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The instrumentalization of the “tortured artist myth”: The birth of a legend of the *völkisch* writer Guido List

Petr Pytlík

Abstract

This article presents the legend about Guido List, an Austrian *völkisch* oriented writer, a typical instance of the “suffering-artist-myth”. The crucial question then is: How is it possible that a thoroughly mediocre writer who under normal circumstances would have been long forgotten became a legend in the occult and right-wing movements in the 20th century, and moreover, maintains this status till nowadays? The article shows the role of List’s self-portraying and focuses on the instrumentalization of “the tortured artist myth” by him, his followers, but also in the contemporary neopagan and right-wing movement.

Keywords

tortured artist myth; *völkisch* movement; Guido List; Armanenorden; modern esotericism; neopagan movement; personality cult

Introduction: the research question

Guido List (1848–1919) is considered a leading figure of the *völkisch* movement. He was virtually revered by his followers during his lifetime, and his pseudo-scientific studies and literary texts are still being published and translated today, more than hundred years after his death.¹ Yet from the point of view of literary studies, his texts are just average attempts on poetry. This article tries to explain the anatomy of a legend about Guido List based on the analysis of his texts that served to force his self-positioning - just like it was the case with many other *völkisch* writers, dealing the following questions: a) How was born the legend about Guido List, which in certain circles, especially in the occult and right-wing movements, is maintained till nowadays? (See the *List of examples of actual paratexts about List / translations of List 's texts* as appendix to this article); and b) What kind of role did the artist myths (the myth of a tortured artist, the myth of a writer-seer) play in his unusual career?

Using the example of Guido List who was seen by his like-minded contemporaries as a seer and a prophet already during his lifetime, and who is highly regarded as an important thinker of various occult movements even today, we will examine the role of the artist myths, primarily the myth of the tortured artist, which could be a key, if we would like to understand the reception of his personality and ideology. It is obvious that for his followers, List became the prototype of a misunderstood post-Romantic poet-seer (*poeta vates*) and a seeing man among the blind who has created his work with extreme difficulties and *in pain* (Balzli 1914; Krebel 2014). Therefore, List's legend seems to be a suitable case to analyse how myths about artists are constructed and unfolded, added to, and even reinterpreted, or updated in the course of time. The paper concludes by discussing the impact of List's legend on today's neo-pagan, esoteric, and/or right-wing extremist movements.

The tortured artist myth in the 19th century

The myth of the tortured artist shows exceptional resistance through time, and despite Roland Barthes' 'proclamation of the death of the author and the *desacralisation* of the image of the artist more than fifty years ago (Barthes)², it is still effective in literary historiography as well as in contemporary cultural discourses.

1 For example, the following titles have been translated into English in recent years and are available in internet shops: *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk: Esoteric and Exoteric* (2017), *The Rita of the Aryo-Germans I* (2013), *The Rita of the Aryo-Germans II* (2015), *The Germanic Wotan Priesthood* (2012), *Freemasonry and the Germanic Tradition* (2015), *The Invincible* (2011).

2 Although the tortured artist myth is still effective today, it should be noted that it experienced its heyday more than a hundred years ago and it has been increasingly regarded as suspect in the scientific field since the end of the Second World War. One should not omit the extensive early research in literary studies on the subject of art religion; see e.g. Detering 2007: 124-133 or Auerochs 2009.

In this context, the idealisation of suffering is one of the oldest topoi in Western culture. It could already be found in Christian thought and has been handed down since Aristotle at the latest, he calls it around melancholy, as Kearney concludes:

It was Aristotelian natural philosophy which first brought about the union between the purely medical notion of melancholy and the Platonic conception of frenzy. This union found expression in what for the Greeks was the paradoxical thesis that not only the tragic heroes, like Ajax, Heracles and Bellerophon, but all really outstanding man, whether in the realm of the arts or in those of poetry, philosophy or statesmanship - even Socrates and Plato - were melancholics. (Kearney 2002: 274)

This stereotypical image of artists had a strong impact on art, especially in the European literary history. Goethe, for example, emphasised the unique position of the artist by claiming: „Das gemeine Menschenschicksal, an welchem wir alle zu tragen haben, muß denjenigen am schwersten aufliegen, deren Geisteskräfte sich früher und breiter entwickeln“ (quoted in Neumann 1986: 56). For Nietzsche, suffering is even a prerequisite for the capacity of knowledge (1954: 584). For Schopenhauer, too, mental suffering is linked to the topos of a genius/Genie.

In fact, the instrumentalization of the myth of the tortured artist became possible with the emergence of the phantasm about the uniqueness and special position of the artist. It was only since an attenuated individualism emerged at the end of the 18th century that the figure of the artist as the creator of the unique became a widespread myth (Reckwitz 2016). The Romantic notion of the artist contributed substantially to the development of the myth of the artist which, among other things, is characterised by the *retreat into inwardness* (Krieger 2007: 46). The poet is seen as a *poeta vates*, a seer who draws from his suffering and from his *inner vision*, whereby this deification strengthens the myth of the artist's infallibility. In the second half of the 19th century in particular, the cult of the genius/Genie experienced a renaissance, and the question of the Genie was debated from a scientific, hereditary, psychiatric-neurological and psychopathological perspective. In addition to this context, it was discussed with passionate intensity in the humanities and in philosophical sciences, increasingly since the 1880s and in the decades that followed (see Köhne 2014). Based on these and other evidence one can finally claim that the idealisation of the tortured artist virtually experienced its heyday in the second half of the 19th century (Feulner 2010: 14, Montaperti 2010: 17).³

The second aspect of the mythical image of the artist highlights the difference between him and the bourgeois. The artist is, in sharp contrast to the bourgeois, portrayed on the one hand as a prophet, while he is at the same time an outsider of bourgeois society on the other hand. The mythical concept of the artist can also be perceived as the result of an effort to fully understand the social role of the artist. The bourgeois society of the 19th century assigns the artist a special position vis-à-vis the bourgeois; he/she is seen at the same time as outsider and a prophet, which reinforces his unique role and his

³ Schopenhauer asserts: "Genius and madness have a side where they border upon each other, indeed merge into each other." Schopenhauer 1819; quoted in Krieger 107.

social isolation. In this context, Feulner and Krieger observe that being an artist in the 19th century brings about *social marginalisation* (Feulner 2010: 14), and that the artists' hallmark is to be anti-bourgeoisie (Krieger 2007: 47). As Krieger notes, this concept of the 19th-century-artists is based on the fact that their existence was insecure. They often lived in poverty, illness, and exclusion. Krieger thus identifies the social basis of the myth of the tortured artist that emerged at that time, whereby in extreme cases suffering was seen as an indispensable condition for the creation of a work of art (see also Krieger 2007: 50, Feulner 2010: 15).

According to Draxler, this mythical concept of the artist is still functioning today. He also adopts it in his recent study on myths about artists in modern art, in which he claims that the artist is undoubtedly a mythical figure even in contemporary art, although "die besonderen Qualitäten dieser Figur gewissermaßen als Negativfolie des Normativen dienen, auf das die rationalen, planerischen und disziplinarischen Anstrengungen der Moderne zielten" (Draxler 2008: 27). From this perspective the artist becomes a mythical figure, which stands as a lone fighter against the ubiquitous mediocrity and thus offers the broader public numerous opportunities for identification.

In the 1980s, Neumann drew attention to the problematic aspects of such a concept in pursuing the following questions: Who benefited from the myth of the artist? What functions did such myths fulfil? Did the formation of identity on the basis of artist myths represent a social white lie, i.e. a compromise? Just like Krieger or Feulner later, he inquires about the artists' influence on our perception in connection with these myths. Yet, he focuses more on the process in which a myth emerges from the real basis of the artists' suffering, thus coming to the following conclusion:

obwohl einzelne leidvolle Erfahrungen authentisch sind und zu wertvollen Erkenntnissen führen können, so sollte man die auratische und suggestive Glocke, die dem Künstlertum übergestülpt wurde, nicht außer Acht lassen. Lässt man aber die erhöhten Vorstellungen von Leid weg, welche als Ausrede, Rechtfertigung oder – von der anderen Seite her als Forderung dienen können, mag man feststellen, dass in jedem Mythos auch ein Fünkchen Wahrheit steckt. Damit schließt sich der Kreis wieder. Die Richtigkeit und Bedeutung der Aussagen kann jeder für sich selbst überprüfen. (Neumann 1986: 54)

First, Neumann is aware that biographical references to the artist's suffering can be authentic, but he draws attention to the narrative perspective, which is characterized with pathos and an emphasis on the artist's self-presentation. He also claims that „befreiende Verstehen der Identitätsmythen neue Mythen erzeugen wird, die wir nicht vorausagen können, auf die wir aber gespannt sein dürfen“ (Neumann 1986: 54). Neumann's questions are crucial to this paper as he draws attention to the fact that while the myth of the artist is built on an authentic basis, it is at the same time social white lies/phantasms, thus providing space for its instrumentalization.

The process of self-portrayal is defined by Wolfgang Iser as a form of doubling (Doppelung). According to Iser, Doppelung is a constitutive component of self-positioning process. In doing so, however, he bases his considerations on the assumption of a dif-

ference, of something that lies before all positioning.⁴ If one transfers this paradigm to fictional texts, we could analyse the literary texts based on deconstructive methods in order to expose intentional strategies of self-presentation of the “real” as well as for the narrator’s self-presentation strategies. It should be pointed out that in the modern theory of autobiographies, in particular the differences between the “intentionally self-presenting” and the “authentic” are blurred (cf. Walter-Jochum 2016). These findings serve as a starting point for the subsequent analysis of texts written by List and about List, because in this analysis no distinction is made between intentional (List’s intended) and text-immanent (resulting from the writing process) self-presentational actions. Since the aim of this article is defined interdisciplinary and uses literary-analytical as well as cultural-sociological methods the source base includes explicit self-presentation statements by List, his literary texts, from which the narrator’s self-presentation emerges, his pseudo-scientific treatises and the venerating texts of his followers, in particular texts by Philipp Stauff (1919), Johannes Balzli (1914), August Horneffer (1919) etc.

It has to be added, that this portrayal of the artist as an outsider, as a suffering seer and later also as a misunderstood prophet enabled the delusions of many self-proclaimed *völkisch* thinkers. Guido List (Pytlík 2019), Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (Repusard 2013), Quido Kolbenheyer (Vordermeyer 2017), Artur Trebitsch (Kaplan 2020), the world conspiracy theorist of Jewish descent, and many others set up such a self-image. In the following text, Guido List is chosen as an example to show the specific ways for an artist and his followers to instrumentalize the artist myths at the end of 19th century in order to portray himself as a prophet and to spread his/their worldview.

From an average writer to a legend

If one tries to explain why List is still popular in particular circles and has not been forgotten, just like many other *völkisch* writers, there are two aspects that become conspicuous.

The first is related to the discovery of the so-called occult roots of National Socialism. It is likely that List’s work would be the subject of only marginal historical research today, had the idea not been raised after World War II⁵ that he had been one of the (occult) inspirers of the National Socialist ideology. Wilfried Daim (1957) was the first to claim that List inspired Hitler. Since then, List has become popular in various right-wing extremist and occult groups. This legend was to be taken over and spread by Nicolas Goodrick-Clarke in the 1980s, unintentionally leading to the next wave of interest in

4 Dieses Vorausliegende vermag niemals vollkommen in Inszenierung einzugehen, weil sonst dieses selbst das ihr Vorausgehende wäre. Anders gewendet ließe sich auch sagen, dass jede Inszenierung aus dem lebt, was sie nicht ist. Denn alles, was sich in ihr materialisiert, steht im Dienste eines Abwesenden, das durch Anwesendes zwar vergegenwärtigt wird, nicht aber selbst zur Gegenwart kommen darf. (Iser 1991: 511)

5 The first to express this was Wilfried Daim in his book *Der Mann, der Hitler die Ideen gab* (1958), which analyses the influence of Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels on the National Socialist ideology, and it also mentions the influence of List’s worldview in this context.

List’s texts, especially in England. Even in the 2010s it was possible to download many of List’s complete texts from several English-language servers; today they are protected by passwords (access to insiders only).

It should be noted that today, 38 years after the publication of Goodrick-Clarke’s book, all the doubts about his conclusions continue to emerge. Indeed, after a more thorough analysis of the *völkisch* movements, it becomes clear that a direct and unambiguous connection between List’s peculiar worldview and the Nazi ideology is extremely difficult to prove.⁶ What is significant for the present contribution is that this thesis helped to strengthen and enforced the cult surrounding List’s personality in esoteric, occult as well as right-wing extremist circles (see also Schuppener 2011). This topic is dealt extensively in the scientific literature and there are therefore enough publications on the polemics surrounding the thesis of the occult roots of National Socialism (Puschner 2012, Breuer 2008, Pytlík 2019). However, this article deals with the second, subsequent aspect, which has not yet been dealt with extensively in the literature in connection with Guido List.

The second aspect relates to the spread of List’s personality cult and the artist myths which were effective at the time, especially the above-mentioned *tortured artist myth*. At the beginning of his career, List was taken only as one of many regional and patriotic writers. He himself believed that he had found traces of ancient Germanic culture in Southern Moravia. When Friedrich Wannieck, a factory owner from Brno, introduced him in 1888 to local Germans, List immediately became a star of the *völkisch* movement and he presented himself as a historian and novelist in the traditional sense of the historical novel founded by Scheffel which combines “science with poetry” (Szendi 2006: 144). At the turn of the 20th century, List’s followers still saw him as a *völkisch* writer which is proven in the text in *Das Zwanzigste Jahrhundert* published in 1894 by the leading *völkisch* author Friedrich Lienhard. The article entitled *Guido List, Lebensbild eines Wiener Poeten* from 1905 also demonstrates that around 1900, List was still perceived as a nationally oriented poet. His extensive “research reports” which were to gain him never-ending glory among the *völkisch* followers mostly appeared only after 1905. The beginning of the 20th century brought a significant break in the perception of List’s personality too; in those early years, the myth of Guido List as a seer and prophet spread the List legend. List himself contributed to this self-depiction because he no longer wrote fiction after

6 It seems that these two ideologies competed. The research group led by Uwe Puschner proved that in the 1930s, the National Socialists devalued the *völkisch* movements as a competing ideology and later even banned them (Puschner 1996). A story from 1903 could serve as an example: Guido List sent his pseudo-scientific texts to the Vienna University and applied for a teaching position. It is known that his texts were returned without comment, yet it is less known that at that time Prof. Rudolf Much, a staunch critic of List, the author of many reviews and articles in the journal “Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur”, was active at the Vienna University. In the 1890s, Much described List’s research attempts as “deutschtümeldes Gallimathias”. Without further context, it might seem that in this case science has defended its hoard against a self-proclaimed, peculiar pseudoscientist. But Much’s students included, among others, Otto Höfler, an eminent Austrian medievalist and a strongly National Socialist-minded professor at the University of Kiel, member of the SS-Ahnenerbe, the author of the well-known text *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*. In this case, too, the notion of the competing attitudes of the Nazi ideologists towards List’s worldview would have to be proven, whereby, incidentally, a direct connection between Much’s and Höfler’s influence on the Nazi ideology may be established (see also Pytlík 2019).

1905 and devoted himself to pseudo-scientific reports or prophecies (see also List's bibliography in Pytlík 2019).

Anatomy of a legend: Mythical self-images

To find out how List presented himself, it is necessary to look at his literary work, his own paratexts, his pseudo-scientific treatises and several other texts about him, especially the biography of Johannes Balzli, which List probably co-edited. The assumption that he himself adapted the story of his own life to fit the tortured artist myth in narrative terms can be illustrated by several quotations and examples. Once again, an important source is provided by Johannes Balzli's biography⁷ published during List's lifetime. It is to be assumed that List, who was in contact with Balzli, was able to adjust the text to his view before its publication.

The narrative of List's career is based on the dichotomy between intuitive knowledge, the *divine revelation*, and the materialistic world of the 19th and 20th century, as another follower of his, Felix Havenstein, later put it (1936: 11). This motif is present in a wide variety. Even List's childhood is portrayed as a struggle between his father, a leather goods dealer, and the boy who was about to discover his artistic talent. Balzli tells us that when the boy (his name at the time was still Karl Anton List) expressed his wish to become an artist, his father, who wanted his eldest son to take over his profession, strictly denied the idea. List thus had to give in and study business. However, as Guido List later reported in his work *Deutsch-Mythologische Landschaftsbilder*, he did not give up the original idea of becoming an artist. Thanks to his excursions and artistic experiments, he started to inquire into nature. These excursions are said to have opened a path to spiritual contemplation (List 1912: 642). In 1862, when List was only 14 years old, he had a vision in the catacombs of St. Stephen's Cathedral. Reputedly, the boy fell on his knees in front of an altar and promised that he would build a temple for Wotan, the highest god of the Germanic people (Balzli 1917). This legend was, among other, important for the perception of List as a prophet with supernatural dispositions and is also perceived positively by modern pagans, especially in the Armanenorden (see the recent presentation of this organisation – Armanenorden 2022).

Based on the narrative of List's *deepest intuitive disposition*, Balzli (and List himself as a co-author) further models List's career. In keeping with *the tortured artist myth*, he

⁷ List's follower Johannes Balzli wrote the best known and most quoted biography entitled *Guido v. List. Guido v. List – Der Wiederentdecker uralter arischer Weisheit, Sein Leben und Schaffen* which was published during List's lifetime (1917). It is considered the most important source for the biographical account as List's estate was lost. There are only a few letters scattered in various archives in Austria, Germany, and the Czech Republic. Since Balzli also printed several documents from the "Master's archive" as well as some of List's texts and lectures, his book is still considered the most important source on List. However, one should be sceptical and critical; Balzli was, after all, List's enthusiastic follower and in his biography, he himself supported the self-positioning of Guido List. He has also adopted List's rhetorical pathos and vocabulary, both of which have helped him shape List's prophet myth. In the 1980s, Balzli's book was critically assessed by Nicolas Goodrick-Clarke who gathered a number of contemporary documents and compared the statements to those of List.

emphasises that List's worldview emerged from the deepest psychological and material hardships; Balzli speaks about the period before 1888 when List got into financial trouble: „Harte Schicksalsschläge trafen ihn Schlag auf Schlag, aber gerade in diesen Nöten formulierte sich mehr und mehr, deutlicher und immer deutlicher die Mission, die von Jugend an, wenn auch nur dunkel gefühlt war.“ List himself later described this period in the *Deutsch-Mythologische Landschaftsbilder* as “a difficult, difficult time” (List 1912: 125). In the following years, he convinced himself of his own mission which helped him deal with both material and family problems.

The *List myth* is elaborated further on in Balzli's 1917 book. After 11 years of material troubles, the novel *Carmuntum* (1888) is said to have carried List among the best *völkisch* novelists and made him widely famous among the *völkisch*. Balzli offers an explanation for this unexpected fame, when he calls those difficult years *an initiation followed by many happier and better years* (Balzli 1917: 22). This interpretation fully corresponds to the tortured artist myth, which says that the great artist has to undergo a time of trial before his genius will eventually be revealed. Thanks to Balzli, List is portrayed as a typical Romantic author-hero. But also the titles of other Lists followers testify, that on the beginning of the 20th century after 1905, List was not perceived as a historian and novelist anymore, but as a prophet a new coming age (see below).

List's attempts at self-positioning are clearly discernible in his literary texts (*Deutsch-Mythologische Landschaftsbilder*, *King Vannius*, *Pipara*, *Alraunenmären*, etc.). List portrays himself as a bard, or a *Skalde*, as he called it, the bearer of ancient Germanic wisdom. His self-image is brought to light most succinctly in the short story *Weihnachtsmärchen* (List 1903). In this text, a Germanic Skald from the early Middle Ages travels involuntarily to modern times because he unknowingly enters a time machine, an old overgrown pagan church. After several unsuccessful attempts to write down his strange experience and explain it to modern people, he returns to this timeless ghost church where he dies abandoned in his little room. The Skalde, mocked a thousand years ago by a quarx in the woods, unheard of in modern times by wandering folk, faithfully reflects List's self-image. It is obvious that List identified with the figure of this lonely, misunderstood, and romantic Skalde. The same Skalde appears in several other short stories contained in the selection *Alraunenmären*, thus linking the most diverse texts in the entire collection. This tale also offers List's critique of contemporary literary conditions:

Die „dankbare Nachwelt“ aber benützte es, um dem „Unsterblichen“, dem nun etliche Literaturhebräer Nekrologe schrieben (die Zeile um 10 Heller) und für den nun Sorge getragen ward, dass man ihn künftig im „Meyer“ und auch im „Brockhaus“ finde, die dankbare Nachwelt also benützte dieses zu spät eingelangte Honorar, um dem Unsterblichen“, erst nach seinem Tode „Entdeckten“ ein Denkmal zu errichten, bei dessen Enthüllung viel schöne Reden geredet wurden. Danach warten sie dreißig Jahre. „bis er frei wird“, damit seine Werke in der „Universalbibliothek“ erscheinen können und das hochgelobte Volk der Dichter und Denker des Unsterblichen Werke für zwanzig Pfennige erwerben könne. (List 1903/2008: 9)

List clearly expresses the self-positioning that appeals to many *völkisch* ideologues who, just like List, felt derided by many and seen as enthusiasts, fantasists, or self-proclaimed prophets. List deliberately emphasizes his fate as an outsider in his subsequent texts, in which he depicts democracy, academic science, industrialisation, or capitalism as the symptoms of a modern social crisis, and himself as the saviour from the decay that remains unheard of.

The above-mentioned perspective opens several possibilities for identification to appear during the 20th century and enable List's legend to be rediscovered again and again by different groups (occultism, right-wing, neonationalists etc.). For example: This happened during the First World War when List's books became the favourite reading of soldiers (Balzli 1917:173). Later in 1932, List was discovered by the Freemasons who regarded him as the prophet of the new age (Horneffer 1932). List prophesied that the Einherier - the souls of the soldiers (Germanic heroes) who died in the First World War - would return from Valhalla in 1932.⁸

An important rediscovery of Guido Listo took place in the 1960s. It was with Adolf Schleipfer and his former wife Sigrun, why the Guido von List Society gained new impetus around 1967. The new organizational structure, implemented primarily by Adolf Schleipfer as President of the Guido von List Society, corresponded more appropriately to their ideological worldview. In 1976 he founded the Armanenorden, and with the journal "Irminsul", which he had already published before 1967, the right-wing religious ideas were spread quarterly. The Guido von List Society remained as the inner circle of the initiated (Röder 2017:269). Since the 1960s, however, List still figures as an important figure in various obscure movements, and especially in recent years, the number of translations of his texts into various languages, especially into English, but also Italian and Spanish has been increasing (see List of new translations as an appendix of this article).

List as a seer and a prophet

Developing the image of List as a seer and a prophet of the Teutonic renaissance, Johannes Balzli, List's follower and biographer, tries to explain which event at the beginning of the 20th century might have caused such a rise. Balzli describes List's visions which he believed to experience during his eye surgery (cataract) that caused him to lose sight for 11 months. Balzli perceives this event as a transitional phase which might have helped *the völkisch prophet* intensify his mystical insights. After 1905 List is not anymore precepted as a *völkisch* writer, but as a prophet. Such a change in the reception of his personality is confirmed by the texts written about List after 1905. All the articles about

8 Several historians (Hamann 2007, Goddrick-Clarke 2005 (1985)) testify to the extent to which this supposed prophecy is currently being received, some even flirt with the idea that List had predicted the Hitler coup. Moreover, in the book published in England in 2010 entitled *Star of the Abyss: The Medium Adolf Hitler in the Light of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*, author unknown, nom de plume Satparam, Guido List's prophecy is examined in detail, and he himself is presented as a daemon.

List after that date emphasise his unique position. Moreover, Guido List is ever since named exquisitely with the aristocratic attribute “von” as Guido VON List (although he was demonstrably not of noble birth), and his followers call him “Meister” (Master); the study by Lanz von Liebenfels entitled *Guido von List, ein moderner Skalde* (1907) is symptomatic, in this respect.

List’s death in 1919 was commented by other members of the Guido List society. Philipp Stauff, the then chairman of the Guido von List Society, wrote an article (1919) entitled *Guido von List gestorben*, and later a more extensive report *Von unseres Meister Letzter Zeit* which became an appendix to the third edition of *Rita der Ario-Germanen* (the last complete work by List) in 1920. List’s friend Lanz von Liebenfels wrote the article *Guido von List, eine ariomantische Studie* (1927). *Guido von List, Der Skalde, Seher und Forscher* by Arthur Wolf-Wolfsberg was published in the same journal. In 1932, a year in which the arrival of the Strong One from Above (*Der Starke von Oben*) was to be expected according to List’s prophecy, there appeared the article *Guido List, der Völkische Philosoph und Prophet* by August Horneffer, a member of the Verein Deutsche Freimaurer (German Freemasonry).⁹

These texts show in detail how List’s personality and work were received immediately after his death. In his extensive report on List’s last days, Stauff (1920) reports that List prophesied the defeat of the Allies in the submarine battle on February 18, 1917 (Stauff 1920:II). And again he mentioned List’s prophecy, in which List determined the elimination of social democracy and Judaism in 1932, which was also later discussed again and again in esoteric and right-wing paratexts:

1918 erließ der Meister das Rundschreiben „An unsere Getreuen“. Darin besprach er die Lage auch auf Grund der Prophetien und lehrte: wir müssen erst den Feind in unserem Innern besiegt haben, ehe wir den vorbestimmten rassisch-völkischen Sieg erringen, der sich 1932 vollenden soll in der Ausschaltung der Sozialdemokratie und des Judentums. (Stauff 1920:III)

Finally, in this text, the tortured artist myth is once again brought in, namely in the quote from List’s Text *An meine Getreuen*, in which List explained about the First World War that this terrible war experience was necessary for him, because *remembering ancient Germanic epochs has to be paired with realizing life*, quoted verbatim:

So sehr ich mich auch mühte und die Hemmung zu brechen versuchte, die mich seit 1914 hindert, mein Haupt- und Schlusswerk „Armanismus und Kabbala“ zu vollenden, so war ich doch ohnmächtig dem Schicksalswillen gegenüber, und immer klarer trat die Erkenntnis vor meine Seele, dass ich der Erfahrung der Kriegsjahre bedurfte, um jenes Werk zu vollenden,

9 Dr. August Horneffer, a philosopher (born 5.7.1878 in Treptow a. d. Rega/Pomerania - died 1955 in Berlin). D. 19.3.1911 Lodge “Zum aufgehenden Licht an der Isar” in Munich; Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge Royal York, called “Zur Freundschaft” in Berlin, chief editor of the Federal Gazette “Am Rauhen Stein”. He revised the Fischer-Catechisms. As the first Grand Speaker of the “United Grand Lodge of the Freemasons of Germany”, he gave the ceremonial address at its foundation on June 19, 1949, in St. Paul’s Church in Frankfurt.

denn das „Erberinnern“ muss sich mit dem „Lebenserkennen“ paaren. Das „Lebenserkennen“ kann aber nur eine so furchtbar große Zeit vermitteln, als welche die siderische Sturmzeit vor der Zeitwende zur siderischen Ostarzeit sich erweist. (Stauff 1920:V)

It should also be noted that the last work of List *Armanismus und Kaballa* was not published, but only “may be given to qualified circles”.

As those articles testify, after his death List strongly was perceived as a prophet of a Germanic rebirth; an image kept up till now, which is particularly effective in the occult and right-wing extremist movements. Both Guido-von-List-Society (founded in 1967) and the Armanen-Orden¹⁰, re-founded by Adolf Schleipfer 1967, were directly linked to List. Adolf Schleipfer and his wife Sigrun also revived the Hoher Armanenorden (HAO) - a group of the same name that Guido List founded at the end of his life for the purpose of gathering the elite of modern Teutons (the so called “Armanen”). Schleipfer also called Guido List *Meister* (and himself *Großmeister*).¹¹ Guido List ‘s pictures, incl. his photographs as a boy became the key representative symbol of today’s Armanenorden¹² -- the cult of Lists personality in this organization is obvious.

Conclusion

This article describes the emergence and development of Guido List’s personality cult from two fundamental perspectives: 1) the way in which his personality has been perceived by others up to now (Balzli 1917, Stauff 1920, Armanenorden 2021 etc.), and 2) the way in which he portrayed himself (List 1912, 2008).

It could be concluded that in his followers’ perception of him as a seer, poeta vates, and later even a prophet in which the “tortured artist myth” played an essential role highlighted the image of List as a chosen prophet of modern Germanic nations. One could also observe a development in that myth. Before 1900, List was only seen as one of many *völkisch* writers; this, however, changed in 1903 after his eye surgery. List himself contributed to this self-depiction because he no longer wrote fiction after 1905 and devoted himself to pseudo-scientific reports or prophecies. His followers also accepted this change in his self-positioning; they added the noble attribute *von* to his name and called him *Meister*. In very restrained circles this Listian myth persists down to our times and is still cultivated, mainly by the neo-pagan group called Armanenorden. Not only does the leader of this group call himself *Großmeister*, but the websites also show photos of List

10 The members of the newly founded Order of Armanen in Cologne tried to update List’s theses for their own purposes. The thought of an allegedly high position of women among the Germanic peoples is linked to modern feminist concepts of matriarchy. However, List’s ideological influence cannot be overestimated. His ideas are processed in general by “the modern Armanians”, hence they can also be found in the works of many *völkisch*-oriented authors. Thus, it would be an exaggerated generalisation to attribute modern witchcraft discourses to List’s ideas only.

11 See e. g. <https://www.hagalil.com/archiv/98/03/armanen.htm>, viewed 31.12.2021.

12 High Order of Armanen websites: <https://vk.com/public108021810>, and other sources: http://nornirsaett.de/list_ariosphen_3/, viewed 31.12.2021.

as a child, a teenager, and an adult, one can even find a scanned manuscript there, and a lot more – the cult of Lists personality in this society is obvious.

Based on various sources on the modern neo-pagan movements, it can be argued that merely List’s confused, thoroughly contradictory worldview could hardly attract today’s esoteric, occult, and right-wing extremist groups; it is rather the myth of his personality, his self-positioning within the *völkisch* movement and later the spectacular discovery that List’s writings are one of the roots of Nazi ideology, which played a crucial role in keeping his heritage alive even 100 years after his death.

With respect to the problematic content of List’s writings, one final remark is in place, here. It should be emphasised that this article has no intention to help spread Guido List’s personality cult; quite the opposite, it aims at pointing out the worrying persistence of myths as for instance the “romantic artist myth”, which tend to survive in violent and traumatizing historical periods. They should therefore not only be taken as white lies, or a social compromise as Neumann puts it, but also revealed and fundamentally deconstructed.

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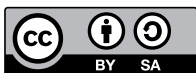
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