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Stephan Resch, Auckland

„Lust, Kraft, Wille und Ekstase erzeugen" – Tracing Vitalism in Stefan Zweig's early works

I. Vitalism

Stefan Zweig's literary, cultural and social interests were wide-ranging. Apart from being an avid and lifelong reader of world literature and an exacting collector of autographs, he had some less well known and more ephemeral interests reflecting the cultural currents of his time. As Mark Gelber has documented, Zweig's Judaism and his acquaintance with Theodor Herzl led him to a brief engagement with the Zionist movement[1], which did not however, result in Zweig adopting a Zionist outlook. In a similar vein, Zweig observed the developments of post 1917 Soviet communism with significant interest, without himself being drawn towards any party allegiance.[2] Yet both the exchanges with Zionist and communist intellectuals left clear traces in Zweig's works for years to come. These passing but often recurring interests have only recently started to receive due critical attention in Zweig scholarship, yet they are crucial for a nuanced understanding of Zweig's complex and multifaceted worldview. I would like to argue that Zweig was influenced to a larger extent than thus far assumed by literary vitalism and that this engagement has left recognisable traces in Zweig's poetic and essayistic oeuvre before WWI. Furthermore, vitalist ideas may be regarded as a contributing factor to Zweig's early support of the Austrian war effort.

What exactly is meant by literary vitalism? Wolfdietrich Rasch's designation of „Lebenspathos"[3] to describe a prevalent cultural current around 1900 may serve as a starting point. Gunter Martens, in his seminal study *Vitalismus und Expressionismus* outlines the term as follows:

> Mehr als durch einen fest umrissenen Inhalt ist der „Oberwert Leben" in seiner Gegenposition zu den philosophischen, religiösen, kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Traditionen des 19. Jahrhunderts gekennzeichnet. Die beschriebene, als Reaktion einsetzende „Thronerhebung des Lebens" mag hier als erste Eingrenzung des literaturhistorischen Begriffes Vitalismus vorangestellt werden.[4]

The idea of the Lebenskult, an ostentatious rejection of bourgeois society and industrialisation in order to embrace themes such as youth, sun, dance, nature and eroticism is primarily associated with vitalist literature. However, as Martens points out, apart from this essentially escapist quality of vitalism, the term can also be extended

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1 Mark H. Gelber: „Stefan Zweig und die Judenfrage von heute". In: *Stefan Zweig heute*. Ed. by Mark H. Gelber, Frankfurt: Peter Lang 1987, p. 160-180.

2 Stephan Resch: „Auf der Suche nach Klarheit: Stefan Zweig, Henri Barbusse und Romain Rolland in der Clarté-Debatte". In: *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 62 (2) 2012, p. 189-205.

3 Wolfdietrich Rasch: *Aspekte der deutschen Literatur um 1900. Zur deutschen Literatur seit der Jahrhundertwende*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler 1967, p. 20.

4 Gunter Martens: *Vitalismus und Expressionismus. Ein Beitrag zur Genese und Deutung expressionistischer Stilstrukturen und Motive.* Stuttgart 1971, p. 16.

to an intellectual current which sought to engage with contemporary issues more actively.

> In der betonten Wendung gegen die Stagnation einer philiströsen Weltanschauung, gegen eine leere Transzendenz, gegen Ruhe und festgelegte Gesetzmäßigkeiten dokumentiert sich gegenüber der Jahrhundertwende nicht allein ein ausgeprägter Wille zur Auseinandersetzung mit den Problemen der Zeit, sondern es wurde dadurch vor allem Lebensdynamik in einer Intensität darstellbar, die dem vorhergehenden Lebenskult vorenthalten bleiben musste.[5]

It is this dynamic concept of vitalism, which, in its most extreme form, extends to the ecstatic celebration of speed, technology and virility by the Italian Futurists, that will be of special interest for this discussion.

Stefan Zweig never publicly associated himself with a particular literary movement. When placing his writing within the intellectual currents of the early 20th century, neo-Romantic influences (Hugo von Hofmannsthal) are usually evoked and the importance of Freudian psychology for Zweig's thinking and writing is correctly pointed out.[6] Neither expressionism nor vitalism are usually associated with Zweig's writings. What has been identified by scholarship, however, is the significant influence of Emile Verhaeren on Zweig in the first decade of the 20th century.[7] Zweig had spent much of the first half of the decade writing German translations of symbolist poetry by writers such as Baudelaire and Verlaine to hone his own literary technique. But it was through meeting Verhaeren in 1902, that Zweig started to find both a self-confident literary and moral outlook:

> Verhaeren war für mich eine Entscheidung. Ich meine damit nicht, daß ich seinen Vers nachahmte oder den Stil seiner Dichtung: er war mir wie Dehmel und Rilke viel bedeutsamer als moralisches Vorbild denn als literarisches und meine Übertragung, mein Eintreten für ihn dann eigentlich ein Akt religiöser Überzeugung.[8]

Verhaeren, a well-respected writer in his native Belgium, was increasingly being recognised throughout Europe as a harbinger of literary modernity. Verhaeren's greatest artistic achievement in Zweig's eyes was the „Umwertung des Dichterischen"[9], questioning the idea that beauty is necessarily expressed through traditional notions such as balance, harmony and pleasing appearances. For Verhaeren, the transition into an industrial society necessitated a reappraisal of aesthetic principles. Beauty could consequently be expressed through the intention, function and the energy of an object. Such a notion of beauty allowed Verhaeren to praise factories as magnificent expressions of modern civilisation, transforming human qualities of energy, knowledge and willpower, into sophisticated industrial products. Verhaeren moves from an initially cautious attitude towards urbanisation and industrialisation towards

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5 Ibid., p. 290-291.

6 Henry and Mary Garland: *The Oxford Companion to German Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, p. 949.

7 Cf. Harry Zohn: „Stefan Zweig and Verhaeren". In: *Monatshefte* Vol. 43, (Apr. – May 1951) No. 4/5, pp. 199-206; Paul Emond: „Emile Verhaeren et Stefan Zweig, une amitie litteraire". In: *Francofonia* No. 18 (Primavera 1990), pp. 45-70.

8 Stefan Zweig: „Autobiographische Skizze". In: *Das literarische Echo* 17 (1914-1915), Columns 199-202, here Column 201.

9 Stefan Zweig: *Emile Verhaeren.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1984, p. 90. The choice of words, reminiscent of Nietzsches „Umwertung aller Werte", would have hardly been coincidental.

one of affirmation as he comes to regard cities as centres of synergies and motors of progress for the modern world.

At a time, when Vienna found itself at the crossroads between a late feudalist and a modern industrial society, Zweig was looking for a poetic voice that could give adequate aesthetic expression to these changes. Growing up in the rarefied world of the well-to-do Jewish bourgeoisie allowed him to largely ignore the social and political realities of his time: „Wir jungen Menschen aber, völlig eingesponnen in unsere literarischen Ambitionen, merkten wenig von [den] gefährlichen Veränderungen in unserer Heimat: wir blickten nur auf Bücher und Bilder".[10] Through Verhaeren's robust and life-affirming poetry, which immerses itself in the noise and the bustle of the cities and its crowds, Zweig's own writing undergoes a gradual change from an introspective, psychological perspective towards an increasing interest in the aesthetic assessment of the world surrounding him.

In 1907, first signs of Zweig's interest in the vitalist aspect of Verhaeren's work become apparent. In a letter to Benno Geiger, he asks for travel advice preceding a journey to Italy and a special favour: „Die zweite Bitte: senden Sie mir bitte einen Begleitbrief an F.E. [!] Marinetti. Es würde mich freuen, den mir von seiner Tätigkeit sehr sympathischen Menschen kennen zu lernen".[11] That Zweig intended to establish contact with Marinetti, who only two years later reached European notoriety as a literary agent provocateur and flamboyant initiator of the *Futurist Manifesto*, is less astounding than it may first sound. Marinetti's fascination with Verhaeren had much in common with that of Zweig. Just as the Austrian writer referred to Verhaeren as „der Dichter von morgen"[12], Marinetti had recognised the visionary qualities in Verhaeren's writing. Marinetti featured translations of Verhaeren's poetry in his literary journal *Poesia* and in 1908, he even dedicated an entire issue to the Belgian. In the 1909 *Futurist Manifesto*, he points to Verhaeren as one of the „cinq ou six grands précurseurs du futurisme"[13] in spite of the futurists' tendency to deny all historic and literary influences. Marinetti's proto-Futurist works paid homage to Verhaeren's new aesthetic vision through translation and the adaptation of literary themes such as the city, factories, technology and the masses. Marinetti's works in the years immediately preceding the publication of the *Futurist Manifesto*, which curiously blend symbolist traditions with an anarchic celebration of modern life have been described by Günter Berghaus as a „prelude to Futurism".[14] What exactly Zweig knew of Marinetti's works is unknown but it can be assumed that through the friendship with Verhaeren, he would have been familiar with the journal *Poesia* or even some of the proto-Futurist works such as *Destruction* (1904) which Marinetti had sent to the Belgian writer. That Zweig's and Marinetti's interests would converge at that point is comprehensible. With similar literary preferences and

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10 Stefan Zweig: *Die Welt von Gestern*. Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 2010, p. 78.

11 Knut Beck, Jeffery Berlin et al. (eds.): *Stefan Zweig – Briefe 1897-1914.* Frankfurt a.M: S. Fischer, p. 159. (Stefan Zweig to Benno Geiger, 18.8.1907). Whether Zweig and Marinetti indeed met is unclear. Zweig's diaries of these years have been lost and there is no further mention of Marinetti in subsequent letters.

12 Zweig: *Emile Verhaeren*, p. 9.

13 David Gullentops: „Verhaeren and Marinetti". In: *Forum for Modern Language Studies* XXXII (1996) 2, p. 107-118, (here p. 112).

14 Günter Berghaus: *The genesis of Futurism: Marinetti's early career and writings 1899-1909*. Leeds: Society for Italian Studies 1995, p. 39.

the mutual mentor of Verhaeren, both writers found themselves at a stage of transition in their literary careers. For Marinetti, Verhaeren's work laid the foundations for a much more radical rejection of conventions and traditions heralded by Futurism.

II. Zweig's vitalist roadmap: Das neue Pathos

Unlike the *Futurist Manifesto*, Zweig's Verhaeren biography, published in 1910, did not set out to be iconoclastic. But at its heart was a similar conviction that 19th century literary conventions were unsuitable to adequately capture the zeitgeist. The book was meant to provide both an account and a celebration of Verhaeren's work, in its content and structure mirroring the spirit of affirmation and enthusiasm that Zweig saw as the basis of Verhaeren's writing. By ostensibly discussing the work and worldview of Verhaeren, Zweig creates a concept for his own artistic agenda for the years to come. Of special interest for its vitalist outlook is the chapter „Das neue Pathos", already published a year earlier in the journal *Das literarische Echo*. The text heralds the beginning of a new phase in Zweig's writing. As he is winding up an almost decade long effort of translating and promoting the works of others, this is the first programmatic text, which lays out his own aesthetic vision. In his essay, Zweig is pleading for the return to a more immediate engagement with poetry. What was in ancient times an oratory skill requiring direct interaction with an audience, has turned into what Zweig regards as an artificial and solitary linguistic pursuit. As poetry became a written and increasingly sophisticated art form, it lost its potential to instil passion, fervour and enthusiasm in its audience, eventually turning into a mere „Stimmungsbild". Zweig's criticism takes aim at the decadent and symbolist poetry which he himself had emulated only years earlier. With reference to Nietzsche and Verhaeren, Zweig predicts a paradigm shift, which would see poetry and poet once again aligned with the demands of an urban, industrial and fast paced society. Through the „new pathos" which borrows from the oratory skills of early rhetoricians, poetry is to gain renewed significance as a medium that exercises direct influence on the masses:

> Ein solches Gedicht darf nicht mehr sentimentaler Dialog des Einsamen mit irgendeinem unbekannten Einsamen irgendwo in der Ferne sein, darf nicht die kurze, flüchtig zitternde Stimme sein, die schon verlischt, ehe die Flamme des Wortes in ihr emporgeschlagen hat, dieses neue Gedicht muß stark jubelnd und beseelt sein, weit ausholend und hinstürmend in raschem Schwung. Nicht für leise Stimmen ist es geschrieben, sondern für laute, hallende Worte. Wer die Menge zwingen will, muß den Rhythmus ihres neuen und unruhigen Lebens in sich haben, wer zu ihr spricht, muß beseelt sein von neuem Pathos. Und dieses neue Pathos, das „ja sagende Pathos par excellence" im Sinne Nietzsches, ist vor allem Lust, Kraft und Wille, Ekstase zu erzeugen. Nicht sensitiv und wehleidig darf dieses Gedicht sein, nicht ein persönliches Leid ausdrücken, damit ein anderer sich darin einfühle, sondern beseelt von Freude und Überschwang, von dem Willem aus Freude wieder Schwung und Leidenschaft zu erzeugen. Nur große Gefühle tragen das Wort zur Menge hin, kleine, die nur im Schweigen wie in unbewegter Luft auffliegen können, stürzen hin. *Das neue Pathos muß den Willen nicht zu einer seelischen Vibration, zu einem feinen ästhetischen Wohlgefühl enthalten, sondern zu einer Tat.*[15]

The poet's role moves away from contemplation, self-observation and critical examination. Instead, it is through a complete identification with and affirmation of the „Rhythmus ihres neuen und unruhigen Lebens" that the poet can become a mouthpiece for the masses. Unlike the philosopher, the poet needs to disengage the intellect

15 Zweig: *Emile Verhaeren*, p. 135.

and allow himself to be swayed by what he observes: „Während der Philosoph zur Erkenntnis der Einheit durch Maß und Berechnung, durch ein ruhig abwägendes Gefühl der Kräfte gelangen kann, wird ein Dichter das Ähnlichwerden und Einswerden der Dinge erst in der Ekstase, erst im erhobenen Zustande der Begeisterung entdecken können".[16] Nietzsche's glorification of the creator in *Also sprach Zarathustra*[17] becomes a fervent and direct call to action in Zweig's text. As Martens argues, this call to action, is not to be conceived as an anarchic attempt to change social or political reality, it is neither revolutionary nor subversive. Action in this context is evidence of vitality and therefore an end in itself.[18]

Zweig's essay had struck a chord especially with the Berlin avant-garde movement. When Kurt Hiller founded his proto-expressionist *Neuer Club* in 1909, he called the public readings „Neopathetisches Cabaret", referring directly to the term coined by Zweig.[19] Perhaps more importantly, the writer Paul Zech asked his friend Zweig for permission to republish his text as lead article in his opening issue of the prominent expressionist magazine *Das neue Pathos* in 1913. Zweig was well acquainted with the Berlin avant-garde scene. He frequented the meetings of „Die Kommenden" and was in contact with Herwarth Walden, who only some years later promoted both expressionist and futurist works in his magazine *Der Sturm*.[20] Remarkably, while Zweig's text was published three times over four years and twice favourably discussed in the context of the early expressionist movement, Zweig did not feel drawn to the movement itself. Three years after the founding of the *Neuer Club*, Kurt Hiller published an edition of early expressionist poetry under the name *Der Kondor*. He referred to it as a manifesto and defined it as: „Eine Dichter-Sezession; eine rigorose Sammlung radikaler Strophen".[21] Although Zweig knew several of the contributors personally, he was openly dismissive about the groups' goals. To Paul Zech he writes:

> Weniger bin ich erfreut über Ihren Zusammenhang mit den Kondor-Leuten, deren aufdringliches Wesen mir im tiefsten antipathisch ist und die den Lärm statt der Leistung machen. Sie spüren ja wohl selbst, wie wenig dichterisch diese Lyrik ist und wie lächerlich der Versuch eine moderne Richtung krampfhaft fabrizieren zu wollen.[22]

Zweig's fierce individualism which, throughout his life, would let him shy away from any substantial involvement with political or intellectual groups, becomes obvious from this statement. While *Das neue Pathos* displays all the hallmarks of a vitalist text – ecstatic affirmation of life, extolling intuition over intellect, action over contemplation – Zweig

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16 Ibid., p. 206.

17 Cf. especially the chapter „Vom Wege des Schaffenden".

18 Martens: *Vitalismus und Expressionismus*, p. 93.

19 Donald Daviau (ed.): *Stefan Zweig – Paul Zech: Briefe 1910-1942.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1986, p. 183. The importance of Zweig's time spent in Berlin for his distinct life affirming outlook of this period should not be underestimated. Zweig's autobiography *Die Welt von Gestern*, seems to point to the fact that he regarded the Berlin bohemian circles which he frequented, with their ethnic, social and cultural diversity as a first opportunity to truly embrace life: „Die Intensität, die sich im Gymnasium nur in den bloßen Formen, im Reim und Vers und Wort ausgelebt, warf sich jetzt gegen die Menschen; von früh bis nachts war ich in Berlin mit immer neuen und immer anderen beisammen, begeistert, enttäuscht, sogar geprellt von ihnen. Ich glaube, ich habe in zehn Jahren nicht so viel geistiger Geselligkeit gefrönt wie in diesem einen knappen Semester in Berlin, dem ersten der vollkommenen Freiheit". Zweig: *Die Welt von Gestern*, p. 129-130.

20 Beck, Berlin et al.: *Stefan Zweig – Briefe 1897-1914*, p. 175 (September 1908).

21 Kurt Hiller: *Der Kondor.* Heidelberg: Verlag Richard Weissbach 1912, p. 7.

22 Daviau: *Stefan Zweig – Paul Zech: Briefe 1910-1942*, p. 25.

never regarded himself as part of a movement. What could be considered vitalist in a small number of Zweig's works, is based on a highly personal and eclectic reading of Verhaeren and, to some extent Nietzsche. A case in point may be Zweig's treatment of technology. As Körber points out, vitalism and technology were not natural allies. Many artists associated with vitalism were deeply critical of Wilhelmine society, positivist science and capitalism. They regarded the technological developments of their time generally as extensions of a flawed society and promoted an escape from industrialised society to a more primordial state of existence.[23] Yet, when reflecting on technology within the framework of dynamism, enabling movement and transformation, it was possible to consider large cities and major engineering projects as an affirmation of human life.

III. Vitalism in Zweig's Feuilletons

In October 1911, Zweig announces to Julius Bab his intention to publish a collection of feuilletons as a book entitled *Vom Rythmus unserer Zeit* [sic].[24] Zweig's use of the term rhythm is paradigmatic for the notion of dynamic vitalism – it connotes movement, velocity, change, growth and elation. In his letter, three feuilletons known to scholarship today are mentioned: *Der Rhythmus von New York*, *Die Stunde zwischen den zwei Ozeanen – Der Panamakanal* and *Die gefangenen Dinge. Gedanken über die Brüsseler Weltausstellung*. All three texts[25], written between 1910 and 1911, are thematically linked by their interest in technology and their celebration of human progress. They can be regarded as a first essayistic implementation of Zweig's poetic self-definition in *Das neue Pathos*. In *Die gefangenen Dinge* Zweig reflects on his visit to the Brussels World Fair in 1910. While he is impressed with the large array of artefacts and industrial products on display, he perceives the inanimate museum style exhibition as inappropriate: „Leben wird hier zum Bild erniedrigt: und so fühle ich auch hier mit den tausend Dingen, die hilflos in den Schränken liegen und fast nie ihre innere Absicht zeigen dürfen, irgendein Mitleid, weil sie so gefangen sind, so abgesperrt von ihren Wirklichkeiten".[26] Applying Verhaeren's concept of inner intention, Zweig feels unable to appreciate the beauty of the exhibits as they are removed from their contextual environment and intended purpose. This discrepancy between the lifelessness of the exhibition which requires abstraction and intellectual effort from its audience to imagine the exhibits in action becomes even greater in the machine pavilion:

> … Kraft von Abertausenden Menschen, eine unirdische Kraft steht da und verleugnet sich durch Untätigkeit. Unwillkürlich fühlt man sie an: ja, sie sind wirkliches Erz, kühl und glatt, man staunt ihre riesigen Arme an, ahnt die Hitzigkeit ihres Umschwunges. Aber man ahnt nur und sieht nichts von diesen Wundern unserer

23 Tessy Körber: *Technik in der Literatur der frühen Moderne.* Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag 1998, p. 134.

24 Beck, Berlin et al.: *Stefan Zweig – Briefe 1897-1914*, p. 241. The book project Zweig envisaged was not published.

25 The other texts Zweig mentions are: *Die Jungfraubahn*, a presumably unpublished text written on the occasion of the completion of the Jungfraubahn tracks in February 1912 and *Fabrikfeuilletons* equally unknown to scholarship.

26 Stefan Zweig: „Die gefangenen Dinge – Gedanken über die Brüsseler Weltausstellung 1910". In: Stefan Zweig: *Zeiten und Schicksale. Aufsätze und Vorträge aus den Jahren 1902-1942.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1990, p. 23.

> Zeit. Es ist so, als zeigte man einem eine Hand voll Dynamit und sagte: Damit kann man ein Haus in die Luft sprengen. Man erlebt nicht das Wunderbare einer so großen Komprimierung von Kraft durch ein Wort, durch einen Blick. Ein eisiges Schweigen herrscht in dieser Halle, die zischen müßte und brodeln von der schwingenden Kraft, jenes heilige Sausen müßte darin sein, das einst in den Eichenwäldern der Götter war, ein Vibrieren des aufgestauten Lebens.[27]

Zweig's reading of Verhaeren never culminated in a comprehensive rejection of the past as did that of F.T. Marinetti. Yet in the glorification of machines and the criticism of the museum as a lifeless space, we find a remarkable convergence of ideas. Marinetti, in his *Futurist Manifesto* had referred to museums as „cemeteries" and „public dormitories", what is more, he declared them dangerous spaces as they demanded passive admiration of the past instead of creation and action.[28] While Zweig did not go as far as Marinetti in calling for the destruction of museums, he equally senses a disconnect between the exhibition's inanimate displays and the energy inherent in the exhibits. Zweig seems disappointed by the wasted opportunity to showcase the true beauty of the machines both for the sake of the exhibition visitors and the poet. His ethos of instilling passion and ecstasy, of providing a thrilling and sensual experience to his readership cannot be fulfilled from what he witnesses. So eventually, Zweig turns to the masses of visitors who crowd the pavilions, to find the vitality that was missing in the exhibition. It is their presence that lends life to the event and the city of Brussels. For Zweig, to immerse himself in the masses means partaking in life and being energised by the unpredictable actions and movements of the crowds. As a poet inspired by the „new pathos", he can share this euphoric experience with his readers:

> Sie rennen und schreien, tosen in einem wunderbaren Tumult, und wie sie endlich verschwunden sind, ist schon eine neue Welle da und schäumt in gleicher Erregung. Es ist, als stünde man auf einem hohen Gipfel und immer käme von einer Seite Sturm an einen heran, immer Lärm, die brausende Stimme des Lebens: man atmet sie ein, fühlt die eigene Kraft, die eigene Lust daran wachsen und freut sich dieser wilden, gierigen Menschen, die kommen, ein einziges Schauspiel zu sehen, und nicht ahnen, daß sie selber es sind.[29]

Early in 1911, Zweig sets out for a journey through North- and Central America. After his return, he publishes a number of travel feuilletons which are intended to give a vivid impression of his travel destinations and elicit excitement about the achievements of human progress around the world. When Zweig visited the Panama-Canal, it was only three years from completion and the scale of the engineering work overwhelmed him. As in *Das neue Pathos* and *Die gefangenen Dinge*, Zweig is distrustful of intellectual abstraction to convey to his readership the scale of accomplishments realised through physical labour: „Ziffern könnten die Gewalt dieser Schöpfung vielleicht ahnen lassen, aber Ziffern sind kalt und unsinnlich, sie rühren an den Verstand und nicht an das Gefühl. Das Wort wiederum greift vergebens nach dem Vergleich, denn hier ist wirklich eine Tat im Reifen, die ihresgleichen in der Geschichte sucht".[30] Zweig transforms the history of the canal into a metaphor of how mankind, through will, imagination and work, has been able to overcome its own shortcomings and, in

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27 Ibid., p. 25.
28 F.T. Marinetti: „The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism". In: Lawrence S. Rainey; Christine Poggi et al.: *Futurism – An Anthology.* New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press 2009, p. 52.
29 Zweig: „Die gefangenen Dinge", p. 29.
30 Stefan Zweig: „Die Stunde zwischen zwei Ozeanen – Der Panamakanal". In: Stefan Zweig: *Auf Reisen.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 2004, p. 151.

the face of adversity, ultimately dominates over nature. Through resilience, courage and heroism, mankind in Zweig's view has earned a quasi God-like privilege to shape nature to its advantage: „Alle die geistigen und technischen Errungenschaften unserer Zeit waren notwendig, ehe es der Mensch wagen durfte, selbst Natur zu spielen, das Antlitz der Erde nach eigenem Willen zu verändern und den Plan der Elemente vorbedacht zu zerstören".[31] Zweig conjures up a utopia, in which technology and machines have allowed mankind to advance to ever new stages of domination over the earth. Zweig himself is in rapture witnessing the feverish rush towards completion.[32] In his quest to adequately capture the scale of this project, Zweig repeatedly evokes biblical references, comparing the building works as piece of „Schöpfungsgeschichte" and as „biblische Taten".[33] Looking at the project from a purely technological perspective, Zweig even casts aside his distinct eurocentrism and admits that in the race between Europe and America, the old continent has been left behind:

> An die Stelle der Franzosen sind die Amerikaner getreten, die mit ihrer unheimlich konzentrationsfähigen Energie, ihrem stählernen Optimismus und ihrer prachtvollen Waghalsigkeit das Werk gefördert haben […] Ihr nationales System, die hinfälligen, unzuverlässigen Menschen durch die eiserne Maschine zu ersetzen, hat sich nirgends besser als in diesen versuchten Gegenden bewährt.[34]

In his description of perceived American qualities – focussed energy, unbreakable optimism, daredevilry and automation – Zweig attached numerous vitalist attributes to the new continent. The importance Zweig attaches to technological leadership can hardly be overestimated: it is equated with nothing less than redrawing world maps, international power relations and a new global value system:

> Dann werden sich die beiden Ozeane umschlingen, wieder wird die Erde enger sein für unsere Hast, kürzer für den edlen Rausch der Geschwindigkeiten, der dieses Jahrhundert so heroisch erfüllt. Ein neues Tor der Welt ist dort neuen Wegen und neuen Werten aufgetan. Die Distanzen werden sich ändern, die Idee von Raum und Zeit, die Machtfülle der Nationen, und vielleicht beginnt dort America sein Imperium mundi.[35]

Die Stunde zwischen zwei Ozeanen is representative for Zweig's writing of the time in its uncritical affirmation of human progress. The feuilleton achieves, what Zweig sets out to do in *Das neue Pathos*, his text becomes primarily a „Mittel zur Erregung von Enthusiasmus".[36]

Der Rhythmus von New York is an attempt to convey the ambience of the American metropolis to his Viennese readers not simply by means of a written account but through a sensual experience. Rhythm to Zweig is a metaphor for movement, energy, change, for ebb and flow and by extension, for life itself. That New York would be the subject of such a travel feuilleton is hardly surprising. For Zweig, Verhaeren's interest in the exploration of the modern, fast-paced industrialised city has its roots in the increasing Americanisation of European life.[37] A stopover in New York during

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31 Ibid., p. 149.
32 „Ein Taumel überfällt einen inmitten dieser fiebrigen Arbeit, der Rausch des Vollbringens". Ibid., p. 156.
33 Ibid., p. 156.
34 Ibid., p. 151.
35 Ibid., p. 157.
36 Zweig: *Emile Verhaeren*, p. 135.
37 „In Verhaeren nun ist der Rhythmus des Eilenden, Hastenden, Laufenden, des Unruhigen, des Leidenschaftlichen, der Rhythmus des modernen, des amerikanischen Menschen". Ibid., p. 124.

his journey through North America thus provided a welcome opportunity for canvasing the city – less as a visual space for aesthetic appreciation but as physical experience in which the author immerses himself with all senses. The old European city (Zweig uses Florence as an example) serves as frame of reference for this experience: architectural harmony and historical continuity have transformed such cities into „eine höchste Form der Landschaft",[38] they have become a landscape in themselves with their own aesthetic narrative. Noise and masses of people would only distract from their beauty. In contrast to this, he perceives American cities as a mockery, even a violation of nature. At first glance, the lack of architectural coherence and the ostentatious utilitarianism of the buildings seems disturbing to Zweig. Yet, just as during the World Exhibition in Brussels, it is the masses of people that lend an irresistible pulse to the streets, they literally become the lifeblood of the city:

> Am Sonntag, wenn dieses schwarze Blut ihren Adern fehlt, sind sie tot, kalt, häßliche nackte Steinbrüche, sinnlose Ansammlungen geschichteter Massen. Doch in den Tagen der Arbeit klingen sie in einem wilden Takt, von einer barbarisch grandiosen Musik, die wie ein Triumphgesang auf den Menschen tönt: sie bezeugen mit einer uns unbekannten und erschreckenden Gewalt ihre schwellende Lebenskraft. Ein wunderbarer Rhythmus des Lebens geht von ihnen aus.[39]

New York becomes for Zweig a metaphor for what he regards as the American way of life. It is defined by restlessness, constant movement and an air of industriousness that even the bystander cannot escape. While Zweig's Panama feuilleton is an unapologetic ode to human progress, the text on New York shows distinct signs of ambivalence. Zweig is clearly fascinated by the city's beacons of technological progress, such as the Brooklyn Bridge („Hier habe ich zum erstenmal den Rhythmus von New York gespürt"[40]) and in order to vividly convey the scale and sense of constant activity his city assumes anthropomorphic qualities. Just as the masses constitute the lifeblood, crucial infrastructure connects the nervous system of the organism: „Dieser Strang, der die zwei Millionenbündel New York und Brooklyn als Nerv verbindet, zittert beständig in jedem Molekül, und jeder, der hier oben steht, schwingt mit von der Erregung der fremden Masse".[41] Zweig uses two strategies to convey energy and scale of the city. Anthropomorphic comparisons are meant to evoke vitality and a constant state of flux, while the scale is evoked through a range of landscape analogies.[42] In Zweig's view, New York aspires to be not simply a city but, as a result of its monumentality, a landscape in itself. Its skyline becomes a mountain range, its avenues gorges, which can be admired like an alpine panorama: „Man steht auf der Höhe des Brückenbogens wie auf dem Gipfel eines Berges und misst mit Bewunderung eine weitgebreitete Landschaft […] Eine Jagd von Schiffen zittert darin: kein Feld ist so gepflügt wie dieses Wasser, ununterbrochen graben Kiele die graue Flut auf".[43]

In spite of his efforts to generate enthusiasm in his readership, Zweig cannot help feeling out of place. He is attempting to observe the city with the eyes of a

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38 Stefan Zweig: „Der Rhythmus von New York". In: Zweig: *Auf Reisen*, p. 135.
39 Ibid., p. 136.
40 Ibid., p. 137.
41 Ibid., p. 137.
42 Bettina Trauner gives a concise analysis of Zweig's use of anthropomorphic comparisons in her MA-Thesis *Miniaturen der Metropole bei Stefan Zweig*. (Unpublished MA-Thesis, University of Vienna 2013).
43 Zweig: „Der Rhythmus von New York", p. 136.

19th century flaneur, yet the paradigmatic 20th century city denies him the chance to reflect and withdraw momentarily. Observing and being observed, taking in the city and its inhabitants in a deliberate effort to decelerate life are concepts which Zweig regards, somewhat nostalgically, as part of European metropolitan life.[44] Yet in New York, such perceived inactivity is not part of the urban raison d'être: „Der Bummler hat hier keinen Raum, der Rhythmus schwemmt ihn weg wie faules Holz".[45] Zweig, while intrigued by the instantaneous amalgamation of the individual with the masses, is clearly uncomfortable with the limitations this city pulse imposes on individual agency.[46] New York is perceived as a city built for the needs of the masses, not the individual. Remaining aloof does not appear to be an option. Consequently, Zweig's final judgement remains ambivalent. A city operating on the principle of movement, speed and constant self-reinvention stands in stark contrast with the acute Viennese concern with tradition, art and an ostentatious joie de vivre. And while Zweig in his conclusion decorates the United States with quintessential vitalist terms as markers of progress, there is a clear sense that a pioneering spirit and technological advancement are seen as incompatible with being a 'Kulturnation'[47]:

> Hier ist schon die Vorahnung jener Energie gegeben, die Amerika beherrscht, das Land, das in hundert Jahren den Weg zurücklegen will, zu dem Europa zweitausend Jahre gebraucht hat, und darum so hastet, so gierig, so mit verbissenen Zähnen vorwärts will. Der Rausch der Geschwindigkeit, den man bei uns nur im Sport empfindet oder bei der Automobilfahrt, ist hier Lebensgefühl eines ganzen Landes. Europa ist wie ein Strom, der schon sein Bett gefunden hat und nun in gemächlicherem Hinrollen Muße findet, die ganze Welt und den Himmel in Kunst und sanftem Genießen zu spiegeln. Hier ist noch die Unruhe des Unerreichten, der Durchbruch der gestauten Kraft in unbekannte Ufer: wer Urkräfte liebt, kann sie hier ungestüm und barbarisch sich entfalten sehen.[48]

IV. Vitalism in Zweig's poetry

What Zweig demands in his programmatic essay from 1909 – to evoke passion and ecstasy through affirmation and pathos – was meant to primarily apply to poetry. Apart from the feuilletons in which vitalist ideas manifested themselves, Zweig started to work on a volume of poetry in 1911, which would be published under the title „Die Herren des Lebens". The poems celebrate the life and work of some of Zweig's favourite creators of art, music and literature, Gustav Mahler, Auguste Rodin and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, to name a few. It is the process of artistic creation with all its associated

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44 Walter Benjamin would later capture this notion of deliberate deceleration fittingly in his *Passagen-Werk*: „Um 1840 gehörte es [in Paris] vorübergehend zum guten Ton, Schildkröten in den Passagen spazieren zu führen. Der Flaneur liess sich gern sein Tempo von ihnen vorschreiben. Wäre es nach ihm gegangen, so hätte der Fortschritt dieses pas lernen müssen. Aber nicht er behielt das letzte Wort, sondern Taylor, der das ‚Nieder mit der Flanerie' zur Parole machte". Walter Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften.* I.2, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1991, p.556-557.

45 Zweig: „Der Rhythmus von New York", p. 140.

46 „Im Nu ist man zur Seite gestoßen, weggedrängt, weitergeschwemmt, wieder eingeordnet in die allgemeine Bewegung. […] Die Restaurants der Geschäftsstadt sind nur für Eilige eingerichtet, manche haben gar keine Tische, nur kleine Sessel, wie eine Bar, und die Menschen, die hier ihr Essen eilig hinabwürgen, sind gleichzeitig noch anders beschäftigt, sie lesen Zeitung oder verhandeln". Ibid., p. 140.

47 The rejection of the US as a 'Kulturnation' can most clearly be seen in Zweig's text "Parsifal in New York". Written after the same journey through the Americas, Zweig comments paternalistically on the lack of cultural awareness of the audience and instead their enthusiasm for celebrities and ice-cream. (Stefan Zweig, „Parsifal in New York", in: Zweig: *Auf Reisen*, p. 145).

48 Zweig: „Der Rhythmus von New York", p. 141.

suffering and self-sacrifice that Zweig is interested in. Within the context of Zweig's work, these poems can be regarded as heroic blueprints for his more detailed character studies which appeared as essays over the following decade.[49] A poem that stands out for its vitalist themes is *Der Flieger*. The poem is Zweig's only work which explicitly explores the relationship between man, machine and nature, a paradigmatic theme especially in the Italian futurist circles. By being included in this cycle of poetry dominated by artists and political dignitaries, the aviator is elevated to the status of a master of life, who can transcend the boundaries of quotidian existence. Zweig had planned to give the poem to Paul Zech for publication in his journal *Das neue Pathos* for its close match with the journal's outlook but due to prior commitments, had to publish it elsewhere.[50] Zweig referred to the poem as „symphonisch", a designation, which is taken directly from his discussion of Verhaeren's poetry. It connotes a polyphonic composition and an exuberant tone with a view to a harmonic resolution at the end. Structurally, such a poem was meant to go beyond the limits of poetry as literary form by incorporating epic and dramatic elements.[51]

Der Flieger gives a vivid portrayal of human endeavour combined with technological advancement, attempting to overcome the limits set by nature. The human desire to fly becomes a last frontier in mankind's effort to dominate over nature. In Der *Rhythmus von New York*, Zweig had repeatedly ascribed anthropomorphic qualities to the city's landmarks to enable his readership to immerse itself in the ambiance of the city. In *Der Flieger*, he pursues a similar strategy in order to convey the ecstatic experience of the flight pioneers. Zweig anthropomorphises the earth, the airplane engine, the clouds and the wind who assume quasi dramatic roles with equal validity next to that of the aviator. In the first stanza, the earth displays its power over man. The aviator is addressed as a worm, bereft of substantial mobility and distinctly located at the bottom of the food-chain. To challenge this order and fight gravity would result in certain death:

> Ich binde
> Die Sohlen dir an mit brennender Schwere,
> Ich füll dir den Leib mit Wucht und Gewicht,
> Und wie zornig du dich auch aufwärts entringst,
> Du sinkst
> In ewiger Ohnmacht stets bodenwärts[52]

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49 Cf. Stefan Zweig: *Drei Meister: Balzac, Dickens, Dostojewski.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 1982.

50 Daviau: *Stefan Zweig – Paul Zech: Briefe 1910-1942*, p. 38.

51 „Darum möchte ich auch seine weitausladenden Gedichte symphonisch nennen. Sie sind wie für ein Orchester gedacht. Nicht Kammermusik sind sie mehr, nicht einsame Geigensoli, sondern begeisterte Mischung aller Instrumente, sie sind abgestuft in einzelnen Absätzen, die verschiedenes Tempo haben und die Pausen der Übergänge. Im Gedichte Verhaerens geht die Lyrik über die Grenzgebiete hinaus. Sie ist gemengt mit dem Dramatischen und mit dem Epischen. Denn nicht nur wie das rein lyrische Gedicht will das seine eine Stimmung schildern, sondern gleichzeitig auch das Entstehen dieser Stimmung. Und dieser erste Aufbau ist episch, er ist schildernd, emporführend von einem niedern Anbeginn zu einer großen Entladung von Kraft. Und dramatisch sind dann die Übergänge, jene Ausbrüche des Temperamentes gegeneinander, jene Abstürze und Aufstiege, die erst zum Schluss zu einer harmonischen Lösung führen". (Zweig: *Emile Verhaeren*, p. 149).

52 Stefan Zweig: „Der Flieger". In: Stefan Zweig: *Silberne Saiten. Gedichte.* Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer 2002, p. 211.

The aviator challenges this notion of the subordinate human being and in the spirit of Nietzsche's Zarathustra[53] embraces lightness and agility as guiding principles in his life. Consequently, the aviator posits that whatever nature is capable of can also be achieved by mankind: „Und was Feuer, Wasser und Tier erreichen / Vermag ich auch".[54] Mankind's ally in this struggle for predominance against nature is the machine, or, in this case the engine of the airplane. Vitalist literature and art, especially through Italian Futurism and British Vorticism have repeatedly displayed their admiration for cars and airplanes as the ultimate means for man to experience the liberty and exhilaration of speed. This admiration was frequently tied to overt erotic symbolism. F.T. Marinetti declared in his *Futurist Manifesto* a „roaring motor car" more beautiful than the „Victory of Samothrace". In his 1908 poem *To my Pegasus*, Marinetti describes the anticipation of a drive which ends with the car losing contact with the earth as a highly sensual experience:

> Je lâche enfin tes brides métalliques et tu t'élances, …
> Avec ivresse, dans l'Infini libérateur ! …
> Qu'importe, beau démon, je suis à ta merci … prends-moi![55]

Overt sexual references are rare in Zweig's works. Yet in *Der Flieger* Zweig describes an orgasmic experience as the airplane engine struggles to generate ever more power to get the plane airborne:

> Meine Adern bersten, mein Blut siedet und surrt,
> Horch, wie es kocht
> Und mit heißen
> Verlangenden Stößen ins Freie pocht.
> Spreng mir den Gurt,
> Reiß mir sie auf, die eisernen Schließen,
> Ich will meine Kraft in die Welt ergießen,
> Hilf, und ich stoße dich steil in die Luft![56]

In the ultimate step to lend life to the inanimate, Zweig's engine experiences erotic desire that results in an erection. It is the first step of what Körber calls a „coitus with space"[57], a desire to become one with the world, which is continued from the perspective of a cloud:

> Was dringt
> So übermächtig in meinen Schoß
> Und fährt durch mich mit schneidendem Stahl?
> O wie er schmerzt, der brennende Stoß!
> Ich fühl mich zerfließen
> Und tränend über die Erde ergießen[58]

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53 „Zarathustra der Leichte, der mit den Flügeln winkt, ein Flugbereiter, allen Vögeln zuwinkend, bereit und fertig" (Section 18).

54 Zweig: „Der Flieger", p. 211.

55 F.T. Marinetti, „A l'Automobile de course (A mon Pegase)". In: Zbigniew Folejewski (ed.): *Futurism and its Place in the Development of Modern Poetry*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1980, p.154. The English translation reads: „I finally release / your metallic bridle / and voluptuously you rush into Infinite freedom! […] But nothing matters, my beautiful demon. / I am at your mercy … Take me! … Take me!" F.T. Marinetti: „To my Pegasus". In: Lawrence S Rainey, Christine Poggi et al.: *Futurism – An anthology.* New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press c2009, p. 425.

56 Zweig: „Der Flieger", p. 212.

57 Körber: *Technik in der Literatur der frühen Moderne*, p. 299.

58 Zweig: „Der Flieger", p. 213.

The act of flying, frenetically received by the observing crowds, is not merely a victory over nature.[59] As the airplane climbs higher, the flight becomes an ecstatic affirmation of life as the aviator begins to interact playfully with the elements. The new perspective allows a reassessment of his position in the world. He seems no longer limited by the landscapes beneath him: „Hügel knicken / Demütig ein mit dienerndem Rücken, / Berge sinken vor ihm auf die Knie. / Hoch über sie /Schwingt er sich hoch und tastet die Runde".[60] Instead he feels liberated by the sense of freedom and solitude that flying affords and concludes that the act of flying itself means being alive („Leben ist Schweben"). Yet the aviator strives for something more than conquest and liberation. As he attempts to fly even higher, he wants to attain an insight into the workings of the cosmos:

> Ich will durch die Kühle
> In den feurigen Kern aller Himmel eindringen,
> Ich will steigen und steigen
> Bis auf zu den Höhn,
> Wo selbst die Engel geblendet sich neigen,
> Und Gott ins ewige Auge sehn.[61]

This wish to become one with the infinite means the annulation of everything he has experienced so far. He loses his position of control and oversight and experiences a loss of his eyesight and a feeling of synaesthesia: „Brennende Tränen verschließen den Blick / Doch den Blinden umrauschen hohe Gesänge / Er fühlt nur mehr Töne, er trinkt nur Musik".[62] Beyond the physical domination of nature lies a unio mystica from which the aviator never returns to earth. As the boisterous roaring of the engine subsides he merges with the eternal silence of space. The full circle from a determined invertebrate to a God-like creature has been completed – an emancipation process which Zweig's anthropomorphic earth regards with disdain: „Aufrauschen die Fernen, er steigt und steigt, / Und nur die niedere neidische Erde schweigt".[63]

As Körber has pointed out, Marinetti's *Mafarka the Futurist*, published in 1909, anticipates many of the ideas put forward in *Der Flieger*. Mafarka's son Gazourmah, half man, half flying machine, attempts a flight to display his omnipotence. A clear distinction is being made between the air, which allows for freedom, self-fulfilment and a wide open future, and the earth, which is associated with all the negative connotations of the dreaded passatismo: „Pouah! Cette odeur de momies, cette puanteur de siècles morts me donnent la nausée ! Montons plus haut !"[64] During his flight, Gazourmah, too, is in constant dialogue with the animated elements, which he

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59 „Ein Mensch hat über die Erde gesiegt". Ibid., p. 213.
60 Ibid., p. 213.
61 Ibid., p. 215.
62 Ibid., p. 215.
63 Ibid., p. 216.
64 F.T. Marinetti : *Mafarka le futuriste.* Paris: E. Sansot & Cie. 1909, p. 301. The English translation reads: „Pah! This odour of mummies, this stench of dead centuries, makes me sick! Let's soar higher!" F.T. Marinetti: *Mafarka, the Futurist.* Middlesex University Press 1998, p. 202.

endeavours to surpass.[65] Finally, his quest for total domination of nature[66] equally culminates in harmonious „total music" as Gazourmah climbs on, never to return to earth.

V. Conclusion: Zweig's reassessment of vitalism

Whether Zweig's interest in Marinetti led him to an adaptation of the Gazourmah-theme in *Der Flieger* remains unclear. In any case, Zweig never regarded technology as a tool for anti-traditionalist provocation. His primary intention, as stated in *Das neue Pathos*, had been to elicit emotive responses from his readership. In order to achieve this, he embraced movement, development, energy and progress as themes that lent themselves for enthusiastic affirmation and he adopted a language that could vibrantly transmit these themes. Contemporary critics pointed early to the weaknesses of such an approach: „Es besteht eine große Gefahr darin, nicht auszuwählen, sondern alles gleichzeitig zu umfassen, Gutes und Schlechtes, Wertvolles und Wertloses. Gibt es dann noch Unterschiede zwischen dem wahrhaft Bewunderungswürdigen und dem, was man von sich weghalten sollte"?[67] It was only with the outbreak of World War I that Zweig started to consider the limitations of his unconditional poetic affirmation. Yet with the majority of writers emphatically supporting the war, he saw no immediate reason to change his style of writing. While privately lamenting the destruction of cross-cultural networks he had been building in the preceding years, Zweig continued to embrace „neopathetical" writing several months into the war, defending the Austro-German war effort. In *Ein Wort von Deutschland*, published in August 1914, he employs both anthropomorphism („Mit beiden Fäusten, nach rechts und links, muß Deutschland jetzt zuschlagen, der doppelten Umklammerung seiner Gegner sich zu entwinden"[68]), heightened vitality, uncompromising confidence in the northern ally and the idea of a merger between man and machine to dominate over the enemy:

> So wie Deutschland aus seinem Ackerboden unter allen Ländern die höchste Quantität des fruchtbaren Ertrages durch geistig geregelte körperliche Leistung erzwingt, so gestaltet es auch aus seiner Millionenmasse das Höchste an moralischer Tatkräftigkeit und sittlicher Energie. Dieser ganze ungeheure Organismus verwandelt sich bei Angriff und Abwehr in einen prachtvollen Mechanismus, in dem jeder einzelne Wille funktioniert wie die Feder im Uhrwerk …[69]

Jacques Le Rider regards Zweig's behaviour in WWI as „schizophrenic"[70] due to the apparent contradictions between Zweig's publications and his private communications. However, in the light of the poetic modus operandi, that he had consistently

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65 The Teasing Breezes: „You'll never fly in the sky, O handsome, heavy lover!" / Gazourmah: „You think me too heavy! Ha! Ha! … Perhaps you'd like to toss me about at your pleasure like a light feather?" Marinetti: *Mafarka, the Futurist*, p. 200.

66 „Back, Sun, dethroned monarch whose realm I have destroyed! […] I don't fear the darkness of infinity! […] I am no crawling man who strives at night to push his puny tortoise head outside the immense carapace of the firmament. The firmament? I am its master!" Ibid., p. 205.

67 Emil Luda: *Literarisches Echo* 17. Jg., Heft 4, 15. Nov. 1914, p. 194-199, here p. 195.

68 Stefan Zweig: „Ein Wort von Deutschland". In: Stefan Zweig: *Die schlaflose Welt. Aufsätze und Vorträge aus den Jahren 1909-1941.* Frankfurt a.M. 1983, p. 30.

69 Ibid., p. 31.

70 Jacques LeRider: „Stefan Zweig und Frankreich". In: *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 33 (1989) Issue 1, p. 31-43.

pursued since the publication of *Das neue Pathos*, Zweig's ambivalent position should rather be regarded as a protracted process of coming to terms with the fact that war was perverting much of his poetic ethos: as the fighting went on, it became abundantly clear that admiration of dynamism and technology, thirst for action and vitality which he had celebrated as signs of human progress, were now being turned against humanity. The language of affirmation that he had employed to elicit enthusiasm was now corrupted for political ends through propaganda. Zweig, thinking only in aesthetic and not in political dimensions was woefully unprepared for these developments. For that reason, both positions, an instinctive rejection of the war and an increasingly cautious affirmation of the war effort were able to coexist for more than one year. When Verhaeren lost his life in a tragic accent in 1916, much of what can be considered vitalist in Zweig's work had also disappeared.