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Klaus Mann's Mephisto: A Secret Rivalry

Abstract

Critics of the 1960s and 1970s have focused their attention on Klaus Mann's use of his former brother-in-law, Gustaf Gründgens, as the model for the hero of his controversial novel, *Mephisto*, while more recent critics have emphasized its significance as a work of anti-Fascist literature.

This essay seeks to resolve some of the apparent contradictions in Klaus Mann's motivation for writing *Mephisto* by viewing the novel primarily in the context of his life and career. Although *Mephisto* is the only political satire that Klaus Mann wrote, it is consistent with his life-long tendency to use autobiographical material as the basis for much of his plot and characterization. Mann transformed his ambivalent feelings about Gründgens, which long antedated the writing of *Mephisto*, into a unique work of fiction which simultaneously expresses his indignation over the moral bankruptcy of the Third Reich and reveals his envy of Gründgens's career successes.

Keywords

1960s, 1970s, Klaus Mann, Gustaf Gründgens, Mephisto, anti-Fascist literature, anti-Fascist, literature, life, political satire, autobiographical, plot, characterization, Third Reich, career

Klaus Mann's *Mephisto*: a Secret Rivalry

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Klaus Mann's novel, *Mephisto*, became an object of controversy shortly after its first publication in October, 1936, because of the similarity of its main character, Hendrik Höfgen, to Gustaf Gründgens, Klaus Mann's former colleague and brother-in-law. Gründgens had gained fame and fortune as an actor and theatrical producer and had been appointed director of the Prussian State Theater in the Third Reich. The novel came to prominence again recently when it was republished in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1981, in the wake of the longest lawsuit in the history of German publishing. It was made into a film directed by Istvan Szábo, with Klaus Maria Brandauer in the title role. *Mephisto* received an Academy Award for the best foreign-language film of 1981.

In order to understand the nature of the controversy surrounding the genesis of *Mephisto* it is necessary to explore the complex relationship between Klaus Mann and Gustaf Gründgens from its beginnings in the mid-1920s until Mann's death by his own hand in 1949. Since the history of this relationship has already been exhaustively described by Eberhard Spangenberg and others,¹ I will confine my discussion of this aspect of the topic to a review of the pertinent facts, concentrating instead on an investigation of Klaus Mann's *motives* in writing the novel, which, in my opinion, still pose a number of unanswered or only partially answered questions.²

Klaus Mann and Gustaf Gründgens became acquainted in Hamburg in 1925, when they collaborated in a series of performances of Klaus's play, *Anja und Esther*, with Klaus's sister Erika and his soon-to-become fiancée Pamela Wedekind in the title roles. Gründgens was twenty-five, Klaus only eighteen. The description of Gründgens in Klaus's autobiography, *The Turning Point*, which chronicles their first meeting, already contains sharply ambivalent sentiments: "The idol of Hamburg's theater fans, he captivated the

audience with his inspired stunts and ever-new disguises. He was morbid and mysterious as Hamlet, irresistible as Schnitzler's Anatole, sinister in Strindberg's dramatic nightmares, flamboyant in Schiller's *Don Carlos*, utterly sophisticated in the farce by Oscar Wilde, taut with hysteria in expressionistic fantasies, quivering with wit and rhythm in the musical comedies by Offenbach. He managed to appear slender on the stage, although in reality, he was rather on the flabby side. He looked strikingly attractive if his role required good looks; and, if necessary, transformed himself into a stooping old man. He was by turns bland and violent, ribald, tragic, timid, or feline. He was all talent, no substance: the most ingenious performer I have ever seen" (115).³ It must be borne in mind that this description was written some sixteen years after the fact, and thus must have been colored by the experiences of the intervening years. Still, we can assume that some of the impressions given here are accurate representations of Klaus Mann's state of mind at the time of the meeting. Even if we leave aside the question of whether these remarks accurately reflect Gründgens's character, there can be no doubt about Klaus Mann's admiration for his abilities as an actor.

One of the significant results of the collaboration on *Anja und Esther* was the marriage of Erika Mann and Gustaf Gründgens, which took place in July, 1926. This turn of events affected Klaus deeply, for, as he wrote in a letter to Pamela Wedekind, "Die Nachricht von Eri's Verlobung hat mich sehr erschüttert, wenngleich ich vorbereitet war und ja auch nicht weiss, wie weit sie stichhaltig ist" (*Briefe* 1:115). (The news of Eri's engagement has shaken me profoundly, even though I was prepared and don't even know how definite it is). In the same letter he proposed to Pamela that they be married during that summer. The fact that Pamela subsequently broke their engagement in order to marry the Expressionist playwright Carl Sternheim must have dealt a double blow to Klaus's self-esteem. Perhaps in partial compensation for this blow, the relationship between Pamela and Sternheim later achieved artistic expression in the none-too-flattering depiction of Nicoletta von Niebuhr and Theophil Marder, two characters who figure prominently in the plot of *Mephisto*.

The professional and collegial component of the relationship between Klaus Mann and Gründgens soon came to an end during the unsuccessful run of Klaus's next play, *Revue zu Vieren*, in which Erika and Pamela also starred. Gründgens had harbored misgivings

about the play from the very beginning, and they were confirmed after its premiere in Leipzig in April, 1927, which received very bad reviews. He left the troupe when it performed in Berlin the following month. In the meantime, relations between Gustaf and Erika had been deteriorating, so much so that they separated at the end of 1927, although the divorce did not take place until January, 1929. Gründgens subsequently settled in Berlin to begin the meteoric career that is so imaginatively caricatured in *Mephisto*.

From this point on relations between Klaus Mann and Gustaf Gründgens became increasingly distant, although what transpired in Klaus's private life in the years between 1927 and 1936 has a direct bearing on the genesis of *Mephisto* and the vicissitudes of its publication. The fall of 1927 marked the beginning of a closer relationship between Erika and Klaus Mann, which began when together they took the trip around the world which was described in a book they co-authored, *Rundherum*, published in 1929. In the same year they traveled by automobile through Europe, from Finland to Morocco. Experiences from this journey are incorporated in two of Klaus's novels written in the first half of the decade of the thirties, *Flucht in den Norden* and *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen*. The heroines in both novels bear unmistakable resemblance to Erika Mann.⁴

Klaus Mann's tendency to use characters and personal experiences as material for his fiction has been thoroughly documented by Werner Rieck and others. Rieck builds his case around the observation that Klaus Mann's portrayal of Gründgens in *Mephisto* has a forerunner in the equally unflattering portrait of the dancer Gregor Gregori, one of the significant secondary characters of *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen*. Gregor Gregori has many attributes in common with his counterpart in *Mephisto*, including the tendency to place his career ambitions above all other considerations. *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen* received scant critical attention when it was published in 1932, however, and what there was of it was largely negative. It is doubtful whether Gründgens had read the novel at the time or was even aware of its existence. The appearance of a character so patently modeled on Gründgens in a relatively obscure work written in 1932, however, is of critical importance in interpreting Klaus Mann's motivation for writing *Mephisto* four years later. Since Klaus Mann frequently used autobiographical characters in his fiction, both before and after writing *Mephisto*, it cannot be convincingly argued that his use of Gründgens as a model is a significant departure from his usual

style. What makes *Mephisto* unique in the corpus of Klaus Mann's fictional writings, however, is the fact that it is his only novel written in the form of a political satire. As Lutz Winckler points out, "Daß Klaus Mann als Medium der Faschismuskritik die Satire gewählt hat, macht Stärke und Problematik des Romans aus. Als Satire weist der Roman deren wichtigstes Merkmal auf: Offensivität" (67–68). (That Klaus Mann chose satire as the medium of his critique of Fascism constitutes the strength and problematic nature of the novel. As a satire the novel demonstrates the most important characteristic of satire: Offensiveness). The fact that Klaus could have used much more offensive personages than Gründgens to bear the brunt of his satire—Göring, Goebbels and, above all, Hitler, play peripheral roles in the novel—makes his reasons for choosing Gründgens all the more problematic.

Klaus Mann conceived the idea of writing *Mephisto* after receiving a letter from his friend Hermann Kesten, dated November 15, 1935, in which the latter wrote: ". . . Sie sollten den Roman eines homosexuellen Karrieristen im dritten Reich schreiben, und zwar schwebte mir die Figur des von Ihnen künstlerisch (wie man mir sagt) schon bedachten Herrn Staatstheater Intendanten Gründgens vor (Titel: 'Der Intendant'). Dabei denke ich nicht daran, daß Sie eine hochpolitische Satire schreiben, sondern—fast—einen unpolitischen Roman, Vorbild der ewige 'Bel-Ami' von Maupassant, der schon Ihrem Onkel das köstliche 'Schlaraffenland' entdecken half" (*Briefe* 1:238). (. . . you should write the novel about a homosexual careerist in the Third Reich, and in fact, there came to mind the figure of the eminent State Theater Director Gründgens, who [so they say] has already been considered by you [Title: "The Director"]. At the same time I don't think you should write a highly political satire, but—almost—an unpolitical novel, modeled on the eternal *Bel-Ami* of Maupassant, which already helped your uncle discover the exquisite "Schlaraffenland"). Klaus was further encouraged to write the novel by his friend and publisher Fritz Landshoff, who wrote: "Ich finde—trotz allem den Kestenschen Vorschlag *gut*. Laß den Mann nicht schwul sein—es muß ja kein Gründgens werden—sondern irgendein 'Karrierist' . . ." (In spite of everything I find Kesten's suggestion *good*. Don't let the man be gay—he doesn't have to become a Gründgens—but rather some "careerist" or other. . .).

Already before *Mephisto* was scheduled to be published serially

in the *Pariser Tageszeitung*, an organ for German intellectuals in exile, Landshoff urged Klaus to request the *Tageszeitung* to print his retraction of its announcement of the novel, in which it had been termed a “*Schlüsselroman*” (a novel in which real persons are portrayed in fictionalized form). Landshoff apparently feared legal retribution—even in Holland, where his firm the *Querido Verlag* was located—by proponents of Gründgens and others hostile to the exiled writers. Klaus did so in a telegram to the newspaper in which he stated: “Dem Dichter lag nicht daran, die Geschichte eines bestimmten Menschen zu erzählen, ihm lag daran, einen Typus darzustellen und mit ihm die verschiedenen Milieus, die soziologischen und geistigen Voraussetzungen, die seinen Aufstieg erst möglich machten” (quoted in Spangenberg 91). (It was not my intention to write the story of a specific person, it was my intention to present a *type* and with it the various milieus, the sociological and intellectual prerequisites which made his ascendancy possible in the first place).

In *The Turning Point*, published in 1942, Klaus is more forthright in explaining his rationale for using Gründgens as a vehicle for expressing his artistic intentions:

I visualize my ex-brother-in-law as the traitor par excellence, the macabre embodiment of corruption and cynicism. So intense was the fascination of his shameful glory that I decided to portray Mephisto-Gründgens in a satirical novel. I thought it pertinent, indeed, necessary to expose and analyze the abject type of the treacherous intellectual who prostitutes his talent for the sake of some tawdry fame and transitory wealth. Gustaf was just one among others—in reality as well as in the composition of my narrative. He served me as a focus around which I could make gyrate the pathetic and nauseous crowd of petty climbers and crooks. (282)

In the expanded German version of his autobiography, *Der Wendepunkt*, published in 1952, some three years after his death, Klaus has moderated the tone of his explanation considerably:

Mephisto ist kein “Schlüsselroman”, wie man ihn wohl genannt hat. Der ruchlos brillante, zynisch rücksichtslose Karrieremacher, der im Mittelpunkt meiner Satire steht, mag gewisse Züge von einem gewissen Schauspieler haben, den es

wirklich gegeben hat und, wie man mir versichert, wirklich immer noch gibt. Ist der Staatsrat und Intendant Hendrik Höfgen, dessen Roman ich schrieb, ein Porträt des Staatsrates und Intendanten Gustaf Gründgens, mit dem ich als junger Mensch bekannt war? Doch nicht ganz. Höfgen unterscheidet sich in mancher Hinsicht von meinem früheren Schwager. Aber angenommen sogar, daß die Romanfigur dem Original ähnlicher wäre, als sie es tatsächlich ist, Gründgens könnte darum immer noch nicht als der "Held" des Buches bezeichnet werden. Es geht in diesem zeitkritischen Versuch überhaupt nicht um den Einzelfall, sondern um den Typ. Als Exempel hätte mir genau so gut ein anderer dienen können. Meine Wahl fiel auf Gründgens—nicht, weil ich ihn für besonders schlimm gehalten hatte (er war sogar eher besser als manch anderer Würdenträger des Dritten Reiches), sondern einfach, weil ich ihn zufällig besonders genau kannte. Gerade in Anbetracht unserer früheren Vertrautheit erschien mir seine Wandlung, sein Abfall so phantastisch, kurios, unglaublich, fabelhaft genug, um einen Roman darüber zu schreiben. (335) (*Mephisto* is not a "Schlüsselroman", as it has been called. The dastardly brilliant, cynically ruthless career-maker who stands at the center of my satire may have certain traits in common with a certain actor who really existed, and, as I am assured, still exists. Is the councillor of state and director Hendrik Höfgen, whose novel I wrote, a portrait of the councillor of state and director Gustaf Gründgens, with whom I was acquainted as a young man? Not quite. Höfgen differs in some respects from my former brother-in-law. But even assuming that the figure in the novel were more similar to the original than it actually is, Gründgens could still not be considered the "hero" of the book for that reason. In this endeavor, which is critical of the times, it is not at all a question of the individual case, but rather of the type. Someone else could have served me just as well as an example. My choice went to Gründgens—not because I considered him particularly bad [he was perhaps even better than many other dignitaries of the Third Reich], but simply because I happened to know him particularly well. It was precisely in consideration of our previous intimacy that his transformation, his defection, appeared so fantastic, curious, incredible, fabulous enough for me to write a novel about it).

Leaving aside consideration of the rationale for Klaus's public disclaimers, it must be emphasized that the crucial question still remains: Given his avowed intention to make a critical statement about a particular type of individual within a particular social, political, and historical context, why *did* he choose Gründgens to make his point, since by his own admission he could just as easily have chosen someone else? The statement that he chose Gründgens simply because he had known him well is a facile obfuscation, symptomatic of a deeper and possibly more troublesome complex of motivation, something akin to the response of the explorer George Leigh Mallory, who, when asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, responded, "Because it is there." Since there is no reason to question Klaus's conscious intention to write a novel about the evils of the Third Reich, any consideration of his motives for using Gründgens as the vehicle must entail an examination of his ambivalent personal feelings about his former brother-in-law, which can only be inferred from the known facts about their relationship.

Marcel Reich-Ranicki perhaps characterizes this ambivalence best and at the same time underscores the problematic nature of the novel itself when he says:

Mephisto ist, dem Anschein zum Trotz, weniger ein politisches Pamphlet als zunächst und vor allem ein Buch über Gründgens. Kein Zweifel, daß Klaus Mann im Exil—seine Tätigkeit als Publizist und Herausgeber beweist es—entschlossen war, den antifaschistischen Kampf konsequent zu führen. Auch den Gründgens-Stoff gedachte er hierfür auszuwerten—und eben daran ist der Roman gescheitert: an der künstlichen, fast gewaltsamen Verquickung des privaten Erlebnisses von gestern mit den politischen Aktivitäten von heute. . . . Der vermeintliche Haß entpuppte sich während der Arbeit als eine elementare Haßliebe. (46–47) (*Mephisto* is, despite appearances, less a political pamphlet than first and foremost a book about Gründgens. Undoubtedly, Klaus Mann in exile—his activity as a journalist and editor proves it—was determined to pursue the anti-Fascist struggle rigorously. He also intended to make use of the Gründgens material for this purpose—and that is precisely where the novel fails; in the artificial, almost forced amalgamation of yesterday's private experience with today's

political activities. . . . The putative hate emerged in the course of the work as an elemental love-hate).

What constitutes this love-hate? The novel itself provides some clues. Klaus's repeated public acknowledgment of Gründgens's talents as an actor notwithstanding, his portrayal of Höfgen's acting abilities is anything but flattering. In the last chapter, titled "Die Drohung," the ghost of Hamlet appears to Höfgen and denigrates his ability to portray him on the stage: "'Du bist nicht Hamlet', antwortete ihm der Prinz. 'Du besitzt nicht die Vornehmheit, die man sich allein durch das Leiden und durch die Erkenntnis erwirbt. Du hast nicht genug gelitten, und was du erkannt hast, war dir nicht mehr wert, als ein hübscher Titel und eine stattliche Gage. Du bist nicht vornehm; denn du bist ein Affe der Macht und ein Clown zur Zerstreuung der Mörder'" (331). ("You are not Hamlet, you don't have the nobility that only suffering and experience can give. You are merely the monkey of power, a clown to entertain murderers") (254). As Anke-Marie Lohmeier points out, Klaus Mann's tendency here to denigrate Gründgens's acting ability runs counter to his avowed purpose of exposing his moral failings as a traitor and collaborator, because bad acting is not in and of itself a symptom of moral weakness (119). But this criticism, valid though it may be, obscures the deeper significance of this scene, which is connected with the powerful feeling of envy which Klaus Mann must have felt in comparing his own abilities with those of Gründgens, a feeling which was probably not entirely conscious.

Other autobiographical components of the novel complement this pattern of inner relations between Gustaf Gründgens and Klaus Mann. The character Sebastian, who bears a close resemblance to Klaus Mann himself, plays a relatively small role in *Mephisto* in comparison with that of the central character of the same name in *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen*. The Sebastian of *Mephisto* is portrayed as a "friend" of Barbara Bruckner, who bears the unmistakable stamp of Erika Mann. Sebastian follows Barbara into exile, and, in one of his rare appearances in the novel, gives the following gloomy appraisal of his role in the struggle against Fascism: "'Der Kampf hat andere Gesetze als das hohe Spiel der Kunst,' sagte er. 'Das Gesetz des Kampfes fordert von uns, daß wir auf tausend Nuancen verzichten und uns ganz auf eine Sache konzentrieren. Meine Aufgabe ist es jetzt nicht, zu erkennen oder Schönes zu formen, sondern zu wirken—

soweit das in meinen Kräften steht. Es ist ein Opfer, welches ich bringe—das schwerste' ” (267). (“The law of battle demands that we renounce all sorts of nuances to concentrate solely on one objective. My duty at the moment is not to study or create beauty, but to act effectively—within the means at my disposal. It’s a sacrifice for me to do so—a hard one”) (207).

This posture invites comparison with that of Höfgen. While Höfgen exploits his talents in order to advance his shortsighted career goals, at the same time blinding himself to the moral consequences of his actions, Sebastian sacrifices the pursuit of his personal ambitions to the fulfillment of a higher aim: victory over injustice. This is precisely what Klaus Mann envisioned himself doing in 1936. What for Klaus Mann had begun innocently enough in 1925 as an adolescent rivalry between two gifted young artists had in the course of events been transformed in his mind into an inner struggle of far-reaching emotional as well as practical implications. *Mephisto* is a record of that transformation. It is as much a novel of Klaus Mann’s career as it is of Gründgens’s.

Further autobiographical features of the novel give still more evidence of Klaus Mann’s tendency to combine his public indignation with his private wishful fantasies. Besides Barbara and Sebastian, those characters in the novel representing real people to whom Klaus remained sympathetic are depicted as joining the exiles and aligning themselves with the anti-Fascist movement. They include Geheimrat Bruckner (Thomas Mann), Dora Martin (Elisabeth Bergner), “der Professor” (Max Reinhardt) and Hedda von Herzfeld (Therese Giehse). Otto Ulrichs (Hans Otto) remains in Germany and is murdered by the Nazis. The only glaring departure from this general adherence to historical accuracy is the portrayal of Nicoletta von Niebuhr (Pamela Wedekind), who divorces von Marder (Sternheim) in order to return to Germany and marry Höfgen. Klaus Mann seems here to have taken the opportunity to exact a modicum of revenge on Pamela for having renounced him in “real” life.

While his qualified admiration for Gründgens’s talents as an actor and director diminished proportionally as their relationship deteriorated, Klaus had every reason to be envious of Gründgens’s accomplishments, which had been considerable even before Hitler came to power. In contrast, Klaus’s own theatrical career, which had gained him much notoriety but scant respect among his peers, foundered after the unsuccessful run of *Revue zu Vieren*. Although

Klaus continued to publish profusely before his exile from Germany in the spring of 1933, he failed to approach the level of public recognition as a writer of fiction or as a social critic that his counterpart had achieved as an actor and director. This deficiency on Klaus's part, which was both real and imagined (occurring as it did during a crucial formative period in his life) was doubtless exacerbated by the conditions of his impending exile. Accordingly, his perception of the disparity between his own accomplishments and those of Gründgens must have profoundly affected his self-esteem. On the one hand, he could console himself with the thought that Gründgens had paid dearly for his success by selling his soul to the forces of evil, while he (Klaus) had jeopardized his own career by remaining true to his principles. On the other hand, he must have been haunted by the suspicion that, if the Third Reich had never existed, Gründgens would still have enjoyed the same success while his own career might have failed for reasons unrelated to the problem of exile. Crucial in Klaus's relationship to Gründgens was his relationship with his sister Erika, which, as we have seen, became more intense as the rift between her and Gründgens widened. The increased closeness of the two siblings, which continued through most of the thirties, provided Klaus with an emotional compensation for the loss of intimacy with Pamela Wedekind and at the same time may have appeared to him as a minor victory in his secret rivalry with Gründgens. If he was, by his own admission, "shaken" by the news of Erika's engagement to Gründgens, he must have been similarly relieved upon learning of their separation and subsequent divorce.

The conflict between Klaus Mann and Gustaf Gründgens continued long after the uproar following the first publication of *Mephisto* had abated, and that despite the fact that the two principals never again came face to face. Klaus emigrated to the United States before the Second World War and became a naturalized American citizen. After serving in the United States Army during the war, he went through a protracted period of depression which ended in his death by suicide on May 21, 1949 in Cannes. Exactly a month earlier he had sent a letter to a German publisher named Georg Jacobi requesting him to consider republishing *Mephisto* in Germany. In a letter dated May 5 he received a polite reply with the statement: "Von hier aus aber kann man schlecht den 'Mephisto' starten, denn Herr Gründgens spielt hier eine bereits sehr bedeutende Rolle, und die Presseveröffentlichungen werden Sie sicherlich kennen, die inzwischen

erfolgt sind. Von Berlin aus hätte man so etwas leichter starten können: im Westen ist aber diese Aktion keinesfalls einfach" (*Briefe* 2:457). (From here one cannot easily start *Mephisto*, because Herr Gründgens already plays a very significant role here, and you surely are aware of the publicity in the press which has resulted in the meantime. One could start something like that more easily in Berlin: in the West, however, this action is by no means simple.) In a letter dated May 12, nine days before his death, Klaus bitterly protested Jacobi's rejection of his proposal: "Das heie ich mir Logik! Und Zivilcourage! Und Vertragstreue! Ich wei nicht, was mich mehr frappiert: die Niedrigkeit Ihrer Gesinnung oder die Naivitt, mit der Sie diese zugeben. Gründgens hat Erfolg: warum sollten Sie da ein Buch herausbringen, das gegen ihn gerichtet scheinen könnte? Nur nichts riskieren! Immer mit der Macht! Mit dem Strom geschwommen! Man wei ja, wohin es führt: zu eben jenen Konzentrationslagern, von denen man nachher nichts gewut haben will . . ." (*Briefe* 2: 304). (I call that logic! And civil courage! And contractual loyalty!—I don't know what astounds me more, the baseness of your attitude or the naïveté with which you admit it. Gründgens is successful: why should you bring out a book which might seem to be directed against him? Only don't risk anything! Always with the power! Swimming with the current! One knows where it leads: precisely to those concentration camps about which one afterwards claims to have known nothing. . .).

Although Klaus Mann's suicide must be attributed to a combination of many disparate factors, there can be no doubt that the prospect of not being able to publish *Mephisto* in a post-war Germany which was more than receptive to ideas critical of its Nazi past weighed heavily on Klaus's mind just before his death. What must have been doubly demeaning to him was the knowledge that Gründgens, after undergoing a brief and relatively painless process of denazification, was once more embarked on a successful career which had every indication of eclipsing the one which had been interrupted by the war. Meanwhile, Klaus had little to show for his efforts except the knowledge that he was continuing to be true to his principles.

But apart from the apparent victory that Gründgens had once more won in their private war, Klaus had other even weightier reasons for being despondent over the course his life had taken. Among the most significant was the fact that his relationship with Erika, so intense during the pre-war period, had been deteriorating. As Klaus's

youngest brother Michael informed me in a conversation on July 19, 1972: "That was a very close friendship until the last few years when it sort of broke apart silently and they didn't see each other much any more. . . . Erika was so active and . . . after all, he was a poet and she was a politician. And then she was so close to her father also. . . . They didn't understand each other very well any more."⁶

Had Klaus been able to resolve the conflicts that precipitated his final act of desperation, he might have lived to see the eventual fulfillment of his ambitions. It is ironic and perhaps not entirely coincidental that Gründgens died of an overdose of sleeping pills in Manila on October 7, 1963, a few months before his adopted son, Peter Gorski-Gründgens, filed suit against the Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung to prevent the publication of *Mephisto* in the Federal Republic of Germany. It is a further irony that, despite years of litigation, *Mephisto* was published in 1981 by Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag and became an immediate best-seller in Germany. Perhaps Klaus Mann did, after all, win the final victory.

NOTES

1. See also Kroll, vols. 2 and 3. For a one-sided treatment from Gründgens's standpoint, see Riess 64–75; 154–57.
2. More recent commentators have attempted to view *Mephisto* in the context of anti-Fascist social and political criticism. Winckler places the novel into the tradition of the "bürgerlich(er) gesellschaftskritisch(er) Künstlerroman" (60) and the political satire (65–67). Lohmeier acknowledges Klaus Mann's tendency to defame Gründgens and others identified with the Fascist regime but at the same time faults the narrator for distancing himself from his subject by emphasizing Höfgen's blind pursuit of his career ambitions and thus downplaying the significance of the moral dilemmas that confront him. It is not my intention to enter into this debate, even though much can still be said on both sides of the issue. Rather, I will restrict myself to a consideration of the private, personal, and to a large extent contradictory psychology that defines the relationship from Klaus Mann's point of view and which will place the novel more definitively into the overall context of his life.
3. English in the original. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
4. See especially the scene in *Treffpunkt im Unendlichen*, where the heroine, Sonja, has a bad experience with hashish (319–34). This matches almost verbatim the

description which Klaus gives in *The Turning Point* of an experience which he and Erika had in Fez, Morocco (191–95).

5. Unpublished letter of November 28, 1935 from Fritz Landshoff to Klaus Mann (quoted in Spangenberg 68).

6. Conversation between the writer and Michael Mann on July 19, 1972.

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