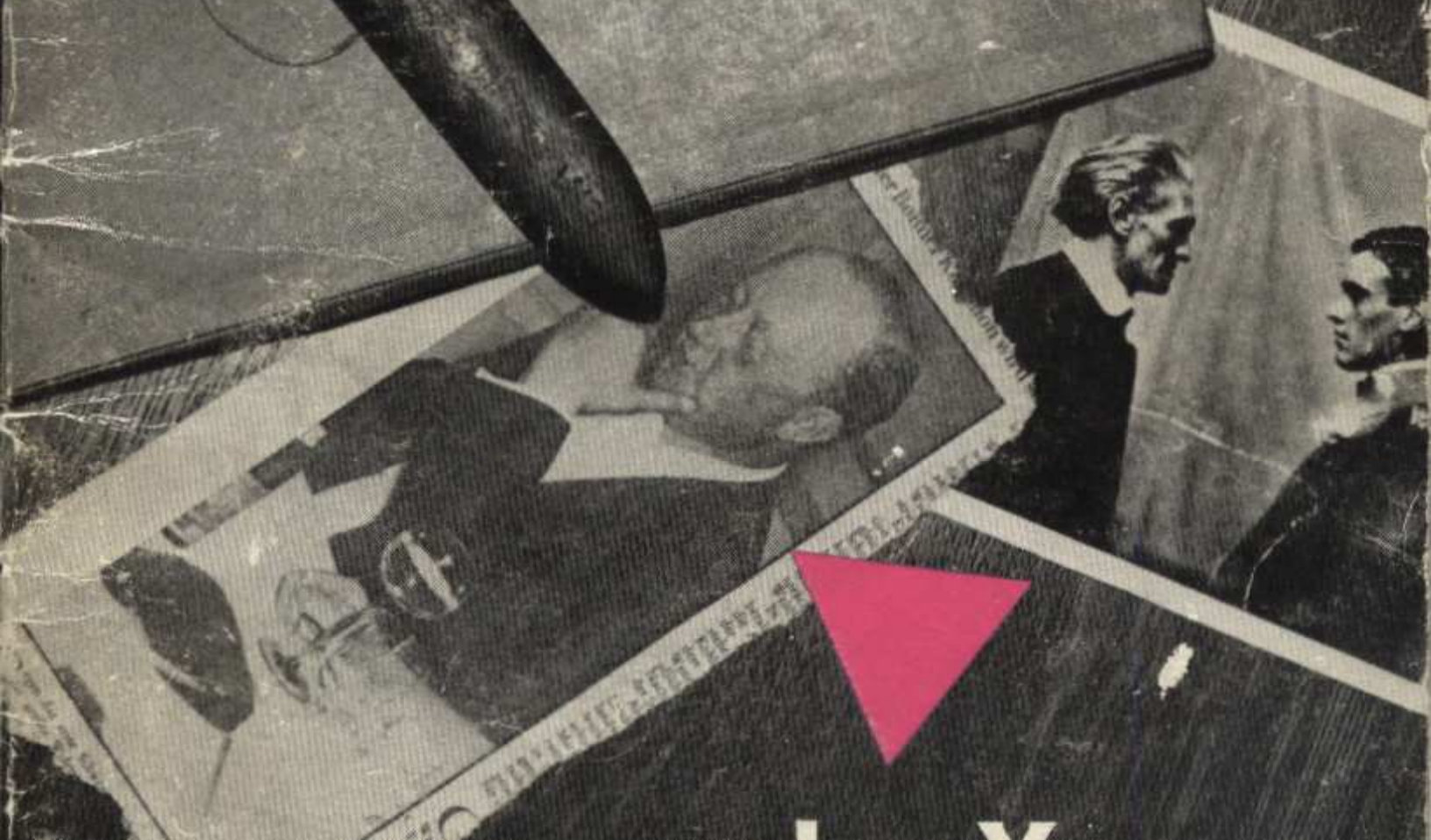
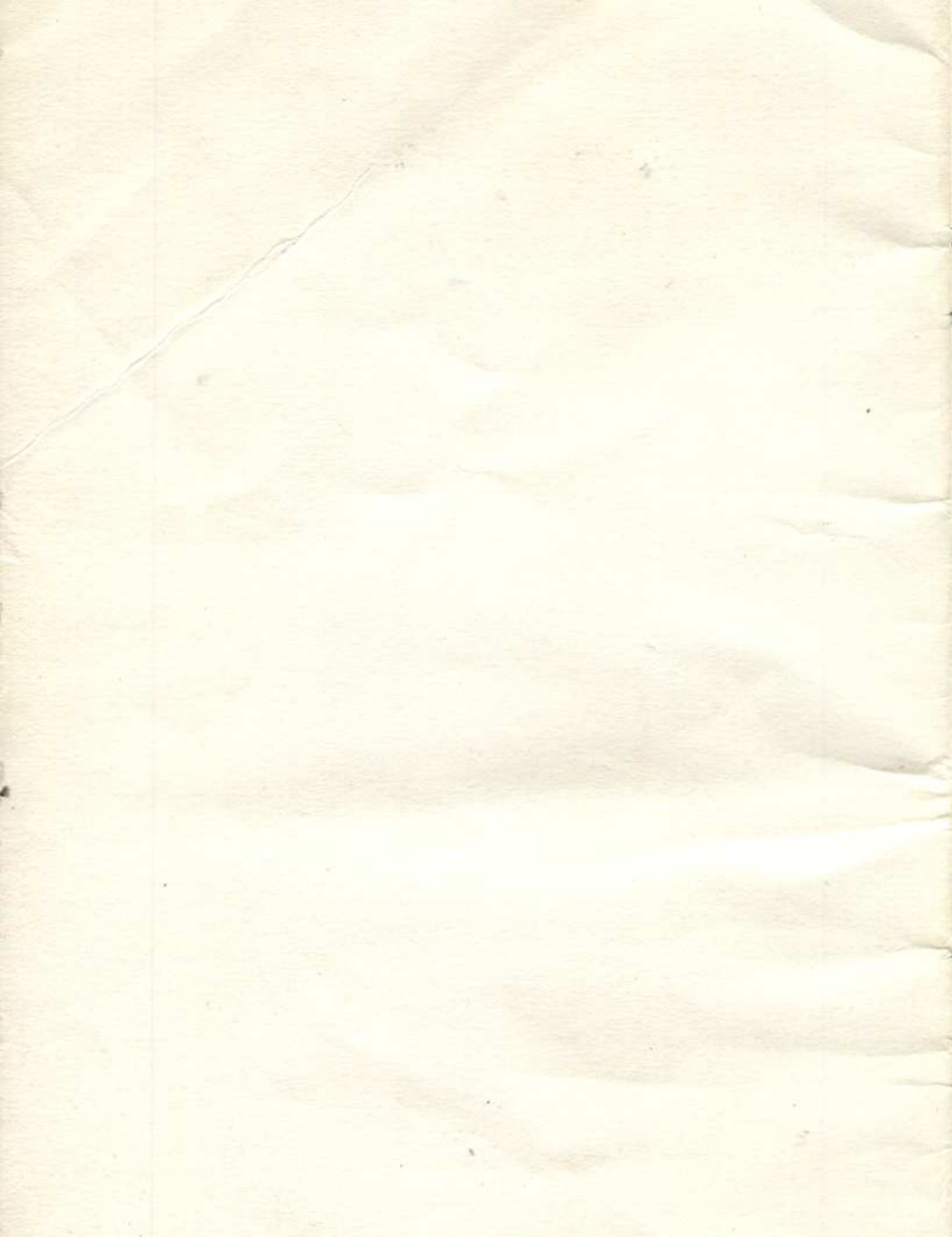


Gay Resistance





Gay Resistance

HOMOSEXUALS IN THE ANTI-NAZI UNDERGROUND

by

Ian Young

Stubblejumper Press, 1985

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INTRODUCTION

For Wulf

London, 18th May 1884

My dear Mr. Darwin
I have just received your letter of the 14th
and am glad to hear that you are
interested in the subject of the
evolution of the human mind.

Yours truly
W. G. S. 701

Dear Mr. Darwin

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INTRODUCTION

Only in very recent years have historians begun to research the fate of homosexuals in Nazi-ruled Europe. Holocaust historian Richard Plant wrote, in a 1977 article in *Christopher Street* magazine, "Over the last few years enough evidence has been accumulated to prove that the Third Reich exterminated countless gays throughout Europe. Numerous documents have finally come to light proving that many gays, arrested and indicted, but without a trial, were put into concentration camps and forced to wear a pink triangle (the homosexual equivalent of the Jews' yellow star) on shirt sleeves and pants; within the camps gays were often beaten, tortured, or killed. The persecution started around 1935, and in many ways ran parallel to that of the Jews."

For the most part, the draconian anti-homosexual policies of the Third Reich have been passed over as an embarrassment or a triviality by most historians of the period. Nor were homosexual victims of Naziism given any official recognition. Very few holocaust memorials or ceremonials have mentioned homosexuals along with other victimised groups such as Jews and Gypsies. The post-war German government which offered some monetary payment to former concentration camp inmates excluded homosexuals from such "restitution" as they were still officially criminals and their incarceration under the Nazi government was considered to have been fully justified.

Only now, with recent or forthcoming English translations of a number of important German works (by Heinz Heger, Prof. Rudiger Lautmann and others) and with the international success of Martin Sherman's play *Bent* is the anti-homosexual nature of the Nazi holocaust being detailed for English language readers.

But there is another aspect of "gay history" that has been equally, if perhaps more excusably, overlooked: the history of homosexual resistance, or, more accurately, of homosexuals in the anti-Nazi Resistance movement. The monograph which follows is a brief note toward that history.

I would like to thank my friend Richard Plant for his translation of material on the Dutch homosexual movement, and for his encouragement.

On the morning of July 20, 1944, a disabled, 37-year old colonel of the German army, Count Claus von Stauffenberg, carried a briefcase containing a bomb into Adolf Hitler's East Prussian headquarters at Wolfsschanze, and placed it under the conference table, close to where the dictator stood. A few minutes later, after Stauffenberg had left, the bomb exploded.

A group of conspirators, led by Stauffenberg, had intended to assassinate Hitler and engineer a coup d'état that would take Germany out of the hands of the Nazis and install a new government that would sue for peace. As is well known, the briefcase and its bomb were moved by an aide and placed behind a thick, reinforced pillar that supported the table. Hitler was only slightly wounded, the coup failed, and its leaders were executed. It was over a year later that the war ended with the defeat of Germany and Hitler's suicide in the ruins of Berlin.

The story of the failed attempt on the Fuehrer's life is a fairly familiar one, but Stauffenberg himself, his character, background and motivation are little known except to a handful of scholars and to devotees of that period of German history. In fact, the crucial, motivating spirit behind Stauffenberg's mission was a man who had died a decade earlier before—the homosexual poet Stefan George (pronounced *Gay-or-guh*).

Born in July, 1868, Stefan George wrote his formal, highly-polished poems for a small circle of initiates, unconcerned with the wider public which he felt would not understand them. A widely-cultured man who read and translated from English, French, Spanish and Italian, George lived for years in his parents' home at Bingen; later he stayed in Berlin, Munich and Heidelberg, usually in a simply furnished single room in which he received his disciples.

He formed around himself a "Circle" of young men which came to be known as the "George Kreis" and has been compared to the group of young students around Socrates. At first, the group was simply the natural gathering of enthusiasts that often forms around a forceful personality, but after a while, the poet's imperious, even awe-inspiring presence changed it into a more structured, self-conscious "school".

The Circle concerned itself with the study of poetry, the discussion of George's poetic and philosophical ideas, and with the issuing of a house journal, *Die Blätter für die Kunst*, which was printed on an obscure press in the slums of Berlin. The young men of the group (there were no women) absorbed and shared George's conceptions of aesthetics, ethics and life. "Membership in this group," writes E.K. Bennett in his book on George, "was not easily obtained, though the Master was on the lookout for suitable candidates."

But the Circle's aim was more than simply discussion. In the eyes of its participants (there was never a formal membership) George and the Circle constituted an elite group with an artistic and social mission. George believed that an age's poetry was the key to its civilization. He stressed the ideals of formal beauty in art, and loyalty and an austere kind of heroic vitalism in life.

"George's reaction to the decay of civilization which surrounded him," wrote Bennett, "was not to put forward plans for the reformation of the world. . . but to create for himself a mode of life which in itself would be the exemplary realization of his protest against the prevailing sloth of the spirit. . . The regeneration of poetry with which he began would imperceptibly bring about the regeneration of society: the circle of young men who assembled around him would automatically, having imbibed the ideas of the Master, form a league of youth to carry these ideas out into the world and so bring about a new order of life."

George, like Nietzsche before him, was scornful of Christianity, to which he contrasted the philosophy, ethics and art of Classical Greece. In his poem "Der Teppich des Lebens", the angel who brings the message of life, after admitting Christianity's adequacy for the mass of humanity, claims a smaller, select circle for the Hellenic ideals. The Germanic, idealized classicism was the basis of George's own mystical philosophy which, though highly spiritual, dispenses with a transcendental god and places the godhead within Man himself (and Man, in George's system, is decidedly male! Woman has little place in it.) For George, the superior man brings life under his spiritual control—his values are creativity, balance, spiritual aspiration, loyalty, friendship, and the study and realization of aesthetic and ethical goals, and through

these, the restoration of civilization's greatness.

To outsiders, George seemed to rule over his group of young men like a Roman emperor over his subjects. This, various quotes from his poems ("You have lost what is noblest: race"; "God's land is destined for us, God's war breaks for us"—by which he meant his followers, not Germany), and his use of the expressions "Fuehrer" and "New Reich" long before Hitler, have caused some to claim him as a precursor of the Nazis; but this is true only in the sense that the whole of German civilization was the precursor of the Nazis. The hermetic meanings imbuing George's poems and utterances were both subtle and naive, and the Nazis easily appropriated and distorted them, as they distorted and appropriated so much for their own needs.

George's doctrine appealed not to the thugs, drifters and untalented bohemians that first rallied to the Nazi cause, but to young artists and scholars, some of considerable ability, and to sensitive and aristocratic young men, especially if they were homosexually inclined. Among the eminent men who had been George's students were the philologist Friedrich Gundolf (a brilliant Jewish professor who at one point taught Josef Goebbels), the poet Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, the writer and translator Ernst Morwitz, Norbert von Hellingrath, the literary historian Friedrich Wolters and the English composer Cyril Scott.

Yet George was decidedly anti-democratic. After the first world war, he praised Hindenburg and disparaged the German parliament. Some of his more fearsome thunderings about heroic apocalypse seem like prescriptions for draconian political measures. Yet, like Nietzsche, George was not a nationalist and disdained war and its vulgar jingoism. His relationships with several of his followers were broken because of his opposition to bellicose German chauvinism. George took a dim view of his admirers adopting points of view which he could not countenance; marriage, for example, might be construed as a breach of loyalty, and various other acts of "betrayal" resulted in expulsions from the Circle from time to time.

The rise of German anti-semitism brought about a serious conflict in the group, about half of whose members were Jewish. George, the final court of appeal in all important matters, unequivocally condemned the racism of a few of his disciples; they had to rid themselves of it, or

leave. The "new aristocracy" had no place in it for racial hierarchies.

George's mystical ideas, like Yeats', are complex and can be made fully intelligible only by close scrutiny of the poems themselves (and George's poems are particularly difficult to translate well). But his *weltanschauung* finds its focus in the figure of "Maximin", a sort of young male angel, whom George's philosophy deifies. Maximin was in reality Maximilian Kronberger, a youth whom George met in Munich a year or two before the boy died in 1904. His place, living and dead, in George's life is reminiscent of Antinous' in the life of the Emperor Hadrian. The real Maximin was a poet who by the time George met him had already written a number of poems on what Eric Bentley has described as "the favorite subject of Hölderlin and Nietzsche: the rebirth of manhood out of catastrophe, the victory of semi-divine youth."

George described Maximin's inclusion in the Circle in idealized terms:

"...When first we met Maximin in our city, he was still in his boyhood. He came toward us from under a stone arch with the unerring certainty of a young fencer, and with a look of leadership and power, softened by the mobility and vague sadness that centuries of Christian civilization have wrought in the faces of the people. In him we recognized the representative of sovereign youth, such as we had dreamed of, youth in that unbroken fulness and purity that can still move mountains and walk on dry land through the midst of the sea, youth filled to receive our heritage and to conquer new domains. We had heard too much of the wisdom that thinks to solve the final enigma, had savored too much of the motley in the rush of impressions... What we had need of was One who was moved by plain and simple things and could show them to us, as they are beheld by the eyes of the gods..."

"...Maximin lived among us for only a short time. In accordance with a covenant that he had made in early years, he was raised to another star before he became less like gods and more like men. To the colorful and diverse destiny of a splendid mortal, he preferred the calm and quiet reign of the celestials. Even his childhood had been filled with seething divinations of the Beyond, and the struggle with One Unnamed. To Him...he offered this covenant: Then let me behold you in the best of your visible creations! Give me Leda, the beloved, give me the great man, the Master! And if it is true that here every structure falls, every flame is extinguished, every flower fades, let me stand upon your summit

and then be snatched away swiftly by your eagle. . . . After these days of transport, he passed from a fevered dream to death—so quickly that we could only stare at the grave like other graves, and not believe that it contained him. . . .”

The being of Maximin came to focus the older poet's interest in the education of male youth and his recurring poetic image of the beautiful young hero. George's poems about the love relationship between himself and Maximin—the intensity and delight, and his grief over Maximin's death—are more moving, and certainly more convincing, than the poems deifying him after he had died. For Maximin became the god of George's new religion, the personification of the Nietzschean superman.

At one point, George wrote, “. . . of all the utterances of the thousands of years that are known to us, the Greek idea that the body is god—the body which is the symbol of transitoriness—was by far the most worthy of mankind, and surpasses in sublimity every other, including the Christian one.” Like a number of “Aesthetes” of the time, George and his followers employed “the Greek ideal” to give a tradition and justification to their own deviations from bourgeois standards.

Eric Bentley, in his chapter on George in *A Century of Hero-Worship*, recounts one critic's visit to George in about 1914; the poet was wearing a toga and reclining on one elbow; a table in the sparsely furnished room was covered with ivy. Among the few books on view were Shakespeare's sonnets, Plato's *Phaedrus* and Goethe's *Winckelmann* (all works with strongly homosexual associations!) “On the wall was a picture of a beautiful boy in the scanty dress of a Greek shepherd. It was Maximin.” This seems to have been George's special set-up for visitors and important occasions. Alexander von Stauffenberg, Claus' brother, recounts that the usual activities were considerably less stagey: shared meals, walks in the country (presumably not in togas) and animated discussion. Only at the poetry readings was there an air of ritual and solemnity. Sometimes, George's readings were held by candlelight (as were those of the other great modern poet of homosexuality, Cavafy).

In the Germany of the 1920's, various youth organizations devoted to comradeship and physical culture had sprung up—the Wandervogel

and Jugendbewegungen—and the homosexual literature of the time reflects their strong appeal. But George found them distasteful, seeing in them the crudities of mass organization, which he detested. Men, he felt, should be united by spiritual bonds and personal attachments, not by organizations or the state. His fears were proven well-founded when the Nazis built the Hitler Youth on the ruined foundations of the Wandervogel.

The Germany in which he and his Circle existed and in which the young Claus von Stauffenberg grew to maturity was one in which the Nazi machine was on its way to taking over the State. What was the Nazis' attitude to George?

A number of recent books and articles (listed in the accompanying bibliography) have documented the vehemence of the Nazi's attitude to homosexuality. This, combined with the Nazi hostility to any group or organization that could provide a loyalty opposed to the loyalty demanded by National Socialism, inclined the Nazis, quite logically, to fear George and his group. Some Nazis—Baldur von Schirach was one—were enthusiasts of George's poetry, but the prevailing view was one of condemnation. Hans Rossner wrote a book denouncing George for not understanding the "philosophy of race" or the "role of woman as creator". For Rossner and many other Nazis, George was a relic of the old order who gathered around him the parasites of the West—Jews. And of course, he was unyieldingly hostile to the family life so extolled by the Nazis.

The scorn was mutual. As soon as the Nazis took power in 1933, George left the country for Switzerland as a protest. He never returned. The Nazi propaganda minister Josef Goebbels, aware of the appeal of George's verses and shrewdly realizing that if George would accept a position as a kind of Nazi laureate, it would bring the Nazi regime considerable prestige, sent overtures to the poet; George made a point of communicating his refusal through Ernst Morwitz—a Jew.

For all of George's learning and sophistication, there is in many of his writings an ambiguity, a divided loyalty, between the values of civilization (which for George was basically Hellenic and cosmopolitan European civilization, rather than narrowly Christian and Germanic) and the special, darker appeal of barbaric cataclysm (an appeal felt by

many romantics, including Hitler). In a number of poems, George predicted the coming of this cataclysm, and of a new Attila the Hun who would scourge and destroy the West and its bourgeois ways and usher in a new pagan aristocracy. But when the time came, and George's prophecy began to come grimly true, George recoiled at the form the holocaust was taking. The realities of Naziism tipped the balance, and George reaffirmed his deeper commitment to civilization by denouncing the fascists, fleeing to Switzerland, and asking not to be buried in German soil that had been fouled by Naziism.

Germany, George felt, had, by accepting Hitler, cut itself off from the past that the Circle most venerated. For George, the most significant figures of the past were, in the main, great thinkers and artists in whose work there is a pronounced homosexual component: Shakespeare, Wincklemann, Plato; and historical figures such as the Roman boy emperor Heliogabalus (in the poem "Algabal", the beautiful emperor builds himself a subterranean realm which he rules, "peaceful and violent with the undisputed strength of his emotions") and the individualistic King Ludwig II of Bavaria, the lover and patron of Wagner.

George, like any great artist, was a product both of his age and of his own unique will. His ideals of aesthetic autonomy and beauty were those prevalent in the 1890's among English aesthetes such as Dowson (whom George translated) and Wilde, and among the French symbolists. Eric Bentley has called George "the greatest of all decadents". In George, aestheticism, Nietzscheanism and homosexual idealism were transmuted into a poetic philosophy that, conveyed by his own magnetic personality, attracted a number of talented young scholars and artists. The result was a private society whose pervading ethos was idealistic, male and homosexual. It was this ethos that drew to it, in 1923, the 16-year old Claus von Stauffenberg.

Claus von Stauffenberg and his brother Berthold met Stefan George in 1923, and they were soon accepted into the intimacy of the circle. They were followed later by a third brother, Alexander. The sculptor Ludwig Thormaehlen described the impression made by the teenaged Claus: "Young though he was, his radiant energy, which he was ready to turn to everything around him, produced an impression of absolute

reliability. He would intervene in a manner which showed his intelligence—frank and honest in opposition, good humoured in criticism, but equally vigorous in agreement or in support of any justified demands. . . .” All these are qualities which would have appealed strongly to George, as would the boy’s striking good looks, set off by dark, metallic blue eyes that Thormaehlen described as revealing “all his good humour and highmindedness, his intelligence and good will.” Another young sculptor, Frank Mehnert, also a member of the Circle, was inspired to make a bust of Stauffenberg several years later. Perhaps in some ways, he reminded George of the beloved Maximin, who had died almost twenty years before.

At first, the Stauffenbergs’ mother was disturbed at her sons’ association with the eccentric homosexual poet, and she drove to Heidelberg to meet with George. But he was able to win her over and from then on, according to Stauffenberg’s biographer Joachim Kramarz, she placed no obstacles in the way of her sons having as much to do with the poet as they pleased.

Claus von Stauffenberg soon became one of the key members of the George Kreis. As a good-looking personable youth of superior intelligence and aristocratic family, he was very popular, and George recognized his uniqueness by calling him simply “Claus” instead of giving him a pseudonym as was usual in the group. George realized that the boy’s character was already developed and integrated. He was, as Kramarz remarks, “ideally suited” to George’s philosophy. Though he married shortly before George’s death (and apparently with George’s approval) he seems to have remained very close to his family, especially his mother and his brother Berthold. It was his mother who nursed him during his convalescence from war wounds. George’s sanctioning Claus’ marriage was unusual—he usually broke with disciples who had the bad taste to marry.

Stefan George left Germany to live in Switzerland when the Nazis came to power in 1933. He died on the 4th of December of that year at the age of 65. His followers were afraid that representatives of the Nazi government might appear, perhaps even attempt to remove the body before it was buried in the early morning two days later. Claus von Stauffenberg arranged that he, his brothers and twelve other of

George's young men keep watch, day and night, around George's deathbed. The candlelight vigil by the devoted students was an appropriate farewell for the Master, both theatrical and moving.

Though Stauffenberg followed a career in the military and was a brilliant soldier, it could never completely satisfy him. He had the Master's scorn of "Prussianism", from its arrogant national expansionism and worship of technical progress to its obsession with spit and polish. Stauffenberg apparently did not bother much about such things as haircuts, shaving and impeccably neat uniforms, nor did he concern himself with such details in others. According to Kramarz, he studied widely in history, military history, politics, philosophy, literature, art, languages and music. He played the cello, attended lectures and concerts and had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. He was a popular officer, especially with the junior officers and enlisted men; he had a natural ability to make his subordinates feel at ease, and was on close terms with several of them.

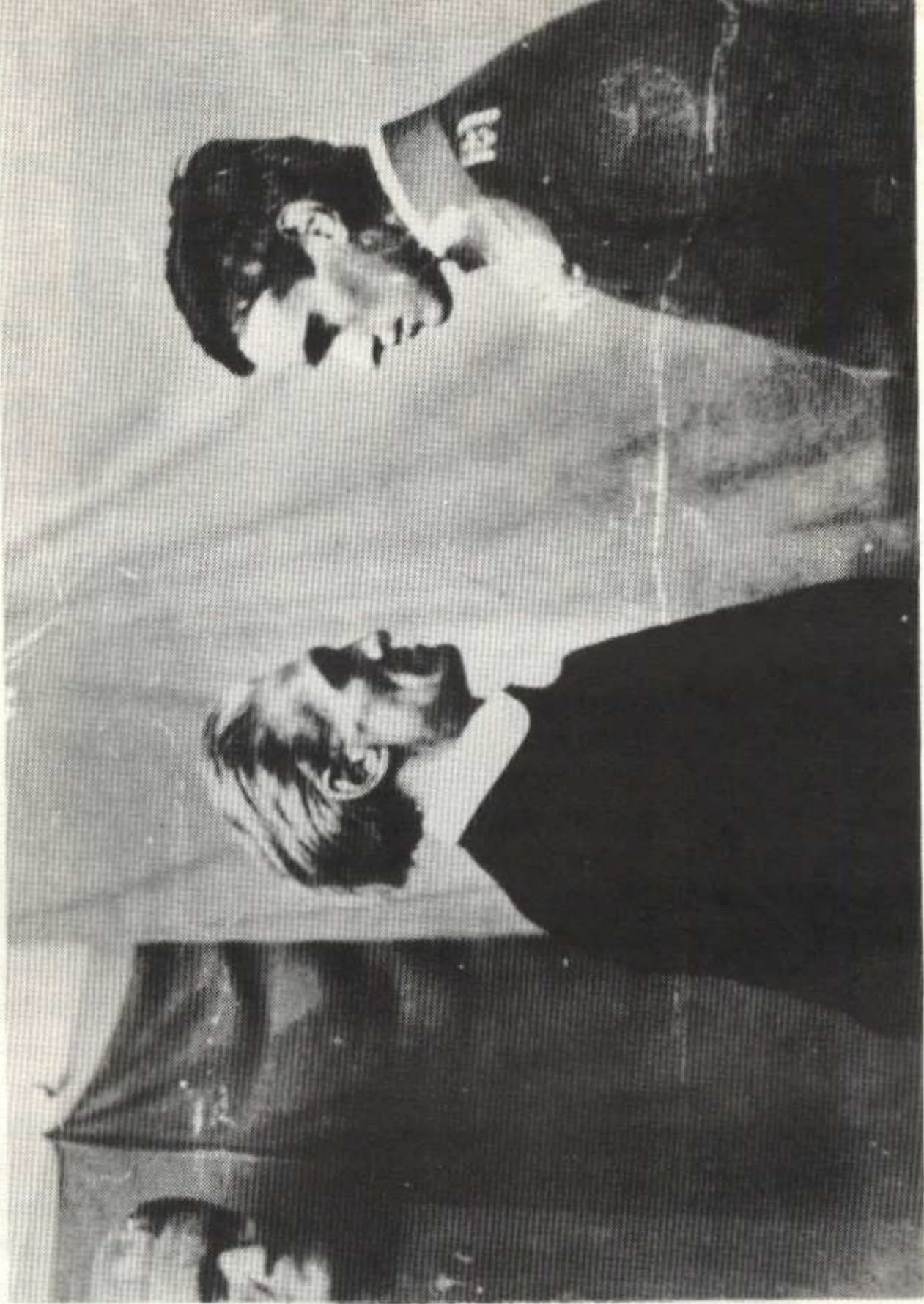
Watching the tightening Nazi grip on the armed forces must not have been pleasant for Stauffenberg. He had on several occasions demonstrated, sometimes publicly, his disgust for the Nazis; the burning of the synagogues on the "Kristallnacht" (Nov. 9th, 1938) was the decisive blow confirming him in his dislike for the regime. Yet he was slow to oppose it openly.

When war came, he distinguished himself in the Polish and Sudeten campaigns, but in both instances took it upon himself to prevent or punish injustices when he could. When Germany invaded and defeated France, Stauffenberg said that the victory could have no meaning unless its outcome was to bring the two countries closer together and end their traditional enmity. At that point, he was still forcing himself to hope that common sense would prevail and the Nazi programme not be implemented, but that hope soon faded.

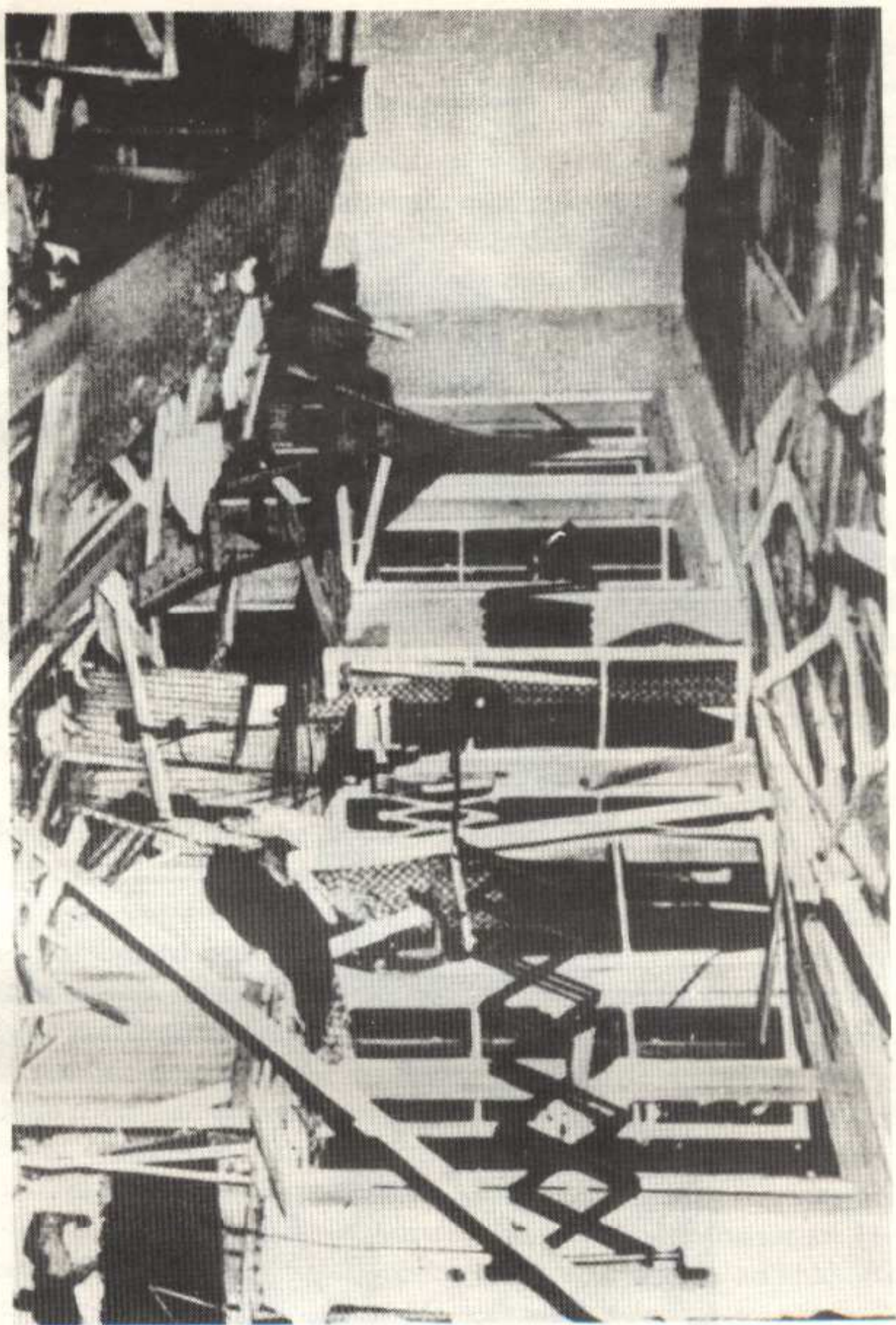
In spite of his eccentricities, he was regarded as a brilliant and loyal officer, and was sent to work at General Staff headquarters where he made contacts with various officials and senior officers, some of whom were to join him in the July 20th conspiracy. In 1942, he was transferred to the Eastern front and given a position of command in the Caucasus. There, he forbade harassment of the local people by German



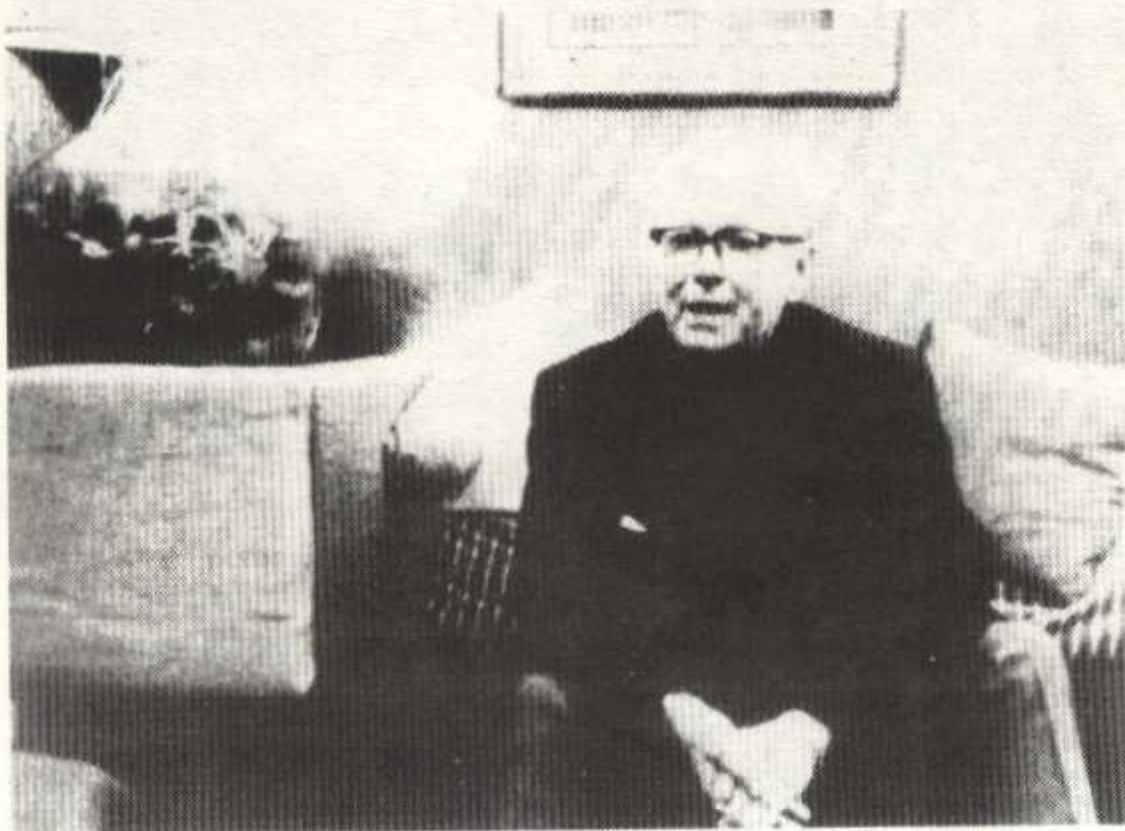
Count von Bernstorff: a lover of luxury who died in Dachau.



Stefan George and the young Claus von Stauffenberg talk as the Ancient World looks on.



Hitler's East Prussian Conference Room after the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt.



Denis Rake, c. 1969.



Jean Desbordes, gay poet and Resistance fighter.

troops, broke up the hated collective farms and gave the people a large amount of self-government. All his positive measures were, of course, totally incompatible with German policy which was not to free the peoples of Russia, or even particularly to drive them against the Soviet regime, but merely to deal with them as inferior races to be worked and eventually eliminated, their lands resettled by "Aryans". Stauffenberg was able, however, to end some of the more flagrant abuses in prisoner of war camps and to make some improvements in the camps for Russian workers. But as early as the winter of 1941, Stauffenberg had recognized the insanity of Hitler's policies and was saying that the only possible end to an unbearable situation was to "put an end to the Fuehrer—and I am prepared to do it."

Stauffenberg had taken seriously Stefan George's belief that a capacity for devotion and self-sacrifice was necessary for the survival and elevation of what was valuable in civilization; and he took to heart George's conviction that the chosen spiritual elite must "rejoice in deeds which, in the perverted view of the people cried to high heaven". The assassination of the national leader for the good of the country and the world was such a deed.

In 1943, Stauffenberg, by then a lieutenant-colonel, was posted in North Africa. There he was severely wounded in combat, losing his right hand, the third and fourth fingers of his left hand, and his left eye. One knee was also injured, and from then on he walked with a limp. He was nursed to health again by his mother, and on his return to active service, he mobilized the contacts and plans for conspiracy begun over a year before. Among his fellow conspirators, Claus was closest to his brother Berthold who had joined the Circle with him and with whom there had always been a close emotional tie. Toward the end of his life, Claus lived with his brother and an aging uncle who helped to take care of the handicapped Claus, and was also part of the conspiracy.

In his introduction to Kramarz's biography, the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper wrote: "Stauffenberg was . . . not merely an able officer and a resourceful conspirator. He was an intellectual in action. The clarity of purpose which he showed, and which he imposed upon the other opponents of Hitler, sprang from a positive philosophy, spiritually generated, intellectually tested. When he had once decided (on his

course of action) no prudential consideration could modify that conviction or change its logical consequence. It was not Alamein or Stalingrad but the fundamental immorality of Naziism, as shown especially by German policy in Russia . . . that had decided him. Therefore he had nothing but contempt for those fairweather conspirators whose opposition varied with time and circumstance. Already by 1942 his mind was made up . . . When he returned from Africa, mutilated by his wounds, he believed that Providence had saved him for the act, and he resolved to do it. Some fellow-conspirators feared the popular verdict. Would not such an act be represented as treachery, a stab in the back? Stauffenberg rejected such egotism. 'It is now time that something was done,' he replied. 'He who has the courage . . . must do so in the knowledge that he will go down in history as a traitor. But if he does not do it, he will be a traitor to his own conscience.'

"Philosophy in action, the fusion of thought and action in one man, is always an exhilarating spectacle. No one in the German opposition showed it so completely as Stauffenberg."

The "Spiritually-generated philosophy" Trevor-Roper refers to (but says little more about) was, of course, Stefan George's version of heroic vitalism, with its reverence for culture and the Greek tradition, its homoerotic mysticism and its belief that the teaching could save the world if transformed into heroic action by the courage and integrity of the initiate. In view of some Nazis having used George's poems with their talk of a "new fuehrer" as helping to justify Hitler's dictatorship, it is ironic that the young colonel would clinch his friends' commitment to the plot against Hitler by reciting George's famous poem "Anti-christ", and that the name given by Stauffenberg to the resistance movement was "The Secret Germany" or "Hidden Germany", from the title of another of the Master's works.

When the day came, Stauffenberg himself carried the bomb into Hitler's headquarters. The other conspirators waited for the word that the Fuehrer was dead, to enact their parts. As it happened, a few small occurrences, primarily the moving of the briefcase, thwarted the plans. The conspirators, including Claus and Berthold von Stauffenberg, were executed. Had the plot succeeded, "incalculable destruction might well have been avoided," wrote Trevor-Roper. "The map of Europe might

well look different today."

"In view of the huge consequences which hung on the events of that day," wrote the historian, "it may amaze us that so much was allowed to depend on one man. Stauffenberg, it seems, had to everywhere at once: in Berlin, to direct the conspiracy; in Rastenburg, to kill Hitler; in Berlin again, to direct the military coup. . . . Partly, it was an unfortunate accident: he alone of the conspirators, thanks to his position as Chief of Staff of the Replacement Army, had direct access to Hitler's conference. But there was also another reason. He was essential because of his extraordinary personality."

It had been Stauffenberg who had reanimated the resistance with new hope when it had been broken by the arrest of its old leaders. It was he who galvanised the others to action and provided the link between the idealists of the so-called Kreislauf Circle, the social radicals, and the activists in the military. And he had kept the conspiracy from stopping half-way. He rejected the arrogant Carl Goerdeler as Hitler's replacement as chancellor. Goerdeler wanted to spare Hitler's life, excuse his crimes and continue many of his policies. Stauffenberg wanted the socialist Julius Leber as chancellor.

After the failure of the plot, all Stauffenberg's papers were seized by the Nazis and none but a few scraps have been recovered. It was said later that his family had destroyed some personal papers, though his wife denied this.

Stauffenberg has been described by friends and enemies variously as a "spirit of fire", "a genius", "a truly universal man" and "a romantic reactionary". He has been claimed by Catholics and by socialists. But it seems clear that, allowing for his Catholic background and some socialist political sympathies, the all-important intellectual influence on his life and thought was that of Stefan George and the Circle. The masculine atmosphere of the Circle, intensely homoerotic and idealistic, found in the young Claus perhaps its most devoted acolyte, and the emotional and intellectual impact of the group stayed with him throughout his life.

George's concept of a semi-secret society, an aristocratic elite of initiates, in love with an idealized version of Attic Greece and employing the tenets of the Master's crypto-religious Maximin cult in

the modern world, must seem to our contemporary standards arrogant, naive and at least a little ridiculous. But Claus von Stauffenberg's life proves that, for all its theatricality, the Circle was not so ridiculous after all. For of all its members, Stauffenberg felt most deeply the significance of George's ideas, and took them most seriously. And, when the time came, he acted on them, and gave his life for them.

II

After the failure of the "July Plot" and the death of Stauffenberg, over 12,000 people were rounded up by the Nazis and taken to concentration camps. Among those caught was a fascinating individual who was a kind of Scarlet Pimpernel of the European Resistance. Count Albrecht von Bernstorff was connected with a group of anti-Hitler conspirators within the German foreign ministry. (As liaison to the Dutch legation, he had been able to warn the Dutch government about Germany's planned invasion of Holland in 1940). Like Stauffenberg, von Bernstorff was an aristocrat. All through the war he played a part—and played it well. A stout, balding man, impeccably dressed, he seemed to spend most of his time in cafes, sipping drinks and propositioning young waiters. He was saved from arrest by the eminence of his family and his connections in the diplomatic service. Everyone considered him an effete and slightly ridiculous pederast, harmless and useless. Like the Pimpernel's foppish disguise, von Bernstorff's cover was a good one. It helped him avoid suspicion while he went about his main business—running an "underground railroad" that smuggled Jews and dissidents and their property out of German hands and into safety. Peter Hoffman, in *The History of the German Resistance: 1933-1945*, writes that von Bernstorff "was one of the most courageous opponents of Hitler."

Eventually, in the aftermath of the July plot, of which he probably knew even if he was not himself involved, von Bernstorff was discovered and interned, first in Dachau, later in Ravensbruck. One survivor remembered him well because, in spite of being treated "especially badly" by the guards and sometimes subjected to "unbelievable torture,"

he helped keep the other inmates' spirits up by such gestures as making them promise to come to a big get-together on his estate after the war was over. He did not survive the camps.

Von Bernstorff had connections with the Dutch government, and it was in Holland where a homosexual group, organized before the war, was able to contribute to the Resistance movement. From 1911 to 1940, there was in Amsterdam a branch of homosexual emancipationist Magnus Hirschfeld's Committee. It was founded by a lawyer, Dr. J.A. Schorer (1866-1957) and engaged in a number of social and political activities, including the founding of the C.O.C., a well-known gay club which is still in existence today.

The Committee had of course come under strong attack in pre-war Holland. A Catholic physicians' congress called for its "destruction", and an article in *The Journal of Dutch Jurists* stated "Homosexuals are aliens in every state and every society and cannot therefore ask for civil rights." These statements were widely quoted by the Nazis when in 1940, they began their crackdown on homosexuals in Holland.

Fortunately, the editor of the C.O.C. paper *Levensrecht* "Right to Life", one Bob Angelo, had advised the organization to burn its membership list. This saved many people. Another gay activist Arent van Santhorst, committed the entire list to memory! This meant that after the war, even though the whole archive had been destroyed or confiscated, the surviving organizers of the C.O.C. could begin to reconstruct the group.

Material on Dutch homosexuals under the German occupation is hard to find as records were "legally destroyed" by the Dutch police. Certainly there was a campaign against homosexuals, and many were sent to concentration camps. There is a record of 48 being arrested in one particular raid in Amsterdam. In July, 1940, an official German order was issued for a "campaign against unnatural sexual acts." In November, 1940, the Dutch SS paper *The Storm* wrote that "homosexuals, the weeds in the Dutch gardens, have been exterminated successfully." Yet later, the weeds had apparently grown back, as *The Storm* was again thundering, condemning the Dutch police for not being severe or efficient enough in cracking down on gay gathering places. Often, of course, the antihomosexual laws were used to arrest a

politically suspect person or to blackmail someone into working for the Germans.

Quite a few homosexual activists joined the Resistance; the best known of these were Willem Aronduus and Sjoerd Bakker. These and other gays formed with others an Amsterdam Resistance group *Gerrit-van-der-Veen*, which was involved in several anti-Nazi attacks, including the spectacular dynamiting of the Nazi records office, blowing to bits the Gestapo's information about thousands of suspicious Dutch citizens.

Another Resistance hero as fascinating in his way as Stauffenberg or von Bernstorff was the French poet Jean Desbordes. A one-time protégé of Jean Cocteau, he was described by Glenway Wescott as "a soft-spoken youth of 20—short, slight, like a little clerk," honest, straightforward and a great lover of animals. "I will never forget," wrote Cocteau, "how uneasy this innocent boy's starry gaze made me feel as I gave my first advice." The remark is reminiscent of similar comments, by Thormaehlen and others, about the young Claus von Stauffenberg.

Desbordes and Cocteau had spent a summer together in the French countryside, visiting Gertrude Stein and Coco Chanel (who complained that they "spent most of the day in their room smoking opium"). Cocteau at this time was writing his *Le livre blanc*, a voyeuristic gay memoir. Desbordes was working on his first book, *J'adore*, a collection of short prose pieces with an introduction by Cocteau and a photo of Desbordes in his sailor suit. In this pantheistic book, Desbordes writes, "Jacques Maritain murmurs that human love is a disfigured, violated love, grace betrayed. Love is royal. It reigns over the many Versailles of the heart. It stops Satan as fire stops wild beasts." Cocteau's biographer Francis Steegmuller writes that "*J'Adore*, in its sexual elan, is the most . . . masturbatory of books; . . . its repeated featuring of hands—in close proximity to mentions of sperm; the genitals and masturbation . . ." Later, Desbordes wrote two novels, a play and a study of de Sade and sadism, *The True Face of the Marquis de Sade*.

When France was invaded, Desbordes joined the Resistance. He flew often between Paris and London as a sort of liaison between the French and Polish Resistance movements (the Polish government-in-

exile was based in London). In 1944, he was arrested in Paris by the pro-Nazi French militia. A Dr. Berlioz, whose flat Desbordes was living in, was also arrested and taken to a Gestapo torture center. Upstairs in this building, a party was going on. Downstairs, people were being brutalized and murdered. Dr. Berlioz, having to vomit during his "interrogation", was taken to a bathroom that was spattered with blood. He saw Desbordes' corpse, terribly beaten. Apparently, Desbordes told his torturers nothing, as none of the people he associated with—and could have informed on—was arrested.

Another Resistance fighter was the gay surrealist poet Robert Desnos. He also wrote poems for the Resistance. He was captured and interned in a concentration camp where he died of exhaustion and malnutrition in 1945.

Working with the French Resistance was a British secret agent by the name of Denis Rake. The former chief of the British "underground", Maurice Buckmaster, describes him: "Denis Rake was a boy—I say a boy, although he is older than I am—who had a faith, a sense of patriotism and a very deep sense of duty. The reason he was so courageous was that he was basically a shy man, and he hated firearms. We needed such people, because they were the ones who had the courage to conquer their fears. . . . We put together a group and armed them with weapons delivered by parachute from London. They were to block the passage of German troops. We sent them Denis Rake, a radio operator. . . . We didn't know of course that on the night Denis Rake arrived in France, the Germans had attacked en masse and that Denis Rake would land right in the middle of the battle. . . ." Rake emerged the next day to send a message that he had arrived at an inopportune moment, but that everything was all right!

In Marcel Ophuls' great film *The Sorrow and the Pity*, Rake is interviewed and asked about his courageous acts. He replies, "I think deep down what I wanted to do was to be able to display the same kind of courage my friends who had become flyers had. Being a homosexual, one of my strongest fears was lacking the courage to do certain things." He added that his experience as a professional female impersonator, singing in a night club, helped give him the acting talent necessary for his job as a secret agent! At one point during the war, Rake had an

affair with a German officer, which lasted until the German was transferred to the Russian front and was killed.

Stauffenberg, von Berstorff, Aronhaus, Bakker, Desbordes, Desnos, Rake. . . diverse kinds of people, but all brought together in spirit by a cruel time that demanded heroic action from those who could find the courage within themselves. At least in the cases of Jean Desbordes, the two Dutchmen and the two Germans, their work in the Resistance seems intimately linked to an idealism rooted in homosexuality or homosexual ideology. For Rake, an effort to prove himself as brave as the "normal" man resulted in his proving himself braver than anyone could have expected or hoped.

There is something of a common pattern here: the doting young disciple of a poet, the flaccid gay playboy; the precocious writer of erotic poetry; the amusing drag-queen. The kind of people Americans call sissies. Who could have thought these sissies would be capable of such commitment and such courage? There is a truth here, not just about Resistance heroes, but about a great number of "sissies". Beneath the pallid and perhaps limp-wristed exterior, often lies a character and spirit of great strength—strong enough to survive adversity and to flourish. Strong enough, even, to survive the rigors and neglect of what is called History.

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N.B.: Readers of German are directed to Manfred Herzer's *Bibliographie Zur Homosexualität* (Berlin, 1982).

Ian Young was born in London, England on January 5, 1945, during an air-raid. The author of several books of poetry including *Year of the Quiet Sun*, *Some Green Moths*, *Common-or-Garden Gods* and the forthcoming *Sex Magick*, he is equally well known for his literary anthologies *The Male Muse*, *On The Line*, *Overlooked & Underrated* and *The Son of the Male Muse*. His *The Male Homosexual in Literature* is the standard English-language bibliography on the subject. He lives in Toronto with Wulf.



Photo by Jim Perry

“Only in very recent years have historians begun to research the fate of homosexuals in Nazi-ruled Europe. . . . But there is another aspect of ‘gay history’ that has been equally overlooked: the history of homosexual resistance. . . .”



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