

REMINISCENCES

OF

RUDOLF STEINER

ANDREI BELYI

AASIA TURGENIEFF MARGARITA VOLOSCHIN

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FOREWORD

The following impressions of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), Austrian philosopher, educator, scientist, artist and founder of Anthroposophy, are excerpted from the books of three Russian authors. Both because it is the gift of the Russian people to be able to describe another's soul-configuration in a particularly pictorial and concrete manner, and because each of these writers knew him and saw him frequently, the impressions are especially living and vivid. The reader should realize that they illuminate Rudolf Steiner's nature only from certain aspects. Fuller accounts appear in his own autobiography, *The Course of My Life*, and in works by Gunther Wachsmuth, Emil Bok and others.

We are able to glimpse, throughout the pages of this book, Rudolf Steiner in the early days of his work in Berlin, and especially during the period when, during World War I, the building of the First Goetheanum was going forward under the hands of volunteers from 17 different nationalities. Here we see how, together with such artists as these authors and in response to their questions, he was developing impulses for the future of the arts, right into the details of technique, as he strove to give fitting form to this center for the Mysteries of a New Age.

— Christy Barnes, Editor

developed his Christology. Here was no knowledge in the ordinary sense of the word. It was a love overflowing all forms, a suffering overflowing all forms.

The mark that he bore on his countenance at such a time, "Ich,"* was an expression of his state of consciousness that awoke the listeners from their sleep.

He stood before us in stern silence, in the outer court of his words on the Christ.

Translated by Maria St. Goar

A LETTER TO ALEKSANDR BLOK

ANDREI BELYI

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The following excerpts are taken from a long letter to his close friend and fellow Symbolist poet, Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921), and sent just a few days after the author had first heard and spoken with Steiner. The accuracy and the detail of the encounter and the full impact of the meeting upon Belyi make this letter an important document for those interested in Steiner and Belyi.

It was published in Russian in Aleksandr Blok i Andrei Belyi: Perepiska (Moscow:1940).

May 14, 1912. Brussels.

My good, eternally dear friend!

I have been conversing with you in my thoughts for a long time. That's why I haven't written. I didn't want to write hastily . . . I'll tell you about Rudolf Steiner — who he is, how he comes across in books, what attitude we came to have towards him in Moscow — for Steiner is the hero of our *epopeia**.

A few years ago I read his book *Christianity as Mystical Fact and the Mysteries of Antiquity*. And, having read it, I said to myself: "This is a boring individual." I said it and forgot it.

*In 1921, Belyi published *The Christened Chinaman* intended as Part I of a work to be entitled *Epopeia*.

(Note by translator: "I" — in the macrocosmic sense.)

A few years later in one of the circles I heard the reading of some Theosophical author's type-written lecture; the lecture was one chapter of an esoteric course; the group was a circle of the elite. And imagine: my head began to spin in a storm of light, the lightning of some clairvoyance; and all that was written was somehow ours, genetically. When I asked who the author was, I was told: "*Steiner*." (Subsequently I found this passage in boring and diluted form in his book *Geheimwissen-schaft* . . .)

On my return to Russia, news arrived more and more often about Steiner: first one, then the other, would arrive from Germany, captivated by him. . . .

From 1909, when I found out how close Steiner's ideas were to all that had become my own *Light on the Path*, I turned toward him with deep veneration. I understood that that which was esoteric for me, "*The Awaited Light*," was the light for Steiner also: I realized that he lives in the *very light*, and all of his works — Steiner's whole movement — was essential to Germany; it is a pedagogy, a preparatory class without which it's impossible to approach anything; at the same time that Steiner is like a Pushkin poem.

From 1910, for many reasons which I can't write to you about in a letter, Steiner came into especially sharp and intimate contacts with all of us: some, like Ellis,* have thrown themselves at him blindly; others, like Voloshin,** are walking with him, not blindly. . . . Since the fall of 1911 Steiner has begun to say the most astounding things about Russia, her future, the spirit of her people, and about V. Soloviev (in Russia he sees a vast and unequalled future). He considers Soloviev the most outstanding man of the second half of the nineteenth century, he knows of the Mongol danger, he main-

*Ellis. The pseudonym of Lev Lvovich Kobylinski (1876-1947). A Symbolist poet, member of the Argonauts. A mystic and later an Anthroposophist.

**Voloshin, Maksimilian Aleksandrovich (1877-1932). Symbolist poet, husband of Margarita Voloshin, the painter.

tains that since the year 1900 a vast change has come about on the earth and that *sunsets have been different from that year on*. . . . To whom, except Steiner, could I put a question point-blank about a certain perplexity, in which I have found myself for exactly seventeen months . . . ? At 2:30 p.m. we decide to go to Cologne; with the preposterous idea of achieving a meeting with Steiner, not being personal acquaintances of his, not being members of the Lodge. Even for members of the Lodge, audiences with him are arranged only with great difficulty. . . .

*

The day is stormy, muggy: through the windows is the huge, lace Cologne cathedral. We go out, take a cab — drive along the bank of the Rhine. . . . We search for the entrance, we ring: a little shell of an old woman — an "auntie," pale, emaciated, but with kind eyes — comes out. We hesitate — we hand over the letter. Another woman, approaching her middle years, comes toward us and says in perfect Russian: "Are you here to see the Doctor? You are here from that Moscow circle, which . . ." etc. She turns out to be a Russian, Mariya Yakovlevna, Marie von Sivers, the Doctor's secretary, who had been inseparable from him for many years. "Wait." — We wait. Sivers returns and says: "Although you are not members of the Lodge, the Doctor will make an exception, and he invites you to a session of the Lodge in two hours. The Doctor will grant you an audience afterwards — today or tomorrow." In two hours we return: the rooms are filled with people; they show us into an oblong hall of a dark blue color: everywhere on the doors and windows are dark blue curtains; in the front there is a dais; in the recess of the wall is a huge cross; on it, a garland of red roses ⊕; on the table, a huge bouquet of the same kind of roses; above, a gold sign ✠ and the initials of a motto. The hall is full of "aunties" and gentlemen; *very significant faces* appear for a moment and then disappear, the majority of them are "aunties."

We squeeze in and sit down near the side door. We wait. The curtain in the doorway moves apart, but behind the curtain the room is empty: Steiner is about to come in. A terrible unrest, anxiety grips me for some reason — as if someone is looking through me; I turn toward the door and for a minute I have a fleeting glimpse of the edge of the cheek of some face — *but the edge of the cheek is transparent, illuminated and I know it is Steiner, but the edge of the cheek of the face has already disappeared* (later Assya, who had been staring at the door the whole time, told me that for a moment Steiner, whom she also saw transparent and illuminated, (in the literal sense), appeared at the door; he had looked at us — at the same time as I sensed the inexplicable unrest — and he had disappeared, so that I caught sight of only the edge of his cheek.

Steiner's first appearance was, for both of us, an *illuminating phenomenon, in the literal, not figurative sense*; but the illuminating phenomenon disappeared.

In about three minutes, Steiner (no longer an illuminating phenomenon), small, reserved, sharply refined, ascended to the platform and began to speak: what he said — I could fill up ten pages writing about that, (but you still can't write everything). Steiner speaks crossly, reservedly, in a bass; at times he begins to shout, at times his voice sings like velvet, but he speaks in such a way that every word twists itself into your soul, leaving an indelible mark. Everyone whom I've ever heard is a puppy compared to Steiner, in the purely external ability to speak beautifully; at times Steiner flings the palms of his hands at his listeners, and from the gesture of the palms, you almost feel a physical slap in the face. On his face, a face breaks apart, and from there, another looks out, in order to set free a third face, the second one having broken apart in its turn.

In the course of the lecture,* ten Steiners passed before me, one proceeding from the other, one not resembling the other,

*On May 6, 1912 Steiner delivered a Branch Lecture entitled "Einweihung des neuen Zweigraumes (Vergessen und Gedenken. Raphael's 'Schule von Athen')." —

yet they were penetrated with some kind of Unity. In the course of the lecture, he was a Spaniard, Brant,* a Catholic Cardinal, a grammar school teacher, and a northern folk hero. The strength and power of his glance were such as *I have never seen on anyone*. Surrounding him — illuminating rays; on his chest swims an illuminated cloud, changing colors: Assya and I saw the change in color at one and the same instant. His *aura* is unbelievable, and always almost visible, but at points of tension in his talk, it becomes blinding (I don't know if you see the aura — already more than a year ago, I began to see it at times). In his face there is often an immeasurable human suffering, a mixture of tenderness and insane courage.

Such was the first impression.

After the lecture we approach Sivers: "When will the Doctor receive us?" — "Ah, you know, I can't say. . . ." — "But we came from Brussels specifically to see him: we must see him. . . ." — "Dozens of people have come for an audience with him, but he is in Cologne for only three days: I don't know if the Doctor will have time to meet with you. . . . Be at the public lecture this evening. . . ." We walk away crestfallen.

Evening. An antiquated hall: paintings on the walls. Noise, an uproar — hundreds of people. We are sitting — coincidentally, again by the side door. Again I sense the agitation: I turn toward the door — from the half-opened door Steiner is watching us; but when I looked at him, the side door closed — Steiner disappeared, then in a moment some woman comes out through the door; she fights her way through the rows, sits down in the empty seat next to us, and says to us: "The Doctor awaits you tomorrow at his house at 2:00 in the afternoon."

In about five minutes — the bell: the lecture begins. Its theme: "*Christ and the Twentieth Century*."**

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*Belyi is perhaps referring to Sebastian Brant (1458-1521), the German humanist and satirical poet who was the author of *Das Narrenschiff* (Ship of Fools, 1494).

**Steiner did deliver a lecture by this title on the evening of May 6, 1912. The omission which follows occurs in the Soviet publication of the text of the letter with no explanation.

In the evening after the lecture we sit in a cafe and drink beer; the music is playing waltzes; on the streets of Cologne with their electric lights, the rain beats down, and carriages thunder past. The next day, in the morning, we stopped at the cathedral — we were quiet for a long time; from there we went to Steiner's. We rang twice: no one opened the door: we waited — and waited. Suddenly there were steps behind us; we look around — and we meet Steiner face to face: he is coming down from an upper floor, polite, — reserved, a bit angry, and as stiff as a board; with him is Sivers — our interpreter. He invited us to enter. He sat down, reserved, cross, as stiff as a board.

In fifteen minutes I set forth the most important thing that had happened to us in two years, as if I were reading a business application addressed to Department X. He, as if the director of Department X, listened — reserved, cross, as stiff as a board.

Then Assya began to speak in a similar business-like manner about the dream, the meeting on the tram,* and — what would come next? Steiner spoke for a long time: when the conversation turned to the gentlemen on the tram, he suddenly smiled affectionately and winked a little, as if he knew; he was not surprised, but about the gentlemen on the tram — *not a sound*. . . . He swallowed, as if we had not spoken. . . . The sense of his words was: "The Russian national spirit is limitlessly profound, but the Russian people has not yet grown to the stature of the Russian national spirit — they have no bearing, they all only theorize — as if to serve their military duty with an iron rod: also, in a few years, there will be given to Russia one who expresses the national spirit, a Russian Teacher, but in the meantime — stand at attention and learn the alphabet!" That is the sense of his words, but the more he spoke, the kinder he became, and the wrinkles of an old man snaked themselves around his eyes. "You will not be betraying anyone, or anything, if you come to me in Munich in July: stay with us for a while, and if it's to your liking — stay for

* An episode described earlier in the letter.

the August course.* And there — it will be visible. . . ." He gave us the address. When we were saying good-bye, he smiled affectionately, with a smile wonderful beyond expression, and he winked at Assya in a somehow special way (she is tiny and still looks almost like a little girl), as if he wanted to play a game with her — as if he were a little billy-goat getting ready to butt.

In the evening, another lecture at the Lodge: again astonishment. We left for Brussels the next day. We arrived at 6:00 p.m. At 7:00 we were at a celebration in honor of Maeterlinck: Maeterlinck is a grey-haired blockhead — Mr. Elephantantson; that's how he seemed after Steiner.

This, my good friend, has not been a letter, but a reserved, objective report to you of what happened to us in Brussels and Cologne. For some reason, I want to share this especially with you. What do you have to say about all this?

While I was writing this letter, your article "From Ibsen to Strindberg" arrived. The article is wonderful and significant: reading the article, I rejoiced that you wrote what you did.

Write to us, my good friend. . . .

It's already after 5:00 in the morning. I am exhausted. I kiss you warmly.

Your tenderly loving brother

Borya

Translated by Cindy Young and Thomas R. Beyer Jr.

* Steiner spoke in Munich on July 23 and gave a course there from August 25 to August 31.