

Project Group B8

Aesthetic Heroism: Concepts of Heroization in Stefan George's Work and Circle

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The aim of this project group was to investigate the genesis and variety of, and changes in, concepts of heroization put forth by Stefan George and his circle, who were exemplary for classical modernism, from 1900 to 1933 (the year of George's death). The project group was divided into two subprojects, each of which focused on a theme related to the question of how George and his circle were able to promote an aesthetic heroism without heroic deeds. This antinomy of concepts of heroization in George's circle was discussed by analyzing the tension between word and deed that runs like a leitmotif through the various genres of the group's works (poetry, biographies, and essays). In the first subproject of this study, the aesthetic conception of the heroic in George's poetry was analyzed, while the second subproject focused on the strategies of heroization used by members of George's circle in their biographies of important figures, such as Caesar, Goethe, Napoleon and Nietzsche.

While previous research referred to the literary strategies of heroization in George's poetry and the circle's biographies, this lacked systematic study. Recent cultural studies researchers focusing on George and his circle have been interested more in the history of the reception of their works and on sociological aspects¹ than in a literary analysis of their works. Nevertheless, the project group was able to rely on several secondary works as sources, especially the so-called "George Handbook" published in 2012,² as well as several monographs that were thematically relevant for our first³ and second⁴ subprojects.

¹ Raulff, U. 2009: *Kreis ohne Meister. Stefan Georges Nachleben*, München; Karlauf, T. 2007: *Stefan George. Die Entdeckung des Charisma. Biographie*, München; Kolk, R. 1998: *Literarische Gruppenbildung. Am Beispiel des George-Kreises 1890–1945* (Communicatio 17), Tübingen; Groppe, C. 1997: *Die Macht der Bildung. Das deutsche Bildungsbürgertum und der George-Kreis 1890–1933*, Köln.

² Aurnhammer, A. / Braungart, W. / Breuer, St. / Oelmann, U. 2012 [2. Aufl. 2015], *Stefan George und sein Kreis. Ein Handbuch*, 3 Bde, Berlin.

³ Eschenbach, G. 2011: *Imitatio im George-Kreis* (Quellen und Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte 63), Berlin; Wacker, G. 2013: *Poetik des Prophetischen. Zum visionären Kunstverständnis in der Klassischen Moderne* (Studien zur deutschen Literatur 201), Berlin.

⁴ Scheuer, H. 1979: *Biographie als Mythographie – Der George-Kreis*, in: ders. (Hrsg.), *Biographie. Studien zur Funktion und zum Wandel einer literarischen Gattung vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 121–151; Scheuer, H. 2001: „Dichter und Helden“ – *Zur Biographik des George-Kreises*, in: W. Braungart [u.a.] (Hrsg.), *Stefan George. Werk und Wirkung seit dem ‚Siebenten Ring‘*, Tübingen, 300–314; Osterkamp, E. 1992: *Das Eigene im Fremden. Georges Maximin-Erlebnis in seiner Bedeutung für die Konzeption der ‚Werke der Wissenschaft aus dem Kreise der Blätter für die Kunst‘*, in: E. Iwasaki (Hrsg.), *Begegnung mit dem ‚Fremden‘. Grenzen – Traditionen – Vergleiche. Akten des VIII. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses Tokyo 1990*, Bd. 10, München, 394–400; Osterkamp, E. 1993: *Friedrich Gundolf zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft. Zur Problematik eines Germanisten aus dem George-Kreis*, in: C. König / E. Lämmert (Hrsg.), *Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 1910 bis 1925*, Frankfurt a.M., S. 177–198; Arrighetti, A.-M. 2008: *Mensch und Werk in kritischen Publikationen des George-Kreises. Zu Friedrich Gundolfs Goethe und zu Ernst Bertrams Nietzsche – Versuch einer Mythologie* (Frankfurter Beiträge zur Germanistik 48), Heidelberg; Rossi, F. 2011a: *Die ‚Gestalt‘ des Erkennens. Verfahren der Wissenskonstitution und der Wissenschaftskritik im George-Kreis*, in: *Scientia Poetica. Jahrbuch für Geschichte der Literatur und der Wissenschaften* 15, 154–187; Rossi, F. 2011b: *Gesamterkennen. Zur Wissenschaftskritik und Gestalttheorie im George-Kreis* (Epistemata. Würzburger Wissenschaftliche Schriften, Reihe Literaturwissenschaft 730), Würzburg.

In both subprojects, a philological approach to the selected texts was used that was also based on cultural history. The first subproject combined a close reading of the texts with a historical contextualization thereof in order not only to outline, but also to relativize the many different heroization strategies in George's poetry. Focus was placed on George's complex poem *Der Krieg* (The War) from 1917, in which he takes a stand against the current glorification of war and hails a prospective new and heroic elite in the post-war era. The strategies of heroization used in studies about George's *Zeitgedichte*, the first cycle of *Der Siebente Ring* (1907), and the third book of *Stern des Bundes* (1914) were also analyzed. The group worked with intertextual references and comparisons with contemporary homages to identify the interplay between stigmatizing and assigning charismatic qualities as a defining strategy used by George to create a canon of role models in the mode of prophetic rhetoric. The autofictional character of the poetic cycle lends this canon additional authority. A central factor in *Stern des Bundes* is "group charisma."⁵ While the heroic models are named in the new admiration of heroes in *Zeitgedichten*, the saviors and leaders in *Stern des Bundes* are left anonymous, or *antonomasia* is used to obscure their identities, thereby leaving them obvious only to the esoteric "flock."

The second subproject analyzed the paradigms of the biographies written by George's circle from a narratological approach. The main focus was therefore on narrative tone, narrative type, language, style, the perspective and structure of biographical materials, the way the narrator addresses the reader, and intertextual references. The corpus of texts included the following works: Friedrich Gundolf's *Goethe* (1916) and *Caesar. Geschichte seines Ruhms* (1924), Ernst Bertram's *Nietzsche. Versuch einer Mythologie* (1918), Berthold Vallentin's *Napoleon* (1923), and Wolfram von den Steinen's *Franziskus und Dominikus* (1926) and *Bernhard von Clairvaux* (1926). A close reading of these texts demonstrated how George's circle used a genealogical and holistic approach as a way of constructing these prominent personalities as heroes, while bathing in the wake of their admiration. Specific characteristics of the "Gestalt" monographies were also defined with the help of an intertextual comparison with contemporary biographies. The biographies written by George's circle systematically transcend the common division between heroes of thought and heroes of action – and between heroes and saints – in favor of a comprehensive and timeless heroic habitus in which the individual aspects of the biographical figure are generalized and the "hero-maker" becomes a stakeholder in his (or her) heroism. In addition to an analysis of the biographies, an approach borrowed from the history of ideas was used to analyze the conceptions of heroization in the circle's programmatic writings. The theoretical texts, especially those by Friedrich Wolters and Friedrich Gundolf published in the *Jahrbüchern für die geistige Bewegung*, promoted a concept of the hero that was critical of the contemporary situation. Despite the latent differences and appropriations of different traditions (Friedrich Nietzsche, Thomas Carlyle, Gustave Le Bon, and Max Weber), a comparative analysis revealed an important similarity: All of the biographies are oriented toward the model of heroism presented by Stefan George in the "Vorrede" (Preface) of his commemorative book *Maximin*.

The research conducted by the two subprojects was consolidated and presented in a lecture by the project leader and assistant at the SFB conference "*Imitatio heroica*. Heldenangleichung im Bildnes" (*Imitatio heroica*. Hero Likeness in Imagery from Antique to the End of the 18th

⁵ Elias, N. 2014: Gruppencharisma und Gruppenschande. Mit einer biographischen Skizze von Hermann Korte, hg. v. E. Jentges (Aus dem Archiv 7), Marbach.

Century) (2014) and published in the 2015 yearbook of the German Schiller Society (Aurnhammer / Bolay 2015a). In the lecture and publication, Erwin Panofsky's three levels of understanding were applied to Stefan George's heroic portraits to compare the "target figure" to the original heroic figure as a way of bringing poet and "perpetrator" closer together. The traditional line between word and deed was thus transcended through a new concept of the hero.

The results of both subprojects overwhelmingly demonstrated that heroization and heroism in George's circle underwent a gradual shift from aesthetic absolutism to an ethical rigor, culminating in the hagiographic cult of Maximin. The circle especially distinguished itself from Wilhelmian heroic patterns by criticizing how these became misconstrued and flat in the bourgeois-national canon. George and his circle used an elitist concept of the heroic habitus to counteract the structurally dominant national discourse. In this discourse, heroization served to outwardly distinguish the nation's superiority over other nations, while inwardly homogenizing it behind the idea of a shared heroism. An "expectation of the heroic" proclaims the "coming hero," without the heroic requiring further definition. This let the circle form a group identity and raise its profile as a group of disciples with an affinity to heroism – or as so-called "heroes of demeanor." The heroization practices of George's circle thereby illustrate the interdependence between personal and social figuration and the reversibility of the interaction between heroization and heroism.

Throughout the project's funding period, the project leader and assistant kept in constant contact with leading Stefan Georg researchers. The project leader analyzed the poem cycles *Zeitgedichte* and *Stern des Bundes: III Buch*, both of which are very important for the study of the heroic, in his contribution to the book *Stefan George: Dichter und Prophet* (Egyptien 2016). He also presented his research at international conferences in Vienna and Rome. The assistant presented her PhD thesis at several conferences and colloquia, also during research stays in other German cities and abroad (Mannheim, Bielefeld, and the University of London as a Sylvia Naish Postgraduate Scholarship recipient). Both subprojects provided innovative and insightful approaches to the specific model of heroism found in the work of George and his circle, thereby remedying this previous lack in research into George's works. The intertextual study *Imitatio im George-Kreis* by G. Eschenbach (2011) and the sociological work *Poetik des Prophetischen* by G. Wacker (2013) offered key insights that were helpful for the first subproject. The studies included in the book *Ästhetischen Heroismus*⁶ edited by N. Immer and M. van Marwyck, which share a similar methodology and similar content and which were reviewed by the project group's assistant in the SFB's e-journal, were also a valuable resource, as was the study *Der inszenierte Held*⁷ by N. Immer. The George expert and researcher F. Rossi, with whom the group stayed in close contact, made himself available for discussions and held a workshop that focused on a comparative perspective of George's translations of Dante. He was also extremely helpful for the second subproject.

Furthermore, Achim Aurnhammer taught the master's seminar "George and His Circle" in the winter semester of 2013/2014, in which students learned about the central aspects that were being studied in the project group. As part of this seminar, assistant Bolay taught three lessons on the biographies written by George's circle. For this research seminar, Hiroshi Matsuo (a visiting scholar from Japan) wrote a comprehensive study called "Arthur Schnitzler and

⁶ Immer, N. / van Marwyck, M. 2013: *Ästhetischer Heroismus. Konzeptionelle und figurative Paradigmen des Helden* (Edition Kulturwissenschaft 22), Bielefeld.

⁷ Immer, N. 2008: *Der inszenierte Held. Schillers dramenpoetische Anthropologie* (Jenaer germanistische Forschungen N.F. 26), Heidelberg.

Friedrich Gundolf" and Jiang Wenja (a visiting scholar from SISU Shanghai in 2014) wrote a prize-winning master's thesis.

Publications by the Project Group

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- Aurnhammer, A. 2017: Zeitgedichte, in: J. Egyptien (Hrsg.), Stefan George – Werkkommentar, Berlin, S. 335–355.
- Aurnhammer, A. 2016a: „Im Anfang war das Wort!“ – „Im Anfang war die Tat!“ Wort und Tat in Stefan Georges Ideal des Heroischen, in: F. von Ammon / C. Rémi / G. Stiening (Hrsg.), Literatur und praktische Vernunft, Berlin, S. 537–554.
- Aurnhammer, A. 2016b: Georg Büchner: „Der Helden-Tod der vierhundert Pforzheimer“ (1829), in: A. Aurnhammer / U. Bröckling (Hrsg.), Vom Weihegefäß zur Drohne. Kulturen des Heroischen und ihre Objekte (Helden – Heroisierungen – Heroismen 4), Würzburg, S. 159–174.
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- Bolay, A.-C. / Schlüter, A. (Red.) 2015b: helden. heroes. héros. E-Journal zu Kulturen des Heroischen 3.1: Faszinosum Antiheld, DOI: 10.6094/helden.heroes.heros/2015/01/01.