Danton’s Death* (Jan. 19); Director and role of Christian Maske in Carl Steinheim’s *The Snob* (Apr. 19)

1928-1931  Director and actor at Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater and its affiliate stages; Performs in cabaret, night performances, and film

1928  Deutsches Theater - Ottfried in the world premiere of Ferdinand Bruckner’s *Felons* (Oct. 23)

1929  Divorces Erika Mann (Jan. 9)

1930  Frederick in W.S. Maugham/Mimi Zoff’s *Victoria* (Jan. 24); Sings and acts in the Nelson Revue *Everyone Needs Some Luck!* (Dec. 25);
       Deutsches Theater - Orest in Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* (June 10)

1931  Kroll Opera House – Directed Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* (Jan. 25); Schränker in Fritz Lang’s *M* (May 11)

1932  Klaus Mann publishes *Meeting Place in Infinity*; Driving instructor in Katscher/Sorkin’s film *No Answer* (Oct. 19); Schauspielhaus am Gendarmenmarkt - Mephisto in *Faust I* (Dec. 2)

1933  Mephisto in *Faust II* (Jan. 21); President Hindenburg appoints Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany (Jan. 30); Dr. Franz Jura in Hermann Bahr’s *The Concert*, Emmy Sonnemann as Marie Heink (Oct. 13)

1934  Fouché in Mussolini/Forzano’s *Hundred Days* (Feb. 15); Named *Kommissarischer Leiter of the State Theater* (Mar.) and *Intendant* (Sept.); Acquires estate on the Zeesener Lake in Königs wusterhausen

1936  Title role in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Jan. 21); Attacks against Gründgens in *Völkischer Beobachter*; One-day exile in Switzerland;
       Named *Preußischen Staatsrat*; Marries Marianne Hoppe (June); Klaus Mann publishes *Mephisto* in Paris (June 23) and in Amsterdam

1937  Named *Generalintendant* of Berlin’s public theaters and opera houses and *Staatsschaupieler*; Director and role of Jack Warren in film – *Capriolen* (Aug. 10)
1938  Guest performance of Hamlet at the Kronborg castle in Denmark (July 19-30)

1939  Title role in Shakespeare’s King Richard II (May 5); Start of WWII (Sept.)

1940  Directs Mussolini/Forzano’s Cavour (May 9)

1941  Lord Chamberlain in film Ohm Krüger (Apr. 4); Director and role of Mephisto in Faust I (Oct. 11)

1942  Director and role of Mephisto in Faust II (June 22); Guest performance as Dr. Jura in The Concert for the Berlin air force in Norway (Aug. 4 – Sept. 5)

1943  Orest in Goethe’s Iphigenie in Tauris (Jan 2); Goebbels declares Total War (Feb. 28); Enrolls in the German Armed Forces

1944  Director and role of Fritz Moor in Schiller’s The Robber (July 29); Theater banned and State Theater closes (Aug. 31); holds three literary performances – Mephisto, Fritz Moor, and Hamlet; Klaus Mann publishes Turning Point in English

1945  Soviet Union captures Berlin and Germany surrenders (April/May); End of WWII in Europe (May 8); Arrested by the Soviets six times and spends seven months in the Jamlitz internment camp (Aug.-March 1946)

1946  Denazification trials in Berlin

Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater - Christian Maske in The Snob (May 3); Banned from performing in American sector (fall); Oedipus in Sophocle’s King Oedipus (Dec. 22); Divorces Marianne Hoppe

1947  Cabaret Ulenspiegel - Günter Neumann’s Alles Theater (Feb. 3); Marquis von Keith in Wedekind’s Marquis von Keith (June 10); Denazification trials in Düsseldorf; Named Generalintendant of the municipal theaters in Düsseldorf; Oedipus in Sophocle’s King Oedipus (Sept. 15); Director and role of Orest in Sartre’s The Flies (Nov. 13)

1948  Christian Maske in The Snob (Oct. 19)

1949  Director and role of Mephisto in Faust I (Apr. 13); Klaus Mann commits suicide in Cannes (May 21); Mephisto at the Edinburg Festival in Scotland (Sept.); Hamlet (Dec. 22); adopts Peter Gorski

1950  Josef K. and direction for Kafka’s The Trial (Sept. 19)

1951  Director and Fritz Moor in Schiller’s The Robber (Sept. 13); S. Fischer publishes German translation of Turning Point
1952 Director and role of Mephisto in Faust I (Apr. 11); Heinrich IV and direction for Pirandello’s Henrich IV (Apr. 20); Attempts first autobiography (Aug. 28)

1953 Peter Suhrkamp publishes Gründgens’ Reality of Theater

1955 Attempts autobiography about Third Reich period (Jan 18.); Named Intendant of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg

1956 East Berlin Aufbau-Verlag publishes Mephisto: Roman einer Karriere

1957 Director and role of Mephisto in Faust I (Apr. 21)

1958 Director and role of Mephisto in Faust II (May 9)

1959 Guest performances of Faust I in St. Petersburg and Moscow (Dec. 2-22)

1961 Mephisto in film of Hamburg Faust I; Guest performance of Faust I at City Center Theater in New York (Feb. 7-19)

1962 Director and role of Albert Heink in The Concert (May 9); Director and role of Phillip II in Schiller’s Don Carlos (Nov. 20)

1963 Last public interview with Günther Gaus (Apr. 10); Resigns from job as Intendant; Leaves for his trip around the world (Sept.); Dies in hotel room in Manila, Philippines (Oct. 7)

1964 Peter Gorksi sues Nymphenburg publishing house on Gründgens’ behalf over Klaus Mann’s Mephisto (March 21)

1965 Klaus Mann’s Mephisto is published in West Germany (Aug. 25); Curt Riess publishes Gustaf Gründgens: A Biography

1966 Court of appeals orders Nymphenburg publishing house to cease publication of Mephisto (Mar. 17)


1971 Gorski wins libel suit and Mephisto is banned in West Germany (July 13)

1979 Ariane Mnouchkine’s directs Méphisto at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris (May 15); Dumont-Lindemann-Archive opens exhibit on Gründgens (Dec. 22)

1980 Bootleg copies of Mephisto appear in West Germany

1981 Rowohlt-Verlag publishes Mephisto in West Germany;
István Szabó’s film *Mephisto* premieres in West Germany (April 29); Alfred Mühr publishes *Mephisto without a Mask: Legend and Truth*; The Dumont-Lindemann Archive publishes *Gustaf Gründgens: a Documentation*

1999

Berlin city library opens exhibit - “But I don’t have my face. Gustaf Gründgens – A German career”

2005

Anders Paulin directs Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* at the Hamburger Schauspielhaus,

2008

Armin Petra directs Tom Lanoye’s *Mephisto Forever* at the Maxim Gorki Theater
**Introduction**

The story of Gustaf Gründgens is a story of masks. Although Gründgens wore only one actual mask during his stage career (that of Phorkyas in *Faust II*), the word *Maske* in German means both mask and stage makeup. Gründgens constructed, portrayed, and defended his public image through his stage characters. There is no single accepted image of the ‘real’ Gründgens, but rather a succession of masks applied by and onto Gründgens during and after his life, in an attempt to create a ‘persona.’ He lived on the stage and staged his life.

This thesis examines Gründgens’ life, his professional work as an actor, and the public role he played in Germany during the most turbulent period of the country’s history, from the Weimar Republic through the Cold War. His story and legend extended beyond his life, through the unification of Germany, and this period is covered as well.

Actors are perceived by the public as putting on masks for the stage; Gründgens, the social actor, wore masks in his everyday life to create his social and personal image. He staged all aspects of his life in order to acquire the ‘face’ that seemed advantageous to him at the moment. He used his marriages, political affiliations, photographs, and relationships to manipulate the public’s perception of him. Gründgens’ life exemplifies this aspect of an actor’s relationship with the public. However, his legend is more than the story of a single man. It is a lens through which we can better understand the public role of famous actors, the Faustian bargain the
German people made in the middle of the twentieth century, and the struggle they faced in coming to grips with the aftermath.

**A Life in Tumultuous Times**

Chapter One discusses Gründgens’ coming of age and initial rise to provincial fame in the early days of the Weimar Republic. From the beginning of his acting career in 1919, Gründgens aspired to become famous. Although he achieved this goal, it was at first limited to Hamburg, and he became typecast as a *Schurke*. He resented being associated with this type of character, but continued to play these roles. This was also the period in his life when he performed in two plays with Klaus and Erika Mann, allegedly having a romantic involvement with the former and marrying the latter to mask his homosexuality.

Chapter Two covers the pinnacle of Gründgens’ fame, when he reigned at the Berlin State Theater during the Third Reich. With Hermann Göring’s assistance, Gründgens became *Generalintendant* and *Staatsrat*, titles that would continue to symbolize Gründgens’ powerful political position in Nazi Germany. While those in exile closely associated him with the character Mephisto through his own ‘pact with the devil’ and Klaus Mann’s novel *Mephisto*, he was most famous in the Third Reich for his six-year run as Hamlet.

Chapter Three examines Gründgens’ attempts to correct and control his legacy in postwar West Germany. In the formal denazification trials and in his response to the negative image he had in the press, he tried to shed the incriminating titles he had acquired during the Third Reich. Although he continued to be a famous, powerful, and successful actor, his reputation was permanently damaged by his position in the
Third Reich, his apparent friendship with Göring, and Klaus Mann’s depiction of his character and career. Repeated condemnations of Gründgens’ character and his inability to come to terms with his own past, led him to retreat deeper into the theater. He filmed his Hamburg production of Faust and presented the play in Moscow, St. Petersburg and New York to counter Klaus Mann’s Mephisto. Although his body was aging, he remained active on the stage, dying soon after his last performance.

Chapter Four examines the development of Gründgens’ legend after his death and the extension of this legend into myth. Gründgens became the personification of Germany’s collective ‘pact with the devil’ and the guilt and anger later associated with that deal. His image became reduced to the Mephisto of the Third Reich. Attempts to uncover the ‘real’ Gründgens in contrast to this legend resulted only in further consolidation of the legend, leaving a fractured picture of the man.

The Role of an Actor in Society

Gründgens is an exemplary case of the self as a socially constructed entity, as defined by the sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman does not limit the process of acting to the formal public performance, where it is accepted and understood that the actor is playing a role. Despite the fact that in everyday life, “the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course,” there is no clear division between what is “staged” and what is “real” (Goffman 1959, 114). The social actor adapts to socially accepted norms and finds his “face” through “approved social attributes” (Goffman 1967, 5).

It is no coincidence that the word “person” is derived from the Latin “persona,” meaning mask. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung defined “persona” as the
personality that one projects to the public, as opposed to one’s genuine self. The American sociologist Robert Ezra Park asserted that “our very faces are living masks,” which change not only according to mood, but also in response to our continued attempts to become a desired type, impersonating those who seemingly embody these desired characteristics (Park 249). “In the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons” (Park 250).

**Gründgens’ Relationships and Their Use as Masks**

The defining relationships of Gründgens’ life and legend were with Klaus Mann, his two wives (Erika Mann and Marianne Hoppe), Hermann Göring, and himself.

Gründgens’ two wives, Erika and Marianne, acted as his heterosexual masks, both on and off the stage. Even though he never publically admitted to being homosexual, rumors of his homosexuality followed him during his entire career. Klaus Mann’s legend of Gründgens portrays him as a sado-masochist, incapable of love, although his various biographers deny these accusations.

Public perception of Gründgens’ personal pact with the devil is best illustrated through his friendship with Göring. This relationship helped him achieve the greatest height of success in the Third Reich, and created the face he tried to deny and shed in the postwar period.

Gründgens’ personality became increasingly fractured as he began to be more aware of his stage persona than of his real person. He lost touch with his own self-identity, and became the sum of his stage roles and public appearances.
Documenting Gründgens’ Life

One encounters a number of limitations and barriers when one attempts to study the life and legend of Gründgens. Although there is an abundance of literature written about Gründgens, only a handful of written documents originate with Gründgens himself. According to Gründgens’ adopted son, Peter Gorski, he did not keep a diary, and many of his personal writings were destroyed, some by Gründgens and some as a result of WWII damage. Accordingly, the vast majority of available letters and speeches are dated after 1945.

The sources on Gründgens include numerous contradictions and inconsistencies. Often the same anecdote is repeated several times, but in different ways. At times, writers even manipulate actual ‘facts,’ such as the dates of premieres, to reinforce certain opinions about Gründgens. Since Gründgens rarely wrote about himself, and many of his letters and speeches are similarly contradictory, there is no real Gründgens to speak of. The inconsistencies have become a part of his biography, and cannot be ignored when considering the Gründgens legend. The major sources that I use in this paper to examine the life and legend of Gründgens are, in addition to Klaus Mann’s writings, Curt Riess’s 1965 biography, Peter Suhrkamp’s 1953 collection of Gründgens’ speeches, Peter Gorski and Rolf Badenhausen’s 1967 collection of letters, essays, and speeches, and the Dumont-Lindemann Archive’s 1979 collection of documents.

Gründgens always strove to separate his everyday life from his public appearances. Riess uses the metaphor of a curtain that Gründgens hid behind his entire life and only came out of in character, as if his entire life were a production. In his preface, Riess asserts that he will lift this curtain for the first time and “have him appear as he never ‘performed,’ as he was in life and as only few knew him.”

Gründgens was never able to complete an autobiography, and Riess claims that Gründgens left the task to him several days before his death (Riess 8). Riess’s challenge in writing the biography was that nobody, not even Riess himself, knew Gründgens well, because Gründgens did everything to prevent people from getting close to him. Riess claimed to have interviewed many people who had known Gründgens ‘well,’ including Emmy Göring, Marianne Hoppe, Rolf Badenhausen, Gustav von Wangenheim, and Peter Gorski (Riess 8). Through these interviews, he observed that everyone knew a different Gründgens and told Riess about “his” Gründgens (Riess 9).

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2 In 1948, Curt Riess published an English-language biography of Goebbels, *Joseph Goebbels—A Biography* and published his German translation the following year. In 1957, when Margarita Nelken translated Riess’s Goebbels biography into Spanish, she used the title *Goebbels—A Modern Mephistopheles*. In 1989, Riess republished his German version under the new title *Goebbels: Demon of Power*. In changing the title, Riess blurred the association between Mephisto and Goebbels. It is fair for Goebbels to be described as a demon, but not the one that is associated with Gründgens, because that would link Gründgens to Goebbels.
3 “Wir wollen ihn auftreten lassen, wie er niemals ‘auftrat’, wie er im Leben war und wie nur wenig ihn kannten” (Riess 7).
Riess does not attribute quotations or cite any facts. He was free to misquote, since no collection of the Gründgens’ letters, from which he was quoting, was published yet, making it impossible for readers to check Riess’ accuracy. Since his work purported to offer the first deep look at the ‘real’ Gründgens and could not be contradicted by available sources, it was not challenged from the start. This led many biographers to later use his work as a foundation for their own writing. By the late 1990’s, books about Gründgens began including notes to make their readers aware that the “inconsistently reliable”\(^4\) Riess had written a “boundless collections of anecdotes.”\(^5\) Despite the exposed inaccuracies of Riess’ work, these anecdotes became a part of Gründgens’ legend and were repeated by others to such an extent that they must be taken into account when considering Gründgen’s public image.

The bulk of Gründgens’ personal writings are found in Peter Suhrkamp’s 1953 collection of Gründgens’ theater speeches, *Reality of Theater*, and in Peter Gründgens-Gorski and Rolf Badenhausen’s 1967 collection, *Gustaf Gründgens: Letters, Essays, Speeches.*\(^6\) Although Gründgens approved *Reality of Theater*, Gorski and Badenhausen’s posthumous collection includes documents that were purchased from the Prussian Cultural Heritage State Library in Berlin shortly after Gründgens’ death and are now part a private collection that cannot be accessed.

Gorski and Badenhausen make the first attempt to portray Gründgens through previously unpublished documents. In their preface to the book, the editors write, “Since Gustaf Gründgens’ death . . . one can observe that his picture, instead of

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\(^4\) Irmela von der Lühe refers to him as “den nicht durchweg zuverlässigen Biographen Curt Riess” (*Aber ich habe nicht mein Gesicht*, 69).

\(^5\) “uferlose Anekdotensammlungen wie bei Curt Riess” (Michalzik 17).

\(^6\) *Briefe, Aufsätze, Reden*
becoming clearer, appears more and more misrepresented.”\textsuperscript{7} This publication appears to be a response to the Riess biography, since many of the letters from which Riess quoted correctly and incorrectly are included. There is, however, no proof that Gorski and Badenhausen offer the true words of Gründgens either, since the sources are not in the public domain and Gorski admits to editing in order to make the documents ‘understandable’ to the public.

In 1979, the Dumont-Lindemann Archive in Düsseldorf opened an exhibition on Gründgens and published a collection of documents in 1981 as \textit{Gustaf Gründgens: A Documentation}. The aim was to show a different, more appealing side of Gründgens in contrast to his depiction as Höfgen in Klaus Mann’s \textit{Mephisto} and did not attempt to ‘lift the curtain’ behind which Gründgens hid his entire life. The collection comprises reviews of performances, essays by others about Gründgens, and correspondence between Gründgens and his former teachers, Dumont and Lindemann; this is the only collection of Gründgens’ documents available to the public without alteration.

\textbf{Mephisto as a Metaphor}

Klaus Mann used a muddled metaphor in his novel \textit{Mephisto}. The protagonist, Hendrik Höfgen, an actor modeled on Gustaf Gründgens, is portrayed as Mephistopheles, his signature role, and as a symbol of the pact the Germans in Nazi Germany made with the devil (the Nazi party, Hitler, Göring). Höfgen is thus confusingly both Mephisto and Faust, both the seducer and the seduced. He

\textsuperscript{7} “Seit dem Tode von Gustaf Gründgens…kann man beobachten, dass sein Bild, anstatt klarer zu werden, immer mehr verzeichnet erscheint” (\textit{Dokumentation 7}).
represents the Faustian struggle and bargain, as well as the deceiver with whom he makes the pact—a devil seducing and making a pact with the devil.

Gründgens, too, became known for both his personal pact with the devil and his signature role, Mephisto. This unclear metaphor was like a misheard lyric; it is repeated so often that it seems to make sense, although logically it does not. Although this metaphor is muddled, it has become a central part of Gründgens’ legend—and of this study.
Chapter One: A Schurke in the Weimar Republic

Historical Context

After losing WWI, the German empire signed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, which forced the German people to take full responsibility for beginning the war, pay war reparations, and give away part of their territory. The newly established Weimar Republic was ruled mainly by the Social Democrats (SPD), but encountered significant opposition from the left and right by two parties established in 1919: the Communist Party (KPD), and the National Socialist German Worker’s Party (DAP), which developed into the Nazi Party under Hitler in 1925.

During the economic boom of the Roaring Twenties, Germany experienced an immense cultural revival centered in Berlin. The art scene flourished with the rise of modernist movements such as Expressionism, theater venues such as cabaret, film stars like Marlene Dietrich, and such theatrical innovators as Bertold Brecht, Max Reinhardt, Carl Sternheim, Georg Kaiser and Gerhart Hauptmann. The German government printed an excess amount of money to pay off war reparations, which led to massive inflation and a depression.

“The Lost Generation” or “Generation of 1914” became the term used for the youth coming of age during and after the war. Young people were described as having lost faith in morality and being closely bound through the shared experience of war. Promiscuity and sexual experimentation became increasingly popular, and one can even say that homosexuality was ‘fashionable.’ These liberal trends were met with violence and opposition by the Nazi Party. During the Great Depression of 1930-
1932, millions were unemployed and tension between the Nazi and Communist
Parties significantly worsened.

**Childhood and Early Fame**

My father hailed from Aachen and my mother from Cologne, bearing me in
Düsseldorf. Both families were once well off. The decline of this family fell
directly before my birth. What remained was the outer façade, which
supposedly had to be maintained, and in the end forced me to support my
parents from the age of 25 on. This fact did not deter them from maintaining a
seven-room apartment in the best neighborhood of the city, but it did
decidedly influence my way of life.¹

Looking back on his life at the age of 53, Gründgens summarized his
childhood in an unfinished autobiography of less than 400 words. His desire to
succeed financially can be attributed to the façade his parents desired, because of their
inability to come to terms with their loss of fortune. By using the claim that his
parents demanded he succeed, he becomes the humble hero who saves his family and
returns them to the public image that their own wealth once afforded them.

Gustaf Gründgens, whose first name was originally spelled Gustav, was born
in Düsseldorf in 1899. Shortly before his birth, his family suffered a decline in
fortune. His father, Arnold, worked as a member of the working class, producing
insulation material in factories (Riess 1965, 17). His mother was a singer, trained by
Lilli Lehmann and inspired Gründgens’ early interest in singing (Riess 16). Even as a

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¹ “Vom Vater her aus Aachen, von der Mutter aus Köln stammend, wurde ich in Düsseldorf
geboren. Beide Familien hatten früher ihre große Zeit…Der Verfall dieser Familie setzte aber
bereits vor meiner Geburt ein. Was blieb, war die äußere Fassade, die angeblich gehalten
werden musste, und mich letzten Endes zwang, schon von meinem fünfundzwanzigsten
Lebensjahr ab meine Eltern zu ernähren, eine Tatsache, die sie nicht davon abhielt, eine
Siebenzimmerwohnung in der besten Gegend der Stadt zu unterhalten, die aber meine
Lebensführung entschieden beeinflusste” (Gründgens, Gustaf, “Entwurf zu einer
Selbstbiographie.” Zurich. 29 August 1952. In *Dokumentation* 7). This biography, started on
August 28, 1952 in Zurich, went unfinished and unpublished in his lifetime.
young child, Gründgens performed in small costumed shows with his childhood friends, as well as his sister, Marita. Riess claims that his two favorite characters were as a famous singer in the game that Riess called “Concert,” and greeting/schmoozing with aristocratic guests in “Dignified Guest.”

Gründgens refrained from talking about his childhood and the only evidence of his childhood we have, besides the testimony of Riess, are four photographs of him alongside his mother, sister, and friends, and Gründgens’ later claim that as a child, his only wish was to become an actor. Although Riess may have been trying to stress the perception of Gründgens as a social climber, as he does throughout his biography, and although these may not have been the actual games that Gründgens played, it is evident through photographs that Gründgens dressed up as an aristocrat with his sister and friends. In Figure 1, Gründgens is dressed in a top hat and tails. Even at this young age, Gründgens shows awareness and control of his body by how he holds himself. The children on the right stare spellbound at Gründgens, while Gründgens arches his back and poses in an aristocratic gesture.

After graduating from secondary school in 1916, Gründgens reported as a soldier to the Western Front in 1917, three years into WWI. During training, Gründgens was injured by a fellow soldier and began a two-year engagement at the theater on the front for the soldiers in Saarbrücken, performing, doing administrative

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3 There are no available photographs of Gründgens’s father, Arnold Gründgens. Gründgens was very close with his mother and sister, but he never mentioned his father, besides the one line in his unfinished 1952 autobiography.
5 Gymnasium
6 Fronttheater Friedrichsburg bei Saarbrücken
work, and rising to the position of *Leiter* (Riess 19; *Dokumentation* 10). Upon his return to Düsseldorf in 1919, Gründgens began actively pursuing his goal of becoming a professional actor. In order to be successful in this career, he would have to become famous—a feat that seemed feasible to the young Gustav. On March 19, 1919, a few days before beginning his studies at the Academy of Stagecraft at the Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus, under the direction of Louise Dumont and Gustav Lindemann, young Gründgens autographed a photograph of himself (Figure 2). On the back of the photograph, he wrote: “To hold onto until I’m famous. With my profile in the Greek manner: a gift from nature.” Although his hubris comes across as ironic, Gründgens displays early signs of vanity, anticipating his own rise to fame. For the duration of his career, he used this profile pose in the majority of his professional photographs.

Gründgens desire to become a star truly began during his training in Düsseldorf. In 1920, when he was cast in only one role (Student in Frank Wedekind’s *Music*), he wrote a letter to the board of directors at the theater, claiming to be much better than the other actors, and demanding to be given more roles. This eagerness and overconfidence was not unfounded, since Gründgens soon began receiving positive reviews on his acting abilities. On his graduation certificate, Dumont and Lindemann anticipated that Gründgens would launch a successful acting career that would include a wide range of roles, young and old, from both classic and modern...
In a 1952 birthday letter to Lindemann, Gründgens claimed that he and Louise Dumont shaped him as an actor and taught him two things: “Reverence for our profession and the fact that art can prosper only on the foundation of truth and reality.”

As stipulated in Gründgens’ first theater contract, for the 1920-1921 season in Halberstadt, he played only 25 minor roles. He performed in all of them as an old man, such as the old shepherd in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, and Pastor Manders in Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (*Dokumentation* 232). He said of this time, “I was 21 and played fathers.” It is not surprising when one looks at photographs of Gründgens during this period that he was being cast as older men. In his twenties, he looked middle-aged and was even beginning to go bald (Figure 5).

During his second engagement, at the united municipal theater in Kiel, he played 35 roles in the 1921-1922 season (*Dokumentation* 232). The Intendant, Max Alberti, did not use typecasting, allowing Gründgens to play a wide range of characters. Some of his roles included Weislingen in Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen*, and Fred O’Brixor in Heinrich Mann’s *Vaudeville*. During these two engagements, he started to become typecast as a Schurke, with roles such as Marinelli in Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*.

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12 “Ich war einundzwanzig und spielte Väter” (Gründgens qtd. in Mühr 196).
13 Vereinigtes Städtisches Theater in Kiel
14 Heinrich Mann’s *Variétè.*
15 Chamberlain of the Prince of Guastalia, Marinelli thwarts Emilia’s wedding to Count Appiani by hiring criminals to murder him. (*Dokumentation* 232).
After not being engaged for the next season, Gründgens decided to try his luck in Berlin, the theatrical hub of Germany. Although he felt the drive to make it in the big city, his initial confidence was dimmed by the type he was assigned to: young bon vivant and character actor. Despite his lack of confidence about fulfilling these types of characters, Gründgens went to Berlin with the Kiel Intendant Max Alberti and the director Clemens Schuberth, to perform at the Theater on Kommandantenstraße in the fall of 1922. His confidence was shattered after he received poor reviews for several of his first roles: Sabud in Adolf Paul's *The Language of the Birds* and an ensemble role in Alexander Zinn’s *Schlemihl*. Although he received positive reviews for his singing and dancing in the “Birds of Passage” sketch at the Cabarett Megalomania he remained in Berlin for only half a year (Riess 40). He attempted unsuccessfully to return to Düsseldorf, asking Louise Dumont to use him as an actor in her theater by flattering her as a director.

From 1923 to 1928, Gründgens worked under the Intendant Erich Ziegel at the Hamburger Kammerspiele, a theater that was becoming known for its modernist and expressionist productions by playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht, Frank Wedekind, and Arthur Schnitzler. At the beginning of Gründgens’ engagement, he changed the spelling of his first name to Gustaf, although the two names are

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17 Paul’s *Die Sprache der Vögel*, Hermann Burte’s *Katte*. (Dokumentation 232)
18 My translations of Wandervögelzene and Kabarett Größenwahn. This was the nickname for Café des Westens.
pronounced identically in German.  

Writers disagree about when he changed his name in order to stress different aspects of his personality. Riess claimed that Gründgens did not change his name until his initial successes in 1924 (Riess 44), while Goertz claimed he did not change his name until he married Erika Mann in 1926 (Goertz 145). He may also have been trying to distance himself from his former instructor, Gustav Lindemann, by changing the spelling of their shared first names.

Although Riess probably exaggerated in claiming that Gründgens began ‘paying’ cab drivers with autographs during this time (Riess 50), most critics agree that Gründgens got a little too big for his britches during his early rise to fame. With this success, according to him, he also became the financial supporter of his family in 1924.

Gründgens became famous during this period for directing and acting in the same plays, which gave him more control over the roles and plays in which he performed. He began playing many of the roles that he would continue playing during his career, and that became his signature roles: Dr. Jura in Hermann Bahr’s The Concert (1925), the title role in Shakespeare’s Hamlet (1927), Danton in Georg Büchner’s Dantons Tod (1928) and Christian Maske in Carl Sternheim’s The Snob (1925 and 1928).

Gründgens spoke openly about his preference for directing and acting in the same plays. He maintained that it was easier, because there is no difference of opinion and therefore no need to dispute things. In an article on a 1930 opinion poll of Berlin

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21 Dokumentation 27.
23 Büchner’s Dantons Tod (Dokumentation 232-233).
actors’ experiences with working with directors, Gründgens wrote about working with himself as a director: “A fanatic about precision, he is a sworn enemy of all that is random, unclear, and uncontrollable.”

By the mid-1920s, Gründgens captured the hearts of many in Hamburg and became a star. With his first rise to fame, there began a fascination with Gründgens, whose powerful acting ability both intrigued and confused his spectators. The public wanted to understand him as a person, but were unable to do so. Even critics found him difficult to describe, though he certainly had an attractive quality that seduced and captivated his audience. The critic Lucy von Jacob wrote in 1926, “[Gründgens] has that mysterious aura that cannot be analyzed. In its glow, everything becomes colorful, bright, iridescent, playful, and the same time meaningful: the eros of the real artist.”

Many critics claimed later that his legend-building began during this initial stardom. Gründgens was both the creator and material of his art, thus the audience began ascribing character traits, as well as their own expectations, onto Gründgens. After Gründgens’s death, his adoptive son, Peter Gorski wrote, “During this period of the early 1920’s in Hamburg, reality and fantasy had already condensed to a ‘phenomenon’ of Gustaf Gründgens, that could not even exist. It seemed as if various

types of pipe dreams and the hero characters he portrayed on the stage, assembled into one person.”

**Gründgens Meets the “Dichterkinder”**

In 1925, Gründgens became acquainted with 19-year-old Klaus Mann, son of the famous author Thomas Mann, starting a relationship that would continue to affect both their lives and link their legacies long after their deaths. Their first encounter made an unforgettable impact on Klaus, who later described Gründgens’ eager desire to please as a manifestation of his insecurities. Klaus claimed to easily see through Gründgens’ attractive façade and pompous attitude, and glimpse the emptiness and pain inside. Although many critics claim that Klaus Mann wrote some of the most accurate descriptions of Gründgens, we must keep in mind that his description is influenced by his anger towards Gründgens during the Third Reich. Klaus Mann vividly describes the impression Gründgens left on him in his 1944 novel, *Turning Point:*

He was all talent, no substance: the most ingenious performer I have ever seen…a neurotic Hermes…He was haunted by his vanity and persecution mania, and a frantic desire to please. There was something very grand and very pathetic about him. He was mangled with inferiority complexes. His face, without the mask of make-up, was strangely wan, as if covered with ashes. He glittered and suffered and seduced. He wanted to be loved, but no one loved him. His eyes were icy and soft, like the eyes of a rare and royal fish who had jewels in the place of eyes. (Klaus Mann 1944, 98).

Gründgens and Klaus Mann met for the production of Klaus’s play *Anja and Esther*, directed by Gründgens, that premiered in Hamburg on October 22, 1925.27 Klaus played Kasper, and Gründgens played Jakob, while Erika Mann, Klaus’ sister, and Pamela Wedekind, the playwright Frank Wedekind’s daughter, played the title roles. The play focuses on the lesbian relationship between Anja (Erika) and Esther (Pamela). The sexual entanglements between the characters become more complicated when Anja’s half-brother Kasper (Klaus) and Esther fall in love with Erik (Gustaf). Anja is left alone, while the three new lovebirds move to the city (Michalzik 46).

During the making and run of this play, the sexual relationships of the closely-knit foursome began to resemble their roles. Although no homosexual relationship between Klaus and Gründgens has ever been verified, both men were reputed to be homosexual, and many Klaus Mann biographers, including Andrea Weiss and Harald Neumann, claim that they became lovers during this period. Neither publically admitted to their homosexuality, but Klaus was relatively open and wrote about his affairs with men in his diaries.28 Gründgens, on the other hand, took every measure possible to hide and repress his homosexuality. Despite the seemingly liberal view of homosexuality during the Weimar Period, homosexuality had been illegal in Germany under Article 175 since 1871.

27 Gründgens claimed that he was forced by Intendant Erich Ziegel to direct the play (Gründgens. Letter to Friedrich Luft, 4 April 1958. In Dokumentation 358). Klaus Mann maintained that Gründgens contacted him "on a sudden whim" to direct the play (Mann 1944, 98). The play also premiered in Klaus and Erika’s home city, Munich, but did not attract the same scandal without the stage appearances by the ‘Dichterkinder.’

28 When trying to obtain US citizenship, Klaus denied his homosexuality (*Die Manns - Ein Jahrhundertroman*).
While Erika Mann and Pamela Wedekind had an affair, Erika became engaged to Gründgens and Klaus became engaged to Pamela. (Weiss 51.) There is also evidence of an “emotionally incestuous” relationship between the Mann siblings (Weiss 51). Photographs from the period also show a similarity between the appearances of Erika and Klaus Mann, who sometimes referred to themselves as “twins” and between Erika and Pamela, who were lovers at the time, both on and offstage (Figures 7 and 8). Gründgens stood out in the group in appearance and age, as he was not visually similar to a member of the group and was several years older.

In many of Klaus Mann’s subsequent writings, the work is autobiographical, but not fully revealing, giving the characters different names than their models. In the play *Anja and Esther*, he used an expressionist style and nonconventional clothing to express autobiographical feelings in a non-realistic manner. In Figures 5 and 6, the foursome is photographed together in and out of costume. In Figure 5, Gründgens’ body is drawn in, with his legs pulled together, while in Figure 6, he has his hands in his pockets. Klaus Mann appears much more relaxed and expansive than Gründgens, putting his arm around the group in Figure 5, and over Pamela’s shoulder in Figure 6. In Figure 6, there is a distance between Gründgens and the other three: Gründgens looks at the group, while Klaus and Pamela both look away, and Erika gives Gründgens a hostile glare.

The line between stage and reality was not clearly drawn, which helped contribute to the conflation of their stage and private relationships in the public eye.

The play was heavily influenced by and aimed to be an expression of the “Lost Generation,” to which the foursome belonged. One characteristic practice of
this generation was sexual exploration. In an attempt to find themselves and break from the societal norms, the youth experimented with homosexuality. Right-wing newspapers attacked the play on the basis of its explicitly homosexual characters. Despite these attacks, Gründgens spoke publically about his admiration for Klaus Mann and his new play, focusing on its insight into the generation to which he belonged. Although he does not include himself directly in his statement, he pays tribute to Klaus Mann’s accurate description of the sexual experimentation of the contemporary youth: “Klaus Mann: He is not only the narrator of the new youth, he is perhaps destined to become its guide.” Later in life, Gründgens claimed that he was unwillingly assigned to Klaus Mann’s play by the Hamburg Intendant Erich Ziegel and disliked the play.

The initial hype surrounding the performance can be attributed to the curiosity of seeing the first production written by and starring what the newspapers called the “Dichterkinder,” children of the famous authors, Thomas Mann and Frank Wedekind (Klaus Mann 1944, 98). Despite the succès de scandale that the “Dichterkinder” stirred, critics of the play condemned it for poor writing and amateur acting. Gründgens was not the child of a famous author, nor was he considered famous enough in his own right to be included in the photos printed by the Berlin Illustrated Newspaper (See Figure 9). His face was cut out of the original photo, and to add insult to injury, another photo was included, with both women on Klaus Mann’s arm.

Klaus Mann later explained that although this was the editor’s decision, he had the impression that Gründgens would never forgive them for the “insult.” While looking at the numerous newspaper photographs of Gründgens during his prominence in the Third Reich, Klaus Mann thought back on this incident as the moment when Gründgens decided to take revenge on him (Klaus Mann 1944, 99). Gründgens also seemingly responded to the photograph by staging his own photograph with both Erika Mann and Pamela Wedekind on his arm, only standing up (Figure 10). Erika Mann turns her body away from Gründgens, holding onto her jacket in a manner that makes her appear uncomfortable.

Although there is no evidence of a sexual relationship between Gründgens and Erika Mann, they married in June 1926, making Gründgens and Klaus brothers-in-law (Spangenberg 22). Their decision to marry remains a mystery to many, and since there is no existing correspondence between the couple, and neither kept a diary, most of what is known about the couple is based on correspondence within the Mann family and Klaus Mann’s writings (Lühe 69). The decision to marry was seen as potentially beneficial to both their careers: Gründgens would marry into the famous and wealthy Mann family, becoming Thomas Mann’s son-in-law; and Erika would not only secure her acting career, but continue to be cast in roles by Gründgens.

This was also an excellent opportunity to prove to the world that Gründgens was not homosexual. Many writers, including Riess, have suggested that Gründgens’ marriage to Erika helped him maintain a sense of order that was so important to him. “Marriage meant for him order, and he wanted to adhere to it. He arranged an auto-da-fé before the marriage, in which he burned all letters that affiliated him with a past
that appeared problematic to him now, and from which he wanted to get away.”  

While this decision may not have been as dramatic as Riess describes, this was an opportunity for Gründgens to make a new start and forget the past.

Figure 13 shows Gründgens and Erika Mann on their wedding day—the quintessential image of a happy couple, smiling and looking into each other’s eyes. Monika Mann later spoke about the theatrical impression Gründgens made on her that day, laughing about the theatrical manner in which he posed for this photo (Die Manns). The photo is filled with extra props: while Erika holds their marriage certificate and bouquet, Gründgens elegantly holds up a glass of champagne. However, Gründgens was not able to deceive as many people as he hoped, both those close to the couple and the public knew that Erika Mann was Gründgens’ beard. Erika Mann wrote in a letter just after the marriage, “Nobody, even the most clever, can believe our marital status.” Klaus Mann and Pamela Wedekind, the newly engaged couple, accompanied the newlyweds on their honeymoon, signaling to the public that these four really did live an unconventional life, acting as a foursome rather than distinct couples (Michalzik 42).

Klaus Mann’s mirroring of reality was hinted at in *Anja and Esther*, and made explicit in his *Four in Revue*. Klaus Mann wrote *Four in Revue* towards the end of

31 “Ehe war ja für ihn Ordnung, und daran wollte er festhalten. Er veranstaltete ein Autodafé vor der Heirat, indem er alle Briefe verbrannte, die ihn noch mit einer Vergangenheit verbanden, die ihm jetzt problematisch erschien und von der er loskommen wollte” (Riess 66-67).
32 “…da niemand und der Klügste nicht, den Ehestand uns glauben kann” (“Zur Friedenskonferenz im Hotel Waldorf Astoria.” Qtd. in Lühe 34).
33 The hotel that Erika chose for the honeymoon, the Kurgarten Hotel, was the same hotel that she and Pamela had stayed in together one month earlier (Weiss 51).
34 Manns *Revue zu Vieren*
1926, after Gründgens and Erika’s marriage, and his and Pamela’s engagement.\textsuperscript{35} The play, however, received very poor reviews and provoked less scandal than the previous play.\textsuperscript{36}

The plot and theme were very similar and the four figures from \textit{Anja and Esther} resurfaced, as the new characters: Director Allan (Gründgens), Ursula Pia (Erika), Michael (Klaus) and Renate (Pamela). The two young couples were Erika and Klaus Mann, as hat-maker and young playwright; and Pamela Wedekind and Gründgens, as actress and director. The two women trade places, but not before having an intimate relationship with each other, as youth of the lost generation trying to find their way.\textsuperscript{37} Klaus Mann made no attempt to hide the similarities between the play and his personal life, setting it up as a play inside a play, with him as the playwright and Gründgens as the director. In figure 11, Gründgens directs Pamela’s dance routine, while Klaus and Erika observe from the corner of the stage, while Erika plays an accordion. Hanging on the wall is an expressionist painting of the foursome, featuring Gründgens’ monocle.

While this tactic had worked well to grab the media’s attention previously, the quality of this play fell short. Gründgens was notably left out of these negative critiques, receiving positive reviews for his theatrical skills, which stood out in contrast to the untrained actors, especially Klaus Mann. He also stood out as being

\textsuperscript{35} In 1928, after Pamela announced her engagement to her father’s contemporary, the playwright Carl Sternheim, Pamela Wedekind and Klaus Mann broke their engagement and she and Erika ended their affair. Pamela Wedekind married Carl Sternheim in 1930 (Lühe 24).


older than the rest of them, and therefore not as closely associated with the generation the play was depicting. As in *Anja and Esther*, he was left out of some of the publicity for the performance, due to his lack of famous parentage. In Figure 12, Gründgens is omitted from the caption for the Leipzig premiere, which mentioned only the three “Dichterkinder.”

In public, Gründgens was not as enthusiastic about this play as he was about *Anja and Esther*. In an attempt to distance himself from the negative press and the association with the lost generation, he asked Pamela Wedekind to become director after the premiere. After playing Allan in the guest performances in Leipzig and in Berlin, he officially broke with the group and split from Erika Mann, while the “Dichterkinder” continued their tour (*Dokumentation* 235). He wrote, “But then when I realized that certain circles were inclined to take this play as an expression of a generation, I distanced myself immediately. And therein lies also the origin of the break from both these people, who always remained an utter mystery to me.”

Gründgens and Erika separated in 1927, after Erika broke her contract with the Deutsches Theater to undertake a nine-month trip around the world with her brother. They officially divorced on January 9, 1929.

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By leaving the theater, Erika was depriving Gründgens of his leading lady, both on and off the stage, leaving him more vulnerable to assumptions about his homosexuality. She was stepping down from her position as his beard, but offered him a replacement: Marianne Hoppe. In a letter to Prof. Dr. K. Bußmann in 1966, Erika Mann wrote, “May I also add, for your personal amusement, that Gründgens did not know how he was going to replace me, and that it took all my powers of persuasion to get him to accept a certain Marianne Hoppe. She was an acting student and I considered her suitable.” Marianne would come to replace Erika in more than one way: as both actress and wife.

**Flirting with Communism**

During this period, Gründgens socialized in Communist circles but never joined the Communist Party. On July 10, 1926, the Hamburger Kammerspiele published a press release, declaring Gründgens’ intention of starting a revolutionary theater, a series of Sunday morning performances. The performances would use not only actors from the ensemble, but also members of the “Labor and Youth Associations.” Gründgens claimed to be opposed to the “contemporary parlour and...

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43 The concept of the Revolutionary Theater was initiated by the actor Gustav von Wangenheim.
44 “Arbeiter- und Jugendverbände.”
bourgeois theater” and a proponent of modern works. He claimed that his original goal had been to produce *Masses Man* by Ernst Toller on September 19, 1925 and continue with works by Paquet, Rolland, and Büchner, and a political revue. On September 25, under a guest director, the prominent epic theater advocate, Erwin Piscator, Gründgens played the role of Sawin in Alfon Paquet’s *Storm Surge*, a glorification of the Russian Revolution. Despite this production, neither the *Masses Man* performance nor the revolutionary theater came to fruition.

Gründgens put on a fleeting Communist mask in an attempt to appeal to the leftist trend in the theater, but was hesitant to become too closely associated with the movement. By the late 1920’s, the Nazi party had a significant and violent presence in the Weimar Republic, threatening the stability of the government. Even though Gründgens took the precaution of not joining the party, claims were brought against him during the Third Reich that he had once been a Communist youth. Many critics view his brief flirtation with Communism as an opportunistic venture. Erika Mann, who was still married to him during his Revolutionary Theater plans, claims that it was a very convincing “performance,” which made it all the more dangerous. This was Gründgens’ first attempt at wearing a political mask to further his career. In 1968, Erika Mann wrote,

“As I have already repeatedly noted, our Gustaf acted 100 percent as a Communist, an attitude that hardly bothered me personally (although mine was diametrically opposed to it). But I dismissed it as insincere, snobby, and quasi-opportunistic, and it significantly contributed to my desire for divorce. That Gründgens was not ‘politically’ a Nazi, nobody will contest. But the fact

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45 “gegen den heutigen Unterhaltungstheater und bürgerlichen Theater.”
46 Toller *Masse Mensch*.
48 Paquet’s *Sturmflut. Dokumentation* 235.
that he was always *apolitical*, and namely that he ‘wore’ what was currently chic and *useful*—that is important.”

The Wolf in a Tuxedo

While Gründgens became known as a deceiver to his close friends during this period, he also became famous for playing deceivers on the stage. Gründgens was associated with elegant *Schurken* throughout his career, but no character is as closely associated with Gründgens as Mephistopheles—the theatrical and seductive devil with whom Faust makes his pact in Goethe’s *Faust*. His first three encounters with *Faust* were not breakthrough performances. In October, 1918 at the front theater Friedrichsburg, Gründgens played the student, who receives advice from Mephisto, who was disguised as Faust. After the front theater moved to Thale and was renamed the Bergtheater Thale, Gründgens recited three scenes as Mephisto in March 1919 (*Dokumentation* 232). During his 1921-1922 engagement in Kiel, he was finally able to perform as Mephisto and received mixed reviews. His performance gave Mephisto a jaunty, witty and elegant form. He was applauded for his mastery of speech, while his gestures were criticized for being too theatrical.”

After meeting Max Reinhardt during guest performances at the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna, Reinhardt invited Gründgens to work as a director and actor in

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49 “Wie von mir wiederholt schon angemerkt, gab unser Gustaf sich hundertprozentig als Kommunist, eine Haltung, die mich persönlich kaum gestört hätte (obwohl sie der meinen diametral entgegenstand), die ich aber als unauffällig, versnobt, quasi-opportunistisch ablehnte, und die nicht unerheblich zu meinem Wunsche nach Scheidung beitrug. Daß Gründgens ‘gesinnungsmäßig’ kein Nazi war, wird niemand bestreiten. Daß er aber immer *gesinnungslos* gewesen ist – und zwar so, daß er ‘trug’, was gerade chic und *nützlich* war –, das ist wichtig” (Letter to Berthold Spangenberg. 10 Oct. 1968. Archiv Ellermann Verlag. In Spangenberg 43).

his Deutsches Theater and its affiliated stages, where he performed in cabaret, night performances, and film from 1928 to 1932 (Dokumentation 236). Berlin was flourishing with the most modern theater in Weimar Germany and the Deutsches Theater was one of the top theaters in the city. Gründgens claimed that he left Hamburg for Berlin because the provincial theater life ceased to offer him the possibility to develop his theatrical skills any further.51

One reason for the move seems to be his frustration with the roles in which Gründgens was cast. By 1922, he had already gained the reputation of a Schurke with roles like Marinelli in Lessing’s Emilia Galotti and his use of a leather jacket and monocle, the height of fashion at the time, off the stage (See figures 18 and 19). Although Gründgens was short-sighted in both eyes, a condition which worsened with age, he rarely used glasses or a monocle onstage. In Halberstadt, Riess claimed, the reason Gründgens was cast as criminals was due to the impression his leather jacket and monocle made on people (Riess 49). Although his fame in the provinces meant nothing upon his arrival in Berlin, he soon became known again as a Schurke, who was both elegant and intellectual, continuing to wear his monocle and play the Schurke.

On October 23, 1928, his first appearance at the Deutsches Theater since the guest performance of Four in Revue, Gründgens gained attention for his portrayal of the sadistic homosexual Ottfried Berlessen in the world premiere of Ferdinand Bruckner’s Felons under the direction of Heinz Hilbert.52 Gründgens spoke out later

52 Bruckners Die Verbrecher (Dokumentation 236).
in his life against such roles, claiming that this typecasting gave him a misleading reputation. He later claimed that he was forced to play these roles in order to sustain his career. He never wanted to become anything but an actor, and for him the ability to perform was a matter of life and death. He was in a difficult situation, however, since he had not gained the prominence necessary to choose all of his own plays and roles. He claimed that his need for jobs forced him to make concessions in regard to the types of roles he played. He wrote, “My appearance in Felons happened due to sheer financial hardship, I think back on this role with only horror, which stood in the gravest contrast to my personal situation.” Looking back on the Third Reich, it is precisely these types of roles that identified Gründgens as homosexual and could have led to persecution.

Gründgens continued to be cast as scoundrels through much of his stage career, but especially during his 1930s film career, with such roles as Schränker, the criminal boss in Fritz Lang’s *M* and as the driving instructor in Rudolf Katscher/Marc Sorkin’s *No Answer* in 1932 (Figure 20). In Figure 20, the lighting and Gründgens’ pose give the illusion that Gründgens is wearing a monocle, even though he is not.

Although Gründgens was never fully able to shake this reputation, he was able to choose his roles when he began directing his own plays in Hamburg. Later in life, as he had more control over his choice in roles, he claimed that those early roles gave a negative and false picture of his person. Gründgens later said in an interview:


54 *No Answer* was the informal English title of *Teilnehmer Antwortet Nicht*
“I love fervently all the roles I play! Wait a minute, hmm, well, ok, yes, I have had unhappy loves. They are . . . the unhappy loves are the typical Gründgens-roles—I hate them. These are the roles which falsify my image. Roles that I can also play. I always played Marinelli in *Emilia Galotti* instead of the prince. I always played the roles that were apparently easy to read from my appearance and never came from my heart. Never. In the beginning I mean! And film is maybe to blame, that I, well, you know that I used to be a typical film *Schurke*. And that sticks. Also my first role in Berlin in Bruckner’s *Felons* was a role that I really hated, but had to play simply to survive, right? But it did not project anything about me. It projected an image of me and I am sometimes quite amazed at how poorly the image that people have of me fits with the image that I have of myself.”

After being repeatedly cast as this type, Gründgens felt that he was not being allowed to define his own persona because others were conflating him with the *Schurke* character. Later in life, he repeatedly referred to the face or image of him that was projected on him by these scoundrel roles, without referring to the specific image itself. As Goffman postulated about the social actor, Gründgens wanted to achieve a face that was socially acceptable, not *Schurke*, especially one who was homosexual. For him, and some of his fans, the face of his characters was his face, or would at least reflect some traits onto the other. Gründgens mentioned the undesirable roles: Marinelli in *Emilia Galotti*, his roles in Klaus Mann’s *Four in Revue* and *Anja and Esther*, and Ottfried in *Felons*, but never addressed the specific differences between

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him and these roles, or why the image in question was undesirable or disagreeable.

Gründgens was, however, no longer the star that he had been in Hamburg and had to build up his fame and reputation once again. He could no longer direct his own plays, usually performing under the direction of Max Reinhardt. He was also no longer able to play the classic roles he loved, performing mainly in comedies of manners such as Frederick in W.S. Maugham/Mimi Zoff’s *Victoria* (1930), playing only one of his classic roles: Orest in Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1930) (*Dokumentation* 236). In an impassioned 1932 speech on the current situation of actors, Gründgens told the public that he had broken his contract at the Deutsches Theater because of his inability to play the types of classical roles he wanted. He wanted a more acceptable face:

“I gained a face: that suffices. But I do not have my face. All impassioned attempts to change this are undone ‘by circumstances.’ Meanwhile, my position is becoming such that people in the public are beginning to identify me with the plays that I am obliged to produce. This is going too far. And I am striking back. At the theater.”

Even though a high level of unemployment had hit Germany and its entertainment industry, Gründgens chose to break away from the theater, claiming that his reputation was being damaged and began performing in cabaret, opera, and film. Despite the inflation and depression, Gründgens was earning enough money to rent a villa in the Grunewald, housing his parents and desperate friends (Riess 111). He performed and wrote songs for cabaret performances, such as the successful revue

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by Hans J. Rehfisch and Otto Katz, *Everyone Needs Some Luck!* He also began receiving acclaim for his first attempts at directing opera, including Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Kroll Opera House. Opera was for Gründgens an escape from the troubled times. Instead of standing politically against the rise of a dictatorship, Gründgens escaped into his opera and invited others to do the same. Although his 1932 speech about directing opera is included in the book, *Reality of Theater*, Gründgens promotes the use of theater as an escape from reality:

> “Today the opera is the clearest expression of ‘art for art’s sake,’ behind which one tries to hide from the day. It distracts one, jolts one, ennobles one—outside of his real life . . . Theater-going today should not be a continuation of the sorrow tattered day; it should carry one off to another, better world, whose sorrows and worries do not resemble ours and to which there is miraculously absolutely no connection.”

Although many would have liked to seek refuge in the theater, the financial instability of the time did not afford many people the luxury to do so, and the Kroll Opera House was closed after one performance of Gründgens’ 1931 *Marriage of Figaro*. In accordance with his agreement to play the treasurer in Offenbach’s *Bandits* at the Prussian State Opera House (1932), Heinz Tietjen, *Generalintendant* of the Prussian State Theater and Opera, offered Gründgens an engagement at the State Theater to perform as both Mephisto and Hamlet.

57 My translation- Rehfisch/Katz *Glück muß man haben!* (*Dokumentation* 236)
In 1932, Klaus Mann came to terms with the idea of leaving Germany and Gründgens behind, by writing an autobiographical novel, *Meeting Place in Infinity*, which dealt with the turbulent times of the lost generation just before Hitler’s rise to power. Gründgens appears as the monocle-wearing Gregor Gregori, a charming and seductive but vain and childishly stubborn dancer. Sebastian, based on the author, leaves Germany and looks back on his friendship with Gregor, trying to come to terms with his anger towards him. His anger stems from the feeling of being betrayed and tricked by somebody that he believed he understood and trusted (Mann 127, 131). This anger and jealousy of Gregor’s success as a dancer clouds his thoughts, and he feels the need to expose Gregor as an impostor. If Gregor was able to fool even Sebastian, he would be able to continue flattering his way to the top (Mann 367).

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Chapter Two: Becoming Mephisto in the Third Reich

On January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany. Hitler won the March 5 elections after blaming the Communist party for the February 27 burning of the Reichstag and completely suppressing the Communist party. Hitler quickly established a totalitarian dictatorship, giving himself full legislative power and denying the German people basic civil liberties, for example, habeas corpus. Hermann Göring was named Minister-President and Minister of the Interior of Prussia, establishing the SA, SS, and Gestapo. He was also in charge of the Berlin State Theater and Opera House and an avid art collector. He later became the commander-in-chief of the new German Air Force, acquiring the title of Field Marshall General, and had almost complete control over the economy.

Within Hitler’s first year of power, swastika flags were hung in all German theaters, and Jews, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Social Democrats, and Marxists, among others, were not allowed to work at the theater under the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. Joseph Goebbels was named Reich Minister of Propaganda, overlooking the Reichskulturkammer for theater, radio, press, film, music, literature and publishing. He appointed Rainer Schlösser Reichsdramaturg, to head the Reichstheaterkammer and act as Chief Censor of German theaters. Only members of the Reichstheaterkammer could be hired at theaters (Wulf 31).

Hitler, a failed artist himself, understood the power of art for rousing and hypnotizing the masses. He theatrically staged rallies and speeches on massive stages,
such as Albert Speer’s Nuremberg rally grounds, with its captivating light shows and choreography. The Third Reich itself could be compared to a grand performance, and Hitler planned on rebuilding Berlin to become the center stage of the world: Germania. Neoclassical romantic realism that centered on nationalist and militaristic themes, stressing the need for obedience, strength, and heroism in the German people became the dominant aesthetic. This ideology is most evident in the Blood and Soil\(^1\) plays of the period, although propaganda made its way into all forms of art, even the performances of the classical works of Shakespeare and Goethe. Art and propaganda became virtually synonymous, and theatricality became a particularly effective means of stirring and controlling the masses.

Hitler demanded that new theater directors "cleanse" German theater of the unwanted modernist qualities that were prominent in the Weimar period, and condemned “decadent” directors such as Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator, and Leopold Jessner (Grange 75). Hitler looked down on “degenerate” modern art, including in this category Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Futurism, Cubism and other modernist trends. The militaristic and political leadership principle (\textit{Führerprinzip}) was applied to the artistic direction of the theater (Gadberry 75).

Works by “degenerate” and non-Aryan playwrights were burned and banned from the theater. The attacks on leftist and Jewish writers and artists began immediately after Hitler became Chancellor on January 30, 1933, forcing them to flee the country in large numbers. Prominent writers and people of the theater such as Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Stefan Georg, Georg

\[^1\textit{Blut und Boden}\]
Kaiser, Gustav von Wangenheim, Albert Bassermann, Leopold Jessner, Fritz Kortner, Erwin Piscator, and Max Reinhardt went into exile. While Jews did not, as Nazi propaganda claimed, hold exclusive control over German theater, they had strongly influenced the pre-1933 German stage. The loss of these talented artists in 1933 left Germany without a significant portion of its artistic talent.

Censorship of written works, spoken words, and actions was strictly enforced. In November 1936, Goebbels banned art criticism, demanding that “the reporting of art should not be concerned with its values, but should confine itself to description” (Gadberry 20). Nobody could speak out openly against Nazism or Nazi party members without fear of persecution; artists lived in fear, constantly lying in order to protect themselves. In 1934, Gründgens’ former teacher, the Jewish Gustav Lindemann, wrote Gründgens a letter explaining this situation: “We no longer derive our decisions from the mind and the truth, but rather from the poisoned undercurrents of the times.”

Rise to Fame at the Berlin State Theater

In 1932, Gründgens made his debut on the Berlin State Theater stage, directing and playing the role of Mephisto in Faust I, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of Goethe’s death. He followed this with his first production of Faust II, premiering just nine days before Hitler’s appointment as chancellor on January 30, 1933 (Dokumentation 237). Gründgens was in Spain filming Johannes Meyer’s The

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"Fine Days of Aranjuez" when Hitler came into power and returned to the theater to find the Jewish Intendant, Leopold Jessner, fired and replaced by the writer Hanns Johst, and the former Intendant from Weimar Franz Ulbrich. Just before Gründgens appeared in an April performance of Faust I, the new Intendanten informed him that they were breaking his contract and he would no longer be allowed to play Hamlet.

That same night, Gründgens was called into Minister-President Hermann Göring’s box during intermission, meeting the man of power for the first time. Gründgens met Göring while wearing his Mephisto costume and makeup, making a dramatic presentation. Göring was so impressed with Gründgens’ performance that he offered him a contract with the theater, securing Gründgens a successful career at the representative theater of Prussia. From this point forward, Gründgens became Göring’s puppet and protégé, while Göring became Gründgens’ protector and boss, and the public began to perceive them as friends.

While the press had begun speculating about Gründgens’ candidacy as Intendant as early as 1932, when he was invited by Generalintendant Tietjen to work as an actor and director at the Berlin State Theater, Gründgens did not accept Göring’s offer of the position at the Berlin State Theater until September 1934. It took seven months of negotiation and a trial period as temporary Leiter before Gründgens felt that he had secured enough autonomy from Göring and signed a six-year contract. Due to his marriage with Erika Mann, and experience in Expressionist theater with and by Weimar period, forerunners like Max Reinhardt, Erwin Piscator, and Georg Kaiser and associations with Communist circles, the left-leaning

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3 Die schönen Tage von Aranjuez
newspapers welcomed him as *Intendant*, and the right-leaning newspapers called it an outrage.”⁵ Although he had had relationships with Communists, he had never been a member of the Communist party. He appeased those who doubted his ability to provide the theater with the German blood it needed by claiming that he had only ‘dabbled’ in cultural Bolshevism and not let it permanently affect his personal character (Riess 121).

Everyone, including Gründgens, is in agreement that the height of his fame fell between the years 1933-1945, coinciding with the period of the Third Reich.⁶ Although members of the Berlin State Theater ensemble and prominent actors, such as Teo Otto, Lucie Mannheim, and Fritz Kortner left, Gründgens stayed and achieved tremendous fame and success. People applauded his decision to stay in the country and entertain them, while those in exile looked at him with anger, jealousy, and disgust. From his 1933 performance as Mephisto in *Faust II* (Jan. 21), until 1945, Gründgens performed only on the Berlin State Theater stage, making this by far his longest engagement (*Dokumentation* 237-238).

After Gründgens was given the official position of *Intendant*, there was a surge of media interest in him. In 1936, he was appointed *Staatsrat*, and the following year promoted to *Generalintendant* of all the theaters in Berlin and named *Staatsschauspieler* (*BAR* 10). He no longer represented the state theater as its *Intendant*, but held a political title and represented all the theaters in Berlin, as an actor, director, and manager. However, it was evident to the public that Gründgens

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did not whole heartedly agree with the principles of National Socialism: he refused to become a member of the National Socialist party, joining neither the SA or SS.

As a part of the public image that came with his new political positions in 1934, photographs were published with him and other members of the Nazi elite, including Göring and Goebbels, that would become incriminating after the war (Figures 25 and 26). Like other political figures of the time, Gründgens was forced to produce personal photographs of him ‘on the job’ to satisfy the media’s curiosity. Hitler’s personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, was commissioned to take Gründgens’ *Staatsrat* photograph (Figure 24). Gründgens looks dramatically and arrogantly past the viewer. His early baldness pops out against the bare black backdrop, and horn-rimmed glasses give him an intellectual appearance. He offers nothing about his personal interests or personality, but merely looks mysteriously into the distance.

This period marked a significant shift in the division between Gründgens’ public performance and everyday life, between his ‘professional’ and ‘private’ lives. To compensate for the lack of control over his public political image, he practiced obsessive control over his stage appearances. While he could not control what was happening in his everyday life, he created a fictional, safe, and beautiful world in the theater. Of this period, he said, “The uncertainty in which we all lived made the stage appear to be the only certain factor.”

This obsession with aesthetic control is most evident in his attitude towards

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7 “Die Unsicherheit, in der wir alle lebten, uns die Bühne als den einzig sicheren Faktor erscheinen ließ” (Interview with Günter Gaus. Rpt. in *Dokumentation* 185).
stage photography. Gründgens was strict about when, and under what conditions, he allowed photographers to take his pictures, working with a few select photographers, who were all women: Rosemarie Clausen, Liselotte Strelow, Ruth Wilhelmi, and Charlotte Willott. For the majority of his career, Gründgens did not allow photographers from the press into the auditorium, although by the 1940s live photography was being done on the stage in other theaters, including the Deutsches Theater. Instead, he invited the photographers into his dressing room one by one to photograph him; sometimes he even let them take pictures in the privacy of his home. He was thus able to control the lighting, facial expression, and pose for each character portrait. His balding head was covered with hats and wigs, and the high contrast lighting and stage makeup sharpened his features and hid any imperfections of his skin.

This control, however, was a serious problem for the photographers who claimed that the magical moments Gründgens exhibited onstage were impossible to achieve off the stage.\(^8\) His character photos lacked a sense of movement and expression, and usually featured Gründgens alone, with his beloved Greek profile and arrogant look. He had more control over his photographs in the theater than he did in his political life. He chose to present himself in costume wherever possible, stressing his profession as an actor rather than a political figure. In Figure 23, from a 1934 article on State Theater actors, Gründgens is the only one in costume. His photograph is also much larger than Emmy Sonnemann’s, evidencing his prominence and fame in the eyes of the media.

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In 1936, Gründgens reached the peak of his fame with the most famous role during this period: the title role in Hamlet, directed by Lothar Müthel. The show ran successfully for six years and sparked what one newspaper called the “Hamlet-Renaissance.”

Gründgens was even invited to perform at the Kronborg Castle in Denmark, the original setting of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Gründgens made it clear that this was his personal guest performance and not that of the Berlin State Theater. In fact, he never voluntarily performed in foreign countries during this period, because he did not want to be seen as a representative of Germany. On the direct orders of Göring, he reluctantly did so for his Hamlet performance and twice for soldiers in Holland and Norway during WWII.

Gründgens chose the role of Hamlet, which he had already played in Hamburg in 1927, to prove to his fans that he could play more than just the criminals and dubious characters for whom he had become known, and instead be recognized as a “serious” actor. He tried to prove that he could master a role that demanded depth and introspection, as opposed to the illusionist Mephisto.

The role of Hamlet was also a means for Gründgens to come to terms with his own family relationships. He strongly disliked his father and deeply loved his mother, who had recently passed away (Riess 202). Like Gründgens in the Third Reich, his Hamlet attempts to suggest the truth through theatricality in a court of liars and remains completely isolated from his environment. The play opens with Hamlet alone

11 Paul Fechter. "Gustaf Gründgens als Hamlet." In Michalzik 64.
onstage, skipping over the meeting of his father’s ghost and Hamlet never truly relating to Ophelia, his mother, or Horatio.\textsuperscript{12}

Shakespeare’s works were celebrated in Nazi Germany and Hamlet was adopted by Nazi Germany as an Aryan hero. Gründgens’ Hamlet was not a procrastinating weakling, but a Teutonic, self-confident go-getter.\textsuperscript{13} This psychology is exhibited in Gründgens’ Hamlet portrait (Figure 39). Gründgens, dressed all in black, is starkly contrasted with the bright white background, which clearly and sharply framed his profile.

Although reviews at the time were positive, several critics, among them Carl Anton Piper, claimed that Gründgens performed Hamlet superficially, lacking nuance and merely speaking the lines.\textsuperscript{14} Gründgens had become so famous for his \textit{Schurke} roles and Mephisto that the audience expected to see the typical Gründgens-\textit{Schurke} on stage and felt that he did not embody Hamlet equally well. “People did not see Hamlet; people saw Gründgens slipped into a theater costume. He played an actor celebrating Hamlet.”\textsuperscript{15} Gründgens had become a powerful public figure, about whom the general public read and gossiped, but they were unable to separate Gründgens’ fame and reputation as a person from the characters he was playing.

As Gründgens had reached the height of his fame during this performance, large crowds were drawn to the theater to see Gründgens live, both on and off the stage, with little concern for the actual theatrical merits of the production. When

\textsuperscript{12} Paul Fechter. "Gustaf Gründgens als Hamlet." In Matzigkeit 64.
\textsuperscript{13} Carl Müller Rastatt. \textit{Hamburger Correspondent} 17 Oct. 1927. Qtd. in Michalzik 123.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Hamburger Nachrichten} 17 Oct. 1927. Qtd. in Michalzik 123.
\textsuperscript{15} “Man sah nicht Hamlet, man sah Gründgens in ein Theaterkostüm geschlüpft. Er spielte einen Schauspieler, der den Hamlet zelebrierte” (Goertz 62).
Gründgens was in a performance, the show was always sold out, especially right after a scandal or particularly juicy piece of gossip about him was exposed. People also flocked to the theater to see government officials such as Göring and Hitler, who often attended Gründgens’ performances.16

While Gründgens became a figurehead for the cultural and artistic world of the Third Reich, he and others later claimed that the Berlin State Theater was referred to, even during the Third Reich, as an “island,” isolated and uninfluenced by National Socialism.17 At the same time, it was the representative theater of Nazi Germany. While the former Intendanten, Hanns Johst and Franz Ulbrich had allowed pure Nazi propaganda plays into the theater, Gründgens allowed only four or five ‘fascist’ plays into the repertoire over the ten years that he was Intendant. For example, Gründgens directed two plays by Benito Mussolini, playing Fouché in Hundred Days (1934) and Cavour (1940).18 There is, however, evidence that propaganda subtly influenced the interpretation of classic plays such as Hamlet and Faust.

Gründgens’ “island” also offered protection to others who wanted to continue making art, but were unable to due so due to the purity laws. His secretary, Zacharias-Langhans, was half-Jewish, and several actors had Jewish wives, including Karl Kitlinger, Otto Wernicke, Paul Bildt, Paul Henckels, and Erich Ziegel.19 Some other actors in his ensemble had lost their jobs under Max Reinhardt or were initially fired

18 Hundert Tage (Dokumentation 237-238).
for their Communist ties: Paul Wegener, Werner Krauss, Paul Hartmann, Emil
Jannings, Müthel, Elsa Wagner and Paul Bildt (Goertz 73).

Although Gründgens claimed to keep his theater clean of Nazi propaganda, he
appeared as the chamberlain in the propaganda film, *Ohm Krüger* (1941). This role
became an incriminating piece of evidence, suggesting that Gründgens assisted in
Nazi propaganda. Understandably, he was not able to announce to the public at the
time that he was forced to do it. However, he attempted to convince the
*Reichsfilm dramaturg* and head of Tobis-Film, Ewald von Demandowsky, to keep his
name off the advertisements for the performance as he was not playing this role
willingly:

“I obeyed the request of Mr. Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels, not as an artist, but rather
as a natural consequence of my position in the *Reich kulturkammer* and Mr.
Reichsmarschal’s close staff...It is in your best interest to request that your press
office refrain from printing unseemly propaganda with my name, which I was willed
to undertake as a contracted obligation to Mr. Reichs Minister Dr. Goebbels. Use
strict objectivity in handling this issue.”

**Hiding Behind Göring**

Gründgens’ involvement with the theater tied him to both Göring and his
wife, *Staatsschauspielerin* Emmy Sonnemann, and helped cement the public’s

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20 Dokumentation 243
21 "Ich habe der an mich ergangenen Bitte des Herrn Reichsministers Dr. Goebbels nicht als
Künstler, sondern in selbstverständlicher Konsequenz meiner Stellung innerhalb der
Reich kulturkammer und des engeren Stabes des Herrn Reichsmarschalls folge geleistet...Ihre
Pressestelle wollen Sie ersuchen, von einer unziemlichen Propaganda mit meinem Namen
abzusehen und diesen Punkt mit der strengen Sachlichkeit zu behandeln, mit der ich die
Herrn Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels gegenüber eingegangene Verpflichtung durchzuführen
gewillt bin” (Letter to Demandowsky. 23 Dec. 1940. In Dokumentation 106).
impression of their close relationships. While Göring was Gründgens’ boss and protector, Emmy was Gründgens’ employee, an aspiring but untalented actress. After Göring made him Intendant, Gründgens’ was obliged to give Sonnemann good roles in the theater, despite her poor acting skills (Riess 128). On October 13, 1933, Gründgens’ appeared as Dr. Franz Jura, alongside Emmy Sonnemann as Marie Heink, in Hermann Bahr’s comedy The Concert (Dokumentation 237). In the play, the young Dr. Jura and Marie Heink come together after discovering that their significant others are having an affair. Photographs of the actors intimately chatting and laughing together during rehearsals appeared in the newspapers, and rumors spread across Germany about the closeness of their friendship (Figure 22). In the photos, one can notice that even when Gründgens’ uses expansive theatrical gestures, they seem controlled and rigid.

Gründgens and Göring worked closely together and Gründgens’ was granted the rare privilege of unmonitored talks with Göring when he accepted the position of Intendant (Riess 122). Hermann Göring, Gründgens’ protector, may have been homosexual himself. He was known for his eccentric style and use of makeup that could be considered drag. But even if Göring was not actually homosexual, he was known to be friends with homosexual men and to say that Göring was one’s protector, implied a sexual relationship to the general public.

While members of the Nazi party began assaults on homosexuals during the Weimar Period, where homosexuality was illegal under Paragraph 175, homosexuals

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22 Just as Göring became intrigued with Gründgens as he performed for him onstage, he fell in love with Emmy Sonnemann at one of her performances. Emmy Sonnemann stopped acting after she and Göring married in 1935.
were driven underground in 1933 after the raids on gay bars and imprisonment of homosexuals. On June 30, 1934, on what became known as the Night of the Long Knives, thirty members of the SA leadership were murdered, and the homosexual SA leader, Ernst Röhm, was arrested and killed several days later. Hitler began directly campaigning against homosexuals, claiming that the Night of the Long Knives occurred because of Röhm’s homosexuality and treason. Nevertheless, homosexuality was considered ‘curable’ and was tolerated as long as the homosexual person changed his lifestyle. In fact, some members of the Nazi elite were homosexual themselves.

Klaus Mann, who had gone into Parisian exile in March 1933, grew worried about Gründgens when he heard of these campaigns; he wrote in his diary, “The new anti-homosexual campaigns. Gustaf’s grave situation. One would not want to be in his shoes.”23 While her brother noted these incriminating commentaries in his diary, Erika Mann attempted to expose his homosexuality. She allegedly sent postcards to Gründgens at the Berlin State Theater that said things like, “So Gustaf, how is it going with your sticky situation in the Third Reich?”24

Sensing the threat of persecution due to the mounting accusations of homosexuality, Gründgens attempted to step down from his position as Intendant on December 28, 1934, citing these ‘false’ allegations as his impetus. In a letter to the Generalintendant of the Prussian State Theater and Opera house, Heinz Tietjen, Gründgens wrote, “The only compelling reason is the repeated campaigns against a

24 “Na Gustaf, wie ist das mit deiner ‘Schwulität’ im Dritten Reich?” (Qtd. in Fischer-Lichte 178). Erika is intending a double meaning with the word, Schwulität, which means to be in a difficult or embarrassing situation. The word schwul, also used by Klaus in the previous quotation, means gay.
certain group of people with whom I in no way identify, but with whom others identify me.” Göring, however, did not let Gründgens resign, claiming that his presence in Germany was essential to the success of its theaters.

Gründgens was trapped in a power struggle between Göring and Goebbels, since Goebbels wanted control of Göring’s Berlin State Theater, and Göring wanted Gründgens to be the head of his theater. The most effective weapon that could be used against Gründgens was his homosexuality. Although Goebbels projected a friendly public relationship with Gründgens, he used critics and rumors to expose Gründgens’ homosexual affairs (Michalzik 130). Legend has it that Göring defended Gründgens on the condition that Gründgens abstain from homosexual activities and marry. In order to avoid further implications Göring started arresting male prostitutes who had had relations with Gründgens (Spangenberg 81).

At the instigation of Göring, Gründgens met with Hitler in February 1936 to discuss the allegations of Gründgens’ homosexuality. Due to the anxiety this meeting caused Gründgens, he took a month-long vacation in Sicily “to have a rest.” Goebbels was responsible for spreading rumors that Gründgens had emigrated to Italy after Hitler exposed his homosexuality (Spangenberg 82). After Gründgens returned to Berlin, an incriminating article in the Völkischer Beobachter criticized his ‘Jewish’ and ‘Bolshevik’ interpretation of Hamlet. This time he left the country with the

25 “Der einzige zwingende Grund sind die wiederholten Aktionen gegen eine bestimmte Gruppe von Menschen, mit denen ich mich keineswegs identifiziere, mit denen man mich aber identifiziert” (Gründgens qtd. in Riess 141).
26 “Ich fuhr im Anschluß daran, um mich zu erholen, für 4 Wochen nach Sizilien. Inzwischen hatte sich in Berlin, wie schon vorher einmal, und wie es später noch öfter sein sollte, ein Gerücht festgesetzt, ich hätte Deutschland für immer verlassen” (Gründgens. “Der Künstler und die Macht.” In BAR 18).
intention of going into exile in Switzerland. Göring called Gründgens that day to inform him that he had arrested those responsible for the article, but if Gründgens didn’t return to Germany within 48 hours, Göring would no longer be considerate toward Gründgens’ family, who were living at his house in Zeesen and financially dependent on Gründgens. In an attempt to prove the necessity of his staying in Germany, Gründgens repeated this story almost word for word in many letters and interviews defending his decision not to emigrate.

When Gründgens returned from ‘exile,’ Göring made him a Staatsrat, a political position that would protect Gründgens from arrest without Göring’s direct approval. Gründgens’ marriage in June 1936 to the actress Marianne Hoppe, like his first marriage to Erika Mann, was rumored to be an attempt to deflect the allegations of his homosexuality, possibly at the direct instigation of Göring (Riess 129).

Gründgens attempted to make the public aware of their ‘happy’ marriage by releasing photographs of a seemingly normal and healthy domestic life, and performing with her onstage, and in films, that portrayed them as a happy couple in love. In Figure 14, Marianne Hoppe and Gründgens sit on their flower-print couch and read together, while in Figure 16, they are surrounded by flowers and read from a letter in a still from Gründgens’ 1937 film Capriolen. Although they sit closely together, there is a feeling of distance between the two, as Marianne focuses her attention on the reading material rather than on Gründgens. The tenderness between the two appears staged and unconvincing. Furthermore, the two photographs that exist today of Marianne and Gründgens at their property in Zeesen (Figures 14 and 15) were taken during the

same photo shoot, evidenced by the fact that they are wearing the same clothes in both pictures. Purposefully, both the ‘private’ and stage photographs of the two project the image of heterosexual happiness.

Despite these attempts, the public knew that Gründgens was homosexual and Marianne Hoppe was bisexual and were not convinced that they had married for love. As in Gründgens’ first marriage, Hoppe served as a cover for Gründgens’ homosexuality, while Gründgens helped Hoppe’s aspiring acting career. For example, the following verses started to be sung around Berlin:

Hoppe hoppe Gründgens
They won’t have any Kindgens;\(^2\)
And if Hoppe does have Kindgens,
They sure won’t be from Gründgens\(^3\)

The public was well aware that Gründgens and Marianne considered their acting careers their primary priority; on their wedding day, Gründgens gave Marianne the script for *Effi Briest*, a film Gründgens later directed to turn Marianne into an UFA film star. On their wedding night, Gründgens performed *Hamlet* (Michalzik 142).

As Gründgens was becoming more famous and the public showed more curiosity about his everyday life, he had to be very careful about where, when and with whom he was seen. His image, especially in his stage characters, was so well known after his 1936 Hamlet performance that fans began to impersonate him and

\(^2\) *Kindgen* is low German dialect for ‘little child.’
\(^3\) “Hoppe hoppe Gründgens
Die kriegen keine Kindgens;
Und wenn die Hoppe Kindgens kriegt,
Dann sind sie nicht von Gründgens” (Spangenberg 84)
taint this image. During Gründgens’ six-year run as Hamlet, one fan reportedly went
to a gay bar dressed in a copy of Gründgens’ Hamlet costume, and rumors began to
spread that Gründgens was frequenting gay bars in costume. Riess claims that
Gründgens was not upset by the rumor and was able to quickly put the matter to rest:
“At first he smiled about it, because it became clear to him that it was a matter of a
Doppelganger, potentially one who was sent by others. Ultimately Zacharias found a
shady youth in a Hamlet costume.”

The boy claimed to merely be Gründgens’ fan and meant no harm. At this point in his career, fame could get him into even more
trouble, since he would be so easily recognized and imposters could deceive the
public.

Because of the mounting pressure of always being in the spotlight, Gründgens
tried to spend as much time as possible away from Berlin. He could no longer be seen
in public without every actions being criticized by the public and used as a means to
discredit him. He began taking long vacations and the growing stress affected him
physically, causing his migraines to worsen significantly after 1938. He had begun
self-medicating with sleeping pills and sedatives in the 1920s, and was taking larger
and larger doses to feel the effect (Riess 222).

Although Göring’s wedding gift to Gründgens was an apartment in the
Bellevue Palace in Berlin, Gründgens remained at his residence in Zeesen, located
fifty minutes away from Berlin (Riess 170). This property served as a place of refuge,
secrecy and security.

30 “Erst lächelte er darüber, dann wurde ihm klar, dass es sich hier um einen Doppelgänger
handeln musste, möglicherweise um einen, der vorgeschickt war. Schließlich fand Zacharias
einen recht zweifelhaften Jüngling im Hamlet-Kostüm” (Riess 176).
Klaus Mann Publishes *Mephisto*

While Klaus Mann struggled as a writer in exile, he watched from afar Gründgens’ rise to fame and success in Nazi Germany. Klaus Mann, who had begun experimenting earlier with drugs such as cocaine and morphine, began using heroine in 1932 and soon became addicted (Weiss 72). This addiction and the pressure of living in the shadow of his Nobel-prize winning father, Thomas Mann, contributed significantly to his depression, anger, and jealousy. He was unable to judge Gründgens’ actions through personal interaction, having access only to biased and second-hand information. The reports he received were sometimes false, and photographs were often misleading. He saw photographs of Gründgens becoming the beloved star of Berlin and rubbing elbows with members of the Nazi elite, including Göring and Goebbels (Figures 25 and 26). Klaus continued to obsess over Gründgens and his feelings of betrayal, love, and hate.

In 1936, the first full version of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* appeared in installments in the *Pariser Tageszeitung*, an exile newspaper in Paris, with the caption *roman à clef* (a novel based on real people under different names) and a description of the novel that directly named Gründgens as the model for Hendrik Höfgen (Figure 40). Höfgen is an opportunistic actor who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for fame and power in the Third Reich, after changing the spelling of his first name from

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31 Klaus Mann 1933, 108.
the original Henrik.\textsuperscript{32} The actor is characterized as so evil and deceptive that his portrayal of Mephisto seduces “the fat one” (Göring) and leads to the pact that launches his rise to fame and power in the Third Reich: “an entrancing pantomime entitled, ‘The Actor Bewitches the Prince’” (Klaus Mann 1995, 180). Höfgen is both the evil seducer and the seduced, a Mephisto making a pact with the devil. When Höfgen is confronted with his guilt at the end of the novel, he rationalizes his Faustian bargain by saying, "Why do they pursue me? Why are they so hard? All I am is a perfectly ordinary actor (Mann 263).”

While Höfgen resembles Gründgens in almost every other regard, his homosexuality is left out of the novel. The homosexual Klaus Mann did not want to use homosexuality as a means of criticism, and instead replaced Gründgens’ sexual orientation that put him in danger in the Third Reich, with a sadomasochistic affair with the Afro-German Princess Tebab.\textsuperscript{33} Although Höfgen marries Barbara Brückner (modeled after Erika Mann), their marriage remains devoid of intimacy (Mann 99). Although Höfgen claims to love both women, they eventually break out of his spell and see through his deception, recognizing his inability to love anybody but himself (Mann 59, 105).

Klaus Mann could accuse Gründgens of many things, but he could never deny his remarkable talent for acting. Klaus claimed that this talent was not restricted to the


\textsuperscript{33} Until 1981, critics believed Princess Tebab in \textit{Mephisto} was a completely imagined character. In 1981, a letter of Erika Mann’s was found, in which she writes that Juliette resembles a woman named Andrea Manga Bell. She was the lover of Joseph Roth, a Jewish Austrian author and journalist, from 1929 to 1936 (Spangenberg 108).
stage, but applied to his everyday life to benefit his career or public image. Several of Thomas Mann’s characters and themes most likely influenced Klaus’s literary descriptions of Höfgen. Höfgen shares characteristics of Felix Krull, a literary character who first appeared in Thomas Mann’s 1911 short story of the same name. Like Felix Krull, Höfgen is ultimately a conman who uses his talent for acting to become the ultimate opportunist. There is no ‘real’ Höfgen; he is constantly lying to the point of being unaware of what the truth really is.

Klaus Mann’s alter-ego, “[Barbara’s] bright, loyal friend” Sebastian described Höfgen to Barbara: “He’s always lying and he never lies. His falseness is his truth—it sounds complicated but it’s actually quite simple. He believes everything and he believes nothing. He is an actor” (Mann 1995, 130). Höfgen is always acting, unable ever to be truthful, even to himself. He cares only about becoming famous, no matter how many lies he must tell, and what morals he has to abandon along the way. He is able to successfully deceive others in a regime controlled by deception and lies. Klaus Mann later wrote of the character Höfgen: “He is not a person, only a comedian . . . the comedian becomes an exponent, a symbol of a thoroughly comedic, deeply untrue and unreal regime. The actor triumphs in the country of liars and pretenders.”

After reading the false reports in the newspapers that Gründgens had gone into exile after his meeting with Hitler in 1936, Klaus Mann became worried that his

34 “Ihrem klugen und ergebenen Freund.”“Er lügt immer und er lügt nie. Seine Falschheit ist seine Echtheit—es klingt kompliziert, aber es ist völlig einfach. Er glaubt alles und er glaubt nichts. Er ist ein Schauspieler” (Mann 1965, 191)
novel would arrive too late. If Gründgens had really gone into exile, he would no longer be the perfect example of one who had no morals and stayed in Germany to become powerful in the Third Reich. On May 1, 1936, he wrote a letter to Katia Mann, relating his frustration: “The model seems to have completely collapsed, which worries and irritates me. He couldn’t have chosen a different moment. He did it just to play a practical joke on me. People are even saying that he is in a camp, but that is probably a real atrocity tale.”

But after reading about Gründgens’ return to Germany and his appointment as Staatsrat, he recognized the value of publishing the novel.

Before bringing out the novel in Amsterdam, publisher Fritz H. Landshoff removed some of the most hateful depictions of Höfgen, “the fat one” (Göring), and Lotte Lindemann (Emmy Sonnemann) for fear of a libel suit. A publisher’s foreword claimed the novel was not a roman à clef: “This book is not written against a certain person, rather, against the careerist, against the German intellectual, who sold and betrayed his spirit.”

As a matter of course, the Nazis banned the novel. At this point, the novel was known only in the exile community, since the price of being caught smuggling in or reading a banned political book in Germany was the concentration camp or death.

36 “Das Modell scheint wirklich gestürzt zu sein, was mich sehr ärgert und irritiert. Einen anderen Moment konnte er sich nicht aussuchen. Er hat es nur mir zum Schabernack getan. Man hörte ja sogar, er sei im Lager, aber das wird wohl Greuelmärchen sein” (In Spangenberg 81).

37 Landshoff. Letter to Klaus Mann. 24 June 1936. In Spangenberg 93.

(Spangenberg 99). Although Gründgens claimed to have never read the novel, he was at the top of Klaus Mann’s list for free first-edition copies (Figure 41). Although he was unable to directly mention Mephisto during this period, he apparently was aware of the book and reacted indirectly to the claims made in the novel.

**Gründgens Becomes Mephisto**

In the Third Reich, Gründgens became Mephisto, thanks to his personal story and his success in the role, cemented by the central metaphor of Mann’s *Mephisto*. Klaus Mann conflated the character Höfgen with Mephisto, referring to him as “Hendrik/Mephisto.” He also had his other characters in the novel, including “the fat one,” begin calling Höfgen Mephisto (Klaus Mann 1995, 17). Gründgens and Mephisto thus became conflated in the public eye. Gründgens received acclaim for his mastery of the stage role, which many claimed he was born to play and fully embodied. The idea of Gründgens as a Mephisto in the Third Reich became the lens through which spectators viewed Gründgens’ performances for the rest of his career.

After the publication of the novel, Gründgens directed and played the role of Mephisto under the Nazi regime once more, in *Faust I* and *II* in 1941 and 1942. Unlike the time of his 1932-1933 productions, he was now a very powerful figure in the country, holding the titles of *Staatsrat*, *Staatsschauspieler* and *Intendant* of the theater, as well as enjoying celebrity status. The crude humor of his 1932 Mephisto, a sexual misfit typical of the Weimar theatrical style, was replaced with intelligent wit
and earnestness when Gründgens resurfaced in 1941. He replaced the leather costume, cape, and cap with a pleated court jester’s costume and plastered black ‘hair’ (See Figures 42 and 43). The replacement of the leather costume with a medieval costume replaced the outcast with a more traditional version of the character. In his character photos with the character Marthe, Gründgens dropped his cold and threatening expression for a softer, more seductive look.

In *Faust II*, Gründgens wore the only physical mask in his career for the character Phorkyas. Gründgens, in the role of Mephisto, disguises himself as Phorkyas, a hermaphroditic figure that is repugnant in both appearance and morality. This ugliness stands in sharp contrast to Helena; evil is represented by hideousness, while good is represented by beauty.

Gründgens’ transformational ability on the stage became even more closely linked to his ability to do the same offstage. The public was aware of the Third Reich’s use of aesthetic effects to control the masses. Hitler’s ability to captivate the German nation and build up a construct that had everyone either terrified into compliance or enthusiastically in support, became tangled up with Gründgens’ ability to deceive on a smaller, but no less deceitful, scale. As Michalzik remarks, “The identification of Mephisto, Hitler, evil itself, and Gründgens is too obvious to not become an idée fixe after 1945 (or even earlier).”

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41 “Die Identifikation von Mephisto, Hitler, dem Bösen an sich und Gründgens ist zu naheliegend, um sich nach 1945 (oder auch schon vorher) nicht in den Köpfen festzusetzen” (Michalzik 278).
Gründgens’ Military Role

In 1942, Gründgens began to retreat from the theater, taking his signature roles (Hamlet, Fiesco, and Richard II) out of the repertoire and playing Mephisto only sparingly.\(^{42}\) He felt unable to continue acting but also knew he could not leave Germany without being arrested by Goebbels. By his own accounts, he was finding it more and more difficult to keep up the public appearance of supporting a regime with which he fundamentally disagreed.\(^{43}\) On February 26, 1943, eight days after Goebbels’s announcement of total war, Gründgens voluntarily joined the German army as a soldier, and asked Reichsmarschall Göring for permission to resign from the theater. He began as a soldier, but became a sergeant—a promotion that Riess attributed to Gründgens’ desire for a private bathroom (Riess 232). Since the German public knew that Gründgens was not a supporter of the Nazi regime, they did not take his decision to join the war seriously, but saw it rather as a means of survival. “Many perceived Gründgens’ entrance into the military as a type of coup de théâtre, only now Gründgens’ stage was the drill-ground.”\(^{44}\)

This military stint lasted less than a year before Gründgens received permission from Göring to come back to the theater. On February 26, 1944, Gründgens returned to Berlin, ten years after accepting his position as Intendant, looking back with mixed feelings of pride and regret in consideration of the cruel effect those ten years had had on him. In a letter to Generalintendant Tietjen,


\(^{43}\) Gründgens. Letter to Kingsley Martin. 8 Oct. 1950. In BAR 73

\(^{44}\) “Viele hielten Gründgens’ frischgebackenes Soldatentum für eine Art Theatercoup, nur dass jetzt der Exerzierplatz Gründgens’ Bühne war” (Goertz 100).
Gründgens expresses himself in free verse, perhaps unable to express honest emotions in prose: “I came to Zeesen for a few days so as not to spend today in my 

*bunker*/…Today marks ten years since that powerful/ and also violent change in my 

life./ Ten years—the best I ever had./ And the result is not nice, despite many nice 
times./ But I prefer it the way it is now, than if/ I had to keep up appearances/ for the 
sake of what I served for ten years, I have/ had to *stomach* more than one probably 
should/ without damage to the soul.”

Riess quotes this same letter, but uses the word “stage” instead of “bunker” 

and the word “appear” instead of “stomach.”

If the document in Gorski’s collection 
is correct, then this is a moment of revelation that Riess has changed considerably. 

Riess makes everything about his appearance, while Gorski shows Gründgens 
internalizing the guilt. The controversy between Riess and Gorski, over whether or not Gründgens was just acting when he served in WWII is perhaps the defining 
difference of opinion about Gründgens. Did Gründgens really think of the bunker as a 
stage and did he only give the appearance of acquiring demonic qualities that would be damaging to his soul? In his collection of letters, Gründgens accepts more 
responsible for his actions during the Third Reich, but he never accepted guilt in 
the public eye. In a sense, Riess’ biography captures the public perception of 
Gründgens as always acting, only accepting guilt to appease the public.

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45 “Für ein paar Tage bin ich nach Zeesen gekommen, um/ den heutigen Tag nicht in meinen 

*Bunker* zu verbringen/…Heute ist es also 10 Jahre her seit jener gewaltigen/ 

und auch gewalttäten Änderung in meinem Leben./ 10 Jahre—die besten die ich wohl 

hatte./ Und das Fazit ist nicht schön – trotz vielem Schönen,/ aber es ist mir lieber so, wie es 

jetzt ist, als wenn/ ich weiter den Schein aufrecht erhalten müsste/ Um der Sache willen, der 

ich 10 Jahre diente, habe ich/ mehr *schlucken* müssen, als man wohl darf ohne/ Schaden an 


Gründgens’ last role in Nazi Germany was as Franz Moor in Schiller’s *The Robbers* on July 9, 1944, in the midst of Allied air raids on Berlin (*Dokumentation* 238). As in the other productions he directed in the Third Reich, he was forced to avoid anything that had contemporary significance, removing all references to peace and freedom, the Jewish character Spiegelberg, and the “Pastor Moser scene” (Goertz 102). Although Goebbels ordered that all German theaters close on September 1, 1944, theaters were still allowed to have literary performances, and Gründgens gave three readings in late September: appearing as Mephisto, Franz Moor, and Hamlet (*Dokumentation* 238). This time, he included the Pastor Moser scene in his reading of *The Robbers* (Goertz 103).

In this same year, Klaus Mann published his English autobiographical work, *Turning Point*, in America. His opinions about Gründgens, which Klaus Mann had thinly veiled in the fictional characters of Gregor Gregori and Hendrik Höfgen, were made explicit in this autobiography. In 1942, Klaus Mann had received American citizenship and joined the US army (Weiss 192). He began writing for the American military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. His anti-Nazi leaflets were dropped over German occupied zones (Weiss 197).

Legend has it that in the last days of the war, Gründgens hid out in the dressing room of his ‘island’ and memorized poems by Goethe and Hölderlin amid the air raids (Riess 260). Gründgens’ ability to perform was his means of survival.
Chapter 3: Battling Mephisto in Postwar Germany

Historical Context

This intensified Allied bombing raids in 1943 destroyed about a third of Berlin by
the end of the war, including the Lessing Theater and the Opera House. The Soviet
Union invaded Berlin on January 16, 1945 and won the Battle of Berlin on May 2
after the suicides of Hitler, Goebbels, and other Nazi officials. After Germany’s
unconditional surrender to the western Allies on May 8, 1945, the war in Europe
ended; meanwhile, the tensions between the U.S. and Soviet Union that would lead to
the Cold War had already begun. The victorious Allied forces partitioned both the
former German Reich and the capital city, Berlin, into four occupation zones: Soviet
Union, United States, France and England. In May 1949, the US, French, and British
zones became the democratic Federal Republic of Germany or West Germany under
Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, and in October, the Soviet zones became a socialist
state, The German Democratic Republic or East Germany under President Wilhelm
Pieck.

The first item on the Allied agenda in 1945 was denazification, an attempt to
remove all remnants of the Nazi regime from German culture and its people. In
January 1946, the Allied Control Council in Berlin began issuing directives on who
should be put on trial and how, while each occupational zone varied in its methods
and criteria for the denazification process. The Soviet zone carried out the most
stringent prosecution of former Nazi party members, while the British and French
zones primarily prosecuted members of the Nazi elite. Since not all Germans could be
put on trial, the Allied powers created a campaign and produced propaganda to
convince the German people of their collective guilt; all Germans were considered responsible for and guilty of the atrocities that happened in their country.

**Disassociation from the Nazi Party**

After the May 1945 occupation of Berlin, Soviet officials arrested and released Gründgens five or six times before he spent seven months in the Jamlitz internment camp. He was initially arrested because his title of “General Intendant” was assumed to mean that he was an army general. ¹ Largely due to the language barrier, Gründgens was unable to prove he was an artist with words, and used the best tool he had at his disposal: acting. After Gründgens formed an ensemble of chanson singers and performed 150 songs from memory, Soviet officials allowed him to continue performing in the central courtyard of the camp, even building him a podium (Riess 261). Riess claims that during this difficult period his primary concern was his appearance, and he traded some of his food rations for soap and shoe-cleaning supplies (Riess 259).

Before they got word of Gründgens’ whereabouts, his friends and colleagues, including Marianne Hoppe, Peter Gorski, Paul Wegener, Horst Casper, Ernst Busch, Erich Engel, Erich Kästner, and Pamela Wedekind, submitted letters of petition to Soviet officials in Berlin. ² They defended Gründgens on the grounds that he was strictly anti-fascist and kept his theater clean of Nazi propaganda, while allowing Jews and others who were affected by the purity laws to work there. In doing so, they testified, he risked his own life, while saving the lives of many others who would

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² 20 Jan. 1946. In BAR 49.
have been sent to concentration camps. He also refused to act in or direct Nazi propaganda films and only performed in Ohm Krüger after refusing several times and eventually being forced into it. Furthermore, the theater community considered his role as a director and actor in Berlin indispensible and they demanded he be released immediately.³

Gründgens and his supporters attempted to prove that the titles he had acquired during the Third Reich were assigned to him without his approval—or ability to refuse. Gründgens claimed that Göring announced his acceptance of the Staatsrat position to the radio stations and newspapers before Göring asked him. Furthermore, Gründgens remained apolitical, and the position was given to him to block further attacks by Goebbels, since a Staatsrat could be arrested only with Göring’s permission. Gründgens could not, however, give a clear answer about what his position actually entailed. He said that the Prussian Staatsrat had never met since its founding in 1933, but that even if it had, he didn’t “remember” participating.⁴

In March 1946, Gründgens was declared anti-fascist by the Allied Commission and authorized to resume participating in film and theater, but only as an actor.⁵ He was said to have preserved the German theater tradition through his performances of the classics at a time when the integrity of theater was being

⁵ "Gründgens hält Antifaschisten." Berliner Zeitung, Mar. 1946. Rpt. in Dokumentation 117. Gründgens was not allowed to resume directing until his second set of trials in Berlin.
destroyed. The Soviet-appointed *Intendant* Gustav von Wangenheim invited Gründgens to work at Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater in Berlin. Gründgens returned to Berlin to find Marianne pregnant by a mutual friend, the British foreign correspondent Ralf Izard (Michalzik 211). Gründgens and Marianne planned to divorce directly before the premiere of his comeback as Christian Maske, the title role in Carl Sternheim’s comedy *The Snob*, on May 3, 1946. Gründgens refused to acknowledge their divorce to the press, saying that a sudden serious case of jaundice was preventing her from attending the premiere. Despite their divorce, they continued to act alongside each other in Düsseldorf and Hamburg, in roles such as Elektra and Orestes in Sartre’s *The Flies* in 1947 (*Dokumentation* 238). Gründgens continued to hide his homosexuality, which was still illegal under Article 175. This law was not repealed in West Germany until 1969, six years after his death.

The tickets for *The Snob* were sold out months in advance, and Klaus Mann purchased a front-row ticket on the black market. For the production, Gründgens wore the monocled ‘mask’ of the bourgeois Christian Maske, who egotistically forces his way up the social ladder to become a stockholder in and boss of a mining

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7 Gustav von Wangenheim had gone into exile in the Soviet Union in the 1930s.
8 Marianne claimed that she was the one to ask for the divorce, while some writers, such as Antje Weisgerber, claim that Gründgens asked for the divorce after the shock and disappointment of her pregnancy (Michalzik 211).
9 *Die Neue Zeit* 5 Feb. 1946. Qtd. in Michalzik 211.
company. Along the way, he unscrupulously disregards the family and friends who supported him.\textsuperscript{11}

As the curtain opened to Gründgens alone on the stage, the audience erupted in a long applause that Klaus Mann estimated lasted five or six minutes.\textsuperscript{12} The audience erupted in applause again after he spoke his first line: “That was grotesque!”\textsuperscript{13} The first applause showed appreciation for Gründgens’ return as well as that of the director, Fritz Wisten, who was detained in the Oranienburg concentration camp during the war (Michalzik 208). The applause after the first line may have been due to sympathy and awareness of Gründgens’ multiple arrests after the war, or agreement with the monstrosities that occurred during the Third Reich.

The impact of seeing Klaus Mann, who was wearing his American army uniform, after the huge applause, was understandably unnerving for Gründgens’ (Spangenberg 124). After receiving recognition from his loving fans, Gründgens’ looked into the eyes of his ex-brother-in-law, a man who had irrevocably damaged his image and with whom he may have once been romantically involved. Klaus Mann wrote of Gründgens’ remarkable ability to hide his feelings and continue acting after this initial shock:

> He definitely saw me, moved toward me, but quickly looked away again. His smile acknowledging the applause of the crowd was crushed as if out of fear

\textsuperscript{11} M. A. Stommel. “Sternheims Snob mit Gründgens.” Rheinishe Post. 23 Oct. 1948. Qtd in Matzigkeit 128. Gründgens chose a play by a Jewish playwright, and one had been a member of the flourishing Expressionist theater before the Third Reich. This was a deliberate statement made by GG to show his desire to bring back the playwrights who had been silenced by the Third Reich.

\textsuperscript{12} Klaus Mann. "Old Acquaintances." Rpt. in Spangenberg 124.

\textsuperscript{13} “Das war grotesk!” (Luft. “Die Berliner Nachkriegsjahre.” In Kaiser 41-42). One spectator commented that Gründgens was so moved by this applause that he broke into tears (Anonymous letter to “Mein liebes Eulchen.” 30 May 1946. In Dokumentation 119).
of sudden pain. But it lasted only a moment; he suddenly pulled himself together. He straightened up, radiant and attractive as always, with a white tie, rosy face and blond wig—Berlin’s indisputable favorite in pre-Nazi Berlin and post-Nazi Berlin.\textsuperscript{14}

Gründgens continued on with the show, but most critics sensed a noticeable distance between him and his character, as if he did not want to fully admit the truths this unity would expose, and the performance was unconvincing.\textsuperscript{15} He was humbled, perhaps by the presence of Klaus Mann and his experience in the Soviet internment camp, so Gründgens allowed Paul Bildt, who played his father, Theobald Maske, to upstage him.\textsuperscript{16} This was something that his Berlin audience had not expected after his long series of performances in the Third Reich, in which he always stole the show.\textsuperscript{17} Although the night began as Gründgens’ comeback night, several critics agreed that Paul Bildt stood out as the star of the show. The negative reviews may have also been partially due to fear of upsetting the occupying Soviet officials by praising a former Third Reich star (Riess 274).\textsuperscript{18}

The character of Christian Maske was typical of the typecasting of Gründgens as \textit{Schurke} early in his career. His use of the monocle in his everyday life only solidified this image, bringing back the Gründgens of the Weimar period. When


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Die Neue Zeit} 5 May 1946. Qtd. in Michalzik 210.

\textsuperscript{16} Luft. “Die Berliner Nachkriegsjahre.” In Kaiser 42.

\textsuperscript{17} When his former acting teacher, Gustav Lindemann, directed his 1933 Berlin State Theater production of \textit{Faust II}, critics commented that he seemed humbled by Lindemann’s presence and played a more subservient Mephisto. This stood out in sharp contrast to his \textit{Faust I} Mephisto, who stole the show.
Gründgens played this character in Hamburg in 1925 and 1928, he was seen as the wolf in a tuxedo and a *Schurke* both on and off the stage. Since he became known as an opportunist during the Third Reich, an image solidified through Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*, this role was perceived as an expression of his actual personality.

Gründgens’ performance in the title role of Frank Wedekind’s *Marquis von Keith* on June 6, 1947 received equally poor reviews, although the character, like Christian Maske, seemed to have been written for Gründgens. According to the critics, Gründgens was too technically precise and deliberate, giving the audience a caricature rather than the sense that the demonic came from within. Gründgens blamed the poor performance on the fact that the theater was too hot, and he, like many others in Berlin, did not have enough food to eat.

Although several of Gründgens’ other Berlin performances were successes, including *It’s all Theater*, which he directed at the Kabarett Ulenpellier and the surrealist fairy-tale play by the Soviet playwright Evgeny L'vovich Shvarts, *The Shadow*, Gründgens returned to Düsseldorf, the city where he was born and first trained as an actor, in the summer of 1947 (*Dokumentation* 238). He was named Generalintendant of the municipal theaters in Düsseldorf (opera, ballet, and theater) and premiered in the title role in Sophocles’ *King Oedipus* (Figure 31). Factors that led to Gründgens’ decision to leave Berlin in 1946 were the Soviet government’s confiscation of his property in Zeesen, and the fact that he was not offered a position

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22 *Dokumentation* 129; 238.
as Intendant in Berlin. Luft postulated that he left Berlin because he could not stand living in the city that contained so many “demonic” memories and experiences.\textsuperscript{23}

After going through two series of denazification trials in Berlin conducted by the Soviets, Gründgens was forced to undergo another imposed by the Americans when he arrived in Düsseldorf, which was located in the British occupation zone.\textsuperscript{24} He tried to stress the fact that although he remained in Germany during the Third Reich, he was not personally influenced by the mass hysteria that swept the nation. He accepted the concept of collective guilt, without admitting to being personally guilty of anything.

National Socialism, which was a superficial ideology and operated only with mass hysteria, did not (at least not consciously for the majority of people) penetrate to a deeper level. For the outside observer, an astonishing picture materializes of the actors, who performed in the theater for the last 12 years and, for the most part, never felt affected by National Socialism and do not identify with its infamous actions. Consequently they recognize and are resigned to what is called German collective guilt, without being aware of any personal guilt.\textsuperscript{25}

Upon arrival in Düsseldorf, Gründgens claimed that he wanted to leave his Berlin fame behind him and get back to his roots, making “Düsseldorfer Theater” and

\textsuperscript{23} Luft. “Die Berliner Nachkriegsjahre.” In Kaiser 44.

\textsuperscript{24} He had also been banned from acting in the American sector in the fall of 1946, before going through his second denazification process in Berlin (Gründgens. Letter to Benno Frank. 27 Oct. 1946. In BAR 59).

not “Berliner Theater.” 26 Although in his last speech at the Berlin State Theater’s closing in 1944, as he read off the names of the employees who were being sent to fight in the war, he said that no matter where they went, they would always remain Berlin State Theater actors. 27 He also invited a number of his former Berlin State Theater ensemble members to work in Düsseldorf and his final engagement in Hamburg, including Marianne Hoppe.

As was the trend during the postwar period in West Germany, Gründgens made up for the fact that so many voices were silenced during the Nazi period by reconnecting to world theater and founding a “New Theater” in Germany. To prove his new attitude, he performed in many productions by foreign playwrights, such as Sartre’s The Flies (1947), Kafka’s The Trial (1950), and T.S. Eliot’s The Cocktail Party (1950). 28 Gründgens began preaching the importance of political activism in the arts, although he had not held this same attitude during the Third Reich. Gründgens said that after making theater for ten years against something, he wanted to make theater for something. 29

Gründgens also continued playing some of the classic roles that he had played before and during the Third Reich, such as the title role in Sophocles’ King Oedipus (1947), Mephisto in Faust I (1949), the title role in Hamlet (1949), and Franz Moor in

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28 Kafka’s Der Prozeß. (Dokumentation 238-239).
Schiller’s *The Robbers* (1951).\(^{30}\) In 1948, Gründgens returned as Christian Maske in *The Snob* for the fourth and final time in his career (*Dokumentation* 238-239).

Because people were not allowed to write openly about Gründgens during the Third Reich, they felt the right and need to write critically about him afterwards. Now that the press could speak out openly against Gründgens, he felt threatened, and incapable of controlling his public image. In his lecture on “Theater and the Press” at the Düsseldorf press exhibit in 1947, Gründgens began:

> I don’t know what the hell came over me when I agreed to give this lecture. The topic that was provided to me is the most uncomfortable and unrewarding one I could imagine. I will be allowed to speak with you today and tomorrow, you can express your opinion or opposing view in all the newspapers for several hundred thousands of people if you want. I will never have time to respond. So it is really an unequal match.\(^{31}\)

Unfortunately, Gründgens depended on the press to promote his theater and make his productions known to the public. He turned to his friends in the press to improve his image in the midst of attacks. Gründgens wrote a letter to Riess in 1949, offering him free tickets to his performance of *Tasso*, but also asked for a positive review: “Take into consideration that every evil thought that comes out from you will feel like pinpricks on my skin. Be lenient and forgiving with an old man, who only drags himself onto the stage for you.”\(^{32}\) Gründgens played up his weaknesses and

\(^{30}\) Schillers *Der Räuber*


\(^{32}\) “Denken Sie, dass ich jeden bösen Gedanken, der bei Ihnen auftaucht, wie Nadelstiche auf meiner Haut fühlen werde. Seien Sie milde und nachsichtig mit einem alten Mann, der sich nur Ihretwegen auf die Bretter schleift” (21 April 1949. In *BAR* 105).
vulnerabilities in order to receive sympathy from some of his harshest critics.

Although Riess claimed to be friends with the Mann family in exile, he also claimed to become one of Gründgens’ closest friends after his return to Germany. Riess was sure to mention both these friendships in his later writings about Gründgens and Klaus Mann to prove to the public that he knew both sides of the story.\textsuperscript{33} Riess was able to use Gründgens’ fame to establish himself as a critic and writer in post-war Germany, while Gründgens was in need of supporters to maintain his legacy. Gründgens was also able to convert Friedrich Luft, another critic who had once given Gründgens negative reviews, into a supporter and fan during these tough times. Both Luft and Riess wrote flattering biographies of Gründgens (1958 and 1967), attempting to offer an alternative image of Gründgens to counter Klaus Mann’s depiction of him through the character of Höfgen in \textit{Mephisto}.

While emotionally incapable of opening up to the public and presenting a clear picture of himself that was different from the press’s opinion, Gründgens spoke out in general against the evils of superficial judgment.\textsuperscript{34} While preaching against the false conclusions reached when one ‘judges a book by its cover,’ he understood the inevitability of its happening. Gründgens was not capable of changing the public’s opinion of him through words, so he tried to show them what type of person he was through photographs.

In 1947, he commissioned the photographer Liselotte Strelow to document his ‘private’ life in a public relations strategy. Gründgens released photographs to the public of himself in his apartment, in the theater, and in the public sphere. In his apartment, he is photographed playing piano, standing in front of his bookshelf, and looking at notes in front of a portrait of his mother. In the theater, he is shown in his dressing room, studying lines and applying his Oedipus makeup (Figure 31). In the public sphere, he is shown looking out over the Rhein and conversing with construction workers outside the destroyed Opera House (Figures 32 and 33). In almost all of his ‘personal’ photographs, he hides his baldness by wearing a hat (Figures 32 and 33), while he dons a wig and crown in his character photograph (Figure 31).

In his staged character photographs and ‘private’ photographs, Gründgens never chose to look directly into or expose his entire face to the camera. Although most photographs feature Gründgens’ ‘Greek’ profile (Figures 31-34), sometimes he chose to have half his face to be covered in shadow, while he looked up, down, or to one side of the camera (Figures 14 and 20). As in the majority of his character photographs, Gründgens is featured alone in all but two of this 1949 series, when he stands in the middle. All of the photographs are clearly staged and present a portrait of Gründgens that he wanted to prove to the public. For example, when he became *Intendant* in Düsseldorf, Gründgens tried to stress that he considered himself a ‘worker’ at the theater and not a ‘star.’ Although he tried to present this to the public in Figure 33, the photograph appears too staged and fake. Although they appear to be

talking, all are turned to the camera and they form a half circle, so that Gründgens is the focus of the photo. Despite this position, he shows as little skin as possible and pulls himself inward, placing his hands in his pockets, and wearing a black sweater, pants, and hat. This outfit is in strong contrast to the construction workers; one wears no shirt and the other has his sleeves rolled up. Although he led the rebuilding of the German theater by managing, directing, and acting, he was not a ‘worker’ in the sense of its physical reconstruction. Gründgens looks awkward, as if he asked for a moment of their time for a photograph that made it appear as if they were talking.

In Figures 32 and 34, Gründgens keeps one hand in his pocket, but this time his hands are also gloved and he wears a long black jacket, popping the collar in Figure 32. In Figure 34, dramaturg Rolf Badenhausen and assistant Peter Gorski wear almost identical outfits and hat, sans gloves. In Figure 31, his hands are exposed, but his face is covered with heavy stage makeup.

In the late 1940s and 50s, several photographs depicting Gründgens in a negative light surfaced in newspapers and magazines (Figures 27 and 29). Photographs of him testifying at Emmy Sonnemann’s denazification trial, as well as shots of Gründgens making speeches in which he looked particularly neurotic, helped further the public image of Gründgens as a Nazi sympathizer, who was both controlling and mentally unstable. Gründgens claimed that these photographs were taken out of context and that these suggestive poses revealed nothing about his inner character. For example, in 1952, a photo series of Gründgens making a speech on theater appeared in The New Literary World (Figure 29).\textsuperscript{36} Key moments were

\textsuperscript{36} Die Neue Literarische Welt

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captured on film of Gründgens looking crazy, controlling, and stressed, presenting a particularly negative image of Gründgens. He responded by producing photographs of himself as Henry IV, in calm, subdued poses (Figure 30). Gründgens wanted to counteract the negative images presented by the media.

When Gründgens found out the *Spiegel* was planning to use a photograph of him in his WWII uniform, he wrote a threatening letter to the editor: “If you put [the photo] on the front page of the *Spiegel* (excuse me if I have become a megalomaniac), I will personally come to Hannover and kill you.” Gründgens suggested replacing the photograph with a photo from his performance in *Tasso*, which he enclosed in the letter. Despite this threat, the photograph appeared on the back cover of the *Spiegel* with a photograph of Gründgens looking particularly crazy on the cover, with the caption, “Have a laugh, you silly goose.” (Figure 27).

Since the attempts that Gründgens made to show his ‘true’ personality appeared so fake, and he refused to acknowledge his participation in the Nazi regime, the press continued to provoke him with articles and photographs that showed him as a part of the Nazi party. Gründgens grew more and more vulnerable to these mounting attacks and seemed incapable of changing the public’s opinion by offering a different and equally believable persona. A month before the publication of this

38 “Lacht doch, ihr blöden Gänse.”
incriminating Spiegel, he wrote, “I am very unhappy about the seemingly unavoidable racket that ensues with every step I take, and I keep feeling the need to escape.”

The Return of Klaus Mann

Upon returning to Germany as a soldier in the US Army in 1945, Klaus Mann was upset about the continued nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiment he felt in Germany after the war was over. He watched Gründgens quickly regain his status as Berlin’s favorite actor and pretend that he had not been a prominent figure in the Third Reich. Klaus Mann wrote “Art and Politics,” a short satire about Gründgens’ ability to transform himself and maintain his prominence, no matter what the political atmosphere of the moment. Gründgens cannot claim to always be apolitical and unaffected by the times if he so completely transforms himself to adapt to them.

Klaus Mann wrote, “An apolitical Staatsrat—is there such a thing? . . . Someone who served a government of thieves as a cultural figurehead for so long and so successfully is not allowed to play naïve afterward. That is absolutely tasteless!”

Even before Gründgens had seen Klaus Mann at the premiere of The Snob and had tried to prove that he had not supported the Nazi regime during the denazification trials, Gründgens was aware of the damage that Klaus Mann’s voiced opinions of him could have in this vulnerable position. In a letter to Pamela Wedekind on March 27, 1946, Gründgens wrote, “Despite all of the Mephistos and Turning Points, the only

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thing that I could at best do, reluctantly, would be to write a note, saying: Dear children, it’s about time for you to stop the mischief. Do you know that you are starting to do us real harm?” If Gründgens actually wrote such a letter to Klaus and Erika, it did not hold Klaus Mann back from his attempts at translating *Turning Point* into German, and publishing *Mephisto* in West Germany.

Klaus Mann’s body and mind were also quickly deteriorating after the war, as he began heavily abusing heroine again, making it increasingly difficult for him to write (Weiss 228). After Klaus’s father was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1946, his closest friend, Erika Mann, left Klaus’s side to care for her father. Klaus felt abandoned and possibly jealous of the new close relationship between his father and sister (Weiss 224). Although Klaus moved to California in 1948 to be nearer to his father and sister, he fell deeper into depression and attempted suicide (Weiss 232).

Klaus Mann had not yet succeeded in making those in Germany fully aware of the danger he sensed in a seductive and powerful figure like Gründgens. Although he had finished the translation of *Turning Point* in 1949, he was unable to find a publisher in Germany willing to print it. On May 5, 1949, the same day that the incriminating article in the *Spiegel* was printed, Klaus received a letter from Georg Jacobi of the Berlin Langenscheidt publishing house, informing him that it would be impossible to publish *Mephisto* in the German Federal Republic, since Gründgens was still a prominent figure. In addition to Klaus’s drug addiction, growing

41 “Trotz allen Mephistos und Turning Points ist das einzige, zu welchem ich mich allenfalls aufraffen könnte, ein Briefchen, in dem steht: Liebe Kinder, nun müsst Ihr den Unfug allmählich lassen, denn wisst Ihr eigentlich, dass Ihr langsam anfangt, uns zu schaden?” (Letter to Pamela Wedekind. 27 March 1946. In BAR 405).
42 In Klaus Mann. *Briefe und Antworten* 1922-1949, 613.
depression, and failure as a writer, it now seemed as if Gründgens was preventing him from publishing in Germany.

Nine days later Klaus committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills in Cannes, the same location he had chosen for the suicide of his protagonist in *Meeting Place in Infinity* (Mills 255). The last letter Klaus received from Erika informed him that Gründgens was planning on bringing his Düsseldorf production of *Faust I* to the Edinburg Festival in Scotland. Erika had tried to scare Gründgens away by announcing on BBC radio that she planned on attending the festival, referring to Gründgens as both Höfgen and Gründgens.43

Gründgens’ performance in Edinburgh was met with resistance, due to the public’s awareness of his role as *Staatsrat* and Göring’s “friend” in the Third Reich. Figure 28 shows the flyer that was thrown onto the stage of Gründgens’ production of *Faust* with a photograph of “culture” in 1830 (the face of Goethe) and of “culture” in 1943 (Gründgens in his army uniform).

Because Klaus’ suicide followed the realization that nobody would publish *Mephisto*, articles in the newspaper identified Gründgens as the cause of Klaus’s suicide. Gründgens claimed to have nothing to do with blocking the publication of Mephisto, since he did not even know what it was about. Gründgens paints himself as an innocent victim of unjustified hate and revenge. In a letter to the publisher of the *The German Jews General News*44 Karl Marx, Gründgens attempted to counteract these rumors:

I do not know Klaus Mann’s book and also do not want to ever read

44 *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland*
it...Incidentally, even if this correspondence with the extremely tactless German publisher had a connection to Klaus Mann’s death (I am tempted not to assume that), I still do not see what I have to do with it, because I do not have, directly nor indirectly, anything to do with the book or its emergence...I have seen Klaus Mann twice since 1928. He knew nothing about me and my thoughts, nothing about my motives. I told him and many mutual friends, also before his death, that it is not possible for me to muster the same pathological hatred that these two people have thrown at me, possibly because they had otherwise too little purpose in life.45

Before sending Klaus Mann’s translation of Turning Point to the S. Fischer publishing house, Erika Mann edited, altered, and expanded on some parts of the book. In 1951, Gründgens, Curt Riess, and Rolf Badenhausen succeeded in postponing publication and removing several passages from the autobiography, which depicted Gründgens as a wealthy opportunist. All the sections explicitly stating that Gründgens was the model for Höfgen were also removed, although they remain in the original English edition (Spangenberg 140-142).

After Erika Mann attempted to publish Mephisto in 1952, Gründgens told his friend and former Jewish secretary, Erich Zacharias-Langhans, that certain Jewish organizations were defending him and petitioning against the publication. Gründgens never admitted to personally preventing the publication of Mephisto in West Germany. Although Gründgens was told that he would win any lawsuit he brought against the publishing house, he claimed that he would rather live a peaceful life and

45 “Ich kenne das Buch von Klaus Mann nicht und will es auch nie lesen...Im übrigen: selbst wenn dieser Briefwechsel mit dem sehr taktlosen deutschen Verleger eine Beziehung zu Klaus Manns Tod haben sollte—ich bin versucht, das nicht anzunehmen—so ist mir immer noch nicht klar, was ich damit zu tun habe; denn ich habe weder direkt noch indirekt mit dem Buch und seinem Erscheinen hier etwas zu tun...Ich habe Klaus Mann seit 1928 zweimal gesehen. Er weiß nichts von mir und meinem Gedanken, nichts von meinem Motiven. Ich habe ihm und vielen gemeinsamen Freunden auch vor seinem Tode gesagt, dass es mir nicht möglich ist, den gleichen krankhaften Haß aufzubringen, den diese beiden Menschen auf mich geworfen haben, vielleicht, weil sie sonst zu wenig Lebensinhalt hatten” (13 Dec. 1950. In BAR 76-78).
not get upset over such matters.\textsuperscript{46}

Instead of speaking out directly against the claims made by Klaus Mann, Gründgens enlisted the help of others to lobby for censorship of \textit{Turning Point} on his behalf (Spangenberg 139). He never told the public why he disagreed with Mann’s image of him or how it differed from his true personality. Gründgens complained that his silence about Mephisto, and other negative depictions that were appearing about him in the news, led to false assumptions:

I have never believed that I should respond to the various pieces of news and incorrect announcements about me, because I believe that there are more important things than me. But little by little my silence contributes to the false impression that the unintentional or maybe also intentional false information is accurate or that I have some motive for keeping silent.\textsuperscript{47}

In 1952, as Erika Mann was trying to find a German publisher for \textit{Mephisto} and a year after the German publication of \textit{Turning Point}, Gründgens attempted to define himself by writing an autobiography. In Düsseldorf, he looked back on his early childhood in the city, commenting on who he once was and who he had become. He avoided talking about what happened during the period of the Third Reich. The attempt was a failure and never got beyond 400 words.\textsuperscript{48} Instead, Gründgens used the medium he knew best for presenting himself to the world: acting. This same year, he appeared once again as Mephisto in a production of \textit{Faust I} in

\textsuperscript{48} Gründgens, Gustaf, “Entwurf zu einer Selbstbiographie.” Zurich. 29 August 1952. In \textit{Dokumentation 7}. 

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Düsseldorf.

Although Gründgens was unable to write a book about himself, Peter Suhrkamp published a collection of Gründgens’ speeches in the 1953 *Reality of Theater*.\(^{49}\) There are speeches from 1930 to 1951, but most of them are from after 1945. In the foreword, Suhrkamp claims that the loss of documents is due to the damage done by the war (*Wirklichkeit* 9). The only photographs included in the book are from Gründgens’ postwar productions: Josef K. in Kafka’s *The Trial* and Hamlet.

As part of Gründgens’ attempt to appear humble and take attention away from the negative associations that attached themselves to him during the Third Reich, many of the speeches stress his role as a worker in the theater, rather than a star. Gründgens’ major defense during the denazification trials was that despite the moral sacrifices he may have made, or was forced to make, he preserved the integrity of German theater in a time of great danger, by letting the plays speak for themselves.\(^{50}\)

The last sentence in *Reality of Theater*, drawn from from Gründgens’ 1951 speech in Düsseldorf, reads: “But my viewpoint will always be that it’s not about me, but about the cause of German theater.”\(^{51}\) Gründgens claimed that he did not let his personal or political views, no matter what they were, alter the integrity of the plays.

By the mid 1950s, Gründgens was still under the stress of saving the Düsseldorf theater, a job which he called “Sisyphus-work” and continued to receive negative press about his Nazi past. The stress continued to take a toll on his health,

\(^{49}\) *Wirklichkeit des Theaters*

\(^{50}\) Gründgens. “Der Künstler und die Macht.” In *BAR* 20.

\(^{51}\) “Aber mein Gesichtspunkt wird immer der sein, dass es nicht um meine Person geht, sondern um die Sache des Deutschen Theaters” (Gründgens, *Wirklichkeit*, 208).
and he began visiting sanitariums and taking morphine for his migraines in 1954.\textsuperscript{52} While on a vacation in Zurich in 1955, Gründgens attempted once again to come to terms with his past and write an autobiography.\textsuperscript{53} In the foreward to this unfinished autobiography, Gründgens wrote that he had attempted several times to write about his time at the Berlin State Theater. He wrote that he would try to separate politics and theater, creating an apolitical book about his experiences as a man of the theater in the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{54} This was an impossible task. The fact that Gründgens skips over Hitler’s rise to power makes it clear to the reader that Gründgens avoided writing about political events that affected his actions.

Gründgens is unable to speak candidly about this period, instead using quotations from friends and colleagues like Erich Ziegel, and words that his lawyer, Werner Schütz, used for Gründgens’ 1947 denazification trial in Düsseldorf (Michalzik 72). The autobiography clearly read as a speech for the defense rather than a heartfelt account of his experiences.

\textbf{Return to Hamburg}

In 1955, Gründgens left Düsseldorf and was named \textit{Generalintendant} of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg. In his opening speech to the employees of the Schauspielhaus, he said, “Do what you want in your private life, but I don’t want to see you bring the daily grind onto the stage. Make sure that the boards on which you

\begin{itemize}
\item Goertz 121.
\item This attempt was published as the first part of Peter Gorski and Rolf Badenhausen’s collection of GG’s letters and speeches, \textit{Briefe, Aufsätze, Rede}. The publishers gave it the title, \textit{The Artist and the Power (Der Künstler und die Macht)}.
\item “Der “Künstler und die Macht.”” In \textit{BAR} 15.
\end{itemize}
Unable to change public opinion of him, Gründgens retreated into the theater. He created another “island” to protect himself from the uncontrollable world outside its walls.

He was fully aware of the legend surrounding his career and desperate to make this discrepancy clear to the public. Although Gründgens acknowledged the legend, he was once again unable to describe the specific differences between the perceived image of him and who he considered himself to be. In the same speech to his new Hamburg colleagues, he wrote:

When, like me, a person has appeared in the foremost of theater for 30 years, one is inevitably subjected to creation of a kind of legend, a legend that more and more loses any connection to oneself, especially, when, as in my case, this creation of a legend was defined and controlled from the outside during a critical phase of my life. I imagine sometimes that if I were to meet my myth on the street, I would not recognize myself. And this constant balancing act between myth and reality eats up a lot of energy.

Hamburg, along with Frankfurt, was a very important press city in Germany at the time. Gründgens was forced to give in to the pressure of live photography, as photographers were sneaking into his rehearsals and taking photos from the balconies.

If the press was going to get photographs of him in action, he wanted to control how they were done (Canaris in Matzigkeit 35). Gründgens was fully aware of the

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importance of theater photography in keeping his memory alive and accepted, with hesitation, the possibility of unflattering photographs being taken.

In 1956, the East Berlin Aufbau-Verlag published *Mephisto* in the GDR, under the new title *Mephisto: Novel of a Career*. The change in title is clearly an attempt to avoid libel charges and stress the fact that the novel is about a career and not a specific person. Just as he had in 1952, Gründgens reacted to the posthumous Klaus Mann publication by performing as Mephisto in *Faust I* (1957) and *Faust II* (1958). In order to combat the legend of Gründgens as evil, he attempted to stress Mephisto’s fall from grace: “a reduced, a fallen angel.” He claimed that there was no such thing as pure good or pure evil. Gründgens expressly played up Mephisto’s relationship with God. In his 1941 performance at the Berlin State Theater, he had had to remove God and the angels from the Prologue in Heaven, allowing the audience to only hear Mephisto make the initial deal with God to seduce Faust. Gründgens claimed that the relationship between God and Mephisto was essential for showing that Mephisto did not seduce Faust out of his own personal pleasure in performing evil deeds. Without God’s presence, Mephisto came across as too evil.

In addition to including God and the angels in the Prologue in Heaven, Gründgens pointed up to heaven and stressed the word ‘we’ when Mephisto makes the pact with Faust and says, “Consider this well; we won’t forget it.”

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57 Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto: Roman einer Karriere*. Although exile literature was embraced in East Germany after the war, West Germany did not really start publishing or teaching exile literature until the 1980s (Spangenberg 135).
58 *Dokumentation* 240.
59 “eines reduzierten, eines gefallenen Engels.”
60 Gründgens in Melchinger 123.
Mephisto is only one example of the type of villain Gründgens played that he did not consider purely evil. At the end of his career, Gründgens said that he preferred playing characters who did not murder or perform evil acts for the pleasure of it, but rather out of metaphysical despair. “As an actor, I am interested in characters who, in the revolt against their destiny, in the dispute with a higher power, with God if you will, perform evil or are broken by a guilty conscience like Macbeth.”62 Although he never played Macbeth, some of his most famous roles fit this description: Richard III, Franz Moor, Hamlet, and Mephisto.

Gründgens also attempted to play up the theatricality of his 1957 performance of Faust I, including the Prologue in the Theater, to stress that the play is not a real world, but the world of theater. Gründgens took on the role of the actor, wearing a medieval court jester’s outfit over his Mephisto makeup and cap (Figure 35).63 By wearing Mephisto makeup under the actor’s costume, he was able to hide behind a series of masks; he was an actor playing the devil playing an actor. This Mephisto makeup was heavier and more stylized than in his previous productions, and more masklike. As he began to noticeably age and weaken, both physically and mentally, he tried to hide behind a heavier and more stylized makeup.

In the last years of his life, Gründgens attempted to “substitute [his] Mephisto


63 (Gründgens. Letter to Bundespresident Heuss, 22 July 1957. In BAR 112.) The actor’s costume is strongly influenced by the geometric shapes that were popular in 1950’s fashion.
for the one by Klaus Mann,“64 by making guest performances in Moscow and Leningrad (1959) and in New York (1961). He also attempted to preserve his Mephisto by capturing it on film in 1961.65 Peter Gorski, Gründgens’ alleged young lover, whom Gründgens adopted in 1949 in the hope that he would protect and preserve his legacy, directed the film (Weiss 259).

In the 1940s and 50s, Gründgens had felt emotionally incapable of dealing with the questions that were bound to be asked in the Soviet Union and New York. In both countries, he was seen in a negative light because of his role in the Third Reich. In addition to not speaking any English or Russian, he was scared about being asked personal questions, especially concerning the Third Reich or Klaus Mann. On May 16, 1960, in a letter to Bruno E. Werner, cultural attaché at the German Embassy in Washington DC and former member of the Reichspresskammer, Gründgens wrote:

I am hesitant about consenting to the guest appearance in New York. For all intents and purposes it comes ten years too late for me. At the same time I do not fear performing in New York so much as the whole shebang, for which, I believe, I am no match. From ‘How do you like America?’ to ‘How do you like Klaus Mann’s Mephisto?’ and ‘How was it being a Staatsrat?’ I foresee an abundance of annoying questions and doubt that my humor will suffice.”66

At this point, Gründgens was already viewed as inseparable from Mephisto, as if they each illuminated truths about the other. After seeing Gründgens’ performance

65 Dokumentation 240; 243.
of *Faust I* in Moscow, Boris Pasternak, the Nobel-Prize-winning Russian poet and the author of *Doctor Zhivago*, commented on their unity: “I cannot picture you in day-to-day life, unmasked and out of character, brilliant Gründgens, so completely you have embodied and impressed upon me the non-existent, the stuff of the imagination.”

The photograph of Boris Pasternak meeting Gründgens in his Mephisto makeup helps to preserve the unity of Gründgens and Mephisto in the public’s memory (Figure 44).

In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, Gründgens wrote letters that he tended to keep to himself and went out as little as possible. He spent most of his time reading (Lawrence Sterne, Tolstoy, Balzac, and Prost), listening to music and watching television, “because visits to the theater are no longer necessarily an unadulterated pleasure for me, simply because too many people know me.” In 1959, Gründgens began traveling to an unidentified island in the Atlantic twice a year to swim and relax. On this island, which it took him two days to reach, Gründgens felt completely cut off from the world. He was able to become a different person, reading works by Jean Paul, Adalbert Stifter, and Gottfried Keller. Gründgens had become so famous that he was overly concerned about any public appearance, even in the ‘privacy’ of his own home. Was he really himself on this mysterious island or was it merely another persona?

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His last two roles in 1962 were as Albert Heink in Hermann Bahr’s *The Concert* and as King Philip in Schiller’s *Don Carlos* in 1962 in Hamburg (Figures 17, 37 and 38). Although Gründgens had played the young Dr. Jura, who has an affair with Marie Heink (Emmy Sonnemann) in 1936, he now played the aging but seductive pianist, Albert Heink, who cheats on his wife, Marie (Marianne Hoppe), with a young student. Despite the affair, Marie comes back to him and continues to believe that he will stay faithful to her (*Dokumentation* 240).

While the aging Albert Heink continues to express his seductive and controlling nature, King Philip in Schiller’s *Don Carlos* is growing insecure and vulnerable in his old age. At the start of the play, King Philip is concerned only with his public persona, coming across as a villain who cares more about killing potential enemies than caring for his family. By the end of the play, the King completely isolates himself out of fear of his enemies and grows increasingly lonely and suspicious.

Some critics commented that Gründgens identified too closely with the role, playing his own old age, loneliness, and suspicion. He appeared to be aware of the fact that this was his last role, letting this awareness affect his portrayal of the character (Michalzik 11). Other critics commented on his inability to accept himself in this role and identify with the character. There seemed to be a sense of resistance, as if Gründgens did not want to accept his own fate. His movements were criticized for being too fixed and mannered, while he seemed unsure in his speech.70

On April 10, 1963, Gründgens gave his last public appearance in an interview with Günter Gaus. In the interview, Gründgens appeared vulnerable and sensitive to personal questions, especially regarding the Third Reich. After a few questions, Gründgens adjusted his pose, so that he was no longer looking directly into the camera. The cameras readjusted accordingly, so that Gründgens continued the interview in profile (Figure 36).

Gründgens continued to answer Gaus’s questions in a defensive manner, repeating statements he used during his denazification. Gründgens said that he could not look back on this period with a clear head, because it did not even seem real to him at the time. Since he could not see the truth of his life in the Third Reich from the inside, the attempts of others to do so from the outside were even more divorced from reality. Because his legend was largely determined from the outside, during this critical point in his life, it is in no way representative of what actually happened.  

Gründgens claimed to have never wanted or asked for any of the fame and power he was given: “The only thing I ever wanted in life was to be an actor. Everything else was surplus . . .”. When asked to explain the desire to act, he used the explanation his father-in-law, Thomas Mann had once used to describe him on his wedding day to Erika Mann, the same description Höfgen uses to describe his talent for acting to ‘the Professor’ (Max Reinhardt): “[Thomas Mann] said that he compared the actor—this is strange now—with little fireflies that would...

73 Mephisto 1977, 193
inconspicuously fly around the other insects, but suddenly and uncannily began . . .
would begin . . . to glow.’”74

At the age of 64, Gründgens looked back on his life and said that he had never
really enjoyed himself or lived in the moment. He said that he intended to change that
and finally learn “how one lives.”75

Before stepping down from his position as Generalintendant of the Hamburg
theater, Gründgens directed his final production: Hamlet, allowing the actor
Maximilian Schnell to play the title role (Dokumentation 240). In September 1963,
Gründgens departed on a trip around the world with his 25-year-old assistant director,
Jürgen Schleiss.76 Directly before his departure, he undertook an operation to correct
his teeth and ordered a whole new travel wardrobe from Munich (Riess 429).

On October 7, 1963, Gründgens died of an overdose of sleeping pills in his
hotel room in Manila, Philippines. His death linked him once again to Klaus Mann,
who had died of an overdose of sleeping pills 14 years earlier. While some friends of
Gründgens’, like Marianne Hoppe and Antje Weisgerber, recognized his overdose as
suicide, others, including Peter Gorski and Riess, claim that the tropical climate
caus ed his dosage to be fatal. The note that he left behind does not give a clear answer
to this question: “I think I took too many sleeping pills, I feel rather strange, let me

74 “Da sagte [Thomas Mann], dass er die Schauspieler—das ist komisch jetzt—mit den
Glühwürmchen verglich, die am Tag wie die anderen Insekten unscheinbar herumflögen, aber
nachts plötzlich unheimlich an zu leuchten fingen…fängen…(In Dokumentation 186)
75 “Wie man lebt.” In Dokumentation 186.
76 Jürgen Schleiß later changed his name.
sleep in.” Schleiss found him the next morning, claiming they had had a fight the night before (Riess 431).

The public had already begun speculating about Gründgens’ old age and weakness during his last role, and rumors of his death had already begun to circulate after his departure from Hamburg (Michalzik 20). The fact that Gründgens chose the Philippines as the location for his suicide has theatrical significance—the island was named after King Philip II, his final role. It seems as if Gründgens’ decision to end his acting career was an acknowledgment of his decision to end his life. He lived in and for the theater; perhaps the idea of a life without the stage was too much to bear.

In 1926, Gründgens published *The Last Words*, a short story about Baldrian Philaterius Steinhügel’s attempts at staging a noble, classic, tragic death. Although he holds the most noble and attractive poses he can muster, and gathers his family around him for the best possible photographs, Steinhügel is unable to control his body and voice in the last moment before his death. He tries to end his life twice with the legendary last words of Goethe, “More light!” But the last words he mutters are “Fuck all this.”

Gründgens ended his life far from Germany and the watchful eyes of his fans. He had tried his entire life to control his image and present only his desired face to the public. Towards the end of his life, he became addicted to morphine and could no

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77 “Ich glaube, ich habe zu viele Schlafmittel genommen, ich fühle mich etwas komisch, läß mich ausschlafen” (Riess 430). Mühr claimed that the final phrase was actually: let me sleep for a long time (“Laß mich lange schlafen”) (Mühr 337). The subtle difference between these two words actually makes a big difference. The former implies restful sleep that lasts until the person chooses to wake up. The latter implies simply sleeping for a long time.
longer act without the assistance of drugs (Riess 428). Under these conditions, he was not in full control of his body, although he continued to maintain his appearance. Like Steinhügel, Gründgens could maintain his image only up to a certain point in his illness. In the time directly before his death, he could no longer act and could not bear to have that happen in the presence of his fans or ‘friends’.
Epilogue: Unmasking Mephisto—Gründgens’ Postmortem Legacy

“The Duel of the Dead”

After Gründgens’ death in October 1963, his adopted son, Peter Gorski, became the primary caretaker of Gründgens’ legacy, with the help of Gründgens’ former dramaturg, Rolf Badenhausen. After Berthold Spangenberg of the Nymphenburg publishing house acquired the rights to publish Klaus Mann’s collected works, on March 21, 1964 Gorski sued the publishing house for libel on Gründgens’ behalf to block publication of Mephisto (BVerfG 5). In what Marcel Reich-Ranicki called the “Duel of the Dead,”1 the plaintiff, Peter Gorski, claimed that Klaus Mann’s Mephisto was not an artistic literary work, but rather a roman à clef.

Gorski maintained that Klaus Mann had based the character of Hendrik Höfgen closely on biographical aspects of Gründgens’ life, but had also included false character traits and events that would negatively affect Gründgens’ posthumous reputation. The particularly damaging sections were cited as Höfgen’s speech at Göring’s forty-third birthday party, which Gründgens’ never gave, and Höfgen’s sadomasochistic relationship to the Afro-German Tebab, which Gründgens never had (BVerfG 16). Gorski maintained that Klaus had written the novel out of hate towards Gründgens and out of the need to avenge the damage that Gründgens had done to Erika Mann’s honor by their marriage (BVerfG 15).

Gorski used excerpts from Klaus Mann’s 1944 Turning Point, some of which

had been censored in the 1951 German translation, to prove that Klaus Mann wrote
the novel out of hatred directed towards Gründgens and not just towards the Nazi
party (BVerfG 12). Furthermore, Gorski delegitimized Klaus’s writing by claiming
that since the novel was written in exile, Klaus did not have the authority to write
about what was happening inside Nazi Germany (BVerfG 17).

For the defendant, the Nymphenburg publishing house, the trial was a political
issue, touching on freedom of speech and the recognition of exile literature as a valid
part of German history (Spangenberg 163).\textsuperscript{2} Spangenberg’s defense was that
\textit{Mephisto} was not a roman à clef, but a work of art written as an expression of Klaus
Mann’s anti-Nazi disposition and anger towards those who remained impartial in
Germany (Spangenburg 165).

During the \textit{Mephisto} trials, it was often asked whether Gründgens ever spoke
out against the novel during his life or took legal action against its 1956 East German
publication. Gorski claimed that although Gründgens never read the novel, he was
aware of and upset by the fact that it was damaging to his reputation (BVerfG 18). It
seems unlikely given all that is known about Gründgens’ relationship to Klaus
Mann’s novel that he would chose to take his concerns to court. He would then have
to speak openly about the book’s content, his relationship with Klaus Mann, and his
life in the Third Reich—topics he avoided speaking and writing about during his life.

On August 25, 1965, the Hamburg regional court,\textsuperscript{3} ruled in the defendant’s
favor, and the publishing house was allowed to print \textit{Mephisto} in West Germany,

\textsuperscript{2} Since its initial founding in 1946 in Munich, the Nymphenburg publishing house included
dissident and exile literature as part of its list (Spangenberg 161).
\textsuperscript{3} Hamburger Landesgericht
coming out with 10,000 copies (BVerfG 5). The court decided that the debate over whether or not the novel was a roman à clef was unimportant, because it was considered to be a work of art protected under basic rights.\(^4\) The court ruled further that Gründgens’ right to protection from slander\(^5\) did not carry over after his death, and, furthermore, the majority of readers would no longer identify Höfgen with Gründgens (BVerfG 6). After Gorski appealed this ruling, the Hamburg provincial court of appeals\(^6\) decided that the novel would have to include a foreword that made it clear to the reader that the novel was not a roman à clef, citing the words of Klaus Mann: “All of the people in this book depict types, not portraits.”\(^7\)

On March 17, 1966, after the novel had been on the market for seven months, the provincial court of appeals decided in Peter Gorski’s favor and ordered the publishing house to cease distribution of *Mephisto* (BVerfG 17). The controversy over the publication of the novel lasted five more years, moving up to the German Supreme Court,\(^8\) which ruled in Gorski’s favor on July 13, 1971, upholding the ban on the novel. In the final court ruling, Gründgens’ right to human dignity\(^9\) carried over after his death and was considered to be of higher constitutional value than both the publisher’s right to freedom of speech and the public’s right to read the novel, even if it was a creative work (BVerfG 75).

Erika Mann, who was helping to defend the publishing company, brought a libel suit herself against *Die Kölner Rundschau* and *Die Zeit* after they made

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\(^4\) Kunstfreiheitsgarantie  
\(^5\) Persönlichkeitsschutz  
\(^6\) Oberlandesgericht  
\(^7\) “Alle Personen dieses Buchs stellen Typen dar, nicht Porträts” (BVerfG 6).  
\(^8\) Bundesverfassungsgericht  
\(^9\) Würde des Menschen
reference to sexual relations between Klaus and Erika, as well as between Klaus and Gründgens, during the hype over the Mephisto trials. She received 10,000 marks as compensation from each newspaper; both papers asserted they had not implied what she was claiming. She never lived to see the publication and great success of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto*, dying in August 1969 in Zurich from a brain tumor (Weiss 250).

The *Mephisto* Revival—1979-1981

Despite the ban, the novel was still available in East Germany and had been translated into several languages, including English by 1977. Klaus Mann’s literary character, Hendrik Höfgen, was first brought to the stage on May 15, 1979 in Ariane Mnouchkine’s French adaptation of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* at the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris. Having been raised in France, Mnouchkine did not know who Gründgens was when she first read the novel and became aware of him as the model for Höfgen only when she began her research (Spangenberg 196). She saw the novel as a horrifying parable of the rise of Fascism, a parable that highlighted the intellectual’s and artist’s responsibility to fight back against those in power.  

As Klaus Mann had claimed he intended, Mnouchkine aimed to portray a type of person, rather than making the play about Gründgens; she referred to Höfgen as “Monsieur X . . . just one of many like him.”  

Unlike Klaus Mann, when he wrote the novel in 1936, Mnouchkine was aware of all the positive testimony about Gründgens’ role in the Third Reich that was not offered until the denazification trials.

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In fact, when Mnouchkine met Ernst Busch, the singer, actor, and Communist resistance fighter, who claimed that Gründgens had saved his life in a time when nobody else reached out a hand to him, she altered her dramaturgical interpretation of the play.  

Mnouchkine, as would be the case with other Mephisto adaptors and directors, did not intend to put Gründgens on trial by exposing his involvement with the Third Reich to the public, but to use this story to illuminate the importance of political theater and the danger of complacency. It is impossible to dismiss the association between Gründgens and Höfgen, even if Klaus Mann really intended the character to be a “symbol” instead of a “portrait.”

The plot of Mnouchkine’s play does not focus on Höfgen, but rather on a group of actors who run an anti-fascist cabaret, the Peppermill Club, in Hamburg. This is in actuality the cabaret that Erika Mann and Therese Giehse, with the assistance of Klaus as a writer, helped found in Munich shortly before the rise of the Nazi party, and that Erika and Therese recreated in exile in Zurich (Weiss 82-83; 107). When Höfgen abandons the cabaret in order to work under the Nazis at the Berlin State Theater, he is shown as someone who forsakes his principles and rejects political responsibility in order to achieve personal success and fame (Mnouchkine 447). This is in contrast to Klaus Mann’s Höfgen, who began with no morals or sense of the political responsibility of the artist.

The play opens with the reading of the 1949 correspondence between Klaus

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13 Mnouchkine 372.
14 Die Pfeffermühle
Mann and Georg Jacobi, who informed Klaus that the novel could not be printed in West Germany due to Gründgens’ fame (the name Gründgens is replaced with Höfgen).\(^{15}\) As Klaus Mann’s response is read aloud, in which he writes that it is exactly this type of complacency that led to the concentration camps, photographs of the camps are projected onto the backdrop.\(^{16}\) (Spangenberg 199). These images forced the audience to see firsthand what monstrosities are possible as a result of complacency, causing a stronger visceral reaction than the literary descriptions and allusions to such events.

While a French audience was perhaps unaware of Gründgens as the model for Höfgen, Mnouchkine took her production on a tour of Belgium, Italy, and Germany, performing at theater festivals in Berlin and Munich in 1980 (Spangenberg 199). The Ellermann publishing house brought out Lorenz Knauer’s German translation of Mnouchkine’s script, and the Stafani Hunzinger/Hans Rudolf Stauffacher theater publishing house published an article about the importance of circumventing the ban on *Mephisto* and defending freedom of speech by producing Mnouchkine’s play on German stages.\(^{17}\)

Mnouchkine’s production sparked an open discussion about the ban of *Mephisto* in Germany. In 1970s Germany, Gründgens’ generation was on the decline, replaced by the “fatherless generation,” who were not convinced that the Nuremberg trials had sufficiently punished those who were still guilty of the evils of Nazi

\(^{15}\) Mnouchkine 361-362.
\(^{17}\) “Schauspiel 'Mephisto' soll Diskussion um verbotenen Roman wieder entfachen.” *Buchreport* Nr. 34. 23 May 1980. Rpt. in Spangenberg 199.
Germany. The Red Army Faction was one of the most militant left-wing terrorist groups who rebelled against the compliance of their parents’ generation by directly and at times violently attacking the institutions, individuals, and systems that they perceived as fostering a compliant attitude. The character Höfgen and the ban on the novel were both symbols of compliance; to expose the evils of compliant behavior would make a statement about the importance for the political responsibility of the artist.

In honor of Gründgens’ eightieth birthday, Heinrich Riemenschneider of the Dumont-Lindemann-Archive, created an exhibition on Gründgens that toured Germany from 1979–1982 and was visited by over 20,000 people. Newspaper articles about the opening of the exhibit clearly demonstrate the impact of Riemenschneider’s attempt to show Gründgens in a positive light. Newspaper articles were published with titles such as: “More Than Mephisto,” “Art City Get its Reputation Back,” “Gründgens Celebrated,” “Without Legend.”

Gründgens could still be remembered as Mephisto, but as a stage character rather than a metaphor for a life of evil. The exhibition presented a large number of documents, in the form of letters, speeches, photographs, newspaper articles, film clips, programs and posters in an attempt to showcase Gründgens’ theatrical versatility and the apparent contradictions in his political life. There were busts of Gründgens in his two most famous roles: Hamlet and Mephisto (Figures 3 and 4).

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18 “Gustaf-Gründgens-Ausstellung im Dumont-Lindemann-Archiv” (Dokumentation 204-230).
Curt Riess also continued lobbying for Gründgens’ innocence, although he was not included in the planning of Riemenschneider’s 1979 collection of Gründgens documents. In 1966, Curt Riess had openly defended Peter Gorski’s libel suit in the Evening Newspaper, claiming that he knew first-hand that Klaus Mann had written the novel out of anger towards Gründgens, because he and Klaus Mann had been acquaintances during their shared time in exile. In February 1981, Riess wrote an open letter entitled “Gründgens was not a Nazi,” which he sent to German newspapers to protest the German premiere of Ariane Mnouchkine’s Mephisto at the Kurt Huber Gymnasium in Gräfelfing in February 1981. The headmaster removed the swastika from the poster (Figure 50), but just as the removal of the swastikas during denazification was not sufficient to wipe away the past, the public continued to associate Gründgens with the Third Reich through the character of Höfgen, and the play continued to be performed. By January 1981, versions of Mnouchkine’s play appeared in Stuttgart and Freiburg (Spangenberg 203).

In 1981, Klaus Mann’s Mephisto was captured on film in the Academy Award-winning joint German-Hungarian-Austrian film, Mephisto, which became the most popular and well-known version of the legend. The director, István Szabó, and the actor portraying Hendrik Höfgen, Klaus Maria Brandauer, aimed at making Höfgen a more three-dimensional character than Klaus Mann’s, whose story they perceived as too black and white and not realistic (Gelder). Brandauer saw the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\text{“Gründgens war kein Nazi.” Spangenberg 218.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\text{“Oberstudiendirektor” (Spangenberg 217).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\text{Szabo’s Mephisto was released on April 29, 1981 in West Germany and on March 22 1982 in USA, while remaining unavailable in East Germany.}\]
universal aspects of Höfgen and empathized with him as an actor, saying "To act the part of Hofgen was like therapy for me, because Mr. Hofgen is an actor and I, too; so he is a brother to me. We all have vanities. We want to have the love of the audience. We want to have success, and sometimes we make great compromises to the public to win success" (Brandauer qtd. in Gelder).

As a Hungarian, Szabó had not recognized Gründgens as the model for Höfgen when he first read the novel, and attempted to make Höfgen a more universal character. Brandauer, however, was German and thus was fully aware of Gründgens’ reputation. Although Höfgen is not explicitly homosexual in the film, Brandauer was aware of Gründgens’ homosexuality, believing a sexual relationship between him and Klaus was possible. In an interview, he wrote, "I remarked immediately that it is the report of a jilted lover, because Klaus Mann and Gründgens were such good friends" (Brandauer qtd. in Gelder). Szabó and Brandauer chose to not include Höfgen’s homosexuality in order to make the character more general and allow more people to identify with him.

Like Klaus Mann, Szabó decided to make Höfgen a sadomasochist as a result of the postwar perception of the sexual perversion of the Third Reich. The Nazi ideal of Aryan manhood included heterosexuality, thus instituting a heterosexist disciplinary framework within the Nazi Party and resulting in charges of sexual perversion against those who did not fit this framework. In a newspaper interview, Szabó said, “The National Socialists and its followers had sexual problems and were
pervers. I do not have problems, so I am not in any danger by Fascism.” That Gründgens would conform to such a framework despite his alleged homosexuality implied to many an masochistic side to the actor.

As in the novel, several Faust rehearsal and performance scenes were enacted to illuminate aspects of Höfgens’ character in the Mephisto role. The scene in which Faust makes the pact with Mephisto is placed directly after a scene where the National Socialist Miklas trains a group of Hitler Youth, suggesting that these youths and Höfgen are making Faustian bargains by supporting the Nazi regime.

Brandauer’s Mephisto makeup was based on Gründgens’ Hamburg performance and film, with the addition of black around the eyes. He wears a similar Mephisto cap, but with a widow’s peak. Both changes give Höfgen a more demonic appearance than Gründgens had intended with his costume and makeup. As in the 1980 production, swastikas were used on the poster as a symbol of Höfgens’ tie to the Nazis. On the movie poster, the swastikas are in his eyes, suggesting an internalization of the Nazi ideology rather a mere association (Figure 49).

In 1980, bootleg copies of Mephisto were published in West Germany, with a photograph of Gründgens in his 1941 Mephisto makeup on the cover (Spangenberg 5). In 1981, the Ellermann publishing house, to which Spanenberg had transferred the rights to Klaus Mann’s collected works in 1974, published Mephisto despite the ban that had never been lifted. Due to the renewed interest in Mephisto and Gründgens after the success of Szabó’s film and the hype over the 15-year ban, the

novel sold over 300,000 copies in its first three months, remaining at the top of the *Spiegel’s* bestseller list (Spangenberg 210).

Some Gründgens biographers, including Alfred Mühr, came out with new biographies of Gründgens, hoping to ride the coattails of the film’s success. Mühr’s fourth Gründgens biography, *Mephisto without a Mask: Legend and Truth*, which Michalzik called “more or less credible firsthand accounts,” is a 350-page book, resembling the size and layout of the 1965 and 1967 Riess and Gorski-Badenhausen publications, and contains, like the Riess biography, no citations. This is another psychohistory, made up of a good deal of imagined dialogue and attributed thoughts in an attempt to offer an image of Gründgens that differs from the *Mephisto* legend. Gründgens’s life is documented through speculations and literally unmasked in a photograph of Gründgens’ in partial Mephisto makeup (Figure 47).

During his lifetime, Gründgens allowed select photographers, like Rosemarie Clausen to publish photographs of himself putting on stage makeup (Figures 31 and 46). After his death, attempts were made to show more of Gründgens than he was willing to expose in his lifetime. Not only did these newly printed photographs show Gründgens with partial stage makeup, they also featured Gründgens staring into the camera. During his lifetime, he made an attempt to only allow photographs of him in profile or partial profile to be printed.

With the success of the novel and film, Gründgens became more conflated with the Mephisto legend than ever before. Michalzik wrote, “A myth was born, which to this day defines the quintessential picture of the artist in the Third Reich.

25 „mehr oder minder zuverlässige Erlebnisberichte wie bei Alfred Mühr” (Michalzik 17).
The man has become such an icon. And this iconic quality has become an essential part of him.”\textsuperscript{26} Just as posters of \textit{Mephisto} used the swastika symbol next to or on Höfgen’s face (in Mephisto makeup) to stress his role in the Third Reich, the \textit{Spiegel} published a story on the “Gründgens Legend” with Gründgens in Mephisto makeup next to a swastika flag (Figure 52).

\textbf{Mephisto in the Twenty-First Century}

In 2005, Anders Paulin directed his adaptation of Klaus Mann’s \textit{Mephisto} at the Hamburger Schauspielhaus, with Philipp Otto playing Hendrik Höfgen. Although it was 42 years since Gründgens’ death, the memory of Gründgens as Mephisto lived on in Hamburg, where he had initially risen to fame, and later produced and filmed his most famous version of \textit{Faust}.

Gründgens’ signature role in the Third Reich is now remembered as Mephisto, although he was in actuality most well known by the public inside Nazi Germany for his Hamlet. Michalzik notes, “When one thinks about Mephisto, one sees Gründgens. ‘Gründgens as Mephisto’ is regarded as the pinnacle of this century’s German art of theater and at the same time as a personification and glorification of Gründgens’ role in German history. Gründgens is Mephisto, just as Mephisto has become Gründgens—one barely dissoluble entity.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{26} “Ein Mythos wurde geboren, der bis heute das Bild des Künstlers im Dritten Reich ganz wesentlich bestimmt. Der Mann ist so zu einer Symbolfigur geworden. Und das Symbolische zu einem wesentlichen Teil seiner selbst” (Michalzik 7).

\textsuperscript{27} “Wer an Mephisto denkt, sieht Gründgens vor sich. Gründgens als Mephisto, das gilt als Gipfel deutsche Theaterkunst in diesem Jahrhundert und gleichzeitig als Verkörperung und Überhöhung von Gründgens’ Rolle in der deutschen Geschichte. Gründgens ist Mephisto, wie Mephisto zu Gründgens geworden ist – ein kaum mehr auflösbare Einheit (Michalzik 213)”
Gründgens’ Hamburg Mephisto makeup and cap, with the addition of the widow’s peak, became the most commonly used imagery for Gründgens as Mephisto. It symbolized not only Gründgens, but also the metaphor of a Mephisto in the Third Reich. In Paulin’s production, Höfgen is not the only Mephisto; “the fat one” (Michael Prelle) wears the Mephisto cap as well, identifying him as the devil with whom Höfgen makes the pact (Figure 51).

Phillip Otto plays multiple roles: Höfgen, Gründgens, himself, and traits of Brandauer’s performance as Mephisto. In an article called “The Devil in Herr Gründgens,” the critic Werner Theurich even comments on how much Philipp Otto resembles Gründgens.”

Philip Otto plays the actor Hendrik Höfgen with embarrassing narcissism performs the psychological distortion of humor and horror, switching between the expansive gestures borrowed from Gustaf Gründgens, Klaus Maria Brandauer’s two-faced charm, his irritability, and Mephisto’s cleverness. So the game becomes a puzzle with diverse levels of play, in which the figures from the novel meet their real models as well as their descendants from the present. Past, present, and fiction come together in a study of vanity and shame and, in the final analysis, the primarily fragmented picture of Gründgens.

Gründgens is woven back into the play after numerous directors, including Mnouchkine and Szabó, attempted to use Höfgen as a symbol, rather than Gründgens himself. Gründgens appears in a projection of his 1963 interview with Günter Gaus, 

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in which he, in his old age, shows his vulnerability and insecurity in an unsettling manner (Theurich). Just as one cannot think of Mephisto without thinking of Gründgens, Höfgen will always evoke the memory of Gründgens in Hamburg.

In 2008, Armin Petra directed Mephisto Forever, Rainer Kersten’s German translation of Tom Lanoye’s Dutch Mefisto for Ever, at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin. Tom Lanoye did far more than just adapt Klaus Mann’s Mephisto; he created a new text, in which Kurt Köpler’s pact with the devil and willingness to deceive and comply is not restricted to the Third Reich. After the war, new leaders call upon Köpler’s talents as an actor, and he obliges without hesitation, having done the same thing under the Nazis.

Mefisto for Ever was Guy Cassiers’ first production as a director in the Antwerp Toneelhuis in 2006, and he had commissioned Lanoye to write this new version in response to the growing threat of the right-wing, nationalist, and anti-immigration political party Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) in Flanders. Cassier wanted to stress that in the face of this new political group, with its Nazi-like ideals, one could not afford to be an apolitical artist. Köpler, whether intentionally or not, becomes a Nazi collaborator, simply by keeping his mouth shut and making his apolitical art under their rule. This play and its lead character show the danger of apolitical art and the artist’s responsibility to preserve certain values for mankind and the theater itself.  

In Armin Petra’s production, projections on the wall are reminiscent of both

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Mnouchkine’s and Paulin’s productions of *Mephisto*. The concentration camps and Gründgens’ last interview were only two parts of Germany’s and Gründgens’ past, which are placed in a greater context in Petra’s *Mephisto Forever*. There is a wide range of projected images and scenes that place the legend of Gründgens as a Third-Reich Mephisto in the greater context of Germany’s history, previous Faust productions, and Gründgens’ other roles, including scenes of the violence during the rise of the Nazi party in the Weimar period, Murnaus’s 1926 *Faust*, and Gründgens in *Dance on the Volcano* (1928).³¹

In the play, rehearsal scenes from *Hamlet, Faust,* and Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* offer insight into Kurt Köpler’s personal feelings that he is incapable of expressing in everyday life.³² The rehearsals are parodies of amateur theater, appearing trivial next to the grand theatricality of the Nazis. When Hitler comes to power while Köpler is in a rehearsal of *Hamlet*, newsreels of the Nazi rallies and other events of the Third Reich are projected on the wall.³³ There is no line separating theater and reality as the presence of the Nazis makes its way into the theater. The actors are unable to keep the theater an “island,” as Gründgens claimed to do and the actors in *Mephisto Forever* attempt to do.

As the theater becomes a forum for the Nazis, and is eventually the podium for the announcement of total war, the actors seek refuge in their rehearsals. Köpler completely loses touch with who he really is, finding clarity only in his characters. In

³³ Nikolaus Merck, “Der Künstler als Opportunist.”
response to a question about what worries him and the stipulation that he express himself with personal, sincere words, Köpler can only stammer “I... mean... I feel... I...”\textsuperscript{34}

Since Gründgens was more himself in performance than in everyday life, perhaps the best way of finding the genuine Gründgens is to let him live on as a stage character. The man who spent his entire career with awareness and concern for his appearance, hiding behind and defining himself through a series of masks, has been literally stripped down in \textit{Mephisto} and \textit{Mephisto Forever} (Figures 54 and 55). Actors continue to play Höfgen and Köpler, breaking down the walls that Gründgens built up around himself.


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Conclusion

The Actor and His Legend

The harder one looks for the true Gustaf Gründgens, the less one is able to find him. In the end, he was little more than a legend, and his life became devoted to managing and reconstructing that legend. At the same time, his life and legend served as a surrogate and symbol for the German people’s self-delusions during the Third Reich and its aftermath.

The fact that the making of his legend as a Schurke and Mephisto occurred during his lifetime, as a result of typecasting and the influence of Klaus Mann’s novel, affected Gründgens’ attempts to control and define his own public image. He was unsuccessful in changing the public’s opinion of him resulting from his role in the Third Reich, his continued portrayals of Schurke roles, and his inability to present a unified ‘face.’

Gründgens became reduced to Mephisto, an opportunistic actor who made a pact with the devil in the Third Reich. Gründgens’ letters and the few remaining personal writings show a lifelong struggle with the public’s perception of him. Although Gründgens only wore one material mask in his acting career (as Phorkyas) and appeared to wear minimal makeup, except for his postwar Mephisto performances, he was always wearing a ‘mask.’ He was not interested in showing who he really was; instead he was continually frustrated about being judged by his appearance and titles. Gründgens exposed himself on the stage, but had such control over his body and voice, rooted in his early Düsseldorf training from Dumont and
Lindemann, that he was never naturalistic. He was able to deceive the public and hide himself with virtuosity and self-discipline, both on and off the stage.

Gründgens’ personality became so fractured that he knew who he was in his public performances more than in his everyday life. He expressed himself through his characters, altering his interpretation of their significance to conform to the societal norms at the time, to satisfy the censors of the Third Reich, and to project his own desired ‘face.’ After becoming known as a purely evil Mephisto after the Third Reich, in his postwar interpretations he emphasized the fact that Mephisto was a fallen angel by stressing his continued relationship with God.

Gründgens played the role of a heterosexual his entire life in an attempt to hide his homosexuality, which was illegal in Germany under Article 175. Although he used Erika Mann and Marianne Hoppe to portray himself as a heterosexual, the public was not convinced. His homosexuality did not figure in his legend for other reasons. Klaus Mann, who was also believed to be homosexual, did not want to use homosexuality as a means for criticism and wanted to create a more universal figure that went beyond Gründgens as an individual. He replaced Gründgens’ sexual orientation, which threatened his position in the Third Reich, with a masochistic relationship with an Afro-German woman. Although Szabo and other Mephisto directors were aware of Gründgens’ homosexuality after the allusions to his possible sexual relationship to Klaus Mann emerged during the Mephisto trials, they chose to make him a masochist. His sexuality became a symbol of sexual perversion in the Third Reich.
Although others were able to capture Gründgens in candid photographs that exposed incriminating and undesirable aspects of his character, Gründgens continued to stage photographs of himself that would not reveal his shame, guilt, or anger. While he did not let these emotions manifest themselves on his face or through his words, they began to affect his body.

Towards the end of his life, Gründgens’ health declined, and he grew more and more dependent on sedatives like morphine, able to perform only with the help of medication. He attempted to hide his decay from the public, retreating in his everyday life and continuing to put a “character” in the spotlight. He controlled the photographs taken of him both in his public performances and in everyday life by using the same four photographers and controlling the setting in which the photographs were taken. His old age, loneliness, and sickness became evident to the audience only in his final performance as Phillip II in 1962. It was at this time that Gründgens realized he would no longer be able to show his desired face and deceive the public, even in the mask of a character. He took himself off the stage to ‘live’ and traveled around the world to let himself die out of the spotlight.

**Gustaf Gründgens and Klaus Mann**

Klaus Mann and Gründgens were alter egos who had much more in common than either was willing to admit. Klaus Mann acted as Gründgens’ conscience, first knowing him intimately, then judging him from a distance, before coming face to face with him again as Gründgens played Christian Maske, the opportunist, in 1946.

When these two men met, both had the same goal in mind: to become famous. Klaus Mann started at the top, with the benefit of his father’s fame, but the fact that
his mother was Jewish, and his father and uncle came to be described as Jewish, forced him into exile. Gründgens started out with nothing, and adopted a façade in order to climb to success. Klaus Mann had the moral superiority of going into exile and used his art as a forum for his political and personal views. Although he exposed himself publicly through characters based on his life in his novels, he never achieved recognition for his writing during his lifetime.

Gründgens used societal masks and professional roles to express his desired face, although he claimed they were not revelatory of his actual person. Gründgens both inspired the writing of Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto* and worked to prevent its publication in West Germany. Klaus Mann revealed too much; Gründgens revealed too little. Both struggled with drug addiction, Gründgens with morphine and Klaus Mann with several drugs, including heroine, and both died of an overdose of sleeping pills. Gründgens refused to be honest and straightforward in the last moments of his life, leaving it unclear as to whether or not this overdose was intentional. Nevertheless, the two were once again linked in the public eye.

**Aspects of the Theater Revealed Through Gründgens’ Story**

Theater represents the dreams, wishes, and psychoses of a society and acts as a mirror of the times. Hamlet, one of Gründgens’ signature roles, advises the actors, “The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” (3. 1. 17-20).
Since the actor is both the creator of the art and the material, acting can be viewed as an embodied art form. The spectator sees both the actor and the character at the same time. When the actor is famous, it is common, although naïve, to conflate the two; seeing the actor through the lens of previously acquired knowledge about the actor’s public performances and public image. Gründgens always spoke out against the common, though incorrect, assumption that he and his characters shared the same ‘face.’

Dumont and Lindemann taught Gründgens “that art can prosper only on the foundation of truth and reality.”¹ In the Third Reich, Gründgens was living in a society dictated by lies and created an ‘island’ that attempted to maintain the integrity of theater. Despite his avowed goal of realizing the original intentions of the playwright, his theater served several functions, depending on the constraints and trends of the period, at different times serving as art for art’s sake, a source of propaganda, and as a moral institution. Although Gründgens was obsessed with order and unity, he never became known for a consistent theatrical style. His public performances were as subject to outside influences as his everyday life, and similarly reflected the desired and accepted trends of the times.

**Mephisto in the Twenty-First Century**

While I was in Berlin in 2008, Germany was celebrating the 200th anniversary of the publication of Goethe’s *Faust I*; every theater in Berlin included productions of this most performed German play on their repertoire. While the Maxim Gorki Theater

¹ “Ehrfurcht vor unserem Beruf und die Tatsache, dass Kunst nur auf dem Boden der Wahrheit und der Wirklichkeit gedeihen kann” (Gründgens, Interview with Werner Höfer. 1949. Rpt. in *BAR* 340).
performed a production of Goethe’s *Urfaust*, it also produced Tom Lanoye’s *Mephisto Forever*. Where *Faust* is being performed, Gründgens’ memory is not far behind. Gründgens is no longer simply the Third Reich’s Mephisto; he is a symbol of the opportunist who remains complacent as an artist in his relationship to those in power.

Although Gründgens attempted to take the public focus off himself by keeping silent about his person while speaking candidly about his characters, he is tied to the Mephisto legend. Even when the directors of Mann’s *Mephisto* aim to create a universal character, there are too many similarities between Höfgen and Gründgens to separate the two. Whether or not Klaus Mann intended to write a roman à clef, Gründgens is dragged along with the legend of Höfgen. As Gründgens fades in our memory, he is only viewed through his films, photographs, biographies, and documents, which show a fractured image of a man and an artist. No matter what accusations people throw at him, they can never deny that he was one of Germany’s most talented actors, and Germany’s greatest Mephisto performer.
APPENDIX A: IMAGES

Figure 1. “Marita Gründgens, Gustav Gründgens and friends put on a costumed play.” 1904. Düsseldorf. In Dokumentation 8.

Figure 2. Gustav Gründgens. Autographed photograph and handwriting: “To hold onto until I’m famous. With my profile in the Greek manner: a gift from nature.” 14 March 1919. Friedrich Gapp/TMD. In Dokumentation 11.


Figure 4. Bust of Gründgens as Mephisto. By Rudolf Chr. Baisch. Ernst-Poengen-Stiftung. In Dokumentation 213
Figure 5. "Literary-Theatrical Quartet of the 20’s.” From left to right: Pamela Wedekind, Klaus Mann, Erika Mann, Gründgens. In *Wie sind wir vornehm* 46.


Figure 7. E. Mann and Wedekind. Early 1920s. Manuscript Department Munich City Library. In Lühe 28.

Figure 8. K. and E. Mann. 1930. Klaus Mann Archive Munich City Library. In Spangenberg 43.

Figure 10. E. Mann, Gründgens, and Wedekind. Hamburg. 1926. In Spangenberg 22


Figure 12. *Revue zu Vieren.* Caption: Erika Mann, Klaus Mann, Pamela Wedekind. Klaus Mann Archive. Leipzig. 22 April 1927. In Spangenberg 24

Figure 13. Gründgens and E. Mann on their wedding day. 24 July 1926. Munich City Library. In Lühe 33.
Figure 14. Marianne Hoppe and Gründgens read on their couch. Zeesen. 1937. In Dokumentation 101.

Figure 15. Gründgens and Hoppe rowing on Lake Zeesen. 1937. In Riess 168.

Figure 16. Capriolen. Film. Jack Warren (Gründgens) and Mabel Atkinson (Hoppe). 1937. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin. In Matzigkeit 58.

Figure 17. The Concert. Albert Heink (Gründgens) and Maria Heink (Hoppe). Hamburg. 1962. In Kaiser 209.
Figure 18. Gründgens with monocle. Berlin. 1930. In Kaiser 73.

Figure 19. Caricature of Gründgens. By Dr. Lovis H. Lorenz. In Wie Sind wir Vornehm, 48


Figure 22. “A Scene Between Emmy Sonnemann and Gustaf Gründgens.” Das Konzert. Dr. Jura (Gründgens) and Marie Heink (Emmy Sonnemann). Münchner Illustrierte Presse Nr. 33/1943. Archiv Ellermann Verlag. In Spangenberg 62.


Figure 24. "Staatsrat Gründgens". Berlin. Heinrich Hoffmann/TMD. In Matzigkeit 40.


Figure 27. “Have a laugh, you silly goose.” Gründgens on the cover of the Spiegel. Nr. 20 v. 12 May 1949. In Spangenberg 129.

Figure 28. Flyer thrown onto the stage at Gründgens’ performance of Faust in Edinburgh. Ciradel Press. In Riess 89.


Figure 30. Henry IV. Gründgens. Düsseldorf. 1952. Liselotte Strelow/TMD. In Matzigkeit 45.

Figure 32. “Gründgens looks over the Rhine.” Düsseldorf. 1947. Strelow/TMD. In Matzigkeit 42.

Figure 33. “Gründgens with construction workers in front of the opera house.” Düsseldorf. 1948. Strelow. In Dokumentation 136.

Figure 34. “Peter Gorski, Gründgens, Rolf Badenhausen next to the Rhine.” Düsseldorf. 1948. Strelow In Dokumentation 141.
Figure 35. Faust I. Film. Actor/Mephisto (Gründgens). 1960. Clausen. In Dokumentation 193.

Figure 36. “Gründgens in interview with Günter Gaus.” Madeira. 10 July 1963. In Dokumentation 184.


Figure 38. Don Carlos. King Phillip II (Gründgens). Hamburg. 1962. Clausen. In Kaiser 215

Figure 40. “Roman á clef.” Announcement for Klaus Mann’s *Mephisto. Pariser Tageszeitung*. 19 June 1936. In Spangenberg 89.

Figure 41. List of the free and recension copies of *Mephisto*, with Klaus Mann’s handwriting. 1936. In Spangenberg 98.

Figure 42. *Faust I*. Marthe (Elsa Wagner) and Mephisto (Gründgens). Berlin. 1932. 21 Jan. 1936. In Kaiser 78.

Figure 43. *Faust I*. Gretchen (Käthe Gold) and Mephisto (Gründgens). Berlin. 1941. In *Dokumentation* 84.
Figure 44. “Boris Pasternak congratulates 'Mephisto' in Moscow.” Gründgens, Ehmi Bessel and Werner Hinz. Gabriel. In Riess 425.


Figure 47. “Mephisto without a mask/makeup.” Gründgens and unidentified man. Clausen. In Mühr 64.


Figure 55. *Mephisto Forever.* Kurt Köpler (Paul Herwig). Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin. 2008. MGT Publicity.
Appendix B: Translations

Chapter One

Gustaf Gründgens

p. 11 Draft of unfinished 1952 autobiography:
My father hailed from Aachen and my mother from Cologne, bearing me in Düsseldorf. Both families were once well off. The decline of this family fell directly before my birth. What remained was the outer façade, which supposedly had to be maintained, and in the end forced me to support my parents from the age of 25 on. This fact did not deter them from maintaining a seven-room apartment in the best neighborhood of the city, but it did decidedly influence my way of life.

13 Written on the back of an autographed photo in 1919:
To hold onto until I’m famous. With my profile in the Greek manner: a gift from nature.

14 Letter regarding what he learned from his former teachers, Gustav Lindemann and Louise Dumont:
Reverence for our profession and the fact that art can prosper only on the foundation of truth and reality.

Regarding his 1920-1921 season in Halberstadt:
I was 21 and played fathers.

17 1930 speech about the role of the director:
A fanatic about precision, he is a sworn enemy of all that is random, unclear, and uncontrollable.

21 Public statement about Klaus Mann’s play, Anja and Esther in 1925:
Klaus Mann: He is not only the narrator of the new youth, he is perhaps destined to become its guide.

25 1958 letter regarding Klaus Mann’s play, Four in Revue in 1927:
But when I realized that certain circles were inclined to take this play as an expression of a generation, I distanced myself immediately. And therein lies also the origin of the break from both these people, who always remained an utter mystery to me.

30 1956 Letter:
My appearance in Felons happened due to sheer financial hardship, I think back on this role with only horror, which stood in the gravest contrast to my personal situation.
1949 interview:
I love fervently all the roles I play! Wait a minute, hmm, well, ok, yes, I have had unhappy loves. They are . . . the unhappy loves are the typical Gründgens-roles—I hate them. These are the roles which falsify my image. Roles that I can also play. I always played Marinelli in *Emilia Galotti* instead of the prince. I always played the roles that were apparently easy to read from my appearance and never came from my heart. Never. In the beginning, I mean! And film is maybe to blame, that I, well, you know that I used to be a typical film *Schurke*. And that sticks. Also my first role in Berlin in Bruckner’s *Felons* was a role that I really hated, but had to play simply to survive, right? But it did not project anything about me. It projected an image of me, and I am sometimes quite amazed at how poorly the image that people have of me fits with the image that I have of myself.

1932 speech regarding breaking of contract with the Deutsches Theater:
I gained a face: that suffices. But I do not have my face. All impassioned attempts to change this are undone ‘by circumstances.’ Meanwhile, my position is becoming such that people in the public are beginning to identify me with the plays that I am obliged to produce. This is going too far. And I am striking back. At the theater.

1932 speech about opera:
Today the opera is the clearest expression of ‘art for art’s sake,’ behind which one tries to hide from the day. It distracts one, jolts one, ennobles one—outside of his real life . . . Theater-going today should not be a continuation of the sorrow-tattered day; it should carry one off to a better world, whose sorrows and worries do not resemble ours and to which there is miraculously absolutely no connection.

**Erika Mann**

23 **Erika Mann** just after marrying Gründgens:
Nobody, even the most clever, *can* believe our marital status.

26 **Erika Mann** in a 1968 letter to the *Mephisto* publisher, Berthold Spangenberg,: 
May I also add, for your personal amusement, that Gründgens did not know how he was going to replace me, and that it took all my powers of persuasion to get him to accept a certain Marianne Hoppe. She was an acting student and I considered her suitable.

27-28 **Erika Mann** in 1968:
As I have already repeatedly noted, our Gustaf acted 100 percent as a Communist, an attitude that hardly bothered me personally (although mine was diametrically opposed to it). But I dismissed it as insincere, snobby, and
quasi-opportunistic, and it significantly contributed to my desire for divorce. That Gründgens was not ‘politically’ a Nazi, nobody will contest. But the fact that he was always *apolitical*, and namely that he ‘wore’ what was currently chic and *useful*—that is important.

**Others**

17 Critic **Lucy von Jacob** in 1926:
[Gründgens] has that mysterious aura that cannot be analyzed. In its glow, everything becomes colorful, bright, iridescent, playful, and the same time meaningful: the eros of the real artist.

17-18 Gründgens’ adopted son **Peter Gorski**:
During this period of the early 1920’s in Hamburg, reality and fantasy had already condensed to a ‘phenomenon’ of Gustaf Gründgens, that could not even exist. It seemed as if various types of pipe dreams and the hero characters he portrayed on the stage assembled into one person.

22-3 **Curt Riess** regarding Gründgens’ marriage to Erika Mann:
Marriage meant for him order, and he wanted to adhere to it. He arranged an auto-da-fé before the marriage, in which he burned all letters that affiliated him with a past that appeared problematic to him now, and from which he wanted to get away.

**Chapter Two**

**Gustaf Gründgens**

p. 40 In a 1963 interview with Günter Gaus regarding the period of the Third Reich:
The uncertainty in which we all lived made the stage appear to be the only certain factor.

45 In a 1940 letter regarding his appearance in *Ohm Krüger*:
I obeyed the request of Mr. Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels, not as an artist, but rather as a natural consequence of my position in the *Reichkulturkammer* and Mr. Reichsmarschal’s close staff...It is in your best interest to request that your press office refrain from printing unseemly propaganda with my name, which I was willed to undertake as a contracted obligation to Mr. Reichs Minister Dr. Goebbels. Use strict objectivity in handling this issue.

48 In a 1934 letter to Heinz Tietjen regarding his decision to resign from position as *Intendant*:
The only compelling reason is the repeated campaigns against a certain group of people with whom I in no way identify, but with whom others identify me.
In a 1944 letter to Heinz Tietjen:
I came to Zeesen for a few days so as not to spend today in my
bunker/...Today marks ten years since that powerful/ and also violent change
in my life./ Ten years—the best I ever had./ And the result is not nice, despite
many nice times./ But I prefer it the way it is now, than if/ I had to keep up
appearances/ for the sake of what I served for ten years, I have/ had to
stomach more than one probably should/ without damage to the soul.

Klaus and Erika Mann

Klaus Mann in 1933 diary entry:
The new anti-homosexual campaigns. Gustaf’s grave situation. One would not
want to be in his shoes.

Erika Mann in postcard to Berlin State Theater circa 1933:
So Gustaf, how is it going with your sticky situation in the Third Reich?

Klaus Mann regarding the character Hendrik Höfgen:
He is not a person, only a comedian . . . the comedian becomes an exponent, a
symbol of a thoroughly comedic, deeply untrue and unreal regime. The actor
triumphs in the country of liars and pretenders.

Klaus Mann responding to the rumor that Gründgens had gone into exile in
1936:
The model seems to have completely collapsed, which worries and irritates
me. He couldn’t have chosen a different moment. He did it just to play a
practical joke on me. People are even saying that he is in a camp, but that is
probably a real atrocity tale.

Publisher’s forward to Klaus Mann’s 1936 Mephisto:
This book is not written against a certain person, rather, against the careerist,
against the German intellectual, who sold and betrayed his spirit.

Biographers

Heinrich Goertz regarding Gründgens’ 1936 Hamlet production:
People did not see Hamlet; people saw Gründgens slipped into a theater
costume. He played an actor celebrating Hamlet.

Curt Riess regarding a rumor about a fan of Gründgens wearing a copy of
Gründgens’ Hamlet costume:
At first he smiled about it, because it became clear to him that it was a matter
of a Doppelganger, potentially one who was sent by others. Ultimately Zacharias found a shady youth in a Hamlet costume.

57 **Peter Michalzik:**
The identification of Mephisto, Hitler, evil itself, and Gründgens is too obvious to not become an idée fixe after 1945 (or even earlier).

58 **Heinrich Goertz** regarding Gründgens’ decision to join the German Armed Forces in 1943:
Many perceived Gründgens’ entrance into the military as a type of coup de théâtre, only now Gründgens’ stage was the drill-ground.

**Others**

37 **Gustav Lindemann** in 1934 letter to Gründgens:
We no longer derive our decisions from the mind and the truth, but rather from the poisoned undercurrents of the times.

50 Song sung by the public about Gründgens marriage to Marianne Hoppe:

Hoppe hoppe Gründgens
They won’t have any Kindgens;
And if Hoppe does have Kindgens,
They sure won’t be from Gründgens

**Chapter Three**

**Gustaf Gründgens**

p. 68 In a 1946 essay on the sociology of actors:
National Socialism, which was a superficial ideology and operated only with mass hysteria, did not (at least not consciously for the majority of people) penetrate to a deeper level. For the outside observer, an astonishing picture materializes of the actors, who performed in the theater for the last 12 years and, for the most part, never felt affected by National Socialism and do not identify with its infamous actions. Consequently they recognize and are resigned to what is called German collective guilt, without being aware of any personal guilt.

70 In a 1947 Lecture on “Theater and the Press”:
I don’t know what the hell came over me when I agreed to give this lecture. The topic that was provided to me is the most uncomfortable and unrewarding one I could imagine. I will be allowed to speak with you today and tomorrow, you can express your opinion or opposing view in all the newspapers for
several hundred thousands of people if you want. I will never have time to respond. So it is really an unequal match.

In a 1949 letter to Curt Reiss regarding performance of *Tasso*:
Take into consideration that every evil thought that comes out from you will feel like pinpricks on my skin. Be lenient and forgiving with an old man, who only drags himself onto the stage for you.

74 In a 1949 letter to Rudolf Augstein regarding the use of a photo of Gründgens in his WWII uniform:
If you put [the photo] on the front page of the *Spiegel* (excuse me if I have become a megalomaniac), I will personally come to Hannover and kill you.

75 In a 1949 letter to Wolf Trutz:
I am very unhappy about the seemingly unavoidable racket that ensues with every step I take, and I keep feeling the need to escape.

76 In a 1946 letter to Pamela Wedekind regarding Klaus and Erika Mann:
Despite all of the *Mephistos* and *Turning Points*, the only thing that I could at best do, reluctantly, would be to write a note, saying: Dear children, it’s about time for you to stop the mischief. Do you know that you are starting to do us real harm?

77-78 In a 1950 letter to Karl Marx:
I do not know Klaus Mann’s book and also do not want to ever read it…Incidentally, even if this correspondence with the extremely tactless German publisher had a connection to Klaus Mann’s death (I am tempted not to assume that), I still do not see what I have to do with it, because I do not have, directly nor indirectly, anything to do with the book or its emergence…I have seen Klaus Mann twice since 1928. He knew nothing about me and my thoughts, nothing about my motives. I told him and many mutual friends, also before his death, that it is not possible for me to muster the same pathological hatred that these two people have thrown at me, possibly because they had otherwise too little purpose in life.

79 In a 1949 notice:
I have never believed that I should respond to the various pieces of news and incorrect announcements about me, because I believe that there are more important things than me. But little by little my silence contributes to the false impression that the unintentional or maybe also intentional false information is accurate or that I have some motive for keeping silent.

80 In a 1951 speech in Düsseldorf:
But my viewpoint will always be that it’s not about me, but about the cause of German theater.
81-82  In his 1955 opening speech in Hamburg:
Do what you want in your private life, but I don’t want to see you bring the
daily grind onto the stage. Make sure that the boards on which you act really
represent the world to you.

82  Same speech:
When, like me, a person has appeared in the foremost of theater for 30 years,
one is inevitably subjected to creation of a kind of legend, a legend that more
and more loses any connection to oneself, especially, when, as in my case, this
creation of a legend was defined and controlled from the outside during a
critical phase of my life. I imagine sometimes that if I were to meet my myth
on the street, I would not recognize myself. And this constant balancing act
between myth and reality eats up a lot of energy.

84  Gerd Vielhaber quotes Gründgens in 1963:
As an actor, I am interested in characters who, in the revolt against their
destiny, in the dispute with a higher power, with God if you will, perform evil
or are broken by a guilty conscience like Macbeth.

85  In a 1960 letter to Bruno E. Werner:
I am hesitant about consenting to the guest appearance in New York. For all
intents and purposes it comes ten years too late for me. At the same time I do
not fear performing in New York so much as the whole shebang, for which, I
believe, I am no match. From ‘How do you like America?’ to ‘How do you
like Klaus Mann’s Mephisto?’ and ‘How was it being a Staatsrat?’ I foresee
an abundance of annoying questions and doubt that my humor will suffice.

86  In a 1961 letter to Max Schnetzer:
Because visits to the theater are no longer necessarily an unadulterated
pleasure for me, simply because too many people know me.

88-89  In a 1963 interview with Günter Gaus:
[Thomas Mann] said that he compared the actor—this is strange now—with
little fireflies that would inconspicuously fly around the other insects, but
suddenly and uncannily began . . . would begin . . . to glow.

89-90  The note found next to his death bed:
I think I took too many sleeping pills, I feel rather strange, let me sleep in.

Klaus and Erika Mann

65-66  Klaus Mann regarding Gründgens’ 1946 premiere in The Snob:
He definitely saw me, moved toward me, but quickly looked away again. His
smile acknowledging the applause of the crowd was crushed as if out of fear
of sudden pain. But it lasted only a moment; he suddenly pulled himself together. He straightened up, radiant and attractive as always, with a white tie, rosy face and blond wig—Berlin’s indisputable favorite in pre-Nazi Berlin and post-Nazi Berlin.

75 Klaus Mann in 1946 “Art and Politics”:
An apolitical Staatsrat—is there such a thing? . . . Someone who served a government of thieves as a cultural figurehead for so long and so successfully is not allowed to play naïve afterward. That is absolutely tasteless!

Others

86 Boris Pasternak in a 1959 letter to Gründgens regarding his Moscow performance of Faust:
I cannot picture you in day-to-day life, unmasked and out of character, brilliant Gründgens, so completely you have embodied and impressed upon me the non-existent, the stuff of the imagination.

Epilogue

p. 94 1965 foreword to Klaus Mann’s Mephisto
All of the people in this book depict types, not portraits.

95 Director Ariane Mnouchkine referring to Höfgen in Mephisto:
Monsieur X . . . just one of many like him.

101-2 Film director István Szabó in 1982 interview about Mephisto:
The National Socialists and its followers had sexual problems and were perverse. I do not have problems, so I am not in any danger by Fascism.

102-3 Michalzik referring to the myth of Gründgens:
A myth was born, which to this day defines the quintessential picture of the artist in the Third Reich. The man has become such an icon. And this iconic quality has become an essential part of him.

103 Michalzik:
When one thinks about Mephisto, one sees Gründgens. ‘Gründgens as Mephisto’ is regarded as the pinnacle of this century’s German art of theater and at the same time as a personification and glorification of Gründgens’ role in German history. Gründgens is Mephisto, just as Mephisto has become Gründgens—one barely dissoluble entity.

104 Critic Werner Theurich regarding 2005 Hamburg Mephisto:
Philip Otto plays the actor Hendrik Höfgen with embarrassing narcissism
performs the psychological distortion of humor and horror, switching between the expansive gestures borrowed from Gustaf Gründgens, Klaus Maria Brandauer’s two-faced charm, his irritability, and Mephisto’s cleverness. So the game becomes a puzzle with diverse levels of play, in which the figures from the novel meet their real models as well as their descendants from the present. Past, present, and fiction come together in a study of vanity and shame and, in the final analysis, the primarily fragmented picture of Gründgens.
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Abbreviations:
BAR = Briefe, Aufsätze, Reden
BVerG = Mephisto; die Entscheidung des Bundesverfassungsgerichts und die abweichende Richter-Meinung.
Wirklichkeit = Wirklichkeit des Theaters.
Dokumentation = Gustaf Gründgens: eine Dokumentation des Dumont-Lindemann-Archivs