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Guide to the

Stefan George letters to Ernst Morwitz

1905-1956 (bulk 1911-1933)

MssCol 18586

Compiled by Philip Heslip, September 2011

Summary

Creator: George, Stefan Anton, 1868-1933

Title: Stefan George letters to Ernst Morwitz, 1905-1956 (bulk 1911-1933)

Size: 1.05 linear feet (3 boxes)

Source: Donated by Estate of Dietrich von Bothmer, 2011

Abstract: Stefan George (1868-1933) was a German poet, philosopher, editor, and head of the Georgekreis (George Circle), an influential group of German academics and thinkers in the first decades of the 20th century. The Stefan George letters to Ernst Morwitz are comprised of approximately 240 communications from George to Morwitz, one of his most devoted confidants (1905-1933). Also present is Morwitz's annotated letter book and several manuscript poems.

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Preferred citation: Stefan George letters to Ernst Morwitz, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Custodial history

Ernst Morwitz gave the collection to Dietrich von Bothmer who bequeathed it to the New York Public Library.

Processing note

The correspondence is organized chronologically. Although many of the items are undated, Morwitz's letter book identified each letter's approximate date. The poems and other writings, many of which were not copied into the letter book, are filed after the correspondence.

Related collections

Ruth and Hermann Vollmer papers, 1600s-1959. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library

Stefan George Archives. Württemberg State Library

Stefan George Personal Name File. Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library

Creator history

German poet, philosopher, editor, and translator Stefan George (1868-1933) was born to wine merchant Stephan George and Eva Schmitt near Bingen, Germany. In 1888, while traveling throughout Europe, George met the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé in Paris. Inspired by the meeting, George began publishing his own poetry, and by 1899 had established himself as an important poet. He founded and edited the influential literary magazine *Blätter für die Kunst*, which he published between 1892 and 1919. George lived an itinerant life throughout his adulthood, staying at the homes of friends throughout Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France. During the First World War, George became more critical of society and his poems became political in nature, particularly his 1917 collection *Der Krieg* ("The War") and his 1928 collection *Das neue Reich* ("The New Empire"). Although his poetry's themes and his philosophies appealed to German nationalists in the early 1930s, George withheld his explicit support of the Nazi government and rejected several offers from them for state honors. George died in Locarno, Switzerland in 1933.

George attracted a group of fellow poets and academics, called the Georgekreis (the George Circle). In their time, they dominated the fields of literature, history, psychology, and economics in German universities. In the first decades of the 20th century, George's circle changed from a group of fellow intellectuals into a clan of devoted disciples that referred to George as their "master." Circle members included Robert Boehringer (1884-1974), Friedrich Gundolf (1880-1931), Max Kommerell (1902-1944), and Karl Wolfskehl (1869-1948). The group was notoriously secretive and protective of their master.

German writer, lawyer, and scholar Ernst Morwitz (1887-1971), a devoted disciple of George, was born in Danzig Germany, to Rosalie Aronsohn and Jewish merchant Wilhelm Morwitz. He studied law in Freiburg, Heidelberg, and Berlin, finally earning a degree in 1910. In 1905, Morwitz befriended Stefan George, and in 1911 published several poems in George's journal *Blätter für die Kunst*. Morwitz served as a paramedic during the First World War and after the war worked as a district judge in Fürstenwalde and a lawyer in Berlin. Morwitz maintained close communications with George over the next decade, and even represented George in legal capacities. After George's death in 1933, Morwitz published *Das Werk Die Dichtung Stefan Georges* (1934). Morwitz fled Nazi Germany in 1938 and emigrated to the America, where he taught German in the United States Army. After the war, Morwitz secured a post at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the Germanic Languages department. Morwitz remained devoted to George and published several volumes on the master, including the first English edition of George's poetry (1943), and, with the help of Carol North Valhope, a comprehensive collection of George's works in America (1949). Eventually, Morwitz returned to Europe as editor of the Amsterdam literary magazine *Castrum Peregrini*. He died in Muralto, Switzerland, in 1971, and left his papers and library to long-time friend Dietrich von Bothmer (1918-2009).

Scope and content note

The Stefan George letters to Ernst Morwitz consist of approximately 240 communications from George to Morwitz, one of George's most devoted confidants. The collection also contains various manuscript poems by George, and Morwitz's annotated letter book created in 1955 and 1956. These papers offer insight into George's thoughts, artistic achievements, travels, and other activities during the final 30 years of his life.

The letters from George to Morwitz spans their entire relationship, from their meeting in 1905 until George's death in December 1933. The letters are personal in nature, and contain discussions of George's thoughts on poetry and other intellectual pursuits, including the printing of George's great

poetry collection *Der Krieg* in 1917. They also discussed news of George's family and personal well-being, and Georgekreis members' activities and travels. During their correspondence, George traveled throughout Germany and Switzerland, while Morwitz lived in Berlin and briefly in Heidelberg. Morwitz received one letter while serving in the German Army during World War I (December 10, 1918). In addition to the George items, there are a few letters from others in his circle, including Maximilian Kommerell (March 1924) and Friedrich Gundolph (1906). The last item in the collection is an urgent telegram from Locarno, Switzerland, informing Morwitz that George was close to death (December 1, 1933).

The bulk of the letters are undated, though many are accompanied by stamped envelopes, and the others are placed into chronology in Morwitz's letter book. George typically signed his letters "G.," "St.," "S.G.," "St. George," Stefan George, "der Meister," and "d. M." He often referred to his circle as "die Staat" (the state).

Writings contain several manuscript poems that George sent to Morwitz. These include: a manuscript booklet entitled *Prinz Indra*, containing 5 poems; a manuscript booklet containing 7 poems (1922); and 13 loose poems, all undated and largely untitled. Also present are 2 drawings and a 32 page booklet entitled "Hugo von Hofmannsthal über Stefan George," written by Wolfgang Frommel as related to him by Stefan George.

Morwitz created the letter book in December 1955 and January 1956 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In it, Morwitz transcribed and annotated every letter and many of the manuscript poems in the collection. The annotations also give dates to many of the undated letters, explanation to textural abbreviations, and offers context to the letters. Additionally, the volume contains Morwitz's thoughts and memories of George and his circle. Of note is a 2 page timeline of George's travels with his friend Ludwig Thormaehlen between the years 1912 and 1933 (pages 171-172). The letter book is organized into four sections:

Section 1 (pages 1-162) contains copies of each letter in the collection, each with extensive annotation by Morwitz.

Section 2 (pages 163-167) comprises 6 annotated poems from the collection sent to Morwitz around 1922: "Widmung," "Leid," "Harren," "Einem Driftes," "Weihe-Gaben," and "Adonis."

Section 3 (page 168) is an index providing the year for each letter in the volume with some notes on undated letters.

Section 4 (pages 169-200) contains Morwitz's writings on George and his circle. Members discussed include Johann Anton, Ernst Bertram, Albrecht von Blumenthal, Robert Boehringer, Bernard von Bothmer, Percy Gothein, Friedrich Gundolph, Max Kommerell, Frank Mehnert, Silvia [Marbees], Ernst Morwitz, Karl Josef Partsch, the Stauffenberg brothers, Ludwig Thormaehlen, Bernhard and Woldemar Count Uxkull-Gyllenband, and Karl Hanna Wolfskehl, among others.

Arrangement

The correspondence is organized chronologically with the writings and letter book ordered at the end of the collection.

Key terms

Subjects

German poetry -- 19th century.

German poetry -- 20th century.

Names

Blätter für die Kunst.

George-Kreis.

George, Stefan Anton, 1868-1933

Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, 1874-1929.

Morwitz, Ernst, 1887-1971.

Special formats

Letter books

Letters(correspondence)

Poems

Occupations

Poets -- German

Places

Germany -- Intellectual life -- 20th century

Germany -- Politics and government -- 20th century

Container list

Correspondence, 1905-1933

b.1 f.1-14 1905-1918

b.2 f.1-11 1919-1933

b.2 f.12 Writings, 1922 and undated

b.3 Letter Book, 1905-1933, 1955-1956