Reconstructed by Luciano Berriatúa

Produced by Filmoteca Española with the collaboration of the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, Det Danske Filmmuseum and the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv with the support of the LUMIERE Project. MEDIA Programme of the European Union.
Synopsis
Free adaptation of Goethe’s work.

The Devil bets with Archangel St. Michael that he can drag any man to evil.

To demonstrate it, he chooses Faust, an old alchemist who is about to discover that he has wasted his life in a research that has lead him nowhere. In spite of all his knowledge, he cannot prepare a medicine to end the plague that ravages the town.

As he does not get any help from God, he invokes the Devil, who takes the shape of Mephisto and with whom he signs a pact that will enable him to eradicate the plague, but the townspeople refuse to take a miraculous medicine originating from the Devil. Faust, in desperation, attempts suicide. But Mephisto makes a very tempting offer: youth. Faust will recover the time he wasted among alchemy books and discovers love in a young girl, Marguerite.

In a duel Faust kills Valentine, Marguerite’s brother, and is forced to flee. Marguerite, alone and rejected by everyone, gives birth in the snow to a boy who dies of cold. She is unjustly accused of this death and sentenced to burn at the stake.

Faust hears Marguerite’s call through space and runs to her, renounces youth and offers his life for her. Both burn at the stake, from where they ascend to Heaven, proving thus that love is stronger than evil.

Poster by Curt Lange
FAUST

Murnau’s original montage was reconstructed by Luciano Berriatúa for FILMOTECA ESPAÑOLA, under the coordination of Catherine Gautier, with the collaboration of the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde and Det Danske Filmmuseum, with the support of the LUMIERE Project, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, and the contribution of the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv and Turner Entertainment Co.

With the kind permission of the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung

The restoration was carried out at the laboratories of L’Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna, from original nitrates and fine grains printed at Internationale Film Union- GmbH, Remagen/Rhein, and YCM Laboratories, Burbank, California. The digital restoration of the intertitles was done at A'Resti - Art S.L., Madrid.

The music score prepared in 1926 by Paul A. Hensel was reconstructed by Luciano Berriatúa for FILMOTECA ESPAÑOLA, with the collaboration of the Goethe Institute. Supervised by Berndt Heller, arranged and orchestrated by Armando and Carlos Pérez Mántaras.
What is so special about this version of FAUST and what makes it different from other copies in circulation of this 1926 classic? Absolutely everything. Murnau filmed numerous takes of each shot using two cameras and often repeated scenes after viewing the daily rushes, making important changes in camera angles, special effects and the acting direction. Murnau edited his version with the best takes and the remaining ones were used to edit negatives for foreign distribution, as was customary at that time. The copies of FAUST presently in circulation were printed from those second class negatives made up of the imperfect takes discarded by Murnau.

Spectators who have previously seen the film may not appreciate the subtle differences, although all the shots are absolutely different. However, we are convinced that they will leave the theatre thinking that the film is better than they remember, as acting direction and timing improve greatly in the takes selected by Murnau.

In the other versions we find very poor quality takes: the actors often stumble or overact, a simple shot of a light shining among the clouds has replaced the shot where Faust and Marguerite finally ascend to Heaven, or the snowflakes are clearly feathers and the dancing bear of the strolling players is obviously a man in disguise, whereas in the shot selected by Murnau it was a real bear, to mention only a few examples.

Only the American version has a similar quality to the original as it was edited by Murnau himself at the MGM studios of Culver City with duplicates of the same shots previously selected for the
German montage. It clearly shows that for Murnau only one take of each shot was perfect and susceptible to be edited; the rest were only rejects.

Unfortunately, the negative edited by Murnau in Germany was lost and the surviving print of this version—with Danish intertitles—is extremely mutilated, with scratches and cuts in practically every shot. The American negative was preserved and has been used as the basis of our reconstruction, eliminating the peculiarities created for the American public and replacing, for example, the shots including English texts, such as the pact with Mephisto, or book pages, with the German ones.

I have used seven materials for the completion of the reconstruction:

The original nitrate negatives of the American, French and the security German versions, conserved in the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv in Berlin.

A dupé negative, held in the MGM Turner archives, in Los Angeles, printed from the American security negative,

The 1926 nitrate print with Danish intertitles of Murnau’s original montage, held in Copenhagen’s Danske Filmmuseum,

A nitrate dupé negative printed in 1948 of that same copy, which was more complete then,

And a fine grain preserved by the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, in Wiesbaden, struck from another negative for foreign distribution.

I have reconstructed the original montage, with the sole exception of two shots with texts—one in which Mephisto is half-hidden behind the parchment with the pact and another of Faust turning the pages of a book—of which only a few frames have survived. I had to replace them by two very similar takes.

Once located the original materials, I undertook the reconstruction, comparing all the shots in each version one by one. Some shots selected by Murnau of special effects or of an extreme difficulty had been duplicated to be used in other negatives. We had to incorporate shots of all the existing versions to reconstruct the original negative, matching their photographic quality, a slow and complex restoration task performed at the laboratories of L’Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna.

The actors finish completely exhausted after repeating endlessly the same shots.

Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek
The Intertitles

The German titles present in two of the Berlin negatives were at first sight identical, but the texts differed considerably from the list published in the existing censorship card. A detailed examination brought to light that, in spite of having the same typography, there were variations in the texts and the backgrounds of most of the intertitles.

The comparison between these titles and the ones in the two existing original scripts, both with handwritten notes by Murnau, and the final script, published in part by the press of the time, helped me arrive at an explanation.

Murnau had left Germany for the United States on June 22, 1926. FAUST was already finished but the background of the titles was so luminous that it blended with the texts, making them very difficult to read. Producer Hans Neumann had them retouched in July, eliminating most of the backgrounds and changing the text in many intertitles, sometimes with unforeseen consequences: when he changed the wording of a church chorale, the music for that scene had to be modified too.

Not content with these changes, Neumann asked the poet Gerhart Hauptmann for new intertitles in verse that were never used as he did not finish them on time for the premiere. Later, Neumann ordered the intertitles that were finally used, with simple characters over a black background and different texts, which are the ones that appear on the single surviving censorship card of October 26, 1926.

The original intertitles designed according to Murnau’s instructions are the ones that appear in the French negative, whereas the German security negative has the intertitles modified by Ufa behind Murnau’s back. Unfortunately, in the French negative only one or two frames of each of the original German titles were present, and in such lamentable condition that some had to be restored digitally in order to reproduce Murnau’s montage.
Murnau prepared with composer Ernö Rapée a musical selection for the accompaniment of FAUST that included pieces of Gounod’s opera. The film was shown publicly with this music only on one special gala screening on the «Parufamet Day», on August 25, 1926. Famous critics, like Hans Feld, considered that a film of such importance needed an original music score and producer Hans Neumann agreed with them. By that time Ernö Rapée had left Ufa and was working in the United States, so Neumann commissioned Giuseppe Becce to write the music. He found it impossible to finish it on time for the premiere, so Werner Richard Heymann, the new musical director of the Ufa Palast am Zoo, where the film was to have its first release, had to write it in a few weeks, combining his own compositions with repertory themes and pieces from Wagner and Richard Strauss.

Heymann’s music was performed during the Berlin release, but Neumann asked Paul A. Hensel to compile a list of repertory music for the other theatres. This last score is the only one that survived in its complete form, due to its publication in the issue 283/1926 of the film magazine Licht-Bild-Bühne. This list divides the film in 78 parts to which he assigned 48 pieces of German, Czech, French and American composers published from the late 19th to the early 20th of this century. It has been necessary to trace them in archives and music publishers around the world, with the help of the music experts Berndt Heller and Theodore van Houten.

The music score has been arranged and orchestrated by Armando and Carlos Pérez Mántaras.

Luciano Berriotúa

Luciano Berriotúa was born in Madrid in 1949. He has directed two feature films, «El buscón» and «La maldición de Horus». He has been linked to the Filmoteca Española for many years and works in the restoration of Spanish silent films since 1993. The Filmoteca Española published in 1992 his book «Los proverbios chinos de F.W. Murnau» and also produced in 1994 the 54 minute Betacam video «The Five Fausts of F.W. Murnau». He is now preparing a television series on Murnau.
THE 7 FAUSTS OF MURNAU

It has taken three years to trace the original materials of FAUST since the Filmoteca Española undertook the project. First we contacted all the film archives in the world that held prints or negatives of the film, examined those materials and checked their origin in order to identify the original materials. We made some surprising discoveries, such as the existence of three original nitrate negatives in the Berlin Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, which until then was believed to store one only.

The main difficulty was that we did not know how many negatives had been made nor to which version the existing ones corresponded. Fortunately there were enough indications in all of them to establish their origin.

One of the negatives could be clearly identified as the American one, because of it’s English intertitles and the MGM trademark. The takes used in this version turned out to be identical to the ones of the Danish copy, printed in 1926 on Kodak and Agfa film and preserved by the Danish Film Museum. The code edge numbers of the American nitrate negative revealed that the shots were actually duplicates made in 1926 of the takes selected by Murnau for the German montage. This fact was confirmed by the distribution contract held in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer archives. The agreement for the American market between Ufa and MGM stipulated «an uncut first class negatives» so that the Americans could edit their version freely, with the sole condition that «there would be no damage to the prestige of Ufa or Germany». It also specified that the negative must be returned to Germany when the distribution period expired; thus the presence of the American negative in Berlin.

This document also revealed that Murnau had decided to edit the film personally in the United States to avoid manipulations, so he had the takes duplicated previously in Berlin on the new fine grain 1503 Kodak emulsion. At the same time, he followed the custom of the time of shooting different takes with two cameras to edit other negatives.

The Turner MGM archives conserve a dupe negative, although not the copy itself, printed from a security negative of the American version in which a few shots are different from the original American negative.

The second negative held in Berlin —which had been used by most FIAF film archives to strike the circulating copies of the film in the past twenty years— turned out to be a very late German security negative. The intertitles are on safety Finopan Agfa material of the 70’s, and were obviously done freezing single frames, now disappeared, reframing them for sound format.

The third negative, which includes one or two frames of most of the original German titles, also includes a single frame of a French intertitle with the Aubert logo, distributor of the film for France in the 20’s and who, evidently, had returned the negative to Berlin after the distribution period expired.

In Amsterdam I could examine the original material which was the source of the version usually circulated by the Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde and the only one to have been shown on television. It is a nitrate copy from a negative made for foreign distribution with bilingual intertitles in English and German struck in 1927 or 1928. We believe that it was screened on the ships of the Hamburg–New York line that carried both German and American passengers. And finally, I could also examine the Danish copy clearly printed from the original German negative as it includes the shots selected by Murnau.

To sum up, there are materials from six different negatives, besides the Murnau montage of the original German negative. No less than seven original versions of Murnau’s FAUST!