

# META-REVISION: THE NEW PARADIGM OF FAUSTIAN STORIES

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## ABSTRACT:

The aim of the study is to introduce and verify the perspective of the “meta-revision” concept for an analysis of adaptations (revisions) in the intermediality discourse. The issue of meta-revisions is presented through evident moral dichotomy in Faustian stories which are frequently adapted in Western culture. Besides many Faustian adaptations that are variable in plot yet traditional in the moral manifestations, we recognise only a few cases that question the exclusivity of conventional Christian ethics. Verification of the concept of “meta-revision” is done especially through the analysis of several film structures, whereas two of them bear significant meta-revisionist features: we identify the meta-revision of cultural self-identification with the hero (*The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* by Terry Gilliam) and meta-revision of cultural self-identification with the villain (*Mephisto* by István Szabó; based on the novel by Klaus Mann). As a conclusion of the study the three distinctive aspects of meta-revision applicable in further research on adaptations are defined.

## KEY WORDS:

adaptation, Faust, film, intermediality, literature, Mephisto, meta-revision, remediation, revision, theatre

## 1 Introduction

The goal of our study is to introduce the potential of meta-revision in the broader interdisciplinary discourse. Many vital media studies concepts widely used in the research of adaptations can be traced to McLuhan’s influential claim that “*the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium*”<sup>1</sup>. The complex set of ideas McLuhan represented in such a brief statement arrives from the media archaeology point of view he shares<sup>2</sup> with Benjamin, Giedion, Curtius, Sternberg and Warburg. It allows us to see that topics of adaptation and media history (mostly in media combination) are not associated through mere nostalgia but are structurally interconnected in the basic processes of media production. This aspect will be evident in our research through a diachronic perspective on adaptations and the critical point of meta-revision narratives (with embedding media forms and techniques), even though media archaeology – very unlike studying adaptations – is in principle materialistic and antinarrative. In other words, they do not share the research sample but perspective and theoretical assumptions about media evolution, therefore they are complementary.

<sup>1</sup> MCLUHAN, M., LAPHAM, L. H.: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1994, p. 8.  
<sup>2</sup> HUHTAMO, E., PARIKKA, J.: Introduction: An Archaeology of Media Archaeology. In HUHTAMO, E., PARIKKA, J. (eds.): *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011, p. 2.

McLuhan's thesis also goes with the reasoning about mixing media in the work of Mitchell, who is "perhaps the most influential contemporary critic of attempts to find clear boundaries between arts and media".<sup>3</sup> Fuzziness of those borders is conceptualised through "intermediality"<sup>4</sup> as the most important umbrella-term in interdisciplinary arts and media research. The term "intermediality" can be explained simply as a "repeating one medium, as a form, in other medium",<sup>5</sup> but some semantic segmentation is necessary to fully implement its possibilities in the more specific area of film adaptations in our study. From the media studies perspective, "film adaptations can be classified in the category of media combination; as adaptations of literary works, they can be classified in the category of media transposition; and if they make specific, concrete references to a prior literary text, these strategies can be classified as intermedial references".<sup>6</sup>

In our study we focus on specific intermediality using remediation, understood as "formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms".<sup>7</sup> The concept of "remediation" might be the most important impulse from media theory in a type of research we are presenting because the accent of our study is on significant cultural changes in mediation of religious stories. Such changes are part of production and economic decisions and they are undoubtedly manifested in metatextual combinations of several media forms for "no medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media".<sup>8</sup>

More than a decade ago Moore successfully applied the term "protocol" from the media historian Gitelman into the realm of adaptation studies with a significant influence on this field. In his effort he made an efficient summarisation from a media studies point of view when he stated that "adaptation suggests not only the preservation of narratives, themes, and rhythms but also a keen recognition of technical constraints and social practices, both within the original medium and its adaptive counterpart".<sup>9</sup> After the many valuable impulses that media studies offered to adaptation research, this 'preservation' metaphor from materialistic media archaeology can be expanded by the recent turn in (not primarily materialistic) adaptation studies: instead of focusing on what was preserved, we are interested in what had to be changed in new versions of media content: mostly in themes, authors, and even technology, because of the previous exclusion of different sex, race, language, religion (etc.) perspectives.

Our study therefore proceeds in the current interdisciplinary research on adaptation-revision led by Leitch,<sup>10</sup> where "revision" is understood as a special case of adaptation that alters the spirit of the previous story. A useful formal tool for this purpose is to change the narrator's (or main character's) point of view. Even without altering the causality of the story, it is possible to invert or relativise the division between a hero and a villain, therefore the use of this artistic approach is interesting in the research on adaptations.

The aim of our study is to introduce and verify the perspective of the "meta-revision" concept for an analysis of adaptations (revisions), where the extensive intertextual realm of the story is challenged along with current adaptation structures. For this purpose, we have chosen Faustian intertext which provides a broad scope of adaptations to verify the concept of meta-revision and its validity.

With respect to the extensive tradition in Faustian research, we define the basic motivic structure of Faustian stories and set boundaries to the most relevant intertext for the purpose of our study. We verify the concept of "meta-revision" in two main cases (and supporting/contrasting subcases) by demonstrating differences between meta-revisions and other adaptations (revisions). We analyse the religious context of Faustian stories in the revision of cultural self-identification with the hero (*The Imaginarium of Doctor*

*Parnassus*)<sup>11</sup> and the revision of cultural self-identification with the villain (*Mephisto*).<sup>12</sup> After the analysis we use two main cases of meta-revision and significant contrasting examples to generalise the three distinctive aspects of meta-revision, which can be useful to identify the structure of meta-revisions in other intertexts.

## 2 Narrative Paradigm of Faustian Stories

If we exclude simple intermedial references<sup>13</sup> or intertextual connections,<sup>14</sup> the core of Faustian stories is usually recognisable by a contract with the devil or a bet between God and the devil for a human soul but the stories themselves vary a lot. In fact, they are so different that there is almost 'no grain to go against'. The structure usually works as a template to manufacture moralistic stories and can be identified by its coherence with the following motifs:

- A. Leitmotif: Unfair contract – Character (usually man) executes a performative act (signing contract, promise, or verbalised crave), in which he declares his desire in front of tempter (or not explicitly present entity). There is a significant fallacy in the character's reasoning in which he assumes that the desired thing with superficial qualities (wealth, power, fame, sexual pleasure) is inherently connected to ideal existence.
- B. Supportive motifs: Bet (between personified good and evil); magic (or other supernatural elements in the story); homunculus (specious triumph of the reason), etc.

Most Faustian stories consist of a stated leitmotif with an unfair contract with combinations of other motifs.

## 3 Intertext of Faustian Stories and Their Traditional Religious Framing

To set evident boundaries for our research, we can point to some cases of similarities on the periphery that are not revisions of Faust but hold some formal resemblance to it. In *Rosemary's Baby*<sup>15</sup> the contract with the devil itself is not at the centre of attention but works as a context or a distant premise of the film. In the (formerly) Yugoslavian popular comedy *Mi nismo andjeli*<sup>16</sup> there is a bet between an angel and the devil over the success of the relationship. The narrative itself is not about the continual corruption of man but his steady recovery. Therefore, a mere resemblance of the framing narrative of the bet between good and evil is not sufficient foundation for our research.

Difficulties also arise with the existence of several versions of literary Faust and picking only one version to cover is an exception. There is a predominance of connections with Johann Wolfgang Goethe's version,<sup>17</sup> but *Doctor Faustus*<sup>18</sup> declares fidelity to Christopher Marlowe's version. Some new interpretations admit several sources, such as Švankmajer's *Faust*,<sup>19</sup> which mentions Goethe, Grabbe, Marlowe, Gounda, and Czech folk puppeteers. Faustian stories draw also from historical sources (as Goethe's did) or folk tales about medieval quacks and mostly there is a mix of intertwined sources.

3 ELLESTROM, L.: The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations. In ELLESTROM, L. (ed.): *Media Borders, Multimodality, and Intermediality*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 11.

4 RAJEWSKY, I. O.: Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality. In *Intermedialités / Intermediality*, 2005, No. 6, p. 44.

5 PAECH, J.: Intermediale Figuration – am Beispiel von Jean-Luc Godards Histoire(s) du Cinéma. In EMING, J., LEHMANN, A. J., MAASSEN, I. (eds.): *Mediale Performanzen*. Freiburg: Rombach, 2002, p. 279.

6 RAJEWSKY, I. O.: Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality. In *Intermedialités / Intermediality*, 2005, No. 6, p. 53.

7 BOLTER, J. D., GRUSIN, R.: *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000, p. 273.

8 BOLTER, J. D., GRUSIN, R.: *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000, p. 15.

9 MOORE, M. R.: Adaptation and New Media. In *Adaptation*, 2010, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 179-180.

10 LEITCH, T.: *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, p. 107.

11 GILLIAM, T. (Director): *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (2009, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.

12 SZABÓ, I. (Director): *Mephisto (1981, Widescreen Version)*. [Blu-ray]. Los Angeles: Concorde Home Entertainment, 2017.

13 RAJEWSKY, I. O.: Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality. In *Intermedialités / Intermediality*, 2005, No. 6, p. 44.

14 HUTCHEON, L.: *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 9.

15 POLANSKI, R. (Director): *Rosemary's Baby (1968, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Los Angeles: Paramount Home Entertainment, 2001.

16 DRAGOJEVIC, S. (Director): *Mi nismo andjeli (1992, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Belgrade: Delat Video, 2004.

17 Sec: GOETHE, J. W.: *Faust: A Tragedy, Parts One and Two, Fully Revised*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2014.

18 BURTON, R., COGHILL, N. (Directors): *Doctor Faustus (1967, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2004.

19 ŠVANKMAJER, J. (Director): *Faust (1994, Full Screen Version)*. [DVD]. New York: Kino Video, 2003.

Faustian stories are so convertible on the surface that for their revision it is more important where they emerge. It would be an exaggeration to assume that there are no Faustian stories outside Western culture. Van der Laan points to cases of Faustian stories finding their place in Japan in a form of *manga* or puppet shows or to “scholarly conference on ‘The Reception of Faust in Non-Christian Cultures’ – especially in Islamic, South Asian, and East Asian countries”.<sup>20</sup> The wide reception of Faust is important to intercultural dialogue but it would not be sufficient to ascribe those adaptations to Western own self-reflection of cultural identity.

A common feature to which Western Faustian adaptations are faithful is the exclusive Christian ownership of the story. Of course, they come from Judeo-Christian (and ancient Greek) heritage but we can say that only one religion inherited them on screen.

Christian reading is predominant in adaptations that declare Goethe as a source because of his Catholic narrative framing. Bloom recognises how the irony of the text can be challenged by framing when he asks: “What are we to do with this apparently Catholic conclusion to an altogether non-Christian poetic drama?”<sup>21</sup> Laan summarises the academic reception of this problem by stating that: “Goethe must certainly be having his fun when he takes a tale so deeply rooted in both Renaissance Humanism and the Lutheran Reformation only to write a thoroughly mystical and Roman Catholic conclusion.”<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the ambiguity of the text and the ‘dead author readings’ offer more traditional interpretations. The hypothesis of Catholic framing is weaker if we consider part one and two separately as Bloom would like to, but as he admits, “since Goethe thought otherwise, his authorial intentions must prevail”.<sup>23</sup> Bloom makes the opposite conclusion about the hierarchy of the Christian and non-Christian aspects of the story<sup>24</sup> but irony and the ‘heretic’ parts of the text are popularly ascribed to the Mephisto-driven narrative as devilish aspects that are defeated at the end. There is a special position of Goethe’s version in Faustian intertext, but we should not forget about many other less culturally ambiguous sources. The historical and philosophical preparation of all adapters should not be overestimated.

The exclusive Christian ‘ownership’ of Western Faust is manifested by the contrast between Christianity and other faiths or by obvious Christian symbolism or ethics embodied in the characters. Very few Faustian revisions get rid of this exclusivity of one religion. It can be done by expanding the religious context or making the right belief irrelevant to the ethical question of good and evil. We also expect that if adapters purposely aim to undermine Christian exclusivity in the Faustian revision, they acknowledge Goethe and his critical reception and will change the religious narrative framing explicitly. We see representatives of other religious traditions in Faustian adaptations but they are on the evil side of the story. Not surprisingly, *voodoo* practices are connected to the devil in several adaptations, most famously in *Angel Heart*.<sup>25</sup>

Partial attempts to expand the religious context in Faustian structure can be seen in the popular TV series *Futurama* – the episode *The Devil’s Hands Are Idle Playthings*<sup>26</sup> uses a parodical religion of robots for this purpose. Despite the obvious allusions to Christianity, the story satirically undermines the exclusive ownership of the old narrative to one religion and goes against the spirit of its predecessors.

20 VAN DER LAAN, J. M.: *Seeking Meaning for Goethe’s Faust*. London, New York : Continuum, 2007, p. 172.

21 BLOOM, H.: *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York, San Diego, London : Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 234.

22 VAN DER LAAN, J. M.: *Seeking Meaning for Goethe’s Faust*. London, New York : Continuum, 2007, p. 140.

23 BLOOM, H.: *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York, San Diego, London : Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 221.

24 BLOOM, H.: *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York, San Diego, London : Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 234.

25 PARKER, A. (Director): *Angel Heart (1987, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Toronto : Momentum Pictures, 2006.

26 HAALAND, B. (Director): *The Devil’s Hands Are Idle Playthings (2003, Futurama Season 4 Box Set, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Los Angeles : Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004.

## 4 Revision of Cultural Self-Identification with the Hero: The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus

A few years after the *Futurama* episode came a stand-alone film that fully explored this revisionist approach without the satirical tones that could exclude parts of the audience. *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* is a fantasy that shakes the exclusive Christian spirit to the extreme without mocking it. We have to remember that the director is not going against Christianity itself but against the spirit of Faust as a purely Christian narrative. Revisions of religious stories are not rare in Terry Gilliam’s work. The lack of satirical comments in the film is surprising. We can see a different approach in his work on *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.<sup>27</sup> To revise the story, he puts the main character, Doctor Parnassus (Christopher Plummer), into two narrative positions of Goethe’s Faust. He is in the framing narrative position of God making a bet with the devil over the world’s destiny and later making a contract with the devil to get a woman, which causes consequential contracts and bets. The status of Doctor Parnassus is unclear and is open to interpretation. The film presents him as a thousands-of-years-old monk that had been trying to sustain the life of the universe by telling stories before he made a bet with the devil. Evil is embodied in Mr. Nick (Tom Waits).

Mr. Nick tries to prove to the old monk that there is no need for his fantasy and that the universe can go on without him and other monks reciting stories. Doctor Parnassus wins the first bet and Mr. Nick grants him immortality but it is just a trap. Mr. Nick is only waiting until the times will change and people will no longer be interested in his tales. This framing plot has also some autobiographical characteristics of Terry Gilliam as an artist<sup>28</sup> but the interesting part is the oscillation of Doctor Parnassus between the position of the man and his divinity. The implications that arise from this position are amplified by the wider symbolic context of the story. In classical Faust, the main character does not have any supernatural powers and all his later abilities are provided by the devil. The desire of having powers or to accomplish goals in ‘an easy way’ is what moves the original plot.

Parnassus is already surrounded by the supernatural. He lives in a temple which is depicted in the film with mixed architectonic references to Hinduism and Buddhism. The temple is carved into a mountain to look like a sculpture similar to the sitting position of a Buddha. Three (Hindu) elephants hold the sitting statue on their backs. Egyptian symbols as pyramids and Horus’s eye are also present in the latter part of the film.

There is no need to enumerate the many varieties of different religious symbols in the film – the predominance of non-Christian imagery is undeniable. Christian symbolism is only embedded in the whole narrative structure. Even Mr. Nick points to the different imagery. He pretends not to take other symbols seriously and he wants to get rid of them. There is a final fight for a lost soul with the significant name – Tony Shepherd. He is portrayed by Heath Ledger and three other actors (Johnny Depp, Jude Law, and Colin Farrell) in the dream-like sequences. Red symbols on Tony’s forehead are not primarily associated with Christianity and Mr. Nick addresses them very suspiciously (as he would traditionally talk about the cross): “Weird markings that he had on his forehead when you found him? What is all that about? Do they protect him or...? What is it? (...) Better, if you can help me wipe that self-righteous little creep off the face of the universe... I’ll give you Valentina back.”<sup>29</sup>

Mr. Nick himself is not afraid of the Christian cross but of something he is not fully familiar with. There is classic symbolic protection but the spirit of the traditional story has changed. This approach differs a lot from the adaptations where the belief in a Christian God is a natural saving mechanism. In the usual happy endings of these adaptations, the devil does not get the soul because of some surprising twist of proven Christian faith.

27 GILLIAM, T., JONES, T. (Directors): *Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Culver City : Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1998.

28 DAWTREY, A.: *Gilliam Mounts Parnassus in London*. Released on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2007. [online]. [2020-04-15]. Available at: <<https://variety.com/2007/voices/columns/gilliam-mounts-parnassus-in-london-1117977723/>>.

29 GILLIAM, T. (Director): *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus (2009, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Culver City : Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.

It manifests as an exception in the signed contract. In *Alias Nick Beal*<sup>30</sup> the devil refuses to touch the Holy Bible covering the contract in case it breaches the contract according to “Article 147, Paragraph 9, Section 3: *Selfless Acts of Redemption*” in the new version of *Bedazzled*.<sup>31</sup>

Mr. Nick in *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* is evil in a far bigger religious universe than the devils we see in previous Faustian stories. Besides the wider symbolism, his motivation is also different. He is much further away from the unpredictable and almost random aspects of the shape-shifting trickster,<sup>32</sup> nor is he needlessly cruel. His function is reduced to obstacles or challenges. There is a stress on the play element of the story. The play itself seems to be more relevant for the devil than his mere winning.

The big game in which the forces of good and evil fight and thus set history into motion is grounded in the structure where good must always win. This is, of course, the natural dynamics to ‘move the plot’. When Mr. Nick is the first one ‘to collect five souls’ he is very surprised by the results of the game. Mr. Nick offers another proposition right after his win to prolong his game. He lets his opponent Parnassus and his daughter ‘off the hook’ as a good gesture. He does not feel good about the fact that he won by a shortcut he did not intend. This is a big diversion from the usual devil that does nothing but use tricks to win. We can also see the devil doing an honest nice deed after he had proved the viciousness of mankind in the comedy *Bedazzled*<sup>33</sup> but the motivation is different. The nice deed in the original *Bedazzled* is the merciful act of the devil who thinks he wins, the end of the world is coming, and he can go back to God. Earthly matters do not interest him anymore. In contrast to the devil from *Bedazzled*, Mr. Nick makes his act of ‘kindness’ as a good sportsman who wants to continue the game with Parnassus.

If Mr. Nick is not afraid of Christian symbols and Christian morals are not the only way to salvation in this story, then it is important to understand where the Christian religion is embedded here. Besides the mentioned evolution of religious tradition, the primary structure that Gilliam suggested is dramatic art as a manifestation of the play principle.<sup>34</sup> Theatrical intermediality is very common in Faustian stories, but there is a revision in this layer. Most common theatrical allusions in Faustian stories are reminders of opera: *Phantom of the Paradise*<sup>35</sup> or the previously mentioned *Futurama* episode.

More complex intermediality in the logic of remediation is noticed in *Faust* by Jan Švankmajer. The surreal story is played out in the theatre building and techniques of stop motion animation and puppeteering are intertwined with the historical context of Faustian puppet shows. The idea of *theatrum mundi* is represented by a metatextual dialogue between puppets and live actors. A similar metatextual dialogue between film and theatre is the central idea of *Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*. The present theatre and the theatrical code are interpretational mediators between the real world and the world of imagination created in Doctor Parnassus’s mind depicted in the film with remarkable computer-generated visuals. This division is also stressed by the death of Heath Ledger in the middle of the production. Terry Gilliam decided that he would not recreate his face using computer-generated imagery; he would rather use three other actors to strengthen the psychological differences and enable a “*more defined separation of character and performance both in front of and behind the mirror*”.<sup>36</sup> The theatre code is strengthened in this remediation. Faust is a mask and his variations can be embodied differently, but not arbitrarily, as the following evidence suggests.

Besides the casual remarks of the devil seeking another soul, Faustian adaptations sometimes add more iteration to the plot. When Švankmajer’s Faust enters the theatre to become an actor in the drama, he encounters a scared visitor – the previous Faust. The same thing happens at the end of the film when he is

30 FARROW, J. (Director): *Alias Nick Beal* (1949, *Essential Film Noir Collection I, 4-Disc Widescreen Version*). [Blu-ray]. East Melbourne: Madman Entertainment, 2020.

31 RAMIS, H. (Director): *Bedazzled* (2000, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000.

32 JUNG, C. G.: *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 161.

33 DONEN, S. (Director): *Bedazzled* (1967, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005.

34 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 14.

35 DE PALMA, B. (Director): *Phantom of the Paradise* (1974, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2002.

36 RANDELL, K.: *Celebrity Trauma: The Death of Heath Ledger and The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*. In BIRKENSTEIN, J., FROULA, A., RANDELL, K. (eds.): *The Cinema of Terry Gilliam: It's a Mad World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, p. 150-151.

trying to escape his fate. He runs into the next clueless soul. In *La main du diable*<sup>37</sup> there are ten explicit iterations in causal connection. Nine of these men exchanged their left hand for a gift from the devil and the main character is the last person in this chain. The tenth is a Christian monk named in the archetypal manner of extremes – Maximus Leo. He is a representation of a Christian ideal and only from him the devil must have stolen his hand. It is the most explicit widening of the variability of the plot in Faustian adaptations.

We can say that Faustian adaptations do not cross Christian boundaries in time and space while picking the main character. This is understandable in a story historically derived from Christian belief. Without baptism, there is narratively no immortal soul ‘in the game’. Therefore, the *Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* is so radical in its revision. The background of Doctor Parnassus is far away from the standard spirit of this narrative. He is not in opposition to Christianity but there is a clear inclusion of the worlds. A significant part of the story is situated in the Western world but the framing parts are outside it. Not to mention that there is also the fantasy world of Doctor Parnassus’s mind with a mixture of archetypal symbolism and mostly recognisable various religious imagery. Parnassus is thousands of years old and it is suggested that he is older than Christianity. He lives in the Far East untouched by the West until the devil comes in his black suit and a bow tie. In contrast with the monk Maximus Leo, Parnassus (his name also alludes to an ideal) represents an abstract religious concept in the position of a monk. Later he takes the universal position of an artist.

To conclude this part of our study, we can say that Gilliam places Christianity in the broader cultural context in which self-identification with the hero is widened from traditional Christian hero to character of every religion, and in which play and art had significant roles in cultivating man. The devil he portrays is predominantly a player (competitor) who is more concerned with the game itself than with mere winning. The director shows the importance of other religious traditions. There is less division between his God and a man. Gilliam’s revisionist attempt is summarised by a disciple of Doctor Parnassus: “*He wants the world to rule itself*”.<sup>38</sup> The need for this revision is highlighted in the dialogue between the lost soul Tony and Parnassus’s colleague: “*Where the hell are we? – Geographically speaking, in the Northern hemisphere, socially, on the margins and narratively; with some way to go*”.<sup>39</sup>

## 5 Revision of Cultural Self-Identification with the Villain: Manifestations of Mephisto

An expedition to the outside world puts the notion of self-identification with a Christian hero in some wider perspective. Naturally, there is also the opposite technique: an expedition to the inner world of man to look for the evil inside. A realistic psychological portrait of evil is needed here because it is a psychological problem: “*The so-called civilised man has forgotten the trickster. (...) As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual, the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated*”.<sup>40</sup>

To make a revision that strongly prefers a psychological explanation of evil to a religious one, it is inevitable to remove any supernatural properties from the devil so there is no ‘great outside’ to blame. In such revision, evil must not come from non-human sources and must be carried out without external diversions. How is it possible to introduce a convincing manifestation of the devil without supernatural powers? The function of those powers is to fulfil the abstraction and assure a clear density of extreme evilness beyond human comprehension. Without reading the devil as an extreme evil, his revision does not have a relevant metatextual impact on the structure of other revisions. Would not the devil without his powers be just as every villain

37 TOURNEUR, M. (Director): *La main du diable* (1943, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Neuilly-sur-Seine: Gaumont, 2010.

38 GILLIAM, T. (Director): *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.

39 GILLIAM, T. (Director): *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* (2009, *Widescreen Version*). [DVD]. Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2010.

40 JUNG, C. G.: *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*. London: Routledge, 2004, p. 173.

ever? Not necessarily, if he is put in the strong intertextual context that the character of Mephisto provides. Therefore, the revisionist book *Mephisto*<sup>41</sup> by Klaus Mann and the film it inspires, *Mephisto*, have a special position in Faustian intertext. They suppress stereotypical visions of the supernatural Mephisto that belong to Christian portrayals of the devil but stay in relevant intertextual dialogue with Goethe's Faust.

The main character in Klaus Mann's *Mephisto*, theatre actor Hendrik Höfgen (performed in the film by Klaus Maria Brandauer), is inspired by the author's real brother-in-law, Gustav Gründgens. Barasch-Rubinstein<sup>42</sup> made an extensive interpretation of Klaus Mann's novel and its historical context. She describes the real-life inspiration behind the story of the selfish actor who is willing to do anything for success in Nazi Germany. We can find very close depictions of Herrmann Göring and Joseph Goebbels and their relationship to the main character but for us, it is essential to state two facts. First, the famous German writer Thomas Mann (Klaus's father) is an inspiration for Höfgen's father-in-law. He is the closest character to the allegorical depiction of God in *Mephisto*. Höfgen literally cannot breathe in his garden and his reaction resembles the devil's contact with sacred places or artefacts in whole varieties of Faustian stories. Second, "the portrayal of the production of Goethe's Faust in the novel is based on Gründgens's real performance of Faust in 1932 – 1933".<sup>43</sup>

Hendrik Höfgen, like his real-life inspiration, climbs 'the ladder of success' so blindly that the role of Mephisto he plays for the Nazis is a great parallel to his life. The historical resemblance was clear enough that even Gründgens was able to legally stop the publishing of the book for several years.<sup>44</sup> If this is the case, then the narrative collision of Faust and Mephisto in one person is inevitable but the interpretational resistance of this fusion is striking. Vojtěch Rynda<sup>45</sup> in his afterword to *Mephisto* states that Höfgen discovered too late that he was not, in fact, a Mephisto but a Faust, who got tricked by the cynical Mephisto – Göring. This is again an interpretational attempt to separate the evil itself from a pitiful man that is allured and corrupted by some outside source.

We understand this traditional point of view but it undermines the strong revisionist message of the story. We do not think that the name of the book serves as a background for this kind of twist that could be summed up in the sentence: 'Göring was the bad guy the whole time'. Mann's book is not the mere aftermath of World War II as are many similar stories that try to deal with the trauma of the last century. The precision in which Mann portrays the rise of the shadow from unconscious latency to its mobilisation in the masses is highlighted by the fact that it was first published in 1936.<sup>46</sup> It is a horrific revelation for any close reader and it is hard to dismiss this version of Faustian story as a great revision of Goethe (not only) in those times. Historical reflection does not lead to the conclusion that the Luftwaffe general (Göring) was the 'true Mephisto' and Höfgen was only one of his victims. Rolf Hoppe in the role of the General paraphrases the lines from a book with his surprising satisfied laughing:

"Your Mephisto occupies my mind. You've brought him alive. He is a hell of a guy. Isn't there a little of him in all of us? I mean isn't there a little bit of Mephisto in every German? Wouldn't our enemies love it if we had nothing but the souls of Faust? No, Mephisto is also a German national hero. It's just something we mustn't tell people."<sup>47</sup>

In particular the last sentence strongly indicates why revision in this matter is so important. In that time, it was a challenging reconsideration of German cultural self-identification. Nazi Germany was a completely different term when Mann was writing the book. He recognised evil in its archetypal form and knew where those forces could lead. The revelation about evil rising from anywhere is covered up again by the historic connotations to Nazi Germany.

41 See: MANN, K.: *Mephisto*. New York : Penguin Books, 1995.

42 See: BARACH-RUBINSTEIN, E.: *Mephisto in the Third Reich: Literary Representations of Evil in Nazi Germany*. Berlin, Jerusalem : De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Magnes, 2015.

43 BARACH-RUBINSTEIN, E.: *Mephisto in the Third Reich: Literary Representations of Evil in Nazi Germany*. Berlin, Jerusalem : De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Magnes, 2015, p. 26.

44 BARACH-RUBINSTEIN, E.: *Mephisto in the Third Reich: Literary Representations of Evil in Nazi Germany*. Berlin, Jerusalem : De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Magnes, 2015, p. 26.

45 RYNDÁ, V.: Nezádržitelný vzestup Hendrika Höfgena. In MANN, K.: *Mephisto*. Prague : Argo, 2018, p. 283.

46 HOFFER, P. T.: Klaus Mann's Mephisto: A Secret Rivalry. In *Studies in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Literature*, 1989, Vol. 13, No. 2, p. 245.

47 SZABÓ, I. (Director): *Mephisto (1981, Widescreen Version)*. [Blu-ray]. Los Angeles : Concorde Home Entertainment, 2017.

What the Luftwaffe general loves about Hendrik Höfgen's Mephisto is his ability to rapidly change form and to be so unpredictable in his acting style. Shape-shifting especially is generally ascribed to the supernatural powers of the devil in Faustian stories but the personification of the devil in an actor can free itself from this layer. Similar to *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*, metaphors of art and the play principle in Mephisto can include Christian religious metaphors and subvert their 'exclusivity' without eradicating them. Mann and Szabó could get rid of the supernatural elements, and there is only a dense summation of the inferior traits of personality. In this manner, Mephisto is not scary by the mere connection to hell itself. He is scary because he is capable of doing anything to accomplish his goals, but the strongest trait he inherits is being pathetic as Klaus Mann admits himself: "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."<sup>48</sup>

We see the despicable Mephisto at his full power in most Faustian adaptations but analysed Mephisto revisions are 'origin' stories told from the villain's pathetic perspective. This story angle is rare in the narratives that are commonly attached to Faustian stories. In the recent *Lucifer*,<sup>49</sup> the devil is also the central protagonist, but psychological explanations of evil are suppressed by his supernatural powers and the likableness of the TV character in a conventional romantic plot. Mann and Szabó do not add sympathy to the devil and are truthful to the unpredictable nature of a trickster without supernatural powers. Mann's *Mephisto* is an 'origin' story that does not escape from the recurring problem of personal evil.

Hendrik Höfgen is not even a product of society. He thrives in any social and ideological background. He was successful in pretending to be a communist and defended the honour of Jewish friends for selfish reasons but later kept his status by doing exactly the opposite. His principles are not against Communism, Nationalism, Christianity, or Judaism. He is against the truth. He thinks he is the best actor and deserves the fame. Even after he fails to play the new role of incorruptible Hamlet, he is not willing to accept that his fame is undeserved. His lack of modesty, his ever-present feeling of shame, and his especially resentful nature when he is confronted with the truth are reasons for his representation of the shadow. This is best described in his 'own origin story'. He was singing in a choir and craved to proudly show off his voice, but he was ruining the concert and his teacher asked him to just stop. He explained it to his wife Barbara as a moment when he was ashamed for the first time in his life. We can see a religious metaphor of a disharmonious element in the church choir but the devil does not need to cross personal boundaries. Klaus Maria Brandauer embodied Mann's lines when we see a pathetic man with tears in his eyes admitting he was ashamed, "so ashamed, I could sink down into hell".<sup>50</sup>

The Faustian story needed a psychological revision which was much closer to the spirit of Milton's *Paradise Lost*,<sup>51</sup> with the resentful Satan as a main protagonist, than to Faust. Brown recognised these undermining forces against the original but she ascribes it as an attribute of failure: "Mann attempts (unsuccessfully) to introduce the Faust legend in his story."<sup>52</sup> Maybe this evaluation would be more relevant if the story carried the name of Faust but the title *Mephisto* declares purposeful alternation from Goethe. This is one of the reasons why the concept of "revision" is important if the discussion about fidelity is being revitalised.<sup>53</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of our study was to introduce and verify the concept of "meta-revision" as a special type of adaptation (revision) that challenges not only the accepted message of the story but also the current adaptation structure. We proved the validity of the "meta-revision" concept in the research on adaptations within the

48 MANN, K.: *The Turning Point: Thirty-Five Years in this Century, the Autobiography of Klaus Mann*. New York : Wiener, 1984, p. 282.

49 WISEMAN, L. et. al. (Directors): *Lucifer (2016, Season 1 Set, Widescreen Version)*. [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2016.

50 SZABÓ, I. (Director): *Mephisto (1981, Widescreen Version)*. [Blu-ray]. Los Angeles : Concorde Home Entertainment, 2017.

51 See: MILTON, J., LEWALSKI, B. K. (ed.): *Paradise Lost*. Oxford : Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

52 BROWN, A. D.: Mephisto. In TIBBETTS, J. C., WELSH, J. M. (eds.): *The Encyclopedia of Novels into Film*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York : Checkmark Books, 2005, p. 293.

53 HERMANSSON, C.: Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse. In *Adaptation*, 2015, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 147.

broad intertext of Faustian stories. Two main issues of the religious context of Faustian stories were found together with significant examples of different meta-revisions: the revision of cultural self-identification with the hero (*The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus*) and the revision of cultural self-identification with the villain (*Mephisto*).

If Christian ethics in Faustian stories were an exclusive way to cultural self-identification with the hero or villain, it is useful to revise that presumption. Exclusivity of one point of view can be altered with another but we confirmed that it will not satisfy the complexity of the stated problem. As our study shows, it is natural to revise the story by adding sympathy for the devil, but disapproving ideological exclusivity itself means a revision on the metatextual level – not by other exclusions but by inclusively opposing the spirit of the original. This is what (few) revisions of Faust can offer. To ‘go against the grain’ of the story being only Christian is not to go against Christianity. In both provided examples of meta-revisions, Christian symbolism was not excluded from the story but was put in a broader perspective on the philosophical or psychological level.

Meta-revision oscillates in the intertextual realm by attempting to erode the structure of previous versions but at the same time understanding that it must operate in the boundaries of inherent narrative paradigm which are also manifested in previous versions. Three following aspects must be gradually considered before a new version of the story is recognised as a meta-revision:

1. Meta-revision is not every adaptation that uses metafictional techniques or remediates other media forms. Altering the spirit of the story is required. This is not the case of *Faust* by Švankmajer with ‘theatre in film’, or *La main du diable* with ‘several iterations of the plot’ where those techniques serve the prevailing theme.
2. Meta-revision is not merely revising the characters’ positions and points of view. Meta-revision structurally changes the manifestation of the story without contradicting its natural narrative paradigm. This is not the case of a *Lucifer* with sympathy for the supernatural devil in conventional television entertainment.
3. Meta-revision is not every revision fighting the exclusion only in the theme of the story. Meta-revision structurally replaces exclusivity itself by broader inclusion. It points not only to a problem; it searches for solutions. This is not the case of *The Devil’s Hands Are Idle Playthings* or *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with prevalent satirical tones.

We conclude that both *Mephisto* and *The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus* effectively manifest properties of meta-revisions. They both remediate other media by bearing a ‘theatre in film (literature)’ structure that serves rapid changes in the Faustian narrative. They both expand traditional manifestations of Faustian stories. Neither of them excludes or mocks Christianity and its symbolism but maintains a strong stance about the fact that Christianity does not have exclusive ‘ownership’ of Faustian stories and morals in general. In comparison to the more ambiguous version of Faust by Goethe, both revisions change particular religious narrative framing and embed stories in the principle of an artistic play.

Considering all the stated conclusions of our research, we can confirm the theoretical concept of “meta-revision” to be a useful methodological tool to understand the dynamics between adaptations attempting to perpetuate the meaning of an original and revisions which contradict the previous versions completely. The general nature of the “meta-revision” concept allows us to use this term in broader intermediality discourse where it can also function as a rare connection between traditional metaphors of preservation from media studies and recent turns to revisionist approaches in adaptations.

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