

# Wilhelm Vöge's sonnet 'On the platform of Strasbourg Cathedral' and his monograph on Niclas Hagnower<sup>1</sup>

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## I Overview and research question

In 1916, at the age of only 48, the art historian Wilhelm Vöge retired from his professorship in Freiburg im Breisgau.<sup>2</sup> From then on, due to illness, he lived in Ballenstedt in the Harz Mountains. The former residence of the Princes of Anhalt was known as a retirement and sanatorium town at the time, and Vöge also initially visited Ballenstedt because of the spa before settling there permanently for reasons one can only speculate about.<sup>3</sup> Recovering from his nervous condition in the late 1920s, Vöge, officially still a professor, began researching again and publishing regularly, concentrating on finishing works he began to write when he had better access to libraries and research institutions than in Ballenstedt. His exploration of the art of German woodcarvers culminated above all in his large monograph on the late Gothic sculptor Niclas Hagnower (c. 1445/60–before 1538) from 1929/30, which is still well worth reading.<sup>4</sup>

Hagnower is famous for his sculptures for the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, which can be seen today in the Museum d'Unterlinden in Colmar, Alsace. Although his works are less famous than the paintings of his colleague Matthias Grünewald

<sup>1</sup> This essay is written in memory of Alfred and Johanna Lüder from Meisdorf near Ballenstedt in the Harz Mountains.

<sup>2</sup> Stefanie Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', in: *Kontinente der Kunstgeschichte. Der Kunsthistoriker Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)*, ed. by Leonhard Helten et al., Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag 2019, 201–225, see: 201–202. – I greatly appreciated the support of Prof. Gábor Enrődi from Budapest and would also like to thank Lothar Lambacher from the Museum of Decorative Arts at Berlin for his advice.

<sup>3</sup> Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', see: 203–207.

<sup>4</sup> Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', see: 216–218. – On this also: Christian Drobe, 'Wilhelm Vöge und Karl Lamprecht. Neue Stilkritik oder Kunstgeschichtsgeschichtsschreibung', in: *Kontinente der Kunstgeschichte. Der Kunsthistoriker Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)*, ed. by Leonhard Helten et al., Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag 2019, 51–65, see: 52. – Cf. Hans W. Hubert, 'Wilhelm Vöge und sein Konzept des Naturstudiums', in: *Kontinente der Kunstgeschichte. Der Kunsthistoriker Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)*, ed. by Leonhard Helten et al. Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag 2019, 11–42, see: 15.

(c. 1445/1450–1491), they are no less impressive and contribute significantly to the overall impression of this iconic work of art. As the first (and so far only) comprehensive account of Hagnower's work, Vöge's monograph is still a standard work on German wood sculpture of the late Middle Ages, which even more recent accounts cannot ignore.<sup>5</sup>

Vöge's involvement with Hagnower's sculpture started with an essay he wrote in 1913.<sup>6</sup> It was deepened with the temporary exhibition of the *Isenheim Altarpiece* in the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich in 1918.<sup>7</sup> This exhibition made the work known to large sections of the German public and established its place in the national memory. Vöge's special interest for the work of Grünewald is evidenced not only by the aforementioned monograph on the work, but also by a hitherto unknown sonnet that he wrote on the back endpaper that was found in the specimen copy of the Hagnower Book still kept in his extensive reference library at Merseburg Cathedral, just as he wrote poems in his spare time on all personal issues that affected him. This is evidenced by a corpus of 360 poems in his written estate, which is now kept in the Vöge Archive of the Art History Institute of the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau. However, there are only a few poems that address art historic issues in a strict sense, and they mostly refer to Grünewald, especially his youth works and his Crucifixion, dealing with them from a personal point of view.

In this sonnet, he takes a look at the artistic landscape of the Upper Rhine, starting with an observation of Strasbourg Cathedral. He does this in a three-step process on the basis of central artistic protagonists whom he associates with this landscape, namely Erwin von Steinbach (1244–1318), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) and Mathis Neithard gen. Grünewald (1480–1530).<sup>8</sup> This helps to illustrate his scientific work in poetic language. In other

<sup>5</sup> See: Berenike Berentzen, *Niclaus Hagenower. Studien zum bildhauerischen Werk: Patentia und Passiones*, Petersberg: Imhof 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Vöge, 'Über Nicolaus Gerhaert und Nicolaus von Hagenau', in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, N. F. 24 (1913), 97–108.

<sup>7</sup> Matthias Mayer, 'Die Rezeption des Isenheimer Altares zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik. Grünewald-Spuren in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts', in: *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, N. F. XXVII–3 (2017), 528–542, see: 532.

<sup>8</sup> According to the findings aid at the Vöge Archive at the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau, a copy of the poem can also be found there in cabinet 1. Although Vöge does not mention Hagnower in this, there is another short and undated poem in his written estate in cabinet 2 (letters, poems, manuscripts, notes, etc. from the Freiburg collection, FR 13, poems III, small forms, 181–190) in the Vöge Archive entitled 'Niclas Hagnower':

Nicolas Hagnower.

words, the embedding of his further occupation with Hagnower in his scholarly worldview is characterized, to put it pointedly, on the one hand by the most thorough research of the accessible historical sources, and on the other hand by his intensive effort to empathise with the artistic work. This was a goal that also characterised the core of his further work. Thus, the works of Vöge should not be examined only in a positivist way, but also in a philological sense.

The newly awakened interest in Grünewald moved Vöge to elaborate his previous preliminary scholarly work into a Hagnower monograph, whose methodical reflection is continued in the sonnet with the means of poetry. For this reason, the interpretation of Vöge's sonnet can also give us deeper insights into his personal relationship to his object of research and its development from a contemporary context. In the following, I would therefore like to embed the interpretation of the poem immanent to the work in the field of his research biography in order to establish a connection to the context in which Vöge's Hagnower book was written and, finally, to clarify the relationship between poem and book.

## II Vöge's Hagnower Monograph and the Reception of the *Isenheim Altarpiece*

The construction of the Hagenow-Grünewald altar with the famous crucifixion scene followed an elaborate theological programme that will not be discussed in detail here.<sup>9</sup> What is important for my question, however, is the critical appraisal

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Lass Sie Dich zausen, Niclas, du bist vom Geschlechte der Helden,  
Die, wenn der Kampf gekämpft, ewig in Heiterkeit blü'hn.

(Nicolas Hagnower.)

Let them chastise you, Niclas, you are of the race of heroes,  
Who, when the battle is fought, bloom eternally in serenity.)

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Hans W. Hubert and his staff most sincerely for the opportunity to consult the archive's holdings.

<sup>9</sup> It was Guido Guersi (1490–1516), preceptor of the Antoniter Order based in Issenheim, who commissioned the altar. The order was responsible for combating St Anthony's fire, a painful gangrene caused by ergot poisoning due to contaminated grain. It was named after St. Anthony the Great (c. 251–356), a hermit, who lived in the desert and exposed himself to the temptations of evil. (Mayer, 'Die Rezeption des Isenheimer Altares zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik. Grünewald-Spuren in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts', see: 528–529. – Cf. Heinemann, 'Entdeckung und Vereinnahmung. Zur Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds in Deutschland bis 1945', in: *Grünewald in der Moderne. Die Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Brigitte Schad und Thomas Ratzka, Köln: Wienand 2003, 8-17, see: 13. – Cf. Robert Suckale, *Kunst in Deutschland. Von Karl dem Großen bis heute*, Cologne: Dumont 1998, 243–249.) – Presumably, the sick usually saw the everyday side, i.e. the closed ensemble, created by Grünewald and Hagnower and their collaborators in cooperation, whereby

that the altar received in later centuries. It was discovered as an object of art criticism and history in the last third of the 19th century, initially by Jacob Burckhardt, who found the work off-putting before an aesthetic of ugliness began to prevail with the emerging naturalism and symbolism – especially with the French novelist Joris-Karl Huysmans around the turn of the century with reference to the ensemble.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Vöge's library also contains a work by Huysmans: *Drei Kirchen und Drei Primitive. Geheimnisse der Gothic* (Three Churches and Three Primitives. Secrets of the Gothic) from 1918, which suggests that Vöge was familiar with his views.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Grünewald's naturalistic depiction of the tortured and decaying crucified on the central altarpiece continued to be rejected as excessive.<sup>12</sup> This only changed against the backdrop of expressionism and the First World War. What had previously been rejected for its drastic nature now appeared to contemporaries as a realistic depiction of the horrors experienced by soldiers in the trenches of the First World War. Through new reproduction techniques, the altar was now made known to broader sections of the population. Colour prints made the altarpiece very popular.<sup>13</sup> In particular, Grünewald's *Isenheimer Altar in neunundvierzig Fotografien* (Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece in forty-nine photographs) by Oskar Hagen (1919) was widely distributed. This was preceded in 1911 by the first Grünewald monograph by Heinrich Alfred Schmidt after the altar had been illustrated in *Kunstwart* (art administrator) in 1907. However, until the publication of sources by Walter Karl Zülch in 1938, knowledge of Grünewald's biography consisted only of what Joachim von Sandrart had compiled in his

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Grünewald executed the painted altar panels between 1512 and 1515 and Hagnower had already produced the shrine architecture as well as the precious gilded and coloured carved sculptures of the altar shrine, the carved decorations and the busts in the predella between 1500 and 1505. (Suckale, *Kunst in Deutschland*, 243, 245.)

<sup>10</sup> Mayer, 'Die Rezeption des Isenheimer Altares zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik. Grünewald-Spuren in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts', 529. – Cf. Achim Aurnhammer, 'Joris Karl Huysmans 'Supranaturalismus' im Zeichen Grünewalds und seine deutsche Rezeption', in: *Moderne und Antimoderne*, ed. by Wilhelm Kühlmann, Freiburg: Rombach 2006, 17–42.

<sup>11</sup> Vöge Library, Merseburg Cathedral Abbey.

<sup>12</sup> The first panel of the multi-part, winged retable shows St. Anthony on the right-hand side panel and St. Sebastian opposite, as well as the crucifixion scene with St. John the Baptist in the centre. The predella depicts the Entombment of Christ. The second image shows the Resurrection of Christ on the right wing and the Annunciation to Mary on the left. The main panel on the right in the centre depicts Christ's Incarnation and opposite, the Concert of Angels. The third and concluding image shows the altar shrine with the image of St. Anthony enthroned in the centre, surrounded by St. Augustine and St. Jerome. In the predella are the busts of Christ with the twelve apostles. The wings of the altar shrine show the Temptation of the Order's saint, St. Anthony, on the right and his encounter with St. Paul Eremita on the left.

<sup>13</sup> Mayer, 'Die Rezeption des Isenheimer Altares zwischen Ethik und Ästhetik. Grünewald-Spuren in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts', 533.

*Teutsche Academie* (German Academy) (1675 and 1679), which is why the artist also offered himself as an intellectual projection screen. Since this work was published after the Hagnower monograph, Vöge probably did not know any details about Grünewald's biography.

Not only among scholars, but also among contemporary artists, the Isenheim work aroused strong interest from the turn of the century onwards, namely from the expressionists. For example, Max Beckmann stayed in Colmar in 1904 and August Macke in 1909.<sup>14</sup> In the course of national appropriation, Grünewald's work was now also stylised as Nordic, while Dürer's art – presumably because of his travels in Italy – was devalued as 'Welsch' (Roman).<sup>15</sup> The *Isenheim Altarpiece* was thus extremely present in the science and society of the Weimar Republic. Enthusiasm and interest were further fuelled by the 1918 exhibition at the *Alte Pinakothek* in Munich.

Vöge tried to attract the interest of his readers in his preface and also distanced himself regarding the Grünewald exhibition when he wrote with critical references to the Apollonian - Dionysian principle established by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, that 'ein dionysischer Grünewald-Rausch die Widerstrebenden mitgerissen [hätte, Annotation by the the author]' ('a Dionysian intoxication swept away those who resisted').<sup>16</sup> Apparently, however, he felt that such a one-sided approach to the artist Grünewald was deficient, which is why he decided to make Hagnower the focus of an art-historical study.

German sculpture around the time of Albrecht Dürer was one of his most important fields of research, since he worked as an assistant to Wilhelm of Bode at the Sculpture Collection of the Royal Museums of Berlin from 1897–1908, his appointment to a professorship at Freiburg im Breisgau in 1908 leading to a more intense preoccupation with it as the titles of Vöge's courses underline: the written dispositions of them are held by the Vöge Archives, starting with 1911. Their volume and detailed break-down point to Vöge's meticulous preparation: regarding his comprehensive lecture on Dürer from 1913/14, his first notes are from 1911. In addition to that, he offered a course of lectures in 1914.<sup>17</sup> According to notes his student Emil Bührlé (1890–1956) left, he also held a course on the 'Art of the Upper Rhine from the 11.th century until the 16.th centuries'.<sup>18</sup> Since he was not able to publish his findings then because he was short of time, he tried to finish his earlier studies during his time in Ballenstedt.

<sup>14</sup> Heinemann, 'Entdeckung und Vereinnahmung. Zur Rezeption Matthias Grünewalds in Deutschland bis 1945', 8–10. – On Beckmann cf. Schulze, *Die Erschütterung der Moderne. Grünewald im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Studie*, Leipzig: Seemann 1991, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Schulze, *Die Erschütterung der Moderne. Grünewald im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Studie*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Vöge, *Niclas Hagnower. Der Meister des Isenheimer Hochaltars und seine Frühwerke*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Urban-Verlag 1931, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Vöge-Archives of the Albert-Ludwig-University Freiburg im Breisgau, Finding aids, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Franz-Josef Sladeczek, 'Die Skulpturen', in: *Stiftung Sammlung E.G. Bührlé*, Katalog I, ed. by Lukas Gloor und Marco Goldin, Zürich: Linea d'ombra Libri 2005, 27–79, see 29.

Vöge turned to his studies on Hagnower precisely at the time of the onset of the world economic crisis in 1928, as can be seen from Vöge's correspondence with his student Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968). He worked on it in the years between 1928 and 1930.<sup>19</sup> After the death of his mother Helene in 1927, with whom the unmarried Vöge was closely connected, he also travelled to southern Germany for study purposes.<sup>20</sup> As already mentioned above, he undertook corresponding preliminary work during his previous activity as an university professor in Freiburg im Breisgau. Evidence of this was his essay on Nicolaus Gerhaerts van Leyden and Niclas Hagnower, published as early as 1913, in which Vöge for the first time established a connection between Hagnower's work and the sculptures of van Leyden. Vöge recognised the contrasting depiction of the saintly figures of the *Isenheim Altar* created by Hagnower and their grimacing expression and was able to identify two small-format shrine figures with attributes from the Julius Bühler collection as belonging to them.<sup>21</sup> In 1929, while working on his Hagnower monograph, he published a study on a van Leyden Strasbourg epitaph.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Vöge was able to draw on his 1910 inventory catalogue of German works in the Berlin Sculpture Collection as a basis.<sup>23</sup>

The main subject of his Hagnower book is a discussion on his attribution of an early Swabian work of Hagnower consisting of sculptures from Ulm and Chur on the basis of stylistic considerations, which, however, did not convince scholars, in contrast to the late Swabian work he postulated.<sup>24</sup> Julius Baum was able to prove this in his review in 1932 by means of a newspaper article, according to which the account book of Bishop Ortlieb von Brandis up to 1484 mentions a stonemason named Claus von Veltkirch as the executing master of the works in question.<sup>25</sup>

While Vöge's research on Hagnower's early work cannot claim any validity, this does not apply to his research on the sculptures of the *Isenheim altar*: he found that Hagnower's images of the saints, deviating from the previous ideal of timeless beauty, namely of sculptures by van Leyden, for the first time also included features

<sup>19</sup> Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', 217, fn. 87. – Since German researchers were financially restricted at that time, they were forced to find their topics of research in Germany. (According to Professor Kathryn Brush, University of Western Ontario, Canada).

<sup>20</sup> Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', 216–217.

<sup>21</sup> Wilhelm Vöge, 'Über Niclas Gerhaert und Nicolaus von Hagenau', in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, N. F. 24 (1913), 98–103, see: 102–103. – Cf. Schlink, 'Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)', in: *Freiburger Universitätsblätter*, 48-4 (2009), S. 9–26, see: 18.

<sup>22</sup> Wilhelm Vöge, 'Nicolaus von Leyen's Straßburger Epitaph und die holländische Steinplastik', in: *Oberrheinische Kunst*, 48 (1929), 35–38.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Vöge, *Beschreibung der Bildwerke der christlichen Epochen in den Kgl. Museen zu Berlin, IV. Teil, Die deutschen Bildwerke und die anderen cisalpinen Länder*, Berlin: Reimer 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Vöge, *Niclas Hagnower. Der Meister des Isenheimer Hochaltars und seine Frühwerke*, 44–67 – A summary review was written by Schlink, 'Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)', 22.

<sup>25</sup> Julius Baum, 'Rezension Wilhelm Vöge Niklas Hagnower, Freiburg, Urbanverlag, 1930', in: *Pantheon*, 9 (1932), 142.

of the ugly and grimacing, so that they can claim a higher degree of psychological truthfulness and closeness to reality than before. These findings of Vöge still proved to be adaptable for current research, namely Berenike Berentzen's study of historical emotion research.<sup>26</sup> Considering the historical context, it can be assumed that Vöge was inspired to do this by the changed reception of Grünewald's works.

### III Vöge's Sonnet – a Dialogue with himself?

As mentioned before, Wilhelm Vöge's estate is now scattered among several institutions. If one looks through Vöge's treasure trove of books in Merseburg, one will find that he was a diligent glossist who annotated many copies. As Guido Siebert has recently pointed out, these notes show Vöge to be a dedicated reader who needed a spontaneous psychological outlet for reactions, impressions and emotions – the enthusiastic, witty or horrified marginal gloss.<sup>27</sup> Whether and how such notes were later incorporated into scholarly works is a question that cannot be pursued further here. For the present context, however, it is relevant that Vöge obviously attached great importance to his own emotionality and spontaneity in his own production process.

Admittedly, there are no marginal glosses in his personal copy of the Hagnower book, but instead, in a hidden place on the back cover without a personal dedication to one or more third parties, there is a sonnet [fig. 1]. Unlike the glosses in Vöge's other books, however, it does not comment on the text. It does not enter into an inner dialogue with it, but forms a linguistically-shaped work of art that expresses a self-contained reflection and becomes one with the scientific text. The lack of a dedication and the absence of an addressee to whom the speaker is directing it reveal it to be addressed to himself:

Auf der Plattform des Straßburger Münsters

Das dankestrunken er einst eingegraben,  
Das Wörtchen Goethe weiht diese Wand.  
Wars nicht auch hier wo Albrecht Dürer band  
Im Flaum der Jugend, Knospenkranz der Gaben.

Wo Mathis, Ausbund deutscher Malerknaben

<sup>26</sup> For more details, see: Berentzen, *Niclaus Hagenower. Studien zum bildhauerischen Werk: Patentia und Passiones*.

<sup>27</sup> Guido Siebert, 'Zum Schreien' – Wilhelm Vöge merkt an', in: *Kontinente der Kunstgeschichte. Der Kunsthistoriker Wilhelm Vöge (1868–1952)*, ed. by Leonhard Helten et al., Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag 2019, 237–248.

Erspähte einst Mariens Bienenstand?  
Hier reichten Blütenzeiten sich die Hand.  
Vom Schönsten, das wir je erschöpfert haben.

Liegt noch der Duft auf diesem Land,  
Duft goldner Waben.

V.<sup>28</sup>

(On the platform of the Strasbourg Cathedral

He once dug this in thanksgiving,  
The word Goethe consecrates this wall.  
Wasn't it also here where Albrecht Dürer banded  
In the down of youth, budding wreath of gifts.

Where Mathis, bundle of German Boys Painters

<sup>28</sup> Vöge, *Niclas Hagnower. Der Meister des Isenheimer Hochaltars und seine Frühwerke*, back cover, Vöge Library, Merseburg Cathedral Abbey. I would like to thank the staff there most sincerely for the opportunity to view Vöge's book treasures. – There is another undated poem, dealing with Mathis Grünewald's youth at the painter workshop at cabinet 2 (letters, poems, manuscripts, notes etc. from the Freiburg collection, FR 13, poems III, small forms, 181–190) in the Vöge Archive at the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau:

Vor Mathis' frühen Selbstbildnissen

Dies ist ein ganz besonderes Kind`  
Von denen eins, die von den Werkstattknaben  
Halbtot geschlagen werden,  
Ein Junge, der von seinem Werte weiß,  
Im Rausche seiner Farben west,  
Der Symphonie von Feuer und Karmin.  
V.

(Before Mathis' early self-portraits

This is a very special child  
One of those who from the workshop boys  
Beaten half to death,  
A boy who knows of his worth,  
In the intoxication of his colours west,  
The symphony of fire and crimson.  
V.)

Once spied Mary's apiary?  
 Here, blossom times shook hands.  
 Of the most beautiful we have ever created.

Is the fragrance still on this land,  
 Scent of golden honeycombs. V.)<sup>35</sup>

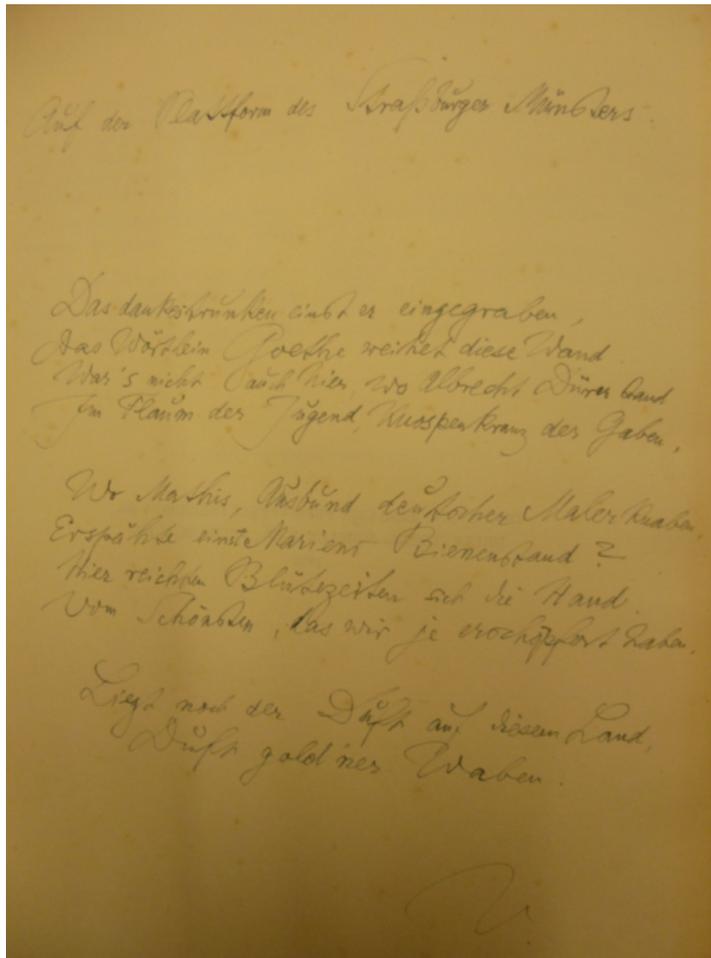


Figure 1 Sonnet by Wilhelm Vöge. Taken from: Wilhelm Vöge, *Niclas Hagnower. Der Meister des Isenheimer Hochaltars und seine Frühwerke*, back cover, personal copy, Vöge library, Domstift zu Merseburg.

The title of the sonnet names the elevated platform of the Strasbourg cathedral tower as the starting point of the poem. Vöge was certainly personally very familiar with it, having received his doctorate in Strasbourg with Hubert Janitschek on Ottonian book illumination on 21 February 1891.<sup>29</sup> His subsequent studies of high and late medieval sculpture, which were integrated into his

<sup>29</sup> Erwin Panofsky, 'Vorwort', in: *Wilhelm Vöge. Bildhauer des Mittelalters. Gesammelte Studien*, ed. by Erwin Panofsky, Berlin: Gebr. Mann 1995, XI-1, see: XIX.

postdoctoral thesis, were probably inspired by the sculptural decoration of the cathedral.<sup>30</sup> However, he turned down a later offer to take over the direction of the municipal museums there in 1908.<sup>31</sup>

This suggests that the content of the poem is generally connected with strong personal references for Vöge. In terms of form, Vöge's poem is a variant of the strict (Italian) sonnet, of which a common form in Germany consists of two quartets and two tercets.<sup>32</sup> In contrast, Vöge's poem has two quartets, but instead of tercets, they are concluded by a two-liner, i.e. it is a variant of the truant sonnet he liked to use.<sup>33</sup> The first quartet begins with the solemn, dignified-sounding lines 'Das dankestrunken er einst eingegraben / Das Wörtchen Goethe weiht diese Wand'. This suggests that the content of what follows is supposed to be about Johann Wolfgang Goethe's relationship to Strasbourg Cathedral. Here, the poem is obviously addressed to an audience that has a classical education, like its speaker. According to the first two lines of the poem, Goethe left a 'little word' in Strasbourg Cathedral. This is probably a broader allusion to the work of Steinbach, the master builder of Strasbourg Cathedral, to whom Goethe, who was deeply admired by Vöge, dedicated the essay *Von deutscher Baukunst* (On German Architecture) in 1772 with the famous exclamation 'O Heiliger Erwin' (O Holy Erwin) as a literary epitaph to the architect. This essay contains the famous lines 'hier in diesem Hain, wo ringsum die Namen meiner Geliebten grünen schneid ich den deinigen in eine deinem Turm gleich aufsteigende Buche' ('Here in this grove, where all around the names of my beloved are green, I cut yours into a beech that rises like your tower').<sup>34</sup> This refers to the Vitruvian primal hut as the first building. In this essay, Goethe in particular established the reception of the Gothic as a supposedly German national style in contrast to France and Italy.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Panofsky, 'Vorwort', XV–XVII. – Cf. Peter Betthausen, Art. 'Vöge, Wilhelm', in: Peter Betthausen et al, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon. Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus vier Jahrhunderten*, Stuttgart / Weimar: Metzler 1999, 428–430, see: 428.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Betthausen, *Georg Dehio. Ein deutscher Kunsthistoriker*, Munich / Berlin 2004, 170.

<sup>32</sup> Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, Stuttgart: Kröner 1989, 864.

<sup>33</sup> Achim Aurnhammer, 'Die Lyrik des Kunsthistorikers Wilhelm Vöge. Zur Krise der Beschreibungssprache in der Klassischen Moderne', in: *Wilhelm Vöge und Frankreich. Akten des Kolloquiums aus Anlass des 50. Todestages von Wilhelm Vöge (16.2.1868–30.12.1952) am Freitag, 2. Mai 2003, veranst. vom Frankreich-Zentrum der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg i. Br. in Verbindung mit dem Kunsthist. Institut, Freiburg i. Br.*, ed. by Wilhelm Schlink, Freiburg i. Br.: Universität 2004, 117–136, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Berliner Ausgabe: Kunsttheoretische Schriften und Übersetzungen* [Vol. 19], Berlin: Aufbau 1960, 33. – Goethe's admiration for Steinbach was based on the fact that he mistakenly believed him to be the sole master of the Strasbourg Cathedral. (Joachim Heimerl, 'Divis manibus' Goethe und Erwin von Steinbach', in: *Revista de Filología alemana* 12 (2004), 9–31, 10.)

<sup>35</sup> Goethe, *Berliner Ausgabe: Kunsttheoretische Schriften und Übersetzungen*, 34, 36.

Vöge was certainly very familiar with Goethe's work and its reception, especially since he had devoted his postdoctoral qualification thesis to the study of Gothic cathedrals in France. In Goethe's work, this is also connected with the genius aesthetic of *Sturm und Drang* ('storm and stress'), according to which the visual artist can become creatively active out of himself.<sup>36</sup> In relation to Vöge's philosophy of art, it is of particular importance that Goethe's description exaggerates the building poetically and at the same time transfers it to the poetic imagination, through which the beauty of the building can only really be experienced.<sup>37</sup> Vöge's sonnet thus can be understood as a poetic imitation of Goethe's prose.

By connecting the second line with the third line of the first quartet: 'Das kleine Wörtchen Goethe weiht diese Wand / War es nicht hier wo Albrecht Dürer band', Goethe is now associatively placed in a backward-looking contextual relationship to Dürer, who is presented as a young man with high artistic potential by the following last line of the quartet: 'Im Flaum der Jugend, Knospenkranz der Gaben'. The 'Knospenkranz' (budding wreath) alludes to this as the embellishment of the young human figure on Dürer's famous etching *Melancholia I* (1514). This can also be seen, together with Hans W. Hubert, in the context of Vöge's studies of the botany of the capitals of medieval cathedrals, which began in 1910: for this purpose, in addition to a herbarium, at the end of the 1920s he had acquired Kühn's *Botanischen Taschen-Bilderbogen* (botanical picture sheet) with colour illustrations for exact plant identification.<sup>38</sup> According to the recollection of his student Panofsky, he characterised the Gothic bud capital with the words that it was 'delicate and firm at the same time, like the young Gothic', i.e. the developing plant is equated with the developing Gothic.<sup>39</sup>

The word 'here' in the preceding line indicates Dürer's stay on his journeyman's tour in Strasbourg.<sup>40</sup> The content of the first lines of the second quartet of the sonnet follows on from the last lines of the first quartet: 'Wars nicht auch hier wo Albrecht Dürer band / Im Flaum der Jugend, Knospenkranz der Gaben. / Wo Mathis, Ausbund deutscher Malerknaben / Erspäte einst Mariens Bienenstand?' This connects it to the painting of the *Stuppacher Madonna*, now kept in a parish church in the village of Stuppach near Mergentheim, made by Grünewald of around the year 1517.<sup>41</sup> It depicts the former front of the southern transept of Strasbourg Cathedral before the old court house was broken down on its left side.<sup>42</sup> That relates to Mary as a symbol of the church, as written down by the mystic Bridget of Sweden.

<sup>36</sup> Heimerl, 'Divis manibus' Goethe und Erwin von Steinbach', 13–14.

<sup>37</sup> Heimerl, 'Divis manibus' Goethe und Erwin von Steinbach', 16–17.

<sup>38</sup> Hubert, 'Wilhelm Vöge und sein Konzept des Naturstudiums', 34–35.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from Panofsky, 'Vorwort', XXVI.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Schauerte, *Dürer. Das ferne Genie. Eine Biografie*, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun. 2012, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Horst Ziermann, *Matthias Grünewald*, Munich / London / New York: Prestel 2001, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Ziermann, *Matthias Grünewald*, 156–157.

The allusion to this painting, which represents the youthful Virgin Mary in lovely forms and delicate colouring, is confirmed in the following line with the question 'Erspäte einst Mariens Bienenstand?', because in the middle ground of the *Stuppacher Madonna*, there are five beehives. According to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah 7:14–15, the future son of the Holy Virgin would eat butter and honey if he knew how to distinguish between good and evil.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it is an eschatological vision of the Last Judgement, according to which the future Messiah will see Paradise after he has separated the righteous from the sinners. The beehive as an attribute is a symbol of Mary's virginity and also represents a connection to Isaiah's prophecy.

In the last two lines of the second quartet, 'Hier reichten Blütenzeiten sich die Hand. / Vom Schönsten, das wir je erschöpft haben', the sum of the cultural-historical references mentioned so far is now established by describing the activities of the three artists mentioned: the medieval master builder Steinbach and the painters Dürer and Grünewald as 'Blütezeiten' (blossom times), or high points of German art. This choice of words is not unusual for Vöge, for he also used linguistic images of growing, maturing and pushing towards development in his scientific treatises. As Susanne Deicher noted, they seem to come from the imaginary world of classical antiquity.<sup>44</sup> In this context, Deicher also referred to the fact that Vöge possibly saw himself ideally as the last link in a series of male figures, which in her opinion began with his father, who died at an early age, and led via his colleagues and friends to the artists of his time and their predecessors.<sup>45</sup>

The last and concluding line of the second quartet, 'Vom Schönsten, das wir [Accentuation by the author] je erschöpft haben', suggests that he identified himself with Goethe's aesthetics of genius that claimed the gothic style as being of German origin. In addition, Vöge's choice of words refers to his realisation that art-historical concepts of style must be developed on the basis of the most important artists.<sup>46</sup> The word 'erschöpft' in the last line of the second quartet seems very unusual in this context and corresponds to the dignified tone of his poem.<sup>47</sup> According to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, it originates

<sup>43</sup> Pantxika De Paepe-Beguérie / Philippe Lorentz, *Grünewald und der Isenheimer Altar: Ein Meisterwerk im Blick*. Musée d'Unterlinden 8 December 2007 – 2 March 2008, Paris: Somogy, 2007, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Susanne Deicher, 'Produktionsanalyse und Stilkritik. Versuch einer Neubewertung der kunsthistorischen Methode Wilhelm Vöges', in: *Kritische Berichte*, 1 (1991), 65–82, see: 69–70.

<sup>45</sup> Deicher, 'Produktionsanalyse und Stilkritik. Versuch einer Neubewertung der kunsthistorischen Methode Wilhelm Vöges', 77.

<sup>46</sup> Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte. Der Weg einer Wissenschaft*, Munich: Prestel 1990, 187.

<sup>47</sup> For more details, see: Aurnhammer, 'Die Lyrik des Kunsthistorikers Wilhelm Vöge. Zur Krise der Beschreibungssprache in der Klassischen Moderne', 121–122.

from *erschaffen*, *create* as well as *haurire*, *exhaurire*: *erschöpfen* (create), and means Vöge's artistic concept of creativity.<sup>48</sup>

The first line of the concluding two-liner then continues the last sentence: 'Liegt noch der Duft auf diesem Land', which is repeated in the last line to reinforce it, for it concludes with 'Duft goldner Waben'. In the context of the poem's content, the 'goldenen Waben' certainly refer to Mary's previously mentioned honeycombs. From the cultural-historical context mentioned here, it can be assumed that the designation 'land' in the first line of the concluding two-line poem means the Upper Rhine as an artistic landscape, since Strasbourg and Colmar are both located there. The 'goldenen Waben', i.e. the honeycombs in the last line of the poem, also make this landscape appear to be fertile in a figurative sense – in the sense of what has been said so far – and as artistically fertile. Vöge was obviously interested in integrating his Hagnower monograph into the overarching intellectual context of artistic creation on the Upper Rhine and, above all, in presenting the cross-fertilisation of the artistic genres of architecture and painting as something natural, while, as already mentioned, omitting his actual subject – sculpture – in terms of content. With Dürer and Grünewald, Vöge also named two protagonists of the Renaissance, which was occupied with national culture by the German bourgeoisie.

Assuming that this poem must have gone through a certain production cycle (first draft, revision and reworking, fair copy, transfer to the printed copy), it can be concluded that Vöge wrote down the poem in a conscious act at precisely this point. That it is indeed a poem by Vöge, and not merely a copy of an already existing poem, can be concluded from the final initial of his surname. From this, however, it can also be concluded that Vöge obviously saw a close connection between his verses and his book and aimed to put his work in a larger art historic context. This makes the sonnet a commentary worthy of interpretation. Although it is undated, it can be assumed that Vöge wrote his poem in the same period as the Hagnower book and wanted to anchor his work personally with this in the context of his scientific oeuvre and world view.

Moreover, Vöge's poetry with Achim Aurnhammer can be seen in the context of wider efforts to counter the abstract language of scientific positivism with an Ekphrasis characterised by empathy with artistic creation,<sup>49</sup> which is perhaps why Vöge chose Goethe's essay as the intellectual starting point for his sonnet. It should be noted that the vast majority of Vöge's poetic works, like the sonnet in his Hagnower monograph, were probably written after his retreat to Ballenstedt, which makes their autobiographical character clear. Many of his handwritten poems in his

<sup>48</sup> 'Erschöpfen', *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, digit. Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/21, <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?Lewid=EO8579>, access 16/09/2021.

<sup>49</sup> For Vöge's concept of science theory, see: Kathryn Brush, *The shaping of art history. Wilhelm Vöge, Adolph Goldschmidt and the study of medieval art*, Cambridge NY: Cambridge Univ. Press 1996.

estate in the Vöge Archive, like the entire scholarly work, have survived in several adaptations, from which it can be concluded that the poems were not merely occasional works, but were subject to an intensive process of shaping. On the one hand, Vöge preferred Roman verse forms, especially the sonnet, and on the other, antique stanza forms – especially the distich – which require a pronounced awareness of form and at the same time reveal a tendency towards his self-exposure.<sup>50</sup>

#### IV Conclusion

Vöge's Hagnower monograph, as already mentioned, represents a progression and completion of his previous areas of work and research. It has already been stated that this particular work of Vöge was not only enabled by his recovery, but furthermore demonstrates his orientation towards the research trends of his time and was presumably also inspired by the great popularity of Grünewald's works at that time.

However, it places Grünewald's *Stuppacher Madonna* in the service of the ageless beauty and represents him as a feminine and fabulous artist, as his other poems on Grünewald suggest too.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, the contemporary historical-national-cultural demarcation with France, where the *Isenheim Altar* was situated after the First World War, a country which Vöge felt deeply connected to through his research on Gothic cathedral sculpture, is not addressed. Rather, Vöge's sonnet is to be seen in the sense of self-affirmation after he had entered the academic public

<sup>50</sup> Aurnhammer, 'Die Lyrik des Kunsthistorikers Wilhelm Vöge. Zur Krise der Beschreibungssprache in der Klassischen Moderne', 118–121. – Vöge's pupil Carl Georg Heise considered him to have an artistic nature himself, but he thought that this leisure activity was considered inappropriate for a scientist at the time. (Carl Georg Heise, *Wilhelm Vöge zum Gedächtnis*, Freiburg i. Breisgau: H. F. Schulz, 1968, 18.)

<sup>51</sup> There is a third undated two-lined poem in cabinet 2 (letters, poems, manuscripts, notes etc. from the Freiburg collection, FR 13, poems III, small forms, 181–190) in the Vöge Archive at the Albert Ludwigs University in Freiburg im Breisgau, that addresses the ugliness of Grünewald's Crucifixions in contradiction to the beauty and youthfulness he connects with Grünewald in his other poems:

Zu Mathis' Kreuzigungen

Daß Du hausieren gegangen bist, mit solch grauenhaften Schränden,  
Nahm ich Dir übel, gerade, weil Du die Rose gemalt.

(On Mathis' Crucifixions)

That you have peddled, with such horrible shreds,  
I resented you, straight, because you painted the rose.)

sphere following a break of almost ten years due to illness: one could also say that he summed up his previous scientific activity.

As the interpretation of the sonnet *Auf der Plattform des Strassburger Münsters* revealed, Vöge presumably felt close to Goethe's aesthetic of genius, since he was artistically active through his poetry. In addition, Goethe's Gothic reception provided an ideal starting point for Vöge's own research on French cathedral sculpture, which, however, was to refute Goethe's thesis of the Gothic as the German national style once and for all, for which his encounter with Strasbourg Cathedral also gave him the impetus. From this, the poem unfolds in a rich chain of associations, starting from Goethe's reception of the Strasbourg cathedral building to Dürer and Grünewald, whose imagined time-transcending encounter Vöge reinterpreted as a fictitious artistic genealogy in which he included himself.

The demanding cultural-historical content of the sonnet, which is formally conceived as a linguistic-hermetic work of art, is not easy to understand and suggests an elitist gesture on the part of the speaker, who for his part is oriented towards a like-minded person: Vöge's poetry thus shows a certain closeness to the poetry of Stefan George (1868–1933), who was of the same age and who had also dedicated himself to Grünewald's works, as he wrote an expressionist poem on the *Isenheim Altar* in his cycle *Der siebente Ring* (The seventh ring) (1907) entitled *Kolmar: Gruenewald*. This assumption is confirmed by the fact that Vöge demonstrably maintained contacts with the George circle. His personal relationship with George was ambivalent, however.<sup>52</sup>

According to the acknowledgement in his Syrlin monograph published in 1950, Vöge maintained close contact with the then Ballenstedt town librarian and secondary school teacher Ernst Kayka.<sup>53</sup> Kayka, for his part, had a long-standing personal relationship with Max Kommerell (1902–1944), a former pupil of George's who later achieved great fame as a literary historian and was also his teacher.<sup>54</sup> Kayka was over twenty years older than Kommerell and the friend of Kommerell's brother-in-law, who was killed in the First World War, so there was also a personal bond with Kommerell.<sup>55</sup> Kayka maintained continuous contact with this relative of Kommerell's and with Kommerell himself via letters from 1916 to 1944.<sup>56</sup> A second connection to George's environment was Vöge's former doctoral student Ludwig Thormaehlen (1889–1956), who was later not only an art historian at the Berlin National Gallery, but also worked as a sculptor. In particular, he created portrait

<sup>52</sup> Achim Aurnhammer, Achim et al., *Stefan George und sein Kreis. Ein Handbuch*, Vol. 1, Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter 2012, 114.

<sup>53</sup> Leibetseder, 'Wilhelm Vöge in Ballenstedt', 212–213.

<sup>54</sup> Max Kommerell, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1919–1944*, ed. by Inge Jens et al, Olten / Freiburg i. Breisgau: Walter 1967, 10–11.

<sup>55</sup> Kommerell, *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen 1919–1944*, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Christian Weber, *Max Kommerell. Eine intellektuelle Biographie*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2011, 31–32.

busts of George in whose immediate environment he moved.<sup>57</sup> These contacts may have additionally inspired the topic, but not the content, of Vöge's sonnet.

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<sup>57</sup> Eugen Blume, Ludwig 'Thormaehlen im Bannkreis des Meisters', in: *Überbrückt. Ästhetische Moderne und Nationalsozialismus. Kunsthistoriker und Künstler 1925–1937* [Colloquium 'Überbrückt' at the Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum for contemporary art, Berlin 27–29 November 1997], Cologne: König 1999, 50–59, see: 50. – Cf. Ludwig Thormaehlen, *Erinnerungen an Stefan George*, ed. from the estate, Hamburg: Hauswedell 1962.