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GO-BETWEENS FOR HITLER

GO-BETWEENS
FOR
HITLER

KARINA URBACH

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Praise for Karina Urbach

Queen Victoria:

This clever and enlightening biography of Queen Victoria is a gripping read. With humour and psychological expertise Karina Urbach portrays—supported by a multitude of documents—an impressive portrait of this woman.

Christopher Clark, University of Cambridge

This short and readable biography of Queen Victoria is a remarkable achievement. First and foremost, it is a masterpiece of a biographical miniature, not in terms of its scholarliness, insight or intellectual power—all of which are by no means in short supply given its proportions. Rather, it manages to be readable, clear, interesting, witty and brief, and yet also important. . . . The failure of academic historians to consider Queen Victoria seriously has meant she has been enigmatic to date. A triumph of Karina Urbach's book is that, by its end, if anything, Victoria has become more seriously and urgently so.

John Davis, *Sehepunkte*

A little masterpiece

Andreas Rose, *Historische Zeitschrift*

Bismarck's Favourite Englishman:

Karina Urbach has managed to bring together an impressive amount of new evidence. . . . She gives us a balanced, carefully researched and gracefully written account of personalities and policies.

James J. Sheehan, *Times Literary Supplement*

Karina Urbach has a light touch and a sharp eye. She provides vivid portraits of William I, Berlin in the 1870s and the great Bismarck, with whom Russell had a close relationship. Here is a work which is a sheer delight to read.

Jonathan Steinberg, University of Pennsylvania,
and author of *Bismarck: A Life*

Preface

Many of us have been go-betweeners at one time or another in our lives. We may have conveyed messages between siblings, parents, or friends after a misunderstanding or argument. But go-betweeners not only exist on a personal level, they are also employed in high politics, well hidden from the public eye. Right now they may be working where official channels have become stuck.

Go-betweeners are not an invention of the twenty-first century, they have existed for a long time. Those in power who have launched go-between missions over the last century have done so regardless of the form of government. But a common thread existed when it came to choosing the ideal person for such missions: up to 1945 they were mainly members of the aristocracy from every corner of Europe. Only after the Second World War were these people replaced by international businessmen, secret servicemen, and journalists.

In the American television series *House of Cards*, the Vice-President snarls at a congressional inquiry: 'When a back channel becomes public, it defeats its purpose.' It has been my purpose for the last five years to highlight the role of the back channel in the first half of the twentieth century. This book uses new sources found in thirty archives in the United States, Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic.

It has been a pleasure writing this story because it gave me a chance to meet real life go-betweeners. Following James Watson's advice 'avoid boring people', I have been spoilt with wonderful friends and colleagues. This is a, probably, incomplete list of them: Denys Blakeway, Gerry Bradshaw, Christopher Clark, Matthew Cotton, Shawn Donnelley, Andreas Fahrmeir, Otto Feldbauer, Lothar Gall, Ulrike Grunewald, Stefan Halper, Klaus Hildebrand, Paul Hoser, Eva Klesse, Jeremy Noakes, Klaus Roser, Jonathan Steinberg, the Stolzenbergs, Natascha Stöber, Miles Taylor, the Unholzers, Adele Warner.

The Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard coined the idea of *Lebensmensch*. I have had three such people in my life: my mother Wera Frydtberg (†2008), who was not just a great actress but also the most enchanting person I have ever met; my son Timothy, and my husband Jonathan Haslam, who have made me so happy.

London, June 2015

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Introduction

In the summer of 1940 a bizarre incident occurred at the German–Italian border—the Brenner. In July the 83-year-old Duchess in Bavaria was refused permission to return to the German Reich. She was stuck in Italy and tried for months to get back to her home in Bavaria. Her aristocratic friends and relatives as well as the German embassy in Rome tried their best to help her. The ambassador Hans Georg von Mackensen explained the case of the displaced duchess to the German Foreign Ministry: she had travelled to Italy ‘for the sole purpose of supporting her granddaughter, the Italian Crown Princess’, during the last stages of her pregnancy.¹ This was required because the mother of the Crown Princess could not come to Italy herself. She was the Dowager Queen of the Belgians and had ‘for understandable reasons’ decided against such a trip.²

This family friendly explanation did not have much effect in Berlin, though. Because nothing was done in the following months, the visit of the duchess threatened to turn into a serious diplomatic incident between Germany and Italy. Only when the ‘esteemed’ Nazi Prince Philipp von Hessen intervened did things start moving again. Hessen used pragmatic arguments vis-à-vis Berlin: as long as the Bavarian duchess was stuck at the border, the Italian royal family had to pay for her costly maintenance. This financial burden was seen as a great nuisance. In October 1940 the displaced Duchess was allowed to re-enter Germany. It turned out that she was not the only member of the higher aristocracy who was in trouble at the border. Over the following years the embassy in Rome was kept busy trying to help other German aristocrats get home.

So what was the regime afraid of? This book will show that the Nazi leadership feared the higher aristocracy because it had *used* their international networks for years and it therefore knew of their great potential.

Members of the aristocracy had worked as go-betweens for Hitler and established useful contacts with the ruling elites of other countries. By 1940 the regime feared that these networks could also work against them.

So far research has focused on the support German aristocrats gave Hitler in gaining power *within* Germany. What has been neglected, however, is that there was also an important international dimension.

Aristocrats saw themselves as an international elite—with their marriages and friendships transcending national boundaries. These international ties were tested in the First World War when royal houses and aristocratic families were attacked as ‘hybrids’ and had to demonstrate national allegiance. But behind the scenes some aristocrats continued to use their international networks. As unofficial go-betweens for emperors and foreign ministries, British and German aristocrats conveyed peace feelers. This activity came to an end in 1918. But not for long. In the inter-war period a new common enemy appeared on the scene: Bolshevism. Fear of it was another bonding experience for the aristocracy. The British were alarmed lest the Empire should be undermined, the Hungarians feared a repeat of Bela Kun’s red terror (1918), and the Germans were scared of their emerging communist party, the largest in Europe.

Encouraged by the Italian model—where Mussolini successfully incorporated the monarchy in his regime (1922)—they turned to a German version of the Duce: Hitler. In 1933 the Führer was short of international contacts and did not trust his own Foreign Ministry. He therefore used members of the German aristocracy for secret missions to Britain, Italy, Hungary, and Sweden. One of the most notorious was the Duke of Coburg—a grandson of Queen Victoria. Born in England and educated in Germany, Carl Eduard is an example of thorough re-education. Unfortunately it was a re-education in reverse—away from the constitutional monarchy he was reared in to dictatorship. This process could have remained a footnote in history. But Carl Eduard’s determination to help the Nazi movement first clandestinely, later publicly, had an impact that, like many other go-between missions, has so far not been recognized. Coburg’s importance to Hitler had been known by the British intelligence services for a long time. In April 1945 the code breakers at the Government Code and Cypher School, Bletchley Park, came across a telegram from Hitler. The contents intrigued them:

Source saw a fragment which contained the following sentence: ‘the Führer attaches importance to the President of the Red Cross, the Duke of Coburg, on no account falling into enemy hands’.³

Hitler was at this point encircled in the bunker. Since he was not known for his caring side it seems bizarre that he made the effort to give instructions about an obscure duke. His message could mean two things. Either Hitler wanted his old confidant, the Duke of Coburg, to be whisked to safety or this was a 'Nero order', i.e. he wanted him to be murdered before the enemy could get hold of him. One thing appeared certain: the secrets Hitler and the Duke shared seemed to be so important that they needed to be forever hidden from public view. This makes one wonder what role Coburg had played for Hitler. Had the Duke been entrusted with secret missions to Britain including one to his close relative Edward VIII, later the Duke of Windsor?

The aim of this book is not just to untangle Coburg's secret negotiations for Hitler, but to uncover several go-between missions, their origins, their significance, and their consequences. It will span the period from the First World War to the Second World War. Apart from the Duke of Coburg, it throws light on the work of many other go-betweens such as Prince Max Egon II Fürstenberg, Lady Barton, General Paget, Lady Paget, Prince Max von Baden, Prince Wilhelm von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, Princess Stephanie Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Schillingfürst, and Prince Max Hohenlohe-Langenburg.

It will hopefully further refine our image of the manner in which diplomacy was conducted in the first half of the twentieth century and will cast new light on a dimension of Hitler's foreign policy tactics hitherto ignored.

PART

I

Go-betweens *before*
Hitler

I

What are Go-Betweens?

In L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*, a 12-year-old boy is used by two lovers as a go-between. The affair ends tragically for all parties, overshadowing the boy's later life.

Go-betweens do not necessarily have tragic fates. Far from it. In the modern academic sub-discipline of 'network analysis', for example, they are regarded as having certain inbuilt advantages: 'People whose network connections allow them to act as go-betweens in organizations, connecting otherwise disconnected individuals and groups, tend to garner many benefits.'¹

It is of course exactly those benefits that attract them to the task. Historians and political scientists know everything about the *official* side of diplomacy, but rarely stray onto its unofficial side. There are many things which statesmen are reluctant to put into writing. The picture therefore gained by historians can be incomplete. Well hidden from the public eye, statesmen often want to send a message to their opposite numbers that can be very different from their public utterances; in some extreme cases, even the opposite. To achieve this balancing act, they have to use a go-between. But what exactly are political go-betweens?

So far there exists no proper definition. In Britain various terms are used to describe the phenomenon: they are called 'unofficial contacts' or 'backroom diplomats'. The Americans call them 'back channels' or 'track II diplomacy'.² In Germany their work is labelled as 'Substitutionsdiplomatie (substitute diplomacy)', 'personal diplomacy', or 'secret diplomacy'.

Since go-betweens have no defined job description and no official standing, it is easy to dismiss them as men and women of no importance. That they are overlooked is understandable. At the conclusion of treaties it is the politicians and diplomats who make the photo shoot and later get most of the attention from historians. However, a wider aperture can be useful.

Out of focus, in the shadows are other figures. It is these people, the camera-shy, who will be drawn to the centre of the stage in this book.

Go-betweens are not part of the government or parliament. They are not elected and they are never civil servants. They are off the books and everything they say is off the record. Because they are not part of a hierarchy they cannot be controlled. They only have to answer to one person—their employer, who is a high-ranking politician, the head of state, or the head of the government.

Though they have things in common, go-betweens are *not* lobbyists or mediators. Mediators have to be impartial, whereas go-betweens are used by one party and therefore represent the interests of that party. They are also not lobbyists. Lobbyists try to cultivate their ‘target’ because of a single issue they want to push. But go-betweens usually know ‘their targets’ already in a completely different context. They have history. As one modern day go-between explained: ‘I knew XY well. When I approached him he was open because we had known each other for a long time in a different capacity.’

In some ways aristocratic go-betweens are a throwback to the old form of ad hoc diplomacy which had ended with Cardinal Richelieu institutionalizing the diplomatic service in 1626. Up to that date ambassadors had often been connected to sovereigns by blood (or the connection was made artificially, resulting in the expression *Ambassador de Sang*). With Richelieu a professionalization had set in. The new concept meant that one did not send diplomats on special occasions, but employed a permanent representative, showing continuity in one’s relations with other countries.³

So are go-betweens just atavistic, a throw-back to the age before Richelieu?

Some want us to believe this. At the Munich security conference in 2007 Vladimir Putin expressed the opinion that the ‘system of international relations is equal to mathematics. There are no personal dimensions.’⁴

Indeed, international relations are not like personal relations, as any politician confused on this point will find out at his peril. National or ideological interests always outweigh even the most loyal partners. But this does not mean that the personal element cannot play a part. Go-betweens symbolize and use that personal element. They think of international relations as their relations. With this simple approach they work in the antechambers of power, circumventing normal diplomatic channels.

Their work is based on the assumption that only in an ideal world do people act rationally all the time. Cultural and social backgrounds, peer group pressure, and emotions have an influence on decision-making processes. These are factors to which go-betweens can appeal.

Up to 1939 go-betweens were chosen from among people with high-level international contacts. Those who offered such contacts were traditionally members of the higher aristocracy (slowly joined by international businessmen and journalists). They were ideal because they were blood-related or connected by friendship to the elites of many other countries. It would indeed be wrong to assume that, with the rise of the middle classes in the nineteenth century, aristocratic spheres of influence were completely taken over by a new elite. A once powerful group does not just vanish into the night. When displaced, it finds new niches. One of them was go-between work. Their *international* network made them ideal for such work. It was a network that had grown organically over several generations and had gained them many advantages. Nobles had always been naturals for international relations. In the early modern period it had not been unusual for aristocrats to have different homelands at different stages of their lives. The Prince von Nassau-Siegen, for example, was the son of a German-Dutch family, born in 1743 in France. He became a grandee of Spain, married a Polish countess, and worked as a Russian admiral until 1794.⁵ Aristocratic families had for centuries acted like a fund-manager who lays bets on different companies to diversify assets: they married off their children or put them in military service in different countries, hoping to open up new branches of the house. As a result many aristocrats had expert knowledge of countries that were seen at the time as rather 'obscure'. The German Prince Wilhelm of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1864–1927), brother of the King of Romania, for example, knew Romanian society well. As will be shown, he was therefore used for unofficial contacts during the First World War. So was the Nazi go-between Prince Max Hohenlohe (1897–1968), twenty years later. Hohenlohe still thought of his family as truly international because they had produced: 'a German chancellor, a French Marshal, a Roman Catholic Cardinal, a number of Austro-Hungarian Field Marshals, Generals of Prussia and Baden, hereditary Marshals of Württemberg, and ADCs General to the Russian Tsar'.⁶ Such international reach was clearly a source of considerable pride.

This genealogical and professional internationalism existed in the higher aristocracy more often than in any other class. Whereas in the eighteenth century most people never even left their own town or village, aristocrats already had the highest mobility rate in Europe. Before the term *Weltbürger* (citizen of the world) was invented, the 'aristocrat of the world' existed. The German novelist Thomas Mann was an admirer of this type. He described the most famous exponent of the 1920s—Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi—as

a man who made ‘the average German feel provincial’. Coudenhove’s blood had been ‘mixed by the international aristocracies of Europe, he was of genteel humanity, a man who was used to thinking in continents’.⁷ Viscount Lymington made a similar observation in his memoirs of 1956: ‘What was and still is, interesting is that there is a sort of international aristocratic family freemasonry which permeates Europe even now.’⁸

As a consequence integration into other countries remained easier for nobles than for any other social group. According to the Nazi Prince Rohan this was because: ‘[we] are united beyond all national passion by a common heritage, blood that has often mixed, a common social level and attitude to life’s problems’.

As we will see aristocrats had languages—more than that, they had native instruction. Others had to learn what they knew already.⁹ They answered to a decisive form of communication, which the up and coming middle classes could not copy: a common social code, based on an idealized medieval code of honour, courtesy rules, and a strong ancestral cult. They also shared a common European memory. The cornerstones of this memory were the threats of 1789, 1848, and 1917.

The details of an aristocratic lifestyle could vary from country to country, but everywhere in Europe the maxim was: aristocrats have access to other aristocrats.¹⁰

A further reason why easy access was obtainable not just to other aristocrats but, as we will see, to democratic politicians as well, was the power of their names. Marcel Proust demonstrated in his novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* the irresistible glamour of old names. They seem to have had their own aura and ‘pull’ over people—Hitler included. Someone with a ‘big name’, a name that evoked historical grandeur—a Habsburg, a Hohenzollern, a Coburg—was, well into the 1930s, much more easily received in the drawing rooms of power than somebody without such an illustrious family name.

Of course the question arises, why were diplomats not used for delicate missions since, well into the 1930s, they too were from aristocratic families?

Indeed, some diplomats and civil servants thought of go-betweens as unwelcome rivals. The Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Office Lord Hardinge of Penshurst wrote in 1917 about go-betweens:

We have had considerable experience of unofficial action in these matters [peace feelers] and it generally contains an element of danger, however sound the motive.¹¹

Diplomats warned of missions that were not run by diplomats. Naturally they feared commitments would be made behind their backs which could not be delivered (or, worse, had to be delivered).

But using diplomats had its drawbacks. It gave the missions an official character. Conversations were recorded in dispatches and eventually became public in the 'blue books' in Britain (or in the 'white books' in Germany). Formalities had to be observed and openness showed weakness. Indiscretions and leaks after talks were also more likely, because others were also involved in the process. The Austrian Foreign Minister v. Czernin believed that 'every political secret is known to one hundred people—the civil servants in the Foreign Ministry, the encipher clerks, the embassies, the envoys and the staff'.¹²

Go-betweens on the other hand hid behind face-to-face conversations and (usually) avoided leaving any written record. They could be much more creative at problem solving and float ideas. They could also make themselves 'invisible': unlike diplomats whose comings and goings are noticed, the sudden appearance of aristocratic go-betweens in other countries was not registered by the press. It was assumed that they were simply visiting relatives and friends. Also go-betweens did not fall under the scrutiny of parliament and could not be checked up on by a commission. When one wanted to keep talks unrecorded and secret it was therefore ideal to use a go-between.

Another reason for using 'outsiders' instead of 'in house people' can also be that the head of government does not trust his own diplomats. This was the case with Hitler who until 1938 suspected his own Foreign Ministry of not being fully 'nazified'.¹³ Diplomacy in its traditional form was despised by him. He therefore preferred his chosen Nazi aristocrats to deliver important messages for him. Three of them, the Duke of Coburg, Princess Stephanie Hohenlohe, and Prince Max Hohenlohe, will be analysed in this book. But they are only the tip of a much bigger iceberg.

Guarding one's turf and distrust of one's own civil servants can also be the reason for using go-betweens in a democratic country. In the inter-war years, foreign affairs were an embattled field in democracies where players tried to establish their own backroom channels, independent of their Foreign Offices. Heads of governments often saw themselves as foreign affairs experts and they therefore used go-betweens to carry out their own policy. President F. D. Roosevelt preferred to use go-betweens to circumvent Cordell Hull at the State Department; John F. Kennedy

employed a long-established go-between during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Such channels were also popular with US adviser on national security Henry Kissinger and German Chancellor Willy Brandt, neither of whom had sufficient confidence in their own diplomatic representatives but wished to sustain a public policy at variance with reality.¹⁴ The British were not averse to this kind of tactic either. As will be seen, Chamberlain chose the go-between option for his appeasement policy. In history books he could find many examples for it. The Stuart King Charles II, for example, had learnt in exile to use the 'back stairs', people he trusted in untrustworthy times.¹⁵

Naturally not everyone who was well connected made a good go-between. To carry out missions go-betweens needed to have fairly stable characters, coping with stressful situations (particularly when they were employed during a war). Their work could be immensely frustrating, varying between times of high tension and total idleness.

They therefore needed a lot of patience and stamina. A study of peace negotiators in the twenty-first century stated: 'only vicars have to drink more tea in the course of their duty than peace mediators. Well tea or coffee or Coca Cola.'¹⁶ Apart from Coca Cola, this was not so very different from a go-between in the first half of the twentieth century.

They also needed a very good memory. Since nobody wanted to commit anything to paper, go-betweens had to try to remember verbatim the arguments of the people involved. Of course this did not guarantee that they passed them on correctly. As in every conversation they could misinterpret the subtext or the tone of voice (threatening, consoling). They could be too eager to hear things that were not actually said. To please their 'employer' they could also raise hopes that were misplaced. Flattered by the mission, they could even oversell themselves to both sides. The better and longer they had known their opposite number, the higher the chance they understood the message. What one German go-between would call 'the study of people' (*Menschenbeobachtung*) was a prerequisite for the job. Nowadays it is quoted as the key to conflict resolution theory: 'the historical setting, the culture, the character of the people involved.'¹⁷

All of this is, of course, common sense. And that is another prerequisite for go-betweens. They had to understand emotions, they played to a certain degree the politics of emotions, 'Gefühlspolitik' as one German called it, but they could never get emotional themselves. Since aristocrats believe

in *Affektkontrolle* (the control of one's emotions) they were well prepared for this.

They also needed to be good at lighting upon the right windows of opportunity, occasionally exclude controversial topics, and bring in new ideas at the right time. Consequently many of the people involved in secret negotiations were often good chess players, thinking strategically. They even used occasional chess language to explain their moves—one go-between was arguing the whole war should be ended and a 'partie remise' (replaying the game later) declared.

So why did aristocrats offer themselves as go-betweens?

First of all the human ego should never be underestimated. Even though these were clandestine missions, they could bring great prestige. Those in the know would remember what a go-between had achieved and compensate them in some form for it. This would not necessarily be financial. Go-between work was not lucrative work per se, but 'only for honour'. A major exception in this book is the go-between Stephanie Hohenlohe who made sure she received very expensive 'thank you' presents.

Another reason for undertaking this job was that many aristocrats thought of themselves as entitled to play a political role. Simply to be asked restored their political relevance.

So in which situations were these go-betweens actually used?

As the following chapters will show, there was a great difference between their work in peacetime and their work during wars. In peacetime go-betweens were mainly employed to solve misunderstandings between heads of states and governments or to establish a channel for future crisis situations.

In times of war, go-betweens could play an even more useful role. When embassies were closed down and every meeting between diplomats interpreted as a possible overture, go-betweens could put out peace feelers and work in an undetected way.

Yet, despite its important role, thus far no one has done any scholarly work on this phenomenon. One reason for this may well be that historians are usually middle class and do not make the connection. They may have been aware of the international networks of the aristocracy but they did not enquire what they were used for. Because no equivalent phenomenon exists among the middle classes, it was simply not looked for in other classes. Instead the aristocracy was dismissed as an anaemic group, entirely passé,

which no longer constituted a relevant political and economic factor. Sir David Cannadine described the British aristocracy more or less gracefully vanishing into the historical background after 1918. He had no interest in international relations and also ignored their impressive survival techniques which have made them an economic and social success to this day. Only a few historians, like Arno Mayer, have believed in the longevity of aristocratic power, pointing out that they still played at least an economic and social role.¹⁸

Added to this class-determined narrow vision, the aristocracy and monarchies did not exactly make it easy for historians to find out more about them. They simply gave a stylized picture of themselves, cleansed of any political *haut goût*. To this day the private archives of many aristocratic families do not allow research on twentieth-century material. The most famous are the Royal Archives at Windsor. They have a strict embargo on royal correspondence for the inter-war years. Another problem has been that aristocratic go-betweens did not leave many traces behind. They did not write down their instructions and later did not 'confess' about them in a sensationalized autobiography. He (or in many cases she) was discreet and loyal. Since their work was not to be mentioned in any official documents, diplomatic historians could get a lopsided view. The Permanent Undersecretary of the Foreign Office, Sir Robert Vansittart, was well aware of this problem: 'It is perhaps difficult for the pure historian to write contemporary history. It cannot be written on documents only—above all on diplomatic ones. I know too much of what lies behind them, too much of what does not appear.'¹⁹

He meant the characters of the people involved and the unwritten assumptions. But he also meant back channels. Vansittart himself actually used go-betweens as will be shown in Chapter 6.

So how can one find out about such missions if there are no sources?

It is certainly not easy and most missions will probably never come to light. But one can reconstruct some by finding a way in by the backdoor. Traces, if they exist at all, can be found mainly among private papers. Occasionally missions are made public by new archival discoveries, e.g. files of the security services. They will therefore play an important part in this book. Even a failed mission can be invaluable to the historian. For instance, after the disastrous 'Sixtus' mission came to light in 1918 (of which more later), the people involved were eager to protest their innocence in their memoirs. The same was true for the go-betweens Hitler used, many of whom wanted to rewrite their life after 1945.

Just because it is difficult to research these missions does not mean one should ignore them. It would entail missing out an important dimension and just relying on official documents. This could easily turn into what E. H. Carr called ‘documentary fetishism’. A historian who does not develop a feel for the gaps in the sources misses out on important connections. He might end up like the Pulitzer prize winner A. Scott Berg, who wrote a biography of Charles Lindbergh without apparently noticing that Lindbergh led a double life in Germany—including having several children.

When it comes to political double lives, go-betweens illuminate a hitherto well-hidden world.

A common language?

At the heart of this book is the question: ‘what’ did aristocratic go-betweens talk about? We should also have a brief look at *how* they talked. How did they use language to establish a closeness with their ‘targets’? And what was their lingua franca? English, German, or French?

If one follows Ludwig Wittgenstein’s conclusion that ‘the limits of my language mean the limits of my world’, then an analysis of the language spoken by aristocratic elites would yield not only an insight into their communication skills but also help us to understand their mentality. Of course, it has to be established first *how* aristocratic language differed from the language of other social groups.

Aristocrats were considered to have a particularly exclusive language.²⁰ Since medieval times, the ideal of knights and their chivalrous vocabulary had become part of how the aristocracy was seen. By the nineteenth century what was assumed to be an artificial mode of speech had become a special focus of attack. Particularly in Germany and France the aristocracy was ridiculed for its ‘unnatural’ discourse and effeminate gestures, which were seen as ‘insincere’. Well into the 1950s a critic of the Austrian aristocracy commented on their ‘bad German, which is littered with foreign words’.²¹ This was not just an Austrian phenomenon. In Britain, the letters of the Mitford sisters show the peculiarity of aristocratic language in the twentieth century. To this day these aristocratic siblings are seen as odd because the two most beautiful of them, Diana and Unity, were infatuated with Hitler, whereas a less glamorous one, Jessica, chose Stalin. It was therefore no surprise that the eldest sister, Nancy Mitford, quite sensibly mined

her family as material for her novels. But apart from indulging in extreme politics the Mitfords are also famous for communicating in their own special vocabulary. Today people think of their letters either as charming or highly obnoxious. Yet whatever the standpoint, these letters stood for much more than eccentricity.

Aristocratic women were cocooned in an insular world, usually tutored at home while their brothers went off to boarding schools, the army, or university. This upbringing made aristocratic women the guardians of an exclusive language. It was Nancy Mitford who wrote the decisive essay on the language of the British upper classes, which to this day has no German or French equivalent. Her essay was inspired by the linguist Alan S. C. Ross. He had written an article on U (upper-class) and non-U (non-upper-class) language. While for example 'toilet' or 'mirror' were non-upper-class words, 'loo' and 'looking-glass' were upper class. Together with other prominent contributors Ross and Mitford then published in 1956 *Noblesse Oblige: An Enquiry into the Identifiable Characteristics of the English Aristocracy*. It caused a furore, making many middle-class people change their vocabulary overnight.

Even though Mitford's analysis was delivered in an ironic tone, it is not an accident that a female member of the upper class helped Ross in his research. These women followed a strict policy of linguistic exclusion, thereby watching over their family's social contacts. Aristocratic and upper-class women also employed a special diction. This 'affected' pronunciation naturally upset members of other classes who felt excluded. When Nancy Mitford served in a firewatching unit in 1940, other watchers—from the middle and working class—wanted her fired.²² They misunderstood her accent as mockery. Mockery was not her intention, but it was an accent so ingrained in female upper-class girls that even Nancy's rebellious sister Jessica Mitford never dropped it. She became a committed communist who sounded like a duchess.

Such artificial diction was less marked among aristocratic and upper-class men, though. Recordings of upper-class male voices well into the 1930s sounded relatively 'normal'. To have a local accent was also common for male aristocrats in Germany. Chancellor Otto von Bismarck identified with 'simple country people' for whom he could switch into a local dialect. Kaiser Wilhelm II often sounded like a Berliner. This was recounted in many anecdotes and is one reason for his surprising popularity.²³ His 'common touch' was intended to lessen social tensions. He tried to use language as a means of sustaining a sense of shared experience and became a master

of the popular catchphrase. His 'soundbites' were unforgettable and often unforgivable. He famously described the Chinese as the 'yellow peril', advised women to stick to 'Children, kitchen, church' (*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*), and called socialists 'fellows without a fatherland' (*vaterlandslose Gesellen*). The fact that the Emperor delivered these soundbites in a manly Berlin accent appealed to the average German.

Even though aristocratic men belonged to a closed group, it would therefore be wrong to see them as socially autistic. Unlike female aristocrats, men often had a greater variety of interlocutors. They talked to members of reigning houses, their own peer group, professional elites (the local doctor, the lawyer), their staff, and farmers. Ideally an aristocrat had to react with different languages to these very different social groups. Indeed, many tried to become experts in varied forms of communication.

When it came to corresponding with monarchs, aristocrats used an extremely formal language. This was the case in Britain, but even more so in Austria-Hungary and Germany. Despite his 'common touch', when talking to his Berliners, the Kaiser expected an almost byzantine writing style from members of his court. His 'favourites', Prince Eulenburg and Prince Fürstenberg, managed to perfect this. Even relatives of the Kaiser had to follow this rule, as did the Kaiser's uncle, Chlodwig von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, who became German Chancellor in 1894. Whereas he was addressed by Wilhelm II as 'uncle', he had to answer the Kaiser as 'your Majesty's humble, loyal servant'. Hohenlohe explained such servility with the words: 'one is not related to sovereigns.'²⁴

However, between sovereigns there existed equality, even if one side came from a tiny state while the other was a British king. The reigning Prince Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen used the German 'Du' when he talked to King George V. The King, who had learnt German in Hesse, reciprocated and made statements to Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen that he would not have made to anyone outside this closed circle. On 24 May 1914 he said to Hohenzollern, for example: 'Du (you) will see that Grey will drag us into a disaster before long.'²⁵ He was probably referring to the problems in Ireland at the time. Yet the fact that the King distrusted Grey, his own Foreign Secretary, was quite a useful piece of information for Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. It was one of many remarks he passed on to the German Foreign Ministry.

Equality also existed amongst the group that ranked below the reigning houses, the aristocrats. In the case of France, the sociologist Monique de

Saint Martin has shown that to this day there exists a tradition in the aristocratic French Jockey Club that ‘two members sitting next to each other at dinner, who have never met before do not introduce themselves to each other. Since they belong to the same world, they have to act as if they had known each other all their lives.’²⁶

A similar tradition exists in the Bavarian aristocracy where members address each other on a first name basis, even if they are not related or friends. It was this ‘linguistic closeness’ that would become useful for go-between missions. To be on first name terms with many of the people they had to approach naturally helped to make conversations more relaxed and open.

However, ladders were pulled up when it came to communication with the middle classes. To deter social climbers, the aristocracy used insider jokes and endless pet names. Today research in private archives is sometimes extremely frustrating because nobody can any longer identify the addressees of letters. Who was dear ‘Mossy’ or darling ‘Dodi’ who got ‘tons of love from Rolly’? Many of these childhood pet names stuck for life. The youngest daughter of Alfred Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, for example, remained in the family correspondence the ‘Baby’. As an old lady she signed off letters to her sister, the Queen of Romania, with ‘love from your old baby’. This ‘infantilization’ of family members had several causes. Traditionally aristocratic families often used the same first names for their children. Consequently there might be an inflation of Victorias, Wilhelms, Franz, Heinrich, Ernst, or Louis in one house. To have such a popular first name, a *Leitname* as the Germans called it, was a sign of prestige and status within the family. By using pet names internally their holders could be identified more easily. Apart from this practical approach there was another important reason for pet names—it worked perfectly as a form of exclusion, as the writer and director Julian Fellowes has shown. Fellowes has written many screenplays about the aristocracy whose accuracy can be questioned, but he has identified correctly why pet names were vital:

Everyone is ‘Toffee’ or ‘Bobo’ or ‘Snook’. They themselves think the names imply a kind of playfulness, an eternal childhood, fragrant with memories of nanny and pyjamas warming by the nursery fire. But they are really a simple reaffirmation of insularity, a reminder of shared history that excludes more recent arrivals; yet another way of publicly displaying their intimacy with each other. Certainly the nicknames form an effective fence. A newcomer is often in the position of knowing someone too well to continue to call them Lady So-and-So but not nearly well enough to call them ‘sausage’, while to use their actual Christian name is a sure sign

within their circle that one doesn't really know them at all. And so the new arrival is forced back from the normal development of friendly intimacy that is customary among acquaintances in other classes.²⁷

Pet names were therefore a useful strategy to avoid unwelcome advances from middle-class outsiders. Nancy Mitford described such advances as pure torture. She hated to be addressed as 'Nancy' by people she hardly knew.

Though the aversion to the social climbing middle classes was obvious among aristocratic and upper-class families, feelings towards the 'lower classes' could be very different. Mitford's essay on U and non-U language already gives an indication of this. The language of the upper classes in England was closer to that of the working classes. They shared much of the same traditional vocabulary. Furthermore, while the working classes had their cockney slang, their upper-class counterparts showed a similar preference, according to Ross: 'There seems no doubt that, in the nineties and at least up to 1914, U-speakers (particularly young ones) were rather addicted to slang.'²⁸ This is illustrated, for example, in P. G. Wodehouse's *Blandings Castle* where the son of Lord Emsworth constantly uses slang words and addresses his enraged father as 'guv'nor'.²⁹

The relative closeness between the 'upper' and the 'lower classes' was not just an English phenomenon. In Germany many aristocrats lived during the first stages of their lives in the countryside; it was here that they learned dialects from the local staff (often to the horror of their middle-class nannies). In later life many male aristocrats actually preferred the company of 'common people' to mingling with the educated middle classes. This was something Prince Castell-Castell mused about in a letter to his wife. Like so many members of his peer group he experienced during the First World War a clash of classes at the front. Many of his officers were middle-class men and Castell-Castell came to the conclusion that aristocrats could get on much better with simple soldiers. 'Less educated people', as he called them, were more agreeable than bourgeois show-offs. Of course, one reason for this was that the middle-class officers were from urban centres and could not understand Prince Castell's rural world. He cared about issues like the latest harvest results and therefore had more to talk about with a farmhand turned soldier than with a dentist turned officer. The dentist had different subjects and vocabulary. Wolfgang Frühwald even claimed that the German middle classes developed their own 'educated dialect' in clear demarcation from the nobility *and* the 'common people'.³⁰

The British middle classes were much less critical of their social superiors than their German counterparts. But even they had serious comprehension problems. In one of his short stories, Aldous Huxley satirized the erratic conversation techniques of the higher aristocracy: Lord Badgery, a member of an old family, constantly changes the subject during a disastrous dinner party. Such an associative conversation was seen as a sign of esprit by the aristocracy, but Badgery's middle-class guests cannot keep up with the pace.³¹ Badgery in turn is deeply bored by their company. Long, educational monologues by professionals were perceived as an imposition. The aristocratic ideal was to be a dilettante in as many fields as possible (to them dilettante still had a positive meaning, stemming from the Latin word *delectare*, to delight). To their annoyance professional middle-class men did not want simply to delight, but rather to 'specialize'. At the end of the twentieth century, the Duke of Devonshire therefore saw it as courageous of his wife 'Debo' to sacrifice a whole day once a year talking to the local dignitaries. In his eyes they were far from interesting. Luckily, Debo was an unusual Mitford girl, not known for the famously sharp Mitford tongue. She was careful not to upset—as Lord Cecil of Chelwood had put it once—'the middle class monsters'.³²

When it came to actual correspondence with the middle classes the aristocracy was in fact very careful to avoid any such thing. In Germany and in England, a polite, politically correct tone was used. This fastidiousness was characteristic of speeches in front of a 'mixed' audience. Prince Castell-Castell referred to his middle-class listeners in a church sermon as 'alongside people' (*Nebennmenschen*).

Apart from the court language, the internal peer group language, and the politically correct language for the middle classes, almost all members of the higher aristocracy also had foreign languages in common. In Germany the aforementioned Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, for example, read newspapers in three languages: *The Illustrated London News*, *Indépendance romaine*, and the *Bukarester Tageblatt*. Language training started early. Prince Hans Pless had at the age of 8 to summarize articles from *The Times* and the *Figaro* for his father.³³ French governesses had groomed the Russian aristocracy and gentry from the time of the Empress Catherine and therefore French was still important, but English had become more fashionable by the later nineteenth century. Armies of British nannies invaded the Continent and left their mark:

Before the war it would have been hard to exaggerate the sway of British nannies among some central European children; toes kept count of pigs going to market

before fingers learnt to bead and Three Blind Mice rushed in much earlier than inklings of the Trinity.³⁴

By the beginning of the twentieth century it was seen as a social stain not to know about blind mice. The Dutch noblewoman Victoria Bentinck commented that her 'poor' niece Mechthild had married down linguistically: 'She made a marriage of convenience to a German Count. As he couldn't speak any other language but his own, he was rather a "fish out of water" in our family at Middachten, where four languages were constantly being spoken sometimes in the same breath. She was the sort of woman who ought to have married a diplomat instead of a country gentleman. In the diplomatic service she would have been in her element.'³⁵

Indeed, Mechthild was not happy about her indolent German husband who had missed out on learning languages properly. The British born Daisy Pless made a similar mistake. She married in 1891 into one of the richest German aristocratic families and for forty years survived on a rather limited German vocabulary.³⁶ One reason for this was that all her German friends, Kaiser Wilhelm II included, insisted on talking English to her. In this regard she 'benefited' from the dominance of English as the new language of the aristocracy. But she should have listened to the advice of her friend King Edward VII, who had admonished her for not learning proper German. In British royal circles German was, until 1914, quite important. Edward VII made sure his older sons learnt it. His son George (later George V) was sent on a refresher course to Hesse when he became Prince of Wales.

Learning foreign languages remained an important way of keeping international friendships and family networks alive. It also demonstrated ubiquity. Royal houses were generally seen as the role model by aristocrats. The Emperor Franz Joseph spoke French, Italian, Czech and a bit of Hungarian, so he could talk to the majority of his subjects in their own languages.'

In Germany, the Pless children learnt Polish, because their father had Polish speaking tenants. Language skills were used as a tool to overcome ethnic differences within one's domain and to demonstrate rights to the land. To speak Polish or Czech showed allegiance to that region, too. By learning Polish, Prince Pless also wanted to defuse social and political tensions. He did not want to be seen as an 'alien element'. He knew that families who neglected such language skills could suffer. A former servant of the south German Prince Oettingen-Wallerstein commented on such a failure: 'the young Prince had a Czech teacher, but he did not want anything to do with

Czech ideas.³⁷ To the disappointment of his parents Oettingen-Wallerstein never developed an interest in the family's Bohemian properties.

Prince Max Egon II zu Fürstenberg made no such mistake. He was brought up bilingually because his family had property in Czech speaking Bohemia and in Germany. When he became a member of the Austro-Hungarian upper house, his Czech language skills repeatedly helped him to sort out political discord.

However, as will be seen in Chapter 2, it was exactly this cosmopolitanism that came into collision with the German middle classes. In the nineteenth century they had been at the forefront of the nationalist movement and attacked the 'linguistic degeneracy' of the higher aristocracy. The German gentry (*niederer Adel*) agreed on this issue: Hans von Tresckow feared in 1907, like many members of the German gentry, a lack of national feeling among the aristocracy. A symptom seemed to be their mania for foreign languages:

Count Maltzahn had invited me to breakfast with him in the Hotel Kaiserhof. I met there Prince Brion, Prince Schönaich-Karolath and a Polish Count Skorczewski—all members of the Prussian upper house, which is currently discussing the expropriation act aimed at the Poles. I sat at a separate table with Maltzahn, because these 'pillars' of the Prussian throne were conversing in French out of consideration for their Polish colleague, who by the way speaks German well. This is really the height of snobbery. The government is supporting a policy of germanisation and the worthy members of the upper house are talking in the German capital with a Prussian citizen of Polish descent, French. Maltzahn was outraged. He is a really good German, who isn't infected by the internationalism of the great families.³⁸

The 'great families' had a lot of reasons not to give up their language skills. They helped them to keep their widespread property arrangements and their social networks going. And it was their multi-layered communication skills which would eventually make them ideal go-betweens.

Networks before 1914: the Protestant network

There existed two main networks in aristocratic and royal circles: a Protestant and a Catholic one. Both were based on faith and family. Both were competing for international connections. An overlap of networks was rare, as Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, explained in 2009:

The princely families of Europe knew each other. They met each other a lot and it was all the way across. France being Roman Catholic, there were few matrimonial connections. There was some with Belgium, but that was fairly distant. Of course, there was Scandinavia. But the nearest other Protestant country that produced wives and husbands was Germany, so there was much more familial contact that way.³⁹

While the Catholic network was dominated by the Habsburgs, the Protestant network had the British royal family at its centre. There were several reasons for this. For Protestant aristocrats all over Europe it had always been appealing to cultivate their British counterparts. Especially since the nineteenth century, Britain was an attractive model that was admired, envied, and copied.⁴⁰ British aristocrats seemed to have adapted best to the social challenges of the Industrial Revolution and profited well from it economically. Furthermore they had an empire at their disposal that offered investments and jobs for their second sons. They had brought their middle classes 'under control' by reforms and kept deference intact.

This was something a continental aristocrat wanted to be connected with. The best route to Britain was via the royal networks. Already the German wives of the Georges had brought in their relatives and so did Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. They were related to a variety of minor German princelings (most importantly the Coburgs, the Leiningens, and the Hohenlohes). Members of these families eventually became Anglo-German, effortlessly moving between the two countries. It was these families who would form the basis for many go-between missions in the twentieth century.

The Coburg network turned out to be the most successful one of them all because it was close-knit. In a secret memorandum Prince Albert's brother, Duke Ernst II of Coburg (1818–93), described how to keep it that way: most important was *Vertrauen*, trust, among family members. Above all: 'bitterness, irony, must be alien to us, as much as avarice and jealousy.' Ernst II appealed to comradeship. Picking up on Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, a novel published in 1844, Ernst pointed out that his 'house' could achieve greatness as long as all the members stayed united—'one for all and all for one'.⁴¹

Of course there were many reasons why the members should respond to such an appeal. The family network was a perfect insurance system and for many poorer relatives a 'meal ticket'. To leave it could mean financial and social suicide. The name Coburg therefore offered its members what the

sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has labelled as 'symbolic capital' (titles), 'cultural capital' (knowledge, education, taste), and 'social capital' (contacts).⁴²

It was common sense to remain a part of and support such a network. But apart from the rational arguments there was also an irrational reason that kept the network together: the power of emotion. In fact, taken as a whole, aristocratic and royal families were experts at managing such emotion.

To this day there is bizarre disagreement about whether the aristocracy was capable of 'genuine' emotion or not. The one extreme of the debate is represented by media personalities like Julian Fellowes, of *Downton Abbey* fame, and the journalist Peregrine Worsthorne, who portray aristocrats as caring individuals who looked after family members and staff well. Their opponents at the other extreme see aristocrats and dynasties as emotionally autistic. Their counter-scenario reminds one of the *Great Gatsby* narrative. Like Scott Fitzgerald's portrayal of the super-rich they would agree that aristocrats are 'careless people (who) smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money . . . and let other people clean up the mess they had made'.⁴³

Both portrayals are naturally caricatures. Fellowes is clearly idealizing the aristocracy. On the other hand it is contradictory to accuse a class that is so obsessed with the idea of family of a lack of emotional bonding. The topos of the 'cold' ruling classes and their loveless family life was in fact used as a line of attack by the rising middle classes, as one historian has pointed out: 'the criticism of aristocratic family life by professional men was among the earliest forms of class consciousness.'⁴⁴ This was not just directed against the upper classes.⁴⁵ The working classes were also portrayed as dysfunctional and incapable of bringing up their children. Upper-class families, however, remained the worst culprits: they handed over children to nurses and married them off for material advantage and not for affection—apparently unlike middle-class people. According to this argument, only the middle classes married for love and looked after their family altruistically. Of course this was a completely idealized representation, but this class fight over emotion was continued by historians. Lawrence Stone, for example, was attacked by E. P. Thompson for his theory that the romantic ideal had started in the upper classes. According to Thompson other classes, including the working classes, also loved romantically. Who loved more or better remains subject to ideological dispute to this day.

For the early twentieth century we still do not know much about emotional bonding within aristocratic families. One reason is that the history of royal and aristocratic families is written by middle-class historians who have their own vantage point. They are also prevented from getting a better view, because royal and aristocratic families seldom afford access to their archives. As a result historians have to use aristocratic autobiographies. These are, however, heavily filtered. According to the mores of the times they don't mention the family much. Wives are only referred to *en passant* and usually described as 'good comrades'. This is deceptive, because *not* to talk about the family was part of the social articulation of feelings well into the 1950s. That feelings were kept private does not mean, however, that they did not exist. In fact the private letters by nobles that are accessible show a surprisingly egalitarian relationship between many members of the family network.

When Duke Ernst II wrote his Coburg memorandum he was aware of the fact that all families can rise or fall depending on how well emotion within the family was handled. The Coburgs invested a lot of time on this issue. Every aristocratic family needed its members to stay loyal to the house *because* it expected them to make great personal sacrifices. In general second sons had to give up their inheritance to first born brothers. This kept great estates intact, but could naturally cause enormous bitterness. Similar sacrifices were expected from daughters. They either had to be 'exported' abroad for an advantageous marriage and therefore leave their homes at a young age or they had to abstain from unsuitable marriages, to keep the family exclusive (after all social permeability had to be avoided at all costs).

Making such demands on one's family members meant that negative emotions had to be constantly managed. This was not an easy task and families therefore developed a double strategy. To keep everyone in line was first of all achieved by inheritance law and family contracts. But contracts were not enough. One had to offer family members more, as Duke Ernst had realized, and that was emotional attachment. Emotion in aristocratic families was fostered on two levels: First of all, children were indoctrinated with emotional stories about the family. It was usually the female members of the family who were in charge of this task. They recounted every turn in history connected to their own family history, they personalized and emotionalized history and adapted it according to the needs of the time. In their stories, there was usually a family hero, a martyr, and a black sheep—working as

examples or warnings. Such stories made the family history a highly emotional business for its offspring. Impressionable children naturally wanted to follow in the footsteps of the worthy ancestors, taking enormous pride in the traditions of their house.⁴⁶ Strong emotions were also aroused by retelling stories of suffering. One example of this is the experience of Queen Victoria's German relatives, the Hohenlohes and the Leiningens. Both houses had lost their reigning status at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was a trauma never forgotten. Such loss of status and prestige left a deep impression on the next generation. These were powerful emotions that bound one to the family.

There was another method of creating emotion: memorabilia. To this day on entering a country house one can spot which ancestor is positioned at the centre of the family's heritage. At the English country house Broadlands in Hampshire, for example, the focus is not on perhaps its most famous owner, the Prime Minister Lord Palmerston, but on an arguably less significant figure, the Duke of Edinburgh's uncle Lord Mountbatten. He made sure that Broadlands became a shrine to his success. His tennis and military trophies are on display and his private cinema shows clips from his exploits during the Second World War. Aristocratic children were surrounded by such family memorabilia to which highly charged emotions were attached: a sword that had been used by the courageous family founder or a helmet that was worn by the family's military hero who died selflessly on the battlefield.

Apart from managing the family through strong emotions, one also had to manage the wider network of relatives and friends. It was important to cultivate as many other families as possible. In aristocratic and royal circles the more international contacts a house had up to 1914, the higher their status within the peer group.

The cultivation of as many people as possible was achieved by constant communication—letter writing and regular visits. German aristocrats called it 'Schlössern', visiting each other's country houses and castles (*Schlösser*). Such visits could be expensive for the host as well as the guest, but they created a closeness and were a good social training ground for the children. They were also important for getting ahead at court where one needed contacts as well as good psychological skills.

A man who was brought up within this Protestant network and greatly benefited from its methods plays an important role in the following chapters: Duke Carl Eduard of Sachsen-Coburg und Gotha (Figure 1). He



Figure 1. The young Charles Edward, who would turn into Carl Eduard Duke of Coburg, with his sister Alice.

would interpret Ernst II's secret family motto 'one for all and all for one' in his own way. His interpretation would make it possible for him to survive at two courts—the court of Kaiser Wilhelm II as well as the court of Adolf Hitler.

If one wants to understand why the Duke of Coburg could become a go-between for the Nazis, one has to examine his early life.

Carl Eduard was born Charles Edward. His father Leopold Duke of Albany had been the most intellectual of Queen Victoria's children. He had studied properly at Oxford and became a friend of the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll.

Leopold suffered from haemophilia and nobody expected him to live a normal life, let alone father children. Yet in 1882 Queen Victoria managed to find a bride for him, Helene Friedericke Auguste zu Waldeck und Pyrmont. Helene was not informed about her husband's illness and her

family was naturally pleased about the advantageous marriage. It lasted two years. In 1883 their daughter Alice was born, named after *Alice in Wonderland*, and a year later Charles Edward.

Leopold never saw his son; he died from a fall five months before Charles Edward's birth in 1884. Helene was a widow at 23 with two small children and reduced status. Her frustration about this situation and her closeness to her own family in Germany, the Waldeck Pyrmonts, would later have an indirect effect on Charles Edward's Nazi career.

While Leopold had been artistic and well read, his son Charles Edward inherited no intellectual curiosity. What he did inherit, though, was poor health. He was described as a highly nervous child who needed constant protection by his older sister Alice (a pattern that would continue to his death). Though Alice herself was extremely healthy, she was a carrier of haemophilia and would pass it on to her own sons.

As one of Queen Victoria's many grandsons, Charles Edward was expected to lead a privileged and unspectacular life. Had he stayed in England, he could have joined one of the fighting services, or he could have lived as a gentleman of leisure. But unforeseen circumstances changed the expected course of events. In 1899 after a family row his Coburg cousin Alfred committed suicide. Young Alfred was the only son of Alfred Duke of Coburg. The Duke himself had been unwell for some time and therefore a new heir had to be found quickly. The first reaction of the British royal family had been to order Queen Victoria's next son in line to take over the dukedoms. Yet the Duke of Connaught was a British general and German newspapers immediately criticized this idea. To them the British royal family were foreigners who had no understanding of Germany, let alone Coburg. They demanded a German Prince instead: 'How shameful for the people [of the dukedoms Coburg and Gotha] to be handed over into foreign hands, like some dead family heirloom.'⁴⁷ The *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* adopted the slogan 'German thrones for German Princes' and the *Berliner Tageblatt* added:

The highest value that three bloody wars have given the German people is a newly awakened national consciousness. The first Chancellor [Bismarck] praised the reigning Princes as custodians and carers of the newly founded German Reich. They have to be German Princes. It is impossible to have two souls inside one's breast—a German and a foreign one.⁴⁸

This reference to Goethe's *Faust* created a clichéd but effective picture. 'Being hybrid', having two 'souls', was seen as cancerous. The Faustian image