

## The German Poet Stefan George and Pre-National Socialism in Germany

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<p><b>Abstract:</b> As a comprehensive account of the European and American reception of George's works and those of the appr. 40 members of his circle is - after the translation of all his poems in 1949 <i>The Works of Stefan George</i> by Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz - yet to be written, the following article is an attempt to introduce George and his followers to the English-speaking world. It focuses on some exemplary, representative persons from a cultural and political point of view. As the male-bonded circle was conceived and perceived by George and his disciples as an aesthetic state within the state and as a quasi-religious sect, born of the opposition to trends of current society around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century, its antiestablishmentarian view had a politically significant influence on pre-Nazi world, reaching its zenith during the <i>Weimar Republic</i>, but even longer up to the recent past of Germany [1]. George's reaction to Hitler's ascension to power has given rise to various and contradictory interpretations, and the question if his poetry was politically guilty or if is pure and timeless, decadent favouring 'l'art pour l'art, has not yet been conclusively interpreted. As the circle was not a monolithic group, its influence was highly ambivalent. In 1924 the call was made that there is a demand for a strong man, feeling tired and making do with sergeants instead of leaders ("Heute, da das Bedürfnis nach einem starken Mann laut wird..., da man der Mäkler und Schwätzer müd sich mit Feldwebeln begnügt statt der Führer") - the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence in Friedrich Gundolf's book on the Roman statesman and general Julius Caesar, the most heroic man, as Gundolf said: The book appeared in the year when Adolf Hitler was tried for his Beer Hall Putsch. What does the call for seriousness, dignity and awe ("für ernst, würde und ehrfurcht" [2]) and the fight against shallowness ("oberflächen-tendenzen") voiced by Friedrich Wolters and Friedrich Gundolf, the most widely read scholar of German philology at the time, in 1910 mean? For Gundolf as for others George was the mixture of strong will and sensitivity, of hard deed and tender dream ("unerbitterlicher Wille und regsame Zartheit", "harte Tat und zarten Traum"), and the transformative power of poetry to purify the German soul and to create new beings ("menschenbildende Weltkraft"/man-creating worldpower), thus becoming like Goethe before a shaper of Germans ("Gestalter der Deutschen"). Some of George's disciples hoped that the Third Reich was or would become the realization of George's "Neues Reich," joined the National-Socialist Party or sympathized with the Nazi movement, some only initially, whereas others opposed the regime, and went into exile (e. g. Karl Wolfskehl (b. 1869, Darmstadt, Germany – d. 1948, Auckland, New Zealand) or saw themselves as part of the <i>innere Emigration</i> (Rieckmann). The concept of a secret Germany ("geheimes Deutschland") played a decisive role that the circle was controversial about.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> 'l'art pour l'art', decadence, heroism, Nationalsocialism, Nietzscheanism, Platonism, poetry, resistance.</p>	<p><b>Research Paper</b></p>
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<sup>1</sup>See Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister Stefan Georges Nachleben*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München, 2012.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/20Jh/Gundolf/gun\\_ja12.html](http://www.fh-augsburg.de/~harsch/germanica/Chronologie/20Jh/Gundolf/gun_ja12.html)

## INTRODUCTION

Numerous authors (e.g. Gabriele d'Annunzio, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, William Butler Yeats, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot) who during the first half of the 20th century showed sympathy for Italian Fascism and German Nazism had their roots within the context of European aestheticism and the avant-garde movements [3]. Stefan George and his circle are one example of the conservative revolution, aesthetic fundamentalism and nationalism (Stefan Breuer), with various members and associates, for longer or shorter periods, becoming Nazis [4], given its calls for national radical renewal through a Führer. George had taught this generation the insufficiency of the modern, scientific-materialist worldview and powerfully reminded them of the importance of heroism, "the beautiful life" (das schöne Leben), and Germany's unique world-historical calling.

The poet, philosopher, editor, and translator Stefan George (1868-1933) was born to wine merchant Stefan George and Eva Schmitt in Budesheim near Bingen on the Rhine, Rhineland-Palatinate, South-Germany. Young Stefan preferred to use the French variant of his given name, Etienne. Already as a schoolboy he was well familiar with both French and Spanish, and even considered writing in French. In 1888, while travelling throughout Europe, George met the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé in Paris. Inspired by the *martis* ('Tuesdays') meetings that included e. g. Oscar Wilde and André Gide, George founded and edited the influential literary magazine *Blätter für die Kunst*, the name ('pages for art') saying in part what its 'intention is: to serve art – especially poetry and the written word, and to exclude everything pertaining to the state and society [5]. In this magazine many publications of the George-circle (George-Kreis) founded around 1903 were published [6]. George demonstrated his disdain for bourgeois conventions by a carefully chosen wardrobe designed to *étaper le bourgeois*: dressed in tight fitting black suits, silk top hats, and brocade ties, he wore a square monocle and put a speck of incense on the tip of his burning cigarette. George lived an itinerant life throughout his adulthood, staying at the homes of friends throughout Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France. During the First World War, George became more critical of society and his poems became political in nature, particularly his 1917 collection *Der Krieg* ("The War") and his 1928 collection *Das neue Reich* ("The

New Empire"). Although his poetry's themes and his philosophies appealed to German nationalists in the early 1930s, George withheld his explicit support of the Nazi government and rejected several offers from them for state honours. George died in Locarno, Switzerland in 1933. Many of his followers belonged to the avant-garde, with highly elitist vanguard pretensions, a radical dismissal of both conventional high and popular culture (many lived a life as bohemians in Munich's Schwabing), an utter contempt for the bourgeois way of life, and frequently an emphasis on the mythically heroic, with the Jewish members Ernst and Friedrich Gundolf and Ernst Kantorowicz penning adulating portraits of Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon and Friedrich II respectively (Steven E. Aschheim). In the first decades of the 20th century, George's circle changed from a group of fellow intellectuals into a clan of devoted disciples that referred to George as their "master." In their time, they dominated the fields of literature, history, psychology, and economics in German universities.

### Main Part

#### *Apocalyptic Yearning*

George had proclaimed that the present is a period of transition that requires less than apodictic sentences more allusive, sibylline, oracle-like sentences (*Blätter für die Kunst*, 2. März=2. Heft 1894) („Nicht bloss in zeiten des übergangs sind die schwankenden bohrenden andeutenden sätze den schulmässig feststehenden vorzuziehen: sie sind die sibyllinischen zeichen aus denen die jugend ihre tiefste anregung empfängt“ [7]). Are we living in the last days? The catastrophe is coming.

(„Die dunkle furcht vor nahem pech und schwefel Die ahnung dass am tor das end schon harrt“ [8]). Streets can be seen – full of greed with the masses haggling and romping around in the evening („Endlosen strassen drin mit gleicher gier Die menge tages feilscht und abends tollt“ [9]). This must come to an end: „Es kann so nicht weitergehen“ was the motto of the editors of the *Jahrbuch für Die Geistige Bewegung* in 1912, the name already indicating that the Circle saw itself not just as a counter-cultural, but also as a "counter-intellectual" movement, in radical opposition to the "official" Zeitgeist of Wilhelmine Germany. Behind the manifold self-deceptions of the age, amidst material wealth and accumulated knowledge such as no other age had ever

<sup>3</sup>Alastair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism. A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism 1919 – 1945*, London 1971.

<sup>4</sup>Fried, "George und seine Juden", op. cit., p. 152, where he lists these as Friedrich Wolters, Ernst Bertram, Ludwig Thormaehlen and Waldemar Graf Uxkull-Gyllenband.

<sup>5</sup>[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=4397](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4397)

<sup>6</sup>The main thesis of Raulff.

<sup>7</sup><http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/George,+Stefan/Sons+Werke/Einleitungen+und+Merkspr%C3%BChe+>

[der+B1%C3%A4tter+f%C3%BCr+die+Kunst/Zweite+ Folge.+Zweites+Heft.+1894](#) Heidegger will in 1939 confirm George's view by saying that George speaks in a transitional way („übergänglich“)

<sup>8</sup>[https://gedichte.xbib.de/--98279\\_74701\\_47332\\_69719\\_55331--.htm](https://gedichte.xbib.de/--98279_74701_47332_69719_55331--.htm)

<sup>9</sup><http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/George,+Stefan/Gesamtausgabe+der+Werke/Der+siebente+Ring/Zeitgedicht+e/Die+tote+Stadt>

called its own, a feeling of dearth and frustration prevailed; the true, eternal values were of no avail to a generation that is blind to them. They felt reminded of the fall of the Roman Empire, and wondered who still believed in the foundations of the present conditions. The End of Times has come when the last Man has become an Anglo-American, Protestant Christian („die satanisch verkehrte, die Amerika-welt“). The Americanization of life, an offspring of Protestantism, as had been proved by Max Weber, led, in their view, to a liberal, bourgeois, and utilitarian life-form. Capitalism, industrialization, and modernity are the targets. The youths who tranquilize themselves with soft sounds play with roses over the abyss and become slaves. In six cryptic gnomic poems on the river Rhine that George felt attached to has as in a dream conjured the memory of that kingdom into the future. It will throw off the dominion of East and West, Germany and France, and the Rhine will ‘spew’ ‘the loathsome rubble of redde, chalk, and tar’, standing for the colours of imperial Germany, ‘into the purifying sea.’

On July 12th, 1928, George celebrated his 60th birthday – the judgements on the poet and prophet that appeared in the newspapers and journals contradicted each other. The Prussian Minister of Culture (Kultusminister Carl Heinrich Becker an Stefan George, 12.7.1928), not at all a rightist, had expressed in the handwritten letter his admiration for George’s creative power and his educational interest in discipline and breeding, still using the word „Führer“(=leader), using the word ‘Zucht’ commonly used for the breeding of animals, and also used by Adolf Hitler in his *Mein Kampf*, designating his demand for eliminating the inferior people and creating a stronger race which, according to the Nazi-pedagogues (i.e.: Ernst Krieck), should become part of the curriculum; another contributor predicted that George will be seen by posterity as a strange and bizarre phenomenon, whereas still another expected Germany’s future from him. The Jewish poetess Edith Landmann wrote to him a handwritten birthday-card, praising the ‘Master’ as the all-animating source, the epitome of beautiful life, perfect Man, thanking him for his loyalty and meekness. Even President von Hindenburg sent a machine-typed letter, hoping for George’s long poetic creativity [10]. The fight against deadly and poisonous banality is the common ground. Other congratulants were:

- Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg who was to become the would-be-assassin of Adolf Hitler

- Propagandaminister Joseph Goebbels, calling Stephan George the poet and seer, the master of the word, the good German (*Dem Dichter und Seher, dem Meister des Wortes, dem guten Deutschen zum 65. Geburtstag ergebenste Grüße und herzliche Glückwünsche Reichspropagandaminister Dr. Goebbels* [11]).

The Nazi Goebbels and the perspective enemy to Hitler – a very strange coalition. Many of George’s disciples were Jews (e.g.: Friedrich Gundolf, Ernst Kantorowics, Kurt M. Singer, Karl Wolfskehl, Berthold Vallentin... [12]), as the Nazis were to realize, e. g. Hans Rößner, *Georgekreis und Literaturwissenschaft/1938* [13] who coined the oxymoron, destructive humanism‘ („destruktiver Bildungshumanismus“ [14]), in which Jewification („Verjudung“) and homosexuality are coupled, going back to Otto Weiniger’s associations, alluding to the homosexuality of some of the circle’s members, and opening the discussion of the role of Eros in Plato’s philosophy. George had always stressed that Plato’s idea from the *Republic* Book III (398-403) that already music could change the state, and musical innovation might be full of danger to the state, for when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them. The furor Platonicus had been triggered off by George himself in 1897: The youth should learn to long for beautiful moderation in the physical and spiritual world and how to walk with an upright head and view their ethnicity (folkdom? nationality?) in a grand perspective. Only thus can the German conversion begin [15]. All important elements are contained here: the idea of decay and rise, the contrast between the spiritually rich elite and the spiritually deprived mass, the necessity of beauty and beautification, the idea of proud dignity and a purified nation, and thus constituting the 3rd humanism (Werner Jaeger) after that of the Renaissance and die Goethezeit. Plato, read mainly as a political philosopher, became a central figure of German philhellenism in the interwar years, and education (παίδεια/’Bildung’) the interconnecting idea.

Among the members of the George-Kreis, the one who did the most to promote the new Plato was the medical doctor, philosopher, and Hellenist Kurt Hildebrandt through his edition of and an introduction of German translation of Plato’s *Symposion* (*Gastmahl/1920*) and Nietzsche’s *Competition with Socrates and Platon* (=Nietzsches *Wettkampf mit Sokrates und Platon*)/ 1922), starting off an intensive

<sup>10</sup><https://ausstellungen.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/geburtstagsbriefe-an-george/#s16>

<sup>11</sup><https://ausstellungen.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/geburtstagsbriefe-an-george/#s20>

<sup>12</sup>See the important study by Johannes Fried, *George und seine Juden*, Trumah, Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Jüdische Studien Heidelberg (vol. 18, 2008), pp. 132–160.

<sup>13</sup>Raulff p. 90.

<sup>14</sup>Raulff p. 91.

<sup>15</sup>Stephan Rebenich, *Dass ein Strahl von Hellas auf uns fiel*, George-Jahrbuch 20008/09, S. 119f. and Rebenich, *Die Deutschen und ihre Antike, Eine wechselvolle Beziehung*, Klett-Cotta, 2021.

interpretation of the Greek philosopher in the George-circle and the role of (sometimes pederastic) Eros (“Knabenliebe” [16] = τὸ ὀρθῶς παιδεραστεῖν/211b), often found in Plato’s *Symposium*, which made Socrates the true lover (“wahren Erotiker”/Kurt Hildebrandt) - even in his love for boys – not children, but those who have begun to develop reason (“Vernunft”) and a beard, as Nietzsche had already observed in 1876 [17], and which for Hildebrandt is a manifestation of Aphrodite Urania (=heavenly/spiritual love=Ἀφροδίτη Οὐράνα). This higher love is distinguished from the bourgeois-philistine (“bürgerliche”/“spießbürgerliche”) love. Plato for Hildebrandt is reborn in George who is what Nietzsche longed for in vain- Filled with grace (“Anmut”) and ecstasy (“Rausch”), Nietzsche is that illuminates the cosmos, but only a fighting hero, (“kämpfender Heros”), a burning torch (“eine Brandfackel”, thrown into the darkened Europe “geschleudert in das verdüsterte Europa”, a Lucifer, a Prometheus (“ein Luzifer oder Prometheus”) who preferred being bound to a rock over renouncing his tragic fate. Plato is the antitype to modern bloodless time, and no longer the contrast to Nietzsche, as Kurt Hildebrandt, claimed in his interpretation of the ‘worldly’ *Symposium* by Plato that makes Plato a fighter in a war that is fought in this world, not elsewhere, in the afterlife. “Plato’s Realm is of this world!” (“Platons Reich ist von Dieser Welt!”), and his philosophy is confined to a world without transcendence. This interpretation of Plato as an immanentist thinker is opposed to the traditional Christian and ascetic view of Plato’s philosophy which sees it as an enemy to body and the world of matter. According to Hildebrandt, Plato was a leader (“Führer zur Tat”), a state-founder, a legislator, a lover, an educator of a new Man (“Erzieher und Züchter”/breeder), and, by implication, the dandy George a charismatic Master. George occupies for him the highest position in love-hymns together with Dante and Shakespeare. In 1923 Hildebrandt together with the Jew Ernst Gundolf, who was imprisoned in the concentration camp of Buchenwald published *Nietzsche als Richter unserer Zeit* (Nietzsche as a Judge of Our Times) that is focused on Nietzsche’s disgust at modern Europe. Nietzsche distinguished between nobility („Adel“) and the mob („Pöbel“), between genuine and false (“echt und unecht”), between healthy and decayed

(“heil und morsch”). It is directed against the nihilistic educators that replace education (“Bildung”) by emancipated freedom („an Stelle der Zucht die emanzipierte Freiheit”). Again, the biological concept of ‚Zucht‘ (breeding) is invoked that should become the antidote to decay (=Entartung). What can be done in a world of constant uglification, when journalists, businessmen talk about dignity and pigs preach about purity (“die Schweine predigen Reinheit.”), and when man has turned into a human ant (“menschliche Ameise”)? Being noble (“edel”) in a rotten society is the ultimate task. Gundolf longs for an “unverdorben Jugend” (=undecayed youth). Gundolf also used the secret Germany (“geheimen Deutschland”), contrasting it with Prussia (“Preussentum”), a mechanic and moribund system. As if protesting against a new barbarism Gundolf proclaims that life is not the healthy and robust (“das gesunde und robuste Leben”), but longs for the highest refinement (“die höchste Veredlung”) that combines the body with the heart which manifests the nobility (“höchsten Adel”), as if he responds to Max Weber’s statement that there might one day be professionals with spirit and pleasure-seekers without heart. E. Gundolf’s fate proves the failure of overcoming the sense of alienation [18]. In his essay *Zur Beurteilung der Darmstädter Shakespeare-Maske* (on Judging the death-mask in Darmstadt/1928) which E. Gundolf considered to be genuine he sees strongest nobility and misanthropy (“stärkster Adel und Menschenverachtung“) as the mark of the genius. Is this what remains of the longing for perfectness? Hildebrandt and E. Gundolf cooperated, but Hildebrandt’s second book on Plato (*Platon. Der Kampf des Geistes um die Macht*) must have meant the division. In 1933 Hildebrandt wrote an introduction to a German translation of the Platonic *Symposium* Πολιτεία, focussing on the similarities of Plato’s and Hitler’s biographies.

- The catastrophes of war - the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) in which Athens was soundly defeated and the Great War in which Germany was utterly defeated
- The democrat Pericles stuffing the demos with tasty, but ultimately unhealthy treats and having Athenians become lazy, garrulous cowards like

<sup>16</sup>“when a man by the right method of boy-loving ascends from these particulars and begins to descry that beauty, he is almost able to lay hold of the final secret.” *Symposium* 212b

<sup>17</sup><http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Nietzsche,+Friedrich/Briefe/1876/99.+An+Erwin+Rohde,+23.5.1876>  
The most comprehensive account of Nietzsche’s impact on German philosophy Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany: 1890 – 1990*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, 1992.

<sup>18</sup>Jürgen Egyptien, *Beobachtungen zur Kunst des Verschwindens* Egyptien chooses Kafka’s aphorism

(„Zwei Möglichkeiten: sich unendlich klein machen oder es sein. Das zweite ist Vollendung, also Untätigkeit, das erste Beginn, also Tat.“) as a motto. Gundolf’s poem („Oh nährender Boden, und doch nicht mir Mutterland“) was contained in Siegmund Kaznelson, *Jüdisches Schicksal in deutschen Gedichten. Eine abschließende Anthologie*/1st edition, Berlin 1933, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition: 1959) as a document that anticipated the Jew’s attempt at finding a home in Germany and the end of the end of the Jewish-German ‘symbiosis’.

modern parliamentarianism did during the *Weimar Republic*.

For Hildebrandt, Callicles from Plato's *Gorgias* represents the Master Morality "Herrenmoral", and the best of it is approved by Socrates-Plato, if it not just a mere means to satisfy bestial cravings. The book appeared in Berlin in 1933 with the swastika on the cover-page. It was the year of Hitler's assumption of power.

Another member of the George-circle, the Jew Kurt M. Singer in 1927 (*Platon der Gründer*) had already portrayed Plato, not as the founder of a philosophical school nor as a metaphysical thinker whose aim was primarily the solution of the riddles of being and becoming, but as the founder of a new spiritual kingdom, the restorer of the ancient Greek ideas of measure and proportion, of heroic deed and divine law against the background of a sophistic age [19]. The 'new spiritual kingdom' is situated in contrast to the dissolution of society and to the domination of instinct and wants. According to him, Plato is the kingly man, destined by spirit and dignity to become law-making leader ("Führer), a close relative to George who is also driven by the Man-seeking Eros. Both Plato and George live in a chaotic and degenerate era. Banal affluence and security have become the norm. The hollowness of life is compensated by shallow pleasures. But there are eternal norms.

Philhellenism played a major role for the George-circle [20], Hellas becoming the real Germany which is invoked against the false Enlightenment, the arrogance of Western civilization and civilized dogmatism that had nothing to do with the true German spirit, with the inner character of the German Volk, as stated by Ernst Bertram, another follower of George who published his book *Nietzsche Versuch einer Mythologie* (1920) with Georg Bondi where most of George's work were published. Bertram who was admired by no other than Thomas Mann closely referred to Nietzsche's interpretation of Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Ritter, Tod und Teufel* (Knight, Death, and the Devil/1513). Nietzsche, the semi-blind, music-obsessed Romantic Socrates („großen Halbblinden, dem tonsüchtigen romantischen Sokrates“), to Bertram sympathized with the atmosphere of Faust, death and tomb. Bertram stressed the Germanic seriousness („germanischen Lebensernst“) prefigured by Martin Luther's words spoken on the diet of Worms in 1521 („Widerrufen kann und will ich nichts, weil es weder sicher noch geraten ist, etwas gegen sein Gewissen zu tun. Gott helfe mir, Amen.“ = 'my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me') and continued to Kant and Schopenhauer, as Nietzsche commented on Schopenhauer: "What he taught has been done away with; how he lived will remain; you have only to look at him – he was subject to no one" [21]. It is the basis of the absolutely courageous ("Bild des schlechthin 'Mutigen'"), akin to Promethean pride. Such a person does not care about her own happiness and cannot be intimidated, but even looks out for the "Furchtbare" (=awful? terrible? dreadful? horrible?) and "Fragwürdige" (=questionable? doubtful? dubious?) as the yearning for a great enemy ("das Verlangen nach einem großen Feinde."): Blood as self-sacrifice may become the criterion of truth, and the Great Danger ("große Gefahr") may be praised, as it forces us to be strong. Some days before the Nazi book burnings (May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1933) Bertram warned his students at the university of Cologne that if this battle should fail, this would mean "the end of the White World, chaos or a planet of termites" [22]. In 1947 proven to be a man who belonged to the nourishers of National Socialism, and was thus classified as politically compromised. Bertram after the lost war caricatured the denazification commission by writing a play *Goethe, entnapoleonisiert oder Exzellenz vor der Entnapoleonisierungskammer beim Weimarer Wohlfahrtsausschuss anno 1817, im Frühjahr* (=denapoleonized or Excellence before the Chamber of denapoleonization at the Welfare Chamber, 1817, spring).

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they had regarded von Stauffenberg's mentor George as one of the artistic and spiritual forebears of their movement. They tried to enlist the poet to their cause, to reveal to the German people its 'true destiny', and planned to set up a literary award in Stefan George's name that would rival the Goethe Prize. George died that same year, so it was never clear how close he would have been willing to cooperate with the Nazis. Many of his disciples joined the National Socialist Party. And while the Nazis later cooled in their enthusiasm for him, when they discovered there were a number of Jews in his circle, the suspicion has lingered that George prepared the ground for Nazism, with his appeal to a sacred Germany cheated of its destiny. In 1934 the last book from Georg-circle by the Jewish Ernst Morwitz appeared with the swastika on the cover. Two years later he had to emigrate, fleeing from the Nazis.

One who was deeply steeped into German culture was Peter Robert Edwin Viereck (August 5, 1916 – May 13, 2006), one of whose acquaintances was Hans Christoph von Stauffenberg, „cousin of the heroic

to Nietzsche, Cambridge University Press, p. 78. Was er lehrte, ist abgetan; Was er lebte, wird bleiben stahn: Seht ihn nur an — Niemandem war er Untertan« (Nietzsche on Schopenhauer)

[22]Norton p. 729.

<sup>19</sup>Kurt Singer, *Platon und das Griechentum*. Ein Vortrag, Weiss'sche Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg 1920

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Raulff 120ff.

<sup>21</sup>edited by Don Garrett, Bernd Magnus, Kathleen Marie Higgins, Kathleen Higgins, *The Cambridge Companion*

Claus. "Viereck was amazed by the German bipolarity of brutality and sensitivity, illustrated by the widow of Heydrich, the SS mass murderer, who had said that she had married him Because he could play the violin so, soulfully", or by the concentration camp boss who wept over Rilke while stoking the gas chamber [23]. In 1949 in his essay *Perilous Prophet* [24] he came to the conclusion that George, a Nietzschean despiser of mass-men, mechanization and modernity, a Rhineland-rooted admirer of French and Hellenic culture belongs to the dangerous Germanic, would-be Hellenic tradition in which the poet is the mouthpiece of tribal gods. Though a „fastidious despiser of the Nazis“, George gave them their slogans („Neues Reich“, „völkisch“=folkic) [24] and paved the way for war-and Führer-worship. This is partly due to his brilliant professor, Friedrich Gundolf, under whom Goebbels had studied at the University of Heidelberg.

„Herr Doktor Goebbels earned his Ph.D. at Heidelberg University, where he attended the lectures by Stefan George's Jewish disciple“(Viereck) [25].

Though a sincere lover of liberty, Gundolf with his cult of Julius Caesar, George, and other heroes, helped instill a "Führer" cult and a contempt for democracy. But, according to Viereck, George, never envisaged Hitler as the superman whom he preached; yet his teachings played into Hitler's hands" [26]. According to Viereck, Gundolf said about Goebbels: „This boy will either become a great criminal or a charlatan“ [27]? In July 1933, Goebbels instituted the National Book Prize worth 12,000 Reichsmarks, also known as the Stefan George-Preis, claiming the legacy of the poet who died in Switzerland the same year.

The question what George (would have) thought about the Third Reich remains a controversial issue, starting remarkably off with Klaus Mann's *Das Schweigen Stefan Georges* (Stefan George's Silence) (1933), 5 years after George's 60th birthday. Not denying links of the George-circle to National Socialism, some of whom proclaimed the victory of the 'blond race', the cult of the leader, of heroic youth, the concept of breeding and cherished an anti-materialism, Mann sees George's eloquent silence („beredtes Schweigen“) as a delegitimization of the Third Reich – or as a modern

commentator said - his silence was non-ambivalent („wie sein Schweigen uneindeutig war [28]“).

### *The Stauffenbergs and The Anti-Hitler Alliance*

Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg began to realise that Hitler liked George's concepts of "the thousand year Reich" and "fire of the blood" which were incorporated into the party's propaganda. Von Stauffenberg is reported to have said that

"It is time for something to be done. Yet he who dares to do something must be aware that he is likely to go down in German history as a traitor. If he failed to do the deed, however, he would be a traitor to his own conscience" [29].

The Stauffenberg brothers' (Claus, Berthold, Alexander) encounters with the poet Stefan George had a great influence on their intellectual and moral development. They joined his circle in 1923. They regarded themselves as part of a responsible elite, pioneers for a "Secret Germany" [30] in line with Stefan George's ideas. Claus von Stauffenberg was deeply affected by George's death in December 1933. He often recalled lines from the poet later on, using them as maxims to guide his actions and attitudes. In 1943 and 1944 he was still quoting to his fellow conspirators from George's *Der Widerchrist* ("The Anti-Christ") from 1907 that warns against a charismatic flimflam artist that can lead nation astray.

To sense that your senses are stricken ...The Lord of the Flies is expanding his Reich" [31].

Von Stauffenberg had sent various letter to his Master ("Mein geliebter Meister"), one of them (July, 1931) ending with "I embrace and kiss you. Yours, Claus (küsst Dich Dein Claus)" [32]. In a poem called "Abendland" (=Occident") the influence can also be seen.

"I love to delve into old tales of heroes and feel akin to such noble deeds and blood crowned with fame. I could not do without the olden days Where would I look to see my life If not in the lives of the noblest? For this I love the great men of bygone days Under their spell barely palpably growing in will No less born of God" [33].

<sup>23</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jan/14/featu-resreviews.guardianreview11>

<sup>24</sup><https://doi.org/10.2307/4609323>

<sup>25</sup>Viereck 2

<sup>26</sup>*The Antioch Review*, p. 112.

<sup>27</sup>P. 113.

<sup>28</sup>Raulff p. 119.

<sup>29</sup><https://vonstauffenberg.tumblr.com/post/176093799517/es-ist-zeit-da%C3%9F-jetzt-etwas-gegan-wird-derjenige>

<sup>30</sup>See for the idea of secrecy („Geheimnis“) Raulff 232f.

<sup>31</sup>Gerhard Schulz: *Der Widerchrist*. In: Marcel Reich-Ranicki (Hrsg.): *Von Arno Holz bis Rainer Maria Rilke. 1000 Deutsche Gedichte und ihre Interpretationen*. Insel, Frankfurt 1994, S. 83.

<sup>32</sup><file:///D:/Benutzerprofil/Downloads/admin-wlbforum-2018-2-webteil8.pdf> and [https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge\\_sonderpublikationen/PDFs\\_fuer\\_Download/Stauffenberg\\_Katalog\\_Deu\\_Eng\\_2.\\_Aufl.\\_2008.pdf](https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge_sonderpublikationen/PDFs_fuer_Download/Stauffenberg_Katalog_Deu_Eng_2._Aufl._2008.pdf)

<sup>33</sup>[https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge\\_sonderpublikationen/PDFs\\_fuer\\_Download/Stauffenberg\\_Katalog\\_Deu\\_Eng\\_2.\\_Aufl.\\_2008.pdf](https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge_sonderpublikationen/PDFs_fuer_Download/Stauffenberg_Katalog_Deu_Eng_2._Aufl._2008.pdf)

From here von Stauffenberg developed his idea of soldierly principles. From May 1940, Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg served in the organizational section of the Army General Staff and in various positions in the Army High Command. He was promoted to major on the General Staff in May 1941. By 1942, he was not only criticizing Hitler's war tactics and strategic decisions in terms of military expertise, but had turned his back entirely on the Nazi system. In the summer of that year,

- The Nazis' contravention of international law in waging the war,
- The mass murder of the Jews, and
- The oppression of the population in the occupied territories convinced him that attempting to assassinate Hitler was both justified and necessary. He in 1943 quoted George's lines that called for a purification from shame and for heroes that praise dignity [34]. Stauffenberg attempted in vain to recruit several generals and field marshals for an attack on Hitler in the winter of 1942/43, telling a fellow conspirator:

"The men are wetting their pants or have sawdust in their heads, they are not willing..." [35].

Because of a risk that his activities might be uncovered, Stauffenberg arranged to be posted to the front in North Africa. Stauffenberg's oath from July 4th, 1944 resonates with George's ideas that reflect Stauffenberg's worldview.

„We believe in the future of the Germans. We know the powers in the German man that make him destined to lead the community of occidental peoples to a better life. We profess our commitment in spirit and in deed to the great traditions of our people, which created western mankind through the fusion of Hellenic and Christian origins in the Germanic nature. We want a New Order that makes all Germans bearers of the state and guarantees them law and justice, but we disdain the falsehood of equality and demand the recognition of bow to the ranks ordained by nature. We want a people rooted in the earth of our home country and remaining close to the powers of nature, that finds its happiness and satisfaction in working within the given spheres of life and, with free pride, overcomes the base urges of envy and malevolence. We want leaders who emerge from all

classes of the people, connected with the divine powers, who set an example to others through great good sense, discipline, and sacrifice. We are uniting to create an indivisible community that serves the New Order through manner and deed actions and forms the fighting men that the future leaders require. We pledge to live irreproachably, to serve conscientiously obediently, to remain unswervingly silent, and to stand up for one another. (July 4th, 1944) [36].

In his *Der Stern des Bundes* (=The Star of the Covenant) from 1913 George had spoken about a realm of spirit ("reich des Geistes"), summoned his followers to stay loyal to the flame ("Bleibe der flamme trabant!") and to their ideal of a new aristocracy that is based neither on shield nor crown ("Neuen adel den ihr suchet Führt nicht her von schild und krone!"). "You will know who is genuine by his face and stature" ("Antlitz und wuchs weist euch den Echten aus") and "The rank of each individual is revealed in his glance" ("Aus jedes aug erriet sich hier sein grad"), and you recognize your brothers/ In the honest fervor of their eyes [37], then they are asked not to defile their body by mingling with women of a different order ("Mit den frauen fremder ordnung Sollt ihr nicht den leib beflecken"), but follow long traditions ("den urbestimmten bräuchen") and unite with those who are worth carrying their semen ("Eint sie euch den reifen schoossen Euren samen wert zu tragen."). The newly elected group should spew out everything decayed ("das morsche aus dem munde spein") – and carry the dagger in the bunch of laurels ("Ihr sollt den dolch im lorbeerstrausse tragen") [38] (*Der Stern des Bundes*).

Laws for a new nobility are laid down, recognizable not by traditional hallmarks of aristocracy, but by their burning eyes, revealing their determination. They are to renounce luxury and destroy what is decayed, and be prepared for the imminent war. Stauffenberg bore these words in mind. His last words before being shot were either "Long live sacred Germany," or possibly "Long live secret Germany," the watchword of the George Circle. Unfortunately, post-war Germany failed to create a mythic narrative based on the Stauffenbergs. Why? Perhaps, since Claus von Stauffenberg and his brother Berthold had drafted a manifesto calling for a new order that guaranteed law and justice but rejected equality ("die Gleichheitslüge"), revered natural hierarchy, and rested on "ein Volk, das in der Erde der Heimat verwurzelt den natürlichen Mächten nahebleibt."

erpublikationen/PDFs\_fuer\_Download/Stauffenberg\_Katalog\_Deu\_Eng\_2.\_Aufl.\_2008.pdf

<sup>34</sup><http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/George,+Stefan/Gesamtausgabe+der+Werke/Das+Neue+Reich/Spr%C3%BCche/An+die+Toten/%5BWenn+einst+dies+geschlecht+sich+gereinigt+von+schande%5D>

<sup>35</sup>Die Kerle haben ja die Hosen voll oder Stroh im Kopf, sie wollen nicht ...  
[https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge\\_sond](https://www.gdw-berlin.de/fileadmin/bilder/publikationen/Kataloge_sond)

erpublikationen/PDFs\_fuer\_Download/Stauffenberg\_Katalog\_Deu\_Eng\_2.\_Aufl.\_2008.pdf

<sup>36</sup>publikationen/Kataloge\_sonderpublikationen/PDFs\_fuer\_Download/Stauffenberg\_Katalog\_Deu\_Eng\_2.\_Aufl.\_2008.pdf

<sup>37</sup><https://voegelinview.com/eric-voegelin-and-the-stefan-george-circle/>

<sup>38</sup><https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/george/stern1/chap004.html>

(=a people that is rooted in the soil of the homecountry and and remains loyal to the natural powers) [39].

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps, as Futurism was to Fascism, given its quasi-political, mystic, nationalist bent, the George circle may have been more susceptible to Nazi and anti-Semitic themes, yet its history and membership did not necessarily incline it that way. George himself distanced from fanatical patriotism, as the poem *Der Krieg*, written between 1914 and 1917 shows – Not accidentally it is introduced by a phrase from Dante at a time when Germany and Italy were deeply engaged in horrible military hostilities. The protagonist knows that war is not the cause of evil, but only of the symptoms of the murder against life (“mord am Leben”) for which the self-complacent (“der satte bürger”) is to blame: War is just another symptom of the sickness that had infected not only Wilhelmine Germany, but the entire bourgeois-capitalist world. Salvation is only possible if a spiritually (“geistig”) transformed younger generation could determine the future (“Und Herr der zukunfft wer sich wandeln kann” [40]). In this regard George remained consistent. In a conversation with Edith Landmann in 1919 he declared that it would be illusionary to place one’s faith either in the political Right or the Left. A peaceful transformation from the inner (“friedliche Durchdringung vom Geistigen her, eine Erneuerung von innen heraus”) could be the only answer to a total apocalyptic collapse [41]. Even within the George-circle not all the members were quite as committed to the Nazi purpose as is usually assumed. And George, who died on the 4th of December 1933, without taking any position in favour of or against the regime, tried to convince Kurt Hildebrandt to maintain a neutral stance (Lane 2011, 147). Many of the critical descriptions of current society made by the Georgians seem legitimate (e.g. nauseating uglification, also of cities), but some of the remedies are ambivalent. They could be used and exploited by the right-winged radicals. But *abusus non tollit usum* (=misuse of something is no argument against its proper use), e.g.: the idea of nobility is still relevant, as the ideal of a gentleman (καλὸς κἀγαθός) manifests. Even heroism though often misused, can be justified. Friedrich Gundolf undoubtedly proclaimed the ideal of “Vorbilder” (idol, paragon, role-model - “heroen”/heroes; “grosse menschen”=great men) in the *Jahrbuch für Geistige Bewegung*, followed by his works on e. g.: Julius Caesar, Goethe, Shakespeare: Their main function is to increase vitality (“Lebensgefühl”) and to transform their recipients by showing personal representatives of an

idea, as ideas cannot be causes (“ideen sind keine ursache”, “fruchtbar sind nur die Menschen”/1912), and becoming creative myths that order more than bureaucracy can ever do. Gundolf wants through his hero-worship conserve the respect for Man and human dignity by presenting a e. g. Caesar, a cheerful and noble and graceful man, handsome and full of generous vitality. But it must be stated that for Gundolf no merely national men can create culture (“bloss nationale”), as he exemplifies by referring to Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe. Gundolf became important to the German Youth Movement, as one of his compositions (*Schließ Aug und Ohr für eine Weil*/1931) [42] found its way into its repertoires and from there to the Scholl-siblings (Geschwister Scholl) who as members of the White Rose (=Weiße Rose) resisted to Nazi-Germany and sacrificed their lives. Here the idealism of the Youth Movement could find an expression in its demand to closely oneself off from the turmoil and noise of the world which could only be rescued by a deeply committed heart. If the all-decisive hour should come, you should be ready to throw yourself. Definitely, the:

- Youth Movement and Wandervögel Movement through various branches of the Boy Scouts („Bund Deutscher Neupfadfinder“=BNP [43])
- The Ecological Movement that can be traced back to George’s early biocentric co-author Ludwig Klages, and could refer to Stefan George (Karlauf) [44].

Though the George-circle viewed itself as apolitical and was quite indifferent to political parties, and their aesthetic call for transformation lacked a formal, clear-cut programme, the nature of renewal remained rather vague (Aschheim). Conceding and emphasizing that George’s “Secret Germany” was not identical with Nazi Germany, it would be rather naïve not to recognize the preparatory role George played” in helping to make the crimes committed by the Nazis “thinkable” (Norton). What can be said is that George became aware too late of the political reality and thus failed to protect his poetry from ideological usurpation. Not having the relevant documents one may only speculate what some members must have thought (and suffered) when they became to realize that their antiegalitarian discourse unleashed a totally uncultivated barbarianism. But the controversy surrounding George and his circle will certainly continue, as new material and new interpretations will emerge.

<sup>39</sup>The full text is in Peter Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1992), 396–97.

<sup>40</sup>[https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Der\\_Krieg\\_\(George\)](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Der_Krieg_(George))

<sup>41</sup>Rieckmann S.14.

<sup>42</sup>Friedrich Gundolf: *Gedichte*, Berlin 1930, S. 96. It was changed by the Youth Movement into „Als wo dein herz sich *weir*“ (where your opens).

<https://www.volksliederarchiv.de/lexikon/lieder-der-suedlegion/>

<sup>43</sup>Berthold and Claus von Stauffenberg joined the „New Pathfinders“ (=Neue Pfadfinder). Here they recited from George’s poetry, and sang around the campfire. Cf. Baigent.

<sup>44</sup><http://pd-fundamt.blogspot.com/2013/01/die-verlogenheit-der.html>



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