



A Poet's Reich

Politics and Culture
in the George Circle

Edited by
Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl

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Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
<i>Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl</i>	

I: Members and Mores

1: The George Circle: From <i>Künstlergesellschaft</i> to <i>Lebensgemeinschaft</i> <i>Ute Oelmann</i>	25
2: Stefan George's Homoerotic <i>Erlösungsreligion</i> , 1891–1907 <i>Adam Bisno</i>	37
3: The Secret Germany of Gertrud Kantorowicz <i>Robert E. Lerner</i>	56

II: Poetry, Prophecy, Publics

4: The Poet as Idol: Friedrich Gundolf on Rilke and Poetic Leadership <i>Rüdiger Görner</i>	81
5: Kingdom of the Spirit: The Secret Germany in Stefan George's Later Poems <i>Ray Ockenden</i>	91
6: The Absentee Prophet: Public Perceptions of George's Poetry in the Weimar Period <i>David Midgley</i>	117

III: *Wissenschaft* and *Herrschaft*

7: The Platonic Politics of the George Circle: A Reconsideration <i>Melissa S. Lane</i>	133
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8: Political Economy as <i>Geisteswissenschaft</i> : Edgar Salin and Other Economists around George <i>Bertram Schefold</i>	164
9: “Imperium transcendat hominem”: Reich and Rulership in Ernst Kantorowicz’s <i>Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite</i> <i>Martin A. Ruehl</i>	204
IV: The New Reich and the Third Reich	
10: Third Reich and Third Europe: Stefan George’s Imperial Mythologies in Context <i>Richard Faber</i>	251
11: From Secret Germany to Nazi Germany: The Politics of Art before and after 1933 <i>Robert E. Norton</i>	269
12: The George Circle and National Socialism <i>Peter Hoffmann</i>	287
13: Stauffenberg: The Search for a Motive <i>Thomas Karlauf</i>	317
Notes on the Contributors	333
Index	337

Illustrations

Following page 170

- Fig. 1. Bingen on the Rhine
- Fig. 2. Portrait of the poet as a young master
- Fig. 3. Title page of *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1904
- Fig. 4. Carnival in Munich, 1904
- Fig. 5. George's "Bismarck-Fragment"
- Fig. 6. Portrait of Friedrich Gundolf
- Fig. 7. Portrait of Friedrich Wolters
- Fig. 8. Title page of *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung*, 1912
- Fig. 9. The poet as dandy
- Fig. 10. The poet as prophet
- Fig. 11. George and his followers in Heidelberg, 1919
- Fig. 12. The "Marburg Circle" in 1922
- Fig. 13. George in Caesar posture, 1926
- Fig. 14. Portrait of Max Kommerell
- Fig. 15. Portrait of Percy Gothein
- Fig. 16. Portrait of Ewald Volhard
- Fig. 17. Portrait of Ernst Kantorowicz
- Fig. 18. Title page of Kantorowicz's *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, 1931
- Fig. 19. Excerpt from "Der Dichter in Zeiten der Wirren"
- Fig. 20. George in 1933, the year of his death
- Fig. 21. Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg as a youth
- Fig. 22. Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg as an officer of the Wehrmacht

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Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl
Princeton and Cambridge, May 2011

Abbreviations

- GA Stefan George, *Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke: Endgültige Fassung*, 18 vols. (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1927–34)
- LBI Leo Baeck Institute, New York
- StGA Stefan George Archiv, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart
- SW Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Georg Peter Landmann and Ute Oelmann, 18 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981–)
- WSG Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz, *The Works of Stefan George Rendered into English*, 2nd rev. and enlarged edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974)
- ZT Hans-Jürgen Seekamp, Raymond C. Ockenden, and Marita Keilson, *Stefan George: Leben und Werk. Eine Zeittafel* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1972)

Introduction

Melissa S. Lane and Martin A. Ruehl

STEFAN GEORGE (1868–1933) was one of the most important figures in modern German culture. His poetry, in its originality and impact, was ranked by many contemporaries with that of Goethe and Hölderlin. The two collections of his early verse, *Das Jahr der Seele* (1897) and *Der Teppich des Lebens* (1899), still stand as landmarks in the history of early modernism, alongside his celebrated translations of Dante and Baudelaire. George's significance, however, transcended the sphere of literature. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he gathered around himself a coterie of predominantly younger men, later known as the *George Kreis*, who subscribed to his vision of “das schöne Leben” and his comprehensive program of cultural renewal.¹ George and his followers considered themselves the embodiment of “das geheime Deutschland,”² a kind of counter-cultural nucleus or avant-garde that stood in radical opposition to the “official” culture of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany. Some of his disciples were poets themselves; most of them occupied academic positions, notably in the fields of history, German literature, and classics. Their works, in particular their hero-worshipping biographies of great political or cultural figures, affected Germany's educated middle class no less than George's precious-prophetic verse. Above and beyond these publications, the George Circle exerted a peculiar fascination on a new generation of *Bildungsbürger* because of its almost sectarian exclusivity, its *männerbündisch*-homerothic ethos, and its quasi-religious rituals.

Especially after the publication of his penultimate collection of poems, *Der Stern des Bundes*, on the eve of the Great War, George acquired a kind of cult following that extended well beyond the small group of acolytes — never more than twenty — who made up the core of the Circle. In 1916, after only a brief introductory meeting with him, the political economist Kurt Singer waxed lyrical about George in a letter to the philosopher Martin Buber, remarking that his life had become ever more imbued with the conviction “dass heute kein Mensch reiner und schöpferischer das Göttliche verkörpert als George — doch das ist nicht genug: dass der Knoten der Zeit und der Erneuerung sich in George schürzt [. . .] Es ist, als ob alle grossen geistigen Ströme sich in diesem Menschen kreuzten und sich zur Kugel ballten.”³ The twenty-nine-year-old Walter

Benjamin would wait for hours outside Heidelberg Castle just to catch a glimpse of “der Meister,”⁴ as George was reverently addressed by his followers,⁵ and possibly developed his concept of “auratic art” in the light of George’s poetry.⁶ Mesmerized by their unique mixture of lyrical expressiveness and formal stylization, the young Theodor Adorno set George’s poems to music. So did Arnold Schönberg and Anton Webern.

Yet George’s reach went deeper. His exhortation, in the opening lines of a poem from *Der Stern des Bundes* — “Wer je die flamme umschritt / Bleibe der flamme trabant!” — became something like a mantra for the German youth movement and, subsequently, the Hitler Youth,⁷ thus partly confirming Georg Lukács’s 1908 prediction that George’s seemingly cold and exclusive compositions would one day become *Volkslieder*.⁸ According to Benjamin, his poems provided a legitimation and “Asyl” for those scions of the German middle class who had become alienated from the bourgeois ways of their parents’ generation.⁹ They even inspired the antibourgeois rhetoric of the socialist revolutionaries in the Munich Soviet Republic (April–May 1919), who turned George’s apocalyptic vision “Der Einzug” — “Voll ist die zeit · / Weckt was gefeit / Schlieft mit dumpfem gegrolle”¹⁰ — into one of their marching songs.¹¹ George affected the German middle-class youth not just through his poetry, however. Throughout the 1920s, his educational ideals, notably his critique of scientific positivism and his call for a holistic form of *Bildung*, based on the ancient Greek model of the master-disciple relationship and designed to inspire the vital, creative impulses of a new intellectual elite, influenced the teaching and research agendas in the humanities faculties of various German universities. The inscription over the entrance of the new auditorium erected at Heidelberg University in 1930/31, “Dem lebendigen Geist,” chosen by the noted Germanist Friedrich Gundolf, George’s longtime favorite disciple, encapsulated these ideals and demonstrated their increasingly prominent position in German academe.¹²

The impact that George and his Circle had on the development of *Geisteswissenschaften* in the interwar period was particularly pronounced. With his intellectual biography of Goethe, bearing the programmatically simple title *Goethe* (1916), Gundolf had set a precedent for a new type of scholarship that aimed at the vivid, inspirational (*anschaulich*) representation of historical personalities in their essential totality (*Gestalt*), discarding the dissecting, analytical gaze of the “scientist” and turning the great individual of the past into a myth and model for the present.¹³ Ernst Bertram, like Gundolf a scholar of German literature and, since 1906, an associate of the Circle, took a similar approach in his highly acclaimed (and hugely popular) *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie*, which appeared with the Circle’s “house publisher” Georg Bondi in 1918. Ernst Kantorowicz, who joined the Circle in 1919, introduced its mythopoeic method to the field of medieval history with his best-selling biography of the Hohenstaufen

emperor Frederick II. Like Bertram's *Nietzsche*, Kantorowicz's *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (1927) was published by Georg Bondi, adorned on the cover and title page with a curved swastika, the emblem reserved for the Circle's scholarly books or *Geistbücher*, and, lacking both footnotes and a bibliography, ostentatiously addressed to a nonacademic audience. More distant associates of the Circle such as Georg Simmel and Hans-Georg Gadamer incorporated central aspects of George's thinking into their philosophical systems.¹⁴ Karl Jaspers thought that the mystical elements of Martin Heidegger's early writings bore the imprint of the George Circle.¹⁵ Karl Reinhardt, Walter F. Otto, Paul Friedlaender, and Werner Jaeger, four classical scholars who transformed the discipline of *Altertumswissenschaft* in the 1920s and 1930s, all drew, to varying degrees, on George in their critique of the new brand of positivist philology inaugurated by Wilamowitz and in their reinvention of *das Klassische* as an educational and cultural ideal.¹⁶

Even skeptical observers acknowledged the George Circle as an epicenter of the cultural and intellectual revolutions that transformed Germany in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Max Weber, though he disapproved of George's stance as *poeta vates* (poet-prophet) and his tendency towards self-deification,¹⁷ greatly admired his poetry and personality.¹⁸ According to Thomas Karlauf, Weber's notion of "charismatic rule" was partly formed by his impression of George's role in the Circle.¹⁹ In the early 1920s, Thomas Mann, well aware that they considered him a second-rate author,²⁰ nonetheless believed that "die Wahrheit und das Leben" could only be found in the sphere of George and his followers. As he confided in his diary on 1 August, 1921: "Ich wüßte nicht, wo sonst das Positiv-Entgegengesetzte zur Hoffnungslosigkeit der Fortschritts-Civilisation und des intellektualistischen Nihilismus gefunden werden sollte, als in dieser [George's] Lehre des Leibes und Staates. Dies zu finden kann mich die Tatsache nicht hindern, daß auch ich mich mit verneint fühlen muß."²¹

In the wake of the First World War, George thus came to represent a "geistige Gegenmacht," as Benjamin put it,²² which shaped the thinking of intellectuals, students, academics, university officials, sections of the civil service as well as members of the Reichswehr and, later, the Wehrmacht.²³ Though his Circle dissolved shortly after his death in December 1933 and though he soon became *persona non grata* in the Third Reich, whose functionaries had initially sought to claim him as the "prophet" of the Nazi revolution, George's influence extended well beyond the interwar period and left its stamp on the culture of the new West German state. In his recent book on George's "Nachleben," Ulrich Raulff reconstructs the various Georgean networks that shaped the intellectual and political life of the Bonn Republic in the 1950s and 1960s. As Raulff shows, some of the foremost "federal families," notably the Weizsäcker, Pichts, and Beckers

(but also Carlo Schmid and Marion Countess Dönhoff) were attached to the Circle and its values.

In particular, Hellmut Becker, son of the Prussian *Kultusminister* Carl Heinrich Becker, who had been responsible for the appointment of numerous followers of George to prominent academic positions in the Weimar period,²⁴ was deeply indebted to George's pedagogical ideals and, as one of West Germany's most influential *Kulturpolitiker*, saw to it that some of these ideals were incorporated into the large-scale *Bildungsreform* of the 1960s and 1970s.²⁵ But George's emphasis on *Anschauung*, *Ganzheitlichkeit*, and *die Tat* (the deed), as well as his neo-Platonic notion of the charismatic older teacher entrusted with the total education of his (male) charges,²⁶ also influenced the doctrines of *Reformpädagogik*, which were first formulated by educational reformers such as Gustav Wyneken in the early twentieth century and put into practice at some of Germany's most prestigious boarding schools — for instance, the Odenwaldschule, established in 1910 near Heppenheim in the state of Hesse and run by Hellmut Becker's protégé Gerold Becker from 1969 to 1985.²⁷

It is thus no exaggeration to say that George and his Circle represented one of the most powerful “Ausstrahlungsphänomene” (in Gottfried Benn's term) in the cultural and intellectual history of modern Germany after Nietzsche.²⁸ As some of the above comments suggest, this “Ausstrahlungsphänomen” also had a political dimension. Much ink has been spilt, especially since the late 1960s, over the supposedly “reactionary,” fundamentally antimodern *Weltanschauung* embraced by George and his followers. George's defenders have invested an almost equivalent amount of ink to clear him of these charges by showing that his concerns were exclusively poetical or aesthetic, that there was no connection, in other words, between his program of cultural renewal and the far-reaching demands for political renewal circulating in the Weimar period, let alone the political program of National Socialism. Both the detractors and the defenders tend to assume that George's standpoint remained essentially consistent from the foundation of the Circle around 1903 to its collapse thirty years later, in the aftermath of his death in December 1933. A path leading beyond the standoff can begin with a careful consideration of the ways in which his views and those of his followers changed in the course of this period. This introduction will sketch a view of the complex and intertwined evolution of culture and politics in the Circle that identifies many of the themes considered — often from sharply differing vantage points — in the individual contributions to the volume.

In the 1890s and 1900s, George's ideal of a “römisches Deutschland” stood in sharp contrast to the nationalist orthodoxy of the Second Reich. His celebration of the South in *Der Teppich des Lebens* and *Der Siebente Ring* (1907)²⁹ represented an implicit critique of the prussophile patriotism inaugurated by Heinrich von Treitschke, who, in the aftermath of

Bismarck's bitter struggle with Catholicism in the 1870s, denounced Rome as the ultramontane enemy of the Second Reich and demanded the elimination of all Latin influences for the sake of German cultural autonomy.³⁰ While Treitschke's followers glorified the Hohenzollern and their colonization of the Slavonic and Baltic lands, the George Circle exalted the Holy Roman Empire of the Hohenstaufen dynasty. For the former, the symbol of Germanness was the *furor teutonicus* of Hermann the Cheruscan (16 BC–AD 21);³¹ for the latter, it was the restrained, classical beauty of a thirteenth-century equestrian statue in Bamberg Cathedral, the so-called “Bamberger Reiter,” whom Ernst Kantorowicz would call a Mediterranean Germanic type in his biography of the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II.³²

After 1918, however, this cosmopolitan spirit became mixed with more narrowly patriotic sentiments. To some extent, this change was determined by the self-consciously guarded liminal position of the Circle with regard to German society and culture. In the Wilhelmine era, George and his disciples had been anxious to distinguish the Germano-Roman ideals of “das geheime Deutschland” from the “deutschnational” jingoism of the official Germany. But when the Imperial Government of the Second Reich was replaced by the more moderate, cosmopolitan politicians of the Weimar Coalition, the Circle, in its turn, preserved its oppositional stance by becoming more “deutschnational.” This reversal was facilitated by the fact that the experience of the Great War and its aftermath³³ — Versailles, the war-guilt debate, reparations, the occupation of the Rhineland and the Ruhr — had aroused the national passions of the Circle. The “outlawing” of the German people during the war and even more after Versailles, Edgar Salin remarked in his memoirs, was depressing and unbearable for the members of the Circle: “Stärker als irgendwann vorher . . . wies daher der Weg der Ehre in den Jahren von 1919–1932 für die Dichter-Freunde und für das deutsche Volk in naheverwandte Richtung.”³⁴ In particular, Friedrich Wolters, who became — after Friedrich Gundolf's break with George — a more central figure in the Circle, began to strike a much more politicized and assertively Germanic note in his publications during the 1920s, celebrating Goethe as a patriotic, “vaterländischer” poet and glorifying Germany's struggle against her Latin, “welsch,” enemies over the centuries, from the Investiture Controversy to the Franco-Prussian War.³⁵

Although George was not uncritical of Wolters's political activism,³⁶ both his poetic and his private utterances reveal the extent to which he shared this new, stridently patriotic vision of Germanness.³⁷ If his earlier works had been indebted to the spirit of Hölderlin, the models for George's new collection of poems, *Das Neue Reich* (1928), seemed to be Ernst Moritz Arndt and Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Seeing his own vocation as “Dichter der Deutschen,”³⁸ George prophesied Germany's

purification from shame, her coming rebirth, and her universal mission — that one day, Germany, the heart of the continent, would redeem the world.³⁹ Perhaps because, as a native of the region, he was offended by the occupation of the Rhineland,⁴⁰ the Master, who had been so greatly influenced by French poetry in the 1890s, now began to show strong signs of Francophobia and at one point even demanded that the French be exterminated.⁴¹ In this period, George also reevaluated another component of his earlier cosmopolitan conception of *Deutschtum*, the German “Drang nach Süden.”⁴² Even more notable are his frequent diatribes in the 1920s against the Curia and the “Pfaffen,” which stand in sharp contrast to the predominantly pro-Catholic sentiment of the Circle around the turn of the century. Edith Landmann recalled his lashing out bitterly against the egalitarianism of the Catholic religion and its lack of interest in Germany and in European culture in general.⁴³ Bismarck, Wilhelm II, and “Prussianness,” on the other hand, George now saw in a more positive light, and observed, obviously with an eye on the last of the Hohenzollern, that a bad emperor was better than no emperor at all.⁴⁴

The most ominous transformation of the concept of Germanness in the Circle, however, was its increasing preoccupation with the issue of race. In 1920, one of Wolters’s followers, Kurt Hildebrandt, published a treatise on racial hygiene, entitled *Norm und Entartung des Menschen*.⁴⁵ George apparently felt ambivalent about the idea of a state-directed eugenic policy,⁴⁶ but nonetheless defended Hildebrandt’s book against the criticism of Salin.⁴⁷ Wolters spoke of the “minderwertige Rassen” of the French in his 1923 pamphlet “Der Rhein unser Schicksal”⁴⁸ and extolled the “heiligster Herd unserer Rasse” in his “Blättergeschichte.”⁴⁹ The Master, for his part, seems to have conceived this “holiest herd” in European rather than strictly Germanic terms.⁵⁰ It was the “weiße Art”⁵¹ of Western Europe that, he believed, had to be saved from the “gelben Affen” of Asia,⁵² as well as from miscegenation with the African races. According to George, the decline of the French was due to interracial marriages,⁵³ or what he called “Blutschmach” (blood-shame) in his 1917 poem “Der Krieg.”⁵⁴ The racial divide, for him, thus lay between Europe on the one hand and Africa as well as Asia (to which he apportioned Russia) on the other, not between Germanic and “welsch,” or Aryan and Semitic, peoples.

This does not mean that George, as is sometimes claimed, was straightforwardly philosemitic or that his Circle was a “haven of retreat” for German-Jewish intellectuals.⁵⁵ Given the large number of Jews among his immediate entourage (they included Hanna and Karl Wolfskehl, Friedrich and Ernst Gundolf, Berthold Vallentin, Ernst Morwitz, Julius and Edith Landmann, Erich von Kahler, Edgar Salin, Wilhelm Stein, and both Gertrud and Ernst Kantorowicz),⁵⁶ strains of antisemitism can be found to have run surprisingly deep in the Circle.

The Master himself, while he declared that all loyal disciples, whether Catholic, Protestant or Jew, were of his race,⁵⁷ also professed that Jews were a different type of people, whose ability to experience things was not as deep as that of others. He would never allow them, he told Ernst Robert Curtius, to be in the majority in the Circle.⁵⁸ Hildebrandt reports that already during the First World War, George taught that the Jews were agents of decomposition in the political and the intellectual state and that he was increasingly dissatisfied with their attitude.⁵⁹ As for the disciples, there were not infrequent antisemitic remarks *intra muros*, especially from the “third generation” (Max Kommerell, Johann Anton, Woldemar Uxkull-Gyllenband),⁶⁰ sometimes with regard to other Circle members.⁶¹ Kommerell, George’s youthful favorite in the second half of the 1920s, noted with some satisfaction that his own antisemitism was proverbial in the Circle.⁶² Hildebrandt recalls the anti-Jewish tendencies of the “National-Gesonnenen” disciples,⁶³ arguably an allusion to the subgroups around Wolters in Marburg and Kiel.⁶⁴ Wolters’s “Blättergeschichte,” compiled over a decade and a half and published in 1930, with the Master’s explicit approbation, as the official history of the Circle, downplayed the contributions of Jewish disciples (most notably that of Gundolf) and was regarded as antisemitic by many readers.⁶⁵

In view of the growing prominence of Wolters and his adherents as well as George’s implicit endorsement of their attitude, it seems no exaggeration to say, then, that in the postwar era the Circle began to embrace an increasingly nationalist standpoint. The birth of the new republic in the shadow of defeat and the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles had contributed to a gradual transformation of the earlier cosmopolitan ideal of a “Roman Germany.” The anti-Catholic polemics, the exaltation of the German *Volk* over the “Welschen,” the positive reassessment of Prussia, the heightened concern with racial issues — this was *Deutschtum* in a new key. The new nationalism of the “Georgeans,” no doubt, still left room for the admiration of other cultures. Next to the shining armor of the German emperors, George invoked the cedar trees of the Orient; next to Baldur he saw Apollo.⁶⁶ The tirades of Wolters and Elze against France and Rome were offset by Vallentin’s and Gundolf’s paeans to Napoleon and Caesar.⁶⁷ And despite the more narrowly political attacks on Versailles and Weimar, there remained the larger concerns with the aesthetic regeneration of Europe.⁶⁸ The notion of *Deutschtum* in the Circle clearly was not identical with the *Deuschtümelei* of the German Right. But in the 1920s, the boundaries between the two became increasingly blurred. As Walter Benjamin remarked in his 1930 review of Max Kommerell’s book *Der Dichter als Führer in der deutschen Klassik* (1928), the Secret Germany had become part of the official Germany’s ideological arsenal, in which the “Tarnkappe” of the George Circle hung next to the “Stahlhelm” of the Radical Right.⁶⁹

Can any straightforward trajectories or indeed causal connections be identified between the thought of the George Circle and National Socialism? One of George's most prominent biographers, Robert E. Norton, a contributor to this volume, has recently asserted such a link. According to Norton, "George and his circle significantly contributed to the creation of a psychological, cultural, and even political climate that made the events in Germany leading up to and following 1933 not just imaginable but also feasible."⁷⁰ George's defenders, by contrast, have portrayed him either as an apolitical intellectual committed solely to the sphere of aesthetics or as the proponent of a deeply humanistic ethos and a cosmopolitan — or, at any rate, European — conception of *Deutschtum* that was profoundly at odds with the ideologies of the German Right.⁷¹ The present volume aims to move beyond these dichotomous interpretations of George and his Circle. In addition to asking what political effects the George Circle produced, the individual contributors explore the various ways in which its members conceived of their self-imposed cultural tasks in political terms. The underlying assumption of nearly all the chapters in this volume is that the very structure of the Circle, its notion of "das schöne Leben," its "nationalpädagogische Mission," and its program of cultural renewal had political dimensions. Obviously, these structures, ideas, and programs were neither static nor monolithic. They changed over time and they were renegotiated and redefined by the different subgroups of the Circle (often associated with their different locations: Heidelberg, Berlin, and Munich) and the three different generations of disciples that made up the highly heterogeneous collective known as the *George Kreis*. It is equally important, in this context, to stress that George and his associates never formulated a coherent ideology or *Weltbild*, let alone published a pamphlet containing the "official" doctrine of George's "staat."⁷² For all of these reasons, any reference to "culture and politics in the George Circle" in the singular can be only a form of intellectual shorthand. Our title should be read rather as exploring the changing conceptions of the relation between culture and politics, and indeed of cultural politics, in a — capaciously understood — circle of intellectuals and artists.

What the contributions to this volume show is that George's aesthetic and cultural ideas cannot easily be separated from his political aims. At the same time, they also suggest that the realm of politics, in the eyes of George and his followers, was always subordinate to the realm of *Geist*, *Leben*, and *Kunst*. There can be little doubt that for him, as for Nietzsche, "the political" was always a means to an end, never an end in itself. The ultimate end of politics, according to George, was the creation of a new social order that would allow a comprehensive regeneration of culture and a fundamental reform of life. This question — how socio-political change could aid cultural change — became central to the George Circle, especially in the wake of the First World War. As the following chapters dem-

onstrate, it was a question that was endlessly debated — neither the Master nor his disciples ever arrived at a conclusive answer. The contributions to this volume illustrate the intricate, complex, and changing links between culture and politics in the Circle, from its foundation in the early 1900s through its dissolution after 1933.

Part 1 surveys aspects of the Circle's membership and nature, beginning with Ute Oelmann's overview of its evolution from a society of artists, a *Künstlergesellschaft*, to a living community, a *Lebensgemeinschaft*. Oelmann argues that the early, more narrowly poetic preoccupations of George and his followers, manifest in their founding of the *Blätter für die Kunst*, were transformed over time into a new cultural agenda whose significance was existential rather than merely literary.⁷³ The ever-shifting subtle dynamics among the Circle's members included a constant jockeying for George's attention and approval, central to which was the intense homoerotic engagement of the poet with a succession (often overlapping) of young men. Adam Bisno considers the formative expression of this homoeroticism in the early relationship and sudden break between George and fellow poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, an episode that Thomas Karlauf has described as the most consequential event in George's life.⁷⁴ George subsequently replaced Hofmannsthal with a series of younger disciples he could simultaneously adore and be adored by, thus reenacting the role of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*, who was both pursuer of the young Alcibiades and eventually pursued by him. The first and most celebrated of these erotic figures was Maximilian Kronberger, whose early death allowed George to transform him into the object of a cult into which later Circle members were conscripted. Reflection on the Circle's membership is rounded out by Robert E. Lerner's exploration of the complex and problematic role of women in its midst, focused on the dramatic life of Gertrud Kantorowicz.

Part 2 concentrates on the politics of George's poetry, his conception of poetry and culture as well as that of his long-time disciple Friedrich Gundolf, in the context of Weimar, Nazi, and post-1945 Germany. Rüdiger Görner explores Gundolf's reading of Rilke, George's great rival for the mantle of *poeta vates* in the German language up until Rilke's death in 1926. The break that same year between Gundolf and George deeply affected Gundolf's assessment of Rilke's poetry in comparison to George's, which is highlighted in his 1931 lectures on Rilke, delivered shortly before his own death. The concept of a secret Germany in George's late poetry is investigated in Ray Ockenden's essay, while David Midgley examines the reception of George's poetry among the various intellectual and cultural milieus of the Weimar Republic. Midgley traces in detail the fluctuations of George's reputation in the 1920s, identifying a break around 1928 when, despite homage paid on the occasion of the poet's sixtieth birthday, a new poetics associated in particular with Bertolt Brecht was making the

“aesthetic fundamentalism” (Stefan Breuer) of George look increasingly anachronistic.⁷⁵

The George Circle, however, attracted not only poets, but also scholars — and many who, like Gundolf and Wolters, pursued both vocations. Yet the role and nature of scholarship in its incarnation as *Wissenschaft* was deeply problematic for the members of the Circle. The critique of *Wissenschaft* as dry, arid, and positivist was one to which George subscribed, especially after his break with Gundolf, who had, much to the surprise of his friends and followers in the Circle, completed his habilitation in 1911 and become a popular and dedicated professor at Heidelberg University. Gundolf’s sojourn in Heidelberg, first for his habilitation and, from 1916, as professor of German literature, brought George and various of his followers into the ambit of Max Weber who in these same years was engaged in rethinking the meaning and purpose of *Sozialwissenschaft*. Weber was a strong advocate of dispassionate scholarship, accepting that scholars cannot but acknowledge the value-dimensions of what they study, yet insisting, at the same time, on a clear distinction between speaking as a scholar and engaging in political activism.⁷⁶ Yet, for Gundolf, Weber’s conception of science contributed to the *Entzauberung* of the world,⁷⁷ which led him and other members of the Circle to articulate a notion of *Wissenschaft* that would be consonant with myth and passion rather than destructive of them.

Part 3 explores these contested engagements with *Wissenschaft* — along with the Circle’s ideas regarding *Herrschaft* — in three essays. Melissa S. Lane’s focus is on the extensive scholarly writings by members of the Circle on Plato’s philosophy, a topic second to none in terms of their publication record: George’s disciples published twenty-six books dealing with Plato, alongside pamphlets, speeches and articles.⁷⁸ Lane argues that Plato became a crucial figure for the Circle earlier than is widely thought, mainly because of his unique status as a model who was at once poet, philosopher, and political founder. The studies of Plato produced by the *Georgeaner* blurred the lines between scholarship and mythic vision, thought and action, illustrating the Circle’s appeal to the unifying and living *Gestalt* in attempts to give new meaning and value to *Wissenschaft*. The topic of *Wissenschaft* in the Circle is taken up from another angle by Bertram Schefold, who examines the underappreciated set of political economists with Circle affiliations, most notably Edgar Salin and Arthur Salz. Schefold shows how creative and unorthodox their thought became as a result of their contact with George. Martin A. Ruehl addresses the case of Ernst Kantorowicz, whose Jewish birth marked him out for proscription and exile, yet whose political and scholarly views in many respects chimed with the notions of *Herrschaft* and *Deutschtum* propagated by the Nazis.

Finally, while anticipated at several previous junctures in the volume, the political import of the Circle after 1933 is the special focus of part 4.

Richard Faber sets the scene with an investigation of George's understanding of Germany's relation to France, Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire in the context of German-speaking debates about the Reich in the inter-war and immediate post-war period. Robert E. Norton — whose intellectual biography of George highlights his increasingly conscious commitment to a political transformation of Germany to match his elitist and authoritarian politics of friendship — traces that trajectory back to Hofmannsthal's view of the political efficacy of poetry and George's particular appropriation of that view.⁷⁹ The question of the Circle's bearing on the formulation of Nazi ideas and the question of the participation of members of the Circle in National Socialism, are taken up by the two final essays of the volume. Peter Hoffmann argues for a general affinity between many members of the Circle and the Nazi regime, and repudiating apologetic or distancing remarks by Circle members after the fact. In contrast, Thomas Karlauf takes as representative of the Circle's political import not the majority of its members but the destiny of one of them: Claus von Stauffenberg, who played a central role in the “bomb plot” of 20 July 1944. That contrast between the many and the one in the debate over the political significance of the Circle is a fittingly ambivalent echo of the Circle's own elitism in both culture and politics.

That both events — the “seizure of power” in January 1933 and the bomb plot of July 1944 — can be viewed as possible endings to the story of the curious interplay between politics and culture in the George Circle suggests the irreducible ambivalence of that story. More than thirty years ago, Sebastian Haffner remarked that the three names “George – Hitler – Stauffenberg” denoted a crucial chapter in modern German intellectual history that remained to be written.⁸⁰ The present volume is a first attempt to write that chapter.

Notes

¹ See Roman Köster, Werner Plumpe, Bertram Schefold, and Korinna Schönhärl, eds., *Das Ideal des schönen Lebens und die Wirklichkeit der Weimarer Republik: Vorstellungen von Staat und Gemeinschaft im George-Kreis* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2009).

² “Das geheime Deutschland” was an in-house term used by members of the George Circle to refer both to themselves and to the “Dichter und Helden” of the past whom they venerated, e.g., Hölderlin and the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II: see Eckhart Grünewald, *Ernst Kantorowicz und Stefan George. Beiträge zur Biographie des Historikers bis zum Jahre 1938 und zu seinem Jugendwerk Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1982), 74–80. The term goes back to a 1910 essay by Karl Wolfskehl, one of George's original associates, who

described George's poetry as the manifestation of a different, "geheimes Deutschland," distinct from the "offizielles Deutschland" that was the Wilhelmine Empire: Karl Wolfskehl, "Die Blätter für die Kunst und die neuste Literatur," *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung*, vol. 1 (1910): 1–18; here, 14–15. Norbert von Hellingrath, like Wolfskehl an early associate of George's, invoked the concept in his 1915 lecture on "Hölderlin und die Deutschen": "Ich nenne uns 'Volk Hölderlins,' weil es zutiefst im deutschen Wesen liegt, daß sein innerster Glutkern unendlich weit unter der Schlackenkruste, die seine Oberfläche ist, nur in einem *geheimen* Deutschland zutage tritt." Norbert von Hellingrath, "Hölderlin und die Deutschen," in Norbert von Hellingrath, *Hölderlin-Vermächtnis. Forschungen und Vorträge. Ein Gedankenbuch zum 14. Dezember 1936* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1936), 123–53; here, 124–25. George himself used the term "Geheimes Deutschland" as the title for one of the poems he composed in the early 1920s (published in the 1928 collection *Das Neue Reich*), whose final stanza reads:

Nur was im schützenden schlaf
 Wo noch kein taster es spürt
 Lang in tiefinnerstem schacht
 Weihlicher erde noch ruht —
 Wunder undeutbar für heut
 Geschick wird des kommenden tages.

Stefan George, "Geheimes Deutschland," in Stefan George, *Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke*, vol. 9, *Das Neue Reich* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1928), 59–65; here, 65.

³ Kurt Singer to Martin Buber, 5 February 1916: see Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten: 1897–1965*, 3 vols., ed. Grete Schaeder (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1972–75), vol. 1, 416–17. See also Michael Landmann, *Figuren um Stefan George*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam and Bonn: Castrum-Peregrini-Press, 1988), 62.

⁴ See Walter Benjamin, "Über Stefan George" [1928], in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 622–23:

Im Bewußtsein, daß ein solcher Versuch nie und nimmer gelingen könnte, bemühe ich mich, desto genauer mir zu vergegenwärtigen, wie George in mein Leben hineinwirkte. Voranzuschicken ist dies: Er tat es niemals in seiner Person. Wohl habe ich ihn gesehen. . . . Stunden waren mir nicht zu viel, . . . lesend, auf einer Bank, den Augenblick zu erwarten, da er vorbeikommen sollte. . . . Doch das war alles zu einer Zeit, da die entscheidende Erschütterung seines Werkes mich längst erreicht hatte.

⁵ See Stefan George, *Tage und Taten. Aufzeichnungen und Skizzen* [1933] (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper vormals Georg Bondi, 1967) 55: "Deshalb o dichter nennen dich genossen und jünger so gerne meister weil du am wenigsten nachgeahmt werden kannst und doch so grosses über sie vermochtest."

⁶ See Wolfgang Braungart, “Walter Benjamin, Stefan George und die Frühgeschichte des Begriffs der Aura. Anmerkungen mit Blick auf die Geschichte des fotografischen Portraits,” *Castrum Peregrini* 230 (1997): 38–51; here, 38; and Günter Heintz, “Der Zeuge: Walter Benjamin,” in Günter Heintz, *Stefan George: Studien zu seiner künstlerischen Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Hauswedell, 1986), 310–45; here, 340.

⁷ Stefan George, *Sämtliche Werke*, 18 vols., ed. Georg Peter Landmann and Ute Oelmann (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981ff.), vol. 8 (= *Der Stern des Bundes*), 84. The complete poem reads:

Wer je die flamme umschritt
 Bleibe der flamme trabant!
 Wie er auch wandert und kreist:
 Wo noch ihr schein ihn erreicht
 Irrt er zu weit nie vom ziel.
 Nur wenn sein blick sie verlor
 Eigener schimmer ihn trägt:
 Fehlt ihm der mitte gesetzt
 Treibt er zerstiebend ins all.

For the popularity of the first two lines in the *Wandervogel* and the Hitler Youth, see, e.g., Heinz Schreckenber, *Erziehung, Lebenswelt und Kriegseinsatz der deutschen Jugend unter Hitler: Anmerkungen zur Literatur* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000), 195.

⁸ Georg Lukács, “Die neue Einsamkeit und ihre Lyrik: Stefan George,” in Georg von Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), 176:

Georges Kälte ist somit: das Nicht-lesen-können des heutigen Lesers . . .
 Er ist kalt: weil seine Töne so fein sind, daß sie nicht jeder unterscheiden kann; kalt: weil seine Tragödien solcherart sind, daß sie der heutige Durchschnittsmensch noch nicht als tragisch empfindet, und daher glaubt, jene Gedichte seine nur der schönen Reime zuliebe entstanden; kalt: weil die von der gewöhnlichen Lyrik ausgedrückten Gefühle keine Rolle in seinem Leben mehr spielen. Einmal, vielleicht, können trotzdem auch aus diesen Gedichten Volkslieder werden.

⁹ See Benjamin, “Über Stefan George,” 623: “Wenn es das Vorrecht und das unnehmbare Glück der Jugend ist, in Versen sich legitimieren, streitend und liebend sich auf Verse berufen zu dürfen, so verdanken wir, daß wir dieses erfuhren, den drei Büchern Georges, deren Herzstück das ‘Jahr der Seele’ ist”; and Walter Benjamin, “Rückblick auf Stefan George,” [1933] in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III, 399: “Das Geschlecht, welchem die reinsten und vollkommensten Gedichte Georges ein Asyl gegeben haben, war zum Tode bestimmt.”

¹⁰ Stefan George, “Einzug,” in Stefan George, *Gesamt-Ausgabe der Werke. Endgültige Fassung*, 15 vols. (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1927–34), vol. 6/7 (= *Der Siebente Ring*), 62. The poem powerfully evokes the millenarian mood that characterizes much of George’s verse and his palingenetic ideal of renewal through destruction, both of which would have appealed to anarchists like Erich Mühsam

and Gustav Landauer who played a prominent role in the so-called Münchner “Räterepublik.” The full poem reads:

Voll ist die zeit ·
 Weckt was gefeit
 Schlieff mit dumpfem gegrolle.
 Jahnächte lang
 Unsichtbar schlang
 Nichtig dursten der scholle:

Grausam geheiss
 Tod-nahen schweiss
 Ohnmachtschrei der Besessnen ·
 Hilflose qual
 Fluchwürdig mal
 Sterbend flehn der Vergessnen.

Boden zerriss
 Hülle zerspliss
 Same drängte zu sonnen.
 Die ihr entfuhr
 Dunkler geburt
 Euer reich hat begonnen.

Spreng aus der klufft!
 Schrecke die luft
 Leuchtender heere geschmetter!
 Rachlieder schnaubt
 Senget und raubt
 Tötet und sichtet · ihr Retter!

Trocknes und meer
 Teilet ihr quer
 Öden neu zu befelden.
 Keimwolken streut
 Lenzblüte beut
 Sturm und feuer der Helden.

¹¹ See Manfred Riedel, *Geheimes Deutschland. Stefan George und die Brüder Stauffenberg* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2006), 107.

¹² See Eike Wolgast, *Die Universität Heidelberg, 1386–1986* (Berlin, Heidelberg, and New York: Springer Verlag, 1986), 139–40.

¹³ On Gundolf’s conception of biography, and indeed of historiography, see Ulrich Raulff, “Der Bildungshistoriker Friedrich Gundolf,” in Friedrich Gundolf, *Anfänge deutscher Geschichtsschreibung von Tschudi bis Winkelmann*, ed. Edgar Wind (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992), 115–54.

¹⁴ That George left a deep mark on Simmel is already evident in Georg Simmel, “Stefan George: Eine kunstphilosophische Betrachtung,” *Die Zukunft* 6 (1898): 386–96. On Simmel and George, see Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus. Stefan George und der deutsche Antimodernismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 169–83; Günther Freymuth, “Georg Simmel und Stefan George,” *Neue deutsche Hefte* 17, 3 (1970): 41–50; Carola Groppe, *Die Macht der Bildung. Das deutsche Bürgertum und der George-Kreis 1890–1933* (Cologne: Böhlau 1997), 160–82; and Michael Landmann, “Georg Simmel und Stefan George,” in *Georg Simmel und die Moderne. Neue Interpretationen und Materialien*, ed. Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 147–73. Gadamer acknowledges his debts to George in Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Stefan George (1868–1933),” in *Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft: Ein Symposium*, ed. Hans-Joachim Zimmermann (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1985), 43–47. See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, “The Verse and the Whole,” in *Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, ed. Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson (Albany: State U of New York P, 1991), 83–92; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Under the Shadow of Nihilism,” in Misgeld and Nicholson, *Gadamer on Education*, 111, where he calls George the most significant artist in the German tongue in the last hundred years. On Gadamer and George, see, e.g., Robert R. Sullivan, *Political Hermeneutics: The Early Thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989), 27, 48.

¹⁵ See Karl Jaspers, *Notizen zu Martin Heidegger* (Munich: Piper, 1978), 93–94, 118–19. Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), 219–20, points out that Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin and Nietzsche was also conditioned by the George Circle.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Uvo Hölscher, “Strömungen der deutschen Graezistik in den wanziger Jahren,” in *Altertumswissenschaft in den 20er Jahren: Neue Fragen und Impulse*, ed. Hellmut Flashar (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995), 65–85.

¹⁷ Heinrich Rickert had drawn Weber's attention to George as early as 1897, but it was only after Weber's nervous breakdown in 1898 that he began to appreciate George's poetry — as Marianne Weber remarked: “Die das Fühlen immer neu vertiefenden künstlerischen Gebilde [i.e., George's verse] fanden jetzt Eingang” — though he continued to stress his distance to the emotions expressed in it. See Marianne Weber, *Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1926), 463. Even before his first meeting with George in 1910 in Heidelberg, which had been arranged by Friedrich Gundolf, Weber had voiced his doubts about the Circle's mysticism and George's promise of quasi-religious redemption:

Dazu führt der Weg entweder durch die ekstatische Entrückung, oder aber durch die kontemplative Mystik. Den ersteren hat, wie mir scheint, die Georgeschule und George selbst gewählt, weil nur er die Anwendung der ihm eigenen, Dantesken Ausdrucksmittel gestattet. Aber dieser Weg führt nun — das ist sein Verhängnis — nie zu einem mystischen Erlebnis, . . . sondern stets nur zum orgiastischen Dröhnen einer Stimme, die dann

als ewige Stimme erscheint, nie mit anderen Worten, zu *Inhalten*, sondern nur zu einem leidenschaftlichen Harfengetön. *Ein* Versprechen eines ungeheuren, Erlösung garantierenden Erlebnisses, wird durch ein anderes, noch größeres überboten, immer werden neue Wechsel auf das, was kommen soll, gezogen, obwohl die Uneinlöslichkeit offen zutage liegt. Und da es über dies rein formale Prophetentum hinaus, schließlich keine Steigerung mehr gibt, ist der Dichter auf der beständigen Suche nach dem postulierten Inhalt seiner Prophezeiungen begriffen, ohne ihn jemals erhaschen zu können. (466–67)

¹⁸ See Wolf Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen: Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002), 342: “Dennoch beeindruckten ihn [Max Weber] der Ernst und die Lauterkeit, mit welcher George und seine Anhänger ihre Mission verfolgten. [. . .] Marianne Weber charakterisierte die Debatten mit George als warm, mitfühlend, von Verständnis füreinander geprägt trotz aller Differenzen. [. . .] Weber las noch 1917 . . . in Oerlinghausen aus Georges Gedichten und aus Gundolfs Goethe-Buch vor.” See also Folker Reichert, *Gelehrtes Leben: Karl Hampe, das Mittelalter und die Geschichte der Deutschen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 175: “Vielmehr begegneten sich George und Weber mit wechselseitigem Respekt, und zeitweilig gaben die Kontakte zum George-Kreis dem Kreis um Max Weber das Gepräge.”

¹⁹ Thomas Karlauf, *Stefan George: Die Entdeckung des Charisma* (Munich: Blessing, 2007), 414–50. In his intellectual biography of Max Weber, Joachim Radkau argues, similarly, that George — rather than, say, Gladstone — served as Weber’s model of the charismatic leader. See Joachim Radkau, *Max Weber: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), xv, 295, 394. On Weber and George, see also the perceptive comments in Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen*, 311–57.

²⁰ George revealed his dislike of Mann on various occasions: see, e.g., his letter to Ernst Glöckner of June 1921, in which he urged the recipient to break off all contact with Mann, “einem gemeinen und gefährlichen kerl [*sic*].” S. George to E. Glöckner, 12 June 1921, Stefan-George-Archiv. On George and Mann, see Hans Albert Maier, *Stefan George und Thomas Mann: Zwei Formen des dritten Humanismus in kritischem Vergleich* (Zurich: Speer-Verlag, 1947); Friedhelm Marx, “Der Heilige Stefan? Thomas Mann und Stefan George,” *George-Jahrbuch* 6 (2006/07): 80–99; and Robert Norton, *Secret Germany: Stefan George and his Circle* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2002), 621–22.

²¹ Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher 1918 bis 1921*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1979), 249.

²² Benjamin, “Über Stefan George,” 624.

²³ See Frank Schirrmacher, “Dies ist der Pfeil des Meisters: Der Staat des Dichters Stefan George, der Verrat und der ästhetische Fundamentalismus. Aus Anlaß der Studie von Stefan Breuer,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 265 (14 November 1995), L1.

²⁴ See Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen*, 328–29: “Eindrucksvoll waren Zahl und Namen der George-Schüler, die geisteswissenschaftliche Professuren an deutschen Hochschulen erhielten: dabei unterstützt von Kulturpolitikern wie C. H. Becker, der Gundolf 1920, wenn auch vergeblich, nach Berlin holen wollte, der sich für die Berliner Berufung Kurt Hildebrandts einsetzte und Friedrich Wolters gern als Mitarbeiter in seinem Ministerium gesehen hätte.”

²⁵ Ulrich Raulff, *Kreis ohne Meister — Stefan Georges Nachleben* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2009), 356–57:

Um 1960 gab es so gut wie keine bedeutende kulturpolitische Einrichtung in der Bundesrepublik, die Becker nicht beraten, keinen kulturpolitisch wichtigen Beirat, dem er nicht angehört hätte; das reichte vom Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung, dessen Direktoren Adorno und Horkheimer er sich eng verbunden fühlte, über den Beirat des Münchener Instituts für Zeitgeschichte und den Beirat für innere Führung der Bundeswehr bis zum Kulturbeirat des Auswärtigen Amtes. Becker nutzte diese Gremien und die sich daraus ergebenden Kontakte im Sinn einer Politik durch Netzwerke: eine Struktur der Feinsteuerung, unsichtbar und machtvoll. Intuitiv wusste der Sohn des Ministers, dass sich in solchen Netzen oder Beziehungssystemen so etwas wie das eigentliche Leben der Gesellschaften abspielte.

That George’s pedagogical ideals inspired Becker is evidenced in Hellmut Becker, “Die art wie ihr bewahrt ist ganz verfall’: Stefan George und die Bildung” (*Castrum Peregrini* 184–85 [1985]: 67–75).

²⁶ Drawing on Plato, George and his followers believed in the inextricable union of *eros* and *paideia*. According to Thomas Karlauf, “pädagogischer Eros” constituted the structuring principle of the George Circle: see, e.g., Karlauf, *Stefan George*, 403–4.

²⁷ See, e.g., Matthias Bartsch et al., “Familienbande,” *Der Spiegel* 13 (2010): 34–38; and Micha Brumlik, “Von Athen in den Odenwald,” *Die Tageszeitung* (15 March 2010). Because of the strong homoerotic dimension of George’s pedagogical ideas, he was repeatedly associated last year with the sex abuse scandal at the Odenwaldschule. On 5 April 2010, the headline of an interview in the arts section of Germany’s leading highbrow daily read: “Der Übervater der Reformpädagogik: Päderastie aus dem Geist Stefan Georges?,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (5 April 2010). For a spirited defence against these charges, see Christophe Fricker, “Stefan George war anders,” *Die Welt* (3 April 2010).

²⁸ See Gottfried Benn, *Briefe an einen Verleger. Max Niedermayer zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. M. V. Schlüter (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1965), 45, where the label “Ausstrahlungsphänomen” is attached to Nietzsche. Benn’s deep admiration for George and his appreciation of George’s far-reaching impact on German culture are evident in his notorious (if undelivered) “Rede auf Stefan George” of 1934, in which he says of George’s “Wille zur Form,” his “ästhetische[r] Wille . . ., der im Kunstwerk eine Welt aufrichtet und eine überwindet” that it was “ungeheuer allgemein, produktiv und pädagogisch”: Gottfried Benn, “Rede auf Stefan

George” [1934], in Gottfried Benn, *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgarter Ausgabe), ed. Gerhard Schuster (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986–2003), vol. 4 (*Prosa 2*), 109.

²⁹ For George’s praise of Italy in these early collections, see Elisabeth Gundolf, “Stefan George und der Nationalsozialismus,” in *Stefan George: Zwei Vorträge* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1965), 52–76, especially 60–3; Bernhard Böschstein, “Stefan George und Italien,” *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* (1986): 317–33; and Emmy Rosenfeld, *L’Italia nella poesia di Stefan George* (Milan: Malfasi, 1948).

³⁰ See Walter Bussmann, *Treitschke: Sein Welt- und Geschichtsbild*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt, 1981).

³¹ In the eyes of nineteenth-century German nationalists, Hermann’s victory over the Roman military commander Varus in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest (AD 9) prevented the “Latinization” of Central Europe and marked the beginning of German history.

³² Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1927), 77. In his radio lecture “Deutsches Papsttum” (written 1933, broadcast 1935), Kantorowicz again invoked Bamberg as a symbol of a classically restrained, “apolonisch” Germany: E. Kantorowicz, “Deutsches Papsttum,” *Castrum Peregrini 7* (1953): 7–24; here, 9. Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, who entered the Circle in May 1923, apparently bore a close physical resemblance to the statue in Bamberg and the members of the Circle would jokingly refer to him as “der Bamberger Reiter”: see Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *Secret Germany: Claus von Stauffenberg and the Mystical Crusade against Hitler* (London: J. Cape, 1994), 119. The Circle also associated the Stauffenberg brothers with the Hohenstaufen dynasty of the Middle Ages. See Peter Hoffmann, *Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg und seine Brüder* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1992), 52 and 61.

³³ Stefan Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus: Stefan George und der deutsche Antimodernismus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 73–77, notes that George, unlike most of his disciples, condemned the First World War from the start and saw nothing regenerative or redemptive in it. This is confirmed by Edgar Salin, *Um Stefan George: Erinnerung und Zeugnis*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper vormals Georg Bondi, 1954), 260; see also Friedrich Wolters, *Stefan George und die Blätter für die Kunst: Deutsche Geistesgeschichte seit 1890* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1930), 439–40.

³⁴ Edgar Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 143–44.

³⁵ See Friedrich Wolters, *Vier Reden über das Vaterland* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1927); Friedrich Wolters and Walter Elze, *Stimmen des Rheins: ein Lesebuch für die Deutschen* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1923); and Friedrich Wolters, *Die Bedingungen des Versailler Vertrags und ihre Begründung* (Kiel: Max Tandler, 1929). Wolters’s politics and his increasingly dominant position in the Circle are discussed by Carola Groppe, *Die Macht der Bildung: Das deutsche Bürgertum und der George-Kreis 1890–1933* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997), 213–89. See also Claude David, *Stefan George: Son œuvre poétique* (Lyons: IAC, 1952), 361–63; and Martin A. Siemoneit,

Politische Interpretationen von Stefan Georges Dichtung (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), 23–40.

³⁶ For George's critical remarks about Wolters's participation at a Schlageter celebration, see Berthold Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George 1902–1931* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1967), 72. On their relationship see Michael Philipp, "Einleitung," in Stefan George and Friedrich Wolters, *Briefwechsel 1904–1930*, ed. M. Philipp (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini Presse, 1998), 1–61.

³⁷ Michael Petrow, *Der Dichter als Führer? Zur Wirkung Stefan Georges im "Dritten Reich"* (Marburg: Tectum, 1995), 1, as well as Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 145–46, contend that Wolters's opinions did not reflect George's. But Vallentin reports that in April 1931, George expressed his admiration for Wolters's development in the 1920s, and Kurt Hildebrandt recalls that George and Wolters were united in their nationalist attitude since the breakdown of 1918. See Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 136; Kurt Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George und seinen Kreis* (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1965), 119n15.

³⁸ Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 264.

³⁹ *GA*, 9:33, 38, 39, 114: ". . . dass einst/Des erdteils herz die welt erretten soll." See Wolters, *Stefan George*, 440–43.

⁴⁰ See David, *Stefan George*, 362. George was born in Büdesheim near Mainz, spent much of his childhood and youth in Bingen, and later frequently stayed in Heidelberg.

⁴¹ Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 262: "Diese Franzosen müssen ausgerottet werden." To Edith Landmann he remarked in 1926: "Wenn einer einmal die Franzosen so sähe, wie ich sie sehe, dann ging's ihnen schlecht." When Landmann reminded him of his earlier Francophilia, George replied: "Das war damals. Heut, nachdem sie [the French] sich so betragen haben, müssen sie's zurückkriegen": Edith Landmann, *Gespräche mit Stefan George* (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper vormals Georg Bondi, 1963), 150; also 89, 92, 95, 193. See also Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 166–67; and Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 138. In an unpublished poem of 1927/8, George bewailed the predicament of the German Volk, surrounded by envious neighbours eager "uns ein weitres stuck / Auszuhaun aus unsrem fleisch": quoted in Klaus Landfried, *Stefan George: Politik des Unpolitischen* (Heidelberg: Lothar Stiehm, 1975), 241.

⁴² For George's changed view of Italy, see Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 87; and E. Landmann, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 98, 107. Percy Gothein relates how George spoke out strongly against a *Bildungsreise* to Italy which Gothein wanted to undertake after the war: Percy Gothein, "Letzte Universitätsjahre/Der Tod des Vaters: Aus einem Erinnerungsbuch," *Castrum Peregrini* 26 (1956): 7–32; here, 18.

⁴³ E. Landmann, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 178, 182. For George's anti-Catholicism, see also 100, 108, 196.

⁴⁴ Hildebrandt, citing George: "Ein schlechter Kaiser ist besser als gar kein Kaiser!" For George's changed view of Prussianness, see his statement: "Von einem Haß gegen Preußentum und Bismarck ist seit dem ersten Weltkrieg nichts zu spüren:

wesentlich ist der Wille zum nationalen Halt. . . . Ablehnung der Erfüllungspolitik, ja selbst Bereitschaft zum Kriege.” *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 228.

⁴⁵ Kurt Hildebrandt, *Norm und Entartung des Menschen* (Dresden: Sibyllen-Verlag, 1920). The book was published without the signet of the Circle — but with the explicit approval of George and Wolters. See Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 113–14n9. That Hildebrandt was not the only proponent of eugenic ideas in the Circle is evidenced by the programmatic “Einleitung” to the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* 3 (1912): iii–viii; here, v, where Wolters and Gundolf condemn the state’s protection of “die Schwachen, die Krüppel” and call for pro-active measures against “Artverschlechterung.” These passages were reprinted, with George’s assent, in Wolters, *Stefan George*, 437.

⁴⁶ See Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 248; and Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 115, 124n20.

⁴⁷ This is confirmed by Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 248.

⁴⁸ Wolters, “Der Rhein unser Schicksal,” in *Vier Reden*, 139.

⁴⁹ Wolters, *Stefan George*, 440.

⁵⁰ He was disappointed, however, by Austria’s failure to “Germanize” Bohemia and complained: “Heute würde nun an allen Enden versucht, vom Deutschtum abzubrockeln. Von überall kröchen die fremden Völker hinein”: Vallentin, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 64, citing George (8 February, 1922).

⁵¹ *GA*, 9:33. See Landfried, *Stefan George*, 219–21.

⁵² “Nur wenn die gelben Affen kommen,” George remarked to Karl Wolfskehl during the First World War, “dann nehme ich selbst die Flinte” (Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 260).

⁵³ See Ernst Morwitz, *Kommentar zu dem Werk Stefan Georges* (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper vormals Georg Bondi, 1960), 419.

⁵⁴ *GA*, 9:30. This, at least, is Morwitz’s interpretation of the word: Morwitz, *Kommentar*, 419–20; but cf. Katherina and Momme Mommsen, “‘Ihr kennt Eure Bibel nicht!’ Bibel- und Horaz-Anklänge in Stefan Georges Gedicht ‘Der Krieg,’” *Castrum Peregrini* 34, no. 170 (1985): 42–69.

⁵⁵ See Hans Liebeschütz, “Ernst Kantorowicz and the George Kreis,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 9 (1964): 345–47; here, 346; and Ralph Giesey, “Ernst H. Kantorowicz: Scholarly Triumphs and Academic Travails in Weimar Germany and the United States,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 30 (1985): 191–202; here, 193.

⁵⁶ E. Gundolf, “Stefan George und der Nationalsozialismus,” 69, calculated that almost half of the thirty-five German contributors to the *Blätter für die Kunst* were Jewish or of Jewish background. See Yakov Malkiel, “Ernst Kantorowicz,” in *On Four Modern Humanists: Hofmannsthal, Gundolf, Curtius, Kantorowicz*, ed. Arthur R. Evans, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 178.

⁵⁷ Salin, *Um Stefan George*, 244, 249, citing George: “der wirklich von meiner Rasse ist.”

⁵⁸ Ernst Robert Curtius, *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur*, 2nd ed. (Bern: Francke, 1954), 153: “Ich erlaube nie, daß sie in meiner Gesellschaft . . . in der Überzahl sind.” In a similar vein, George referred to Vallentin as “der

Fremdstämmige” and claimed that Jews lacked “die Seele eines Volkes.” They had been chosen by God as “Sündenböcke”: E. Landmann, *Gespräche mit Stefan George*, 109, 87, 106.

⁵⁹ Kurt Hildebrandt to Arvid Brodersen, 7 January 1935, quoted in Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und seine Bruder*, 502n53: “Daß die Juden im politischen Staat und im geistigen zersetzend sind, war St. G.’s Lehre schon in der Kriegszeit. . . . Mit der Haltung der Juden war er in zunehmendem Maasse [*sic*] unzufrieden.”

⁶⁰ These younger members played a more and more central role in the Circle in the mid-1920s. According to Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und seine Brüder*, 76–77, between 1925 and 1930 the *völkisch*-oriented disciples Kommerell and Anton were closest to George, who lost interest during this time in his older Jewish friends. See Groppe, *Macht der Bildung*, 654–57.

⁶¹ See Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und seine Bruder*, 501–2.

⁶² Max Kommerell to Johann Anton, 24 December 1930, quoted in Hoffmann, *Stauffenberg und seine Bruder*, 493.

⁶³ Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 120.

⁶⁴ These included Max Kommerell, Johann and Wolfgang Anton, Walter Elze, and Rudolf Fahrner. See Groppe, *Macht der Bildung*, 273–76.

⁶⁵ Wolters’s antisemitism is evident in his ironic reference to the “Idealtypus des Ullstein-Deutschen.” See Wolters, *Stefan George*, 521. The Jewish Ullstein family owned one of the biggest publishing houses of Europe and ran some of the leading liberal newspapers in Germany before 1933. Ernst Kantorowicz made a similarly acerbic remark about the cosmopolitanism of “Ullstein-Deutschland” in his 1930 speech at Halle. See Ernst Kantorowicz, “Grenzen, Möglichkeiten und Aufgaben der Darstellung mittelalterlicher Geschichte,” ed. Eckhart Grünewald, *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 1 (1994):104–25; here, 121.

⁶⁶ *GA*, 9:57, 34.

⁶⁷ Berthold Vallentin, *Napoleon* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1923); Friedrich Gundolf, *Caesar: Geschichte seines Ruhms* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1924).

⁶⁸ After the war, George remarked to Hildebrandt that his only hope was “die europäische Wiedergeburt aus deutschem Geiste”: Hildebrandt, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, 105. See also 125, 164, 165; Landfried, *Stefan George*, 219–21.

⁶⁹ See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Hella Tiedeman-Bartels, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 259.

⁷⁰ Norton, *Secret Germany*, xvi.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Salin, *Um Stefan George*, and Landfried, *Stefan George*. One of the standard works on the history of German literature, the *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte*, describes George as an unpolitical poet. See Wolfgang Beutin, ed., *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001), 328.

⁷² It was Friedrich Wolters who first used the label “staat” to describe the Circle and its structures, obviously alluding to Plato’s *Republic* which in the German translation is called *Der Staat*: see Norton, *Secret Germany*, 349.

⁷³ Karlauf, *Stefan George*, 336.

⁷⁴ Karlauf, *Stefan George*, 27, similarly observes that the seventh volume of the *Blätter* in 1904 was a turning point in this development, with the earlier volumes calling for the renewal of art in Germany and later ones for the formation of the Circle as a group around George as its lodestar.

⁷⁵ See Breuer, *Ästhetischer Fundamentalismus*, especially 1–9.

⁷⁶ See Max Weber's famous speech on "The Profession and Vocation of Politics," in Max Weber, *Political Writings*, ed. Peter Lassman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 309–69.

⁷⁷ Karlauf, *Stefan George*, 411–12.

⁷⁸ Frank Weber, *Die Bedeutung Nietzsches für Stefan George und seinen Kreis* (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1989), 203.

⁷⁹ It is striking that Hofmannsthal plays a crucial role for both Norton and Karlauf in their otherwise divergent understandings of the Circle's political ambitions.

⁸⁰ Sebastian Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler* (Munich: Kindler, 1978), 26.

I: Members and Moers

I: The George Circle: From *Künstlergesellschaft* to *Lebensgemeinschaft*

Ute Oelmann

IN NOVEMBER 1903, an announcement on the front page of the *Verzeichnis der Erscheinungen der Blätter für die Kunst*, printed in bicolor on beige laid paper, introduced readers to a “Gesellschaft der Blätter für die Kunst.”¹ In fact, this “Gesellschaft” had already been in existence for almost twelve years. It was introduced here retrospectively, in order to correct a certain image it had recently acquired in the public eye. The “Gesellschaft der Blätter für die Kunst,” the authors of the announcement stressed, was a loose association “künstlerischer und ästhetischer menschen” rather than a secret society (“geheime[r] bund”), as the public seemed to believe. It was not held together by statutes or laws; its “Mitglieder,” as they were termed elsewhere,² had been nominated or had joined by natural affiliation. They were all firmly opposed to the Naturalist movement in German literature and saw themselves as the spearhead of a cultural-intellectual counter-revolution aimed at a new form of art and spirituality (*Geistigkeit*).

The announcement of the *Gesellschaft* in the *Blätter für die Kunst* of 1903, as will be argued below, is a document that captures a crucial moment of transition in the history of the George Circle. What began as a mere union (*Zusammenschluss*) of artists with limited goals turned into a tightly knit circle, a movement (*Bewegung*) that soon developed into an esoteric “Kult- und Lebensgemeinschaft,” and, finally, a “staat.” The label *George-Kreis* denotes all of those formations. The goal of my essay is to trace the Circle’s changing forms and functions, the shifting constellations and affiliations of its coterie of friends, and to locate these transformations within the context of fin-de-siècle German culture — in particular, the *Lebensreform* movement. In order to document these changes and to elucidate their significance, I shall be looking mainly at the “Einleitungen” and the so-called “Merksprüche” from the *Blätter für die Kunst*, alongside several of Stefan George’s poems.

Although the announcement in the 1903 edition of the *Verzeichnis* listed Stefan George, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Ludwig von Hofmann,