

# The Story of My Life

## GA 28

### Chapter XXIV

So this question became a part of my experience: "Must one remain speechless?"

With this shaping of my mental life I then faced the necessity of introducing into my outer activity an entirely new note. No longer could the forces which determined my outward destiny remain in such unity with those inner directive tendencies which came from my experience of the spiritual world, as had till now been true.

For a long time previously I had thought of bringing to bear upon my age through a journal those spiritual impulses which I believed ought to be brought before the public of that time. I would not be "speechless," but would say as much as it was possible to say.

To found a newspaper myself was something not to be thought of at that time. The necessary funds and the connections essential to the founding of such a paper were utterly lacking to me.

So I seized the opportunity which came to me to secure the editorship of the *Magazin für Literatur*.

This was an old weekly. It was founded in the year of Goethe's death (1832), at first as the *Magazin für Literatur des Auslandes*.<sup>1</sup> It carried translations of whatever foreign productions in all aspects of the intellectual life the editors thought worthy of being incorporated into the intellectual life of Germany. Later on the weekly was changed into a *Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*.<sup>2</sup> Now it contained poetry, character studies, criticism, from the whole expanse of the intellectual life. Within certain limits it was able to do well in this task. Its activity thus defined fell at a time when a sufficiently large number of persons in the German-speaking regions desired each week to have whatever was "forthcoming" in the intellectual sphere laid before their minds in brief, summary fashion. Then in the 'eighties and the 'nineties, when the new literary objectives of the younger generation entered into this peaceful and superior way of sharing in the intellectual, the Magazine was soon swept into this movement. Its editorship was rather suddenly changed, and it took its colour for the time being from those who in one way or another belonged to the new movements. When I succeeded in secur-

ing it in 1897, it was in close relationship with the strivings of the young literature without having placed itself in strong opposition to what lay outside these strivings. But at all events it was not in a position to maintain itself financially solely on the basis of its contents. For this reason it had become, among other things, the organ of the *Freie literarische Gesellschaft*.<sup>3</sup> This added a little to the otherwise no longer extensive subscription list. But, in spite of all this, the situation was such in connection with my taking over of the Magazine that one had to include all the subscribers, even the less certain ones, in order just barely to reach the minimum needed for a livelihood. I could take over the paper only in case I could include as part of my work an activity which seemed likely to increase the circle of subscribers. This was the activity of the Free Literary Society. I had so to determine the content of the paper that this Society should be adequately represented. In the Free Literary Society one expected to find those who had an interest in the productions of the younger generation. The headquarters of the Society was at Berlin, where younger Littérateurs had founded it. But it had branches also in many other German cities. Of course, it soon came about that many a "branch" led a very distinctive existence of its own. It now became my task to deliver lectures before this Society in order that the mediation of intellectual life which was to be effected by the Magazine should also be given a personal expression.

I had thus a circle of readers for the Magazine into whose intellectual needs I had to find my way. In the Free Literary Society I had an organized group which expected something quite definite because something quite definite had till now been offered them. In any case they did not expect that which I should have liked to give them from my innermost being. The stamp of the Free Literary Society was determined by the fact that it wished to form a sort of opposite to the *Literarische Gesellschaft*<sup>4</sup> to which such persons, for instance, as Spielhagen gave the predominant tone.

It was now a necessity of my status within the spiritual world that I should truly share in a wholly inward fashion in this relationship into which I had entered. I made every effort to root myself in my circle of readers and in the membership of the Society in order to discover out of the spiritual nature of these men the forms into which I should have to pour what I wished in a spiritual way to give them.

I cannot say that I had yielded to illusions at the beginning of this activity and that these were gradually destroyed. But the very fact of working outward from the circle of readers and hearers, as it was necessary for me to do, met with greater and greater opposition. One could count upon no strong and earnest spiritual motive on the part of the men who had been drawn about the Magazine before I took it over. The interests of these men were only in a few cases deeply

rooted. And even in the case of these few there were no strong underlying forces of the spirit, but rather a general desire seeking for expression in all sorts of artistic and other intellectual forms. So the question soon arose for me whether I was justified inwardly and before the spiritual world in working within this circle. For, even though many persons who were concerned were very dear to me, although I felt bound to them by ties of friendship, yet even these belonged among those persons who caused the question to arise with respect to that which I vitally experienced within me: Must one be speechless?

Then another question arose. In regard to a great many persons who had until now come into near and friendly relations with me, I was privileged to feel that, although they did not go along with me very far in our mental life, yet they assumed something in me which gave value in their eyes to whatever I did in the sphere of knowledge, and in many other sorts of life relationships. They so often shared in my way of life, without further testing of me, after we had come into relationship.

Those who had till now published the Magazine had no such feeling. They said to themselves: "In spite of many traits of a practical life in Steiner, he is nevertheless an idealist." And since the sale of the Magazine had been made under such conditions that partial payments were to be made to the former owner within the course of the year, and that this person had the chief interest in point of fact in the continuance of the weekly, therefore from his point of view he could not do otherwise than to provide for himself, and for the affair in hand, another guarantee than that consisting in my own personality, regarding which he was unable to say what effect it would have within the circle of persons who had till now rallied about the Magazine and the Free Literary Society. Therefore it was added to the terms of the purchase that Otto Erich Hartleben should be co-editor, sharing actively in the work.

Now in reflection upon the orientation of my editorial work I would not have had it different. For one who stands within the spiritual world must, as I have made clear in the preceding pages, learn to know fully through experience the facts of the physical world. And this had become for me, especially by reason of my mental revolution, an obvious necessity. Not to yield to that which I clearly recognized as the forces of destiny would have been to me a sin against my experience of the spirit. I saw not only "facts" which then associated me for some years with Otto Erich Hartleben, but "facts woven by destiny" (Karma).

Yet there resulted from this relationship insurmountable difficulties.

Otto Erich Hartleben was a person absolutely dominated by the aesthetic. There was something appealing to me in every manifestation of his utterly aesthetic philosophy, even in his

gestures, in spite of the really questionable *milieus* in which he often met me. Because of this attitude of mind he felt the need, every now and then, of staying for months at a time in Italy. And, when he returned, there was actually something Italian in what came to expression out of his nature. Besides, I felt a strong personal affection for him.

Only it was really impossible to work jointly at what was now our common field. He did not direct his efforts in the least toward transplanting himself into the sphere of ideas and interests pertaining to the readers of the Magazine or the circle of the Free Literary Society, but wished in both cases to “impose” what his aesthetic feelings said to him. This acted upon me like something alien. Besides, he often insisted upon his right as a co-editor, but also often did this not at all for a long while. Indeed, he was often absent in Italy for a long time. In this way there came to be a certain lack of consistency in the Magazine. And, with all his “ripe aesthetic philosophy,” Otto Erich Hartleben could never overcome the “student” in himself. I mean the questionable aspect of “studentship,” not, of course, that which may be brought into later life as a beautiful force of one's existence out of one's student days.

At the time when I had to bind myself to him, an added circle of admirers had become his on account of his drama *Die Erziehung zur Ehe*.<sup>5</sup> This production had not come into existence at all from the graceful aesthetic which was so charming in one's association with him; it was the product of that “exuberance” and “unrestraint” which caused everything that came from him, both by way of intellectual productions, and also in his decisions regarding the Magazine, to issue, not from the depths of his nature, but from a certain superficiality – the Hartleben known to very few of his personal associates.

It came about, as a matter of course, that, after I removed to Berlin, where I had to edit the Magazine, I associated with the circle formed about Otto Erich Hartleben. For this was the one that rendered it possible for me to supervise what pertained to the weekly and to the Free Literary Society in the manner necessary.

This caused me, on the one hand, much suffering; for I was thus hindered from seeking out those men, and getting close to them, with whom delightful relationships had existed in Weimar. And how I should also have enjoyed calling frequently on Eduard von Hartmann!

Nothing of this sort happened. The other side claimed me wholly. And so at one stroke much was taken from me of a valuable human element which I would gladly have retained. But I recognized this as a dispensation of destiny (Karma). It has always been perfectly possible for me, by reason of the substratum of the soul which I have here described, to apply my mind

with complete interest to two such utterly different human groups as those associated with Weimar and those existing round the Magazine. Only neither of these groups would have found any permanent satisfaction in a person who associated by turns with those belonging in soul and mind to polarically opposed world spheres. Besides, I should have been forced in such an intercourse to explain continually why I was devoting my labour exclusively to that service to which I was obliged to devote it by reason of what the Magazine was.

More and more it became clear to me that I could no longer place myself in such a relationship to men as I have described in connection with Vienna and Weimar. Littérateurs assembled and learned in literary fashion to know one another as little littérateurs. Even with the best, even in the case of the most clearly marked characters, this element of the writer (or painter or sculptor) was so deeply embedded in the soul that the purely human retired wholly into the background.

Such was the impression I received when I sat among these persons, much as I valued them. All the deeper for this reason was the impression which I myself received of the human soul background. Once after I had given a lecture, and O. J. Bierbaum a reading, in the Free Literary Society in Leipzig, I sat amid a group in which was also Frank Wedekind. I could not take my eyes from this truly rare figure of a man. I use the term "figure" here in a purely physical sense. Such hands! – as if from a previous earthly life in which they had achieved things such as only those men can achieve who cause their spirits to stream into the most delicate branching of the fingers. This may have given an impression of brutality, because energy had been used up in work, yet the deepest interest was attracted to what streamed forth from those hands. And that expressive head – altogether like a gift of that which came from the unusual note of will in the hands. He had something in his glance and the play of his features which gave itself so arbitrarily to the world, but which especially could withdraw itself again, like the gestures of the arms expressing what the hands felt. A spirit alien to the present time spoke from that head. A spirit that really set itself apart from the human impulses of the present. Only a spirit that could not inwardly attain to clear consciousness as to which world of the past was that to which he belonged. As a writer – I express now only what I perceived in him, and not a literary judgment – Frank Wedekind was like a chemist who utterly rejects contemporary views in chemistry and practises alchemy, even this without sharing inwardly in it but with cynicism. One could learn much about the working of the spirit on the form if one received into the vision of the soul the outer appearance of Frank Wedekind. In this, however, one must not employ the look of that sort of "psychologist" who "proposes to observe man," but the look which shows the purely human against the background of the spiritual world through an inner dispensation of destiny, which one does not seek, but which simply comes.

A person who notices that he is being observed by a “psychologist” may justly be indignant; but the passing over from the purely human relationship to “perceiving the spiritual background” is also purely human, somewhat like passing from a casual to an intimate friendship.

One of the most unusual personalities of Hartleben's Berlin circle was Paul Scheerbarth. He had written poems which at first appeared to the reader arbitrary combinations of words and sentences. They are so grotesque that one for this reason feels oneself drawn on to get beyond the first impression. Then one finds that a fantastic sense for all sorts of generally unobserved meanings in words strives to bring to expression a spiritual content derived from a fantasy of soul, not only without foundation, but not in the least seeking for a foundation. In Paul Scheerbarth there was a vital inner cult of the fantastic, but one that moved in the sought-out forms of the grotesque. It is my opinion that he had the feeling that the man of wit should set forth whatever he does set forth only in grotesque forms, because others tease everything into humdrum form. But this feeling of his will not develop even the grotesque into rounded artistic form, but in a lordly, purposely senseless mood of soul. And what was revealed in these grotesque forms must spring from the inner realm of the grotesque. There was a basic quality of soul in Paul Scheerbarth of not seeking for clarity in reference to the spiritual. What comes out of common sense does not go over into the region of spirit – so said this “fantast.” Therefore one does not need to be sensible in order to express spirit. But Scheerbarth made not one step from the fantastic to fantasy. And so he wrote out of a spirit that was interesting but remained fixed in the wild fantastic, a spirit in which whole worlds of the cosmos gleam and glisten as framework for stories caricaturing the realm of spirit and yet containing elevated human experiences. Such is the case in *Tarub, Bagdad's berühmte Köchin*.<sup>6</sup>

One did not see the man in this light when one came to know him personally. A bureaucrat, somewhat lifted up into the spiritual. The “outer appearance,” which was so interesting in Wedekind, was in him quite ordinary, commonplace. And this impression was still further strengthened if one entered into conversation with him in the early stages of one's acquaintance. He bore within him the most burning hatred of the Philistines, but had the gestures of a Philistine, their manner of speech, and behaved as if the hatred came out of the fact that he had taken on too much from Philistine circles in his own appearance and was conscious of this and yet had the feeling that he could not overcome it. One read at the bottom of his soul a sort of recognition: “I should like to annihilate the Philistines because they have made me one of themselves.”

But if one passed from this outer appearance to the inner nature of Paul Scheerbarth independent of this, there was revealed an altogether fine spirit-man, only fixed in the grotesque-fan-

tastic, and remaining incomplete. Then one realized in his “luminous” head, in his “golden” heart, the manner in which he stood in the spiritual world. One had to say to oneself what a strong personality, penetrating in vision into the realm of spirit, might there have come into the world if that incomplete had been at least in some measure completed. One saw at the same time that the “devotion to the fantastic” was already so strong that even a future completion during this earthly life was no longer within the realm of the possible.

In Frank Wedekind and Paul Scheerbarth there stood before me personalities who, in their whole being, afforded the most significant experience to one who knew the truth of the repeated earthly lives of men. They were, indeed, riddles in the present earthly life. One perceived in them what they had brought with them into this earthly life, and an unlimited enrichment of their whole personalities stood forth. But one understood also their incompletenesses as the result of earlier earthly lives which could not in the present spiritual environment reach complete unfolding. And one saw how that which might come out of these incompletenesses needed future earthly lives.

Thus did many personalities of this group stand before me. I recognized that meeting them was for me a dispensation of destiny (Karma).

A purely human, heartfelt relationship I could never win even with that so entirely lovable Paul Scheerbarth. It was always the case that in our intercourse the *littérateur* in Paul Scheerbarth, as in the others, invariably intervened. So my feelings for him, affectionate to be sure, were finally restricted to the attention and interest which I was impelled to feel for his personality, in such high measure noteworthy.

There was, indeed, one personality in the group whose living presence was not that of a *littérateur* but in the fullest sense human – W. Harlan. But he talked little, always really sitting as a silent observer. When he spoke, however, his talk was always either in the best sense brilliant or else genuinely witty. He really wrote a great deal, but not exactly as a *littérateur*; rather as a man who must speak out what he had in his mind. It was just at that time that the *Dichterbörse*<sup>7</sup> had come from his pen, a representation of life full of excellent humour. I was always glad when I came somewhat early to our meetings and found Harlan, as the first arrival, sitting there all alone. One then got close to him. I exclude him, therefore, when I say that in this group I found only *littérateurs* and no “persons.” And I think he understood that I had to view the group in this light. Utterly different paths of life soon bore us far apart.

The men associated with the Magazine and the Free Literary Society were evidently woven into my destiny. But I was in no manner whatever woven into theirs. They saw me appear in Berlin, became aware that I would edit the Magazine and work for the Free Literary Society, but did not understand why I should do this. For the way in which, as regards the eyes of their minds, I went about among them, offered them no inducement to go more deeply into me. Although there did not cling to me a single trace of theory, yet my spiritual activity appeared to their theoretical dogmatizing as something theoretical. This was something in which they, as “artistic natures,” thought they need take no interest.

But I learned in direct perception to know an artistic current in its representatives. This was no longer so radical as that appearing in Berlin at the end of the 'eighties and in the early years of the 'nineties. It was also no longer such that it represented absolute naturalism as the salvation of art – as in the theatrical transformation under Otto Brahms. They were without any such comprehensive artistic conviction. They relied more upon that which streamed together out of the wills and the gifts of individual personalities, which was, however, utterly without any unified endeavour toward style.

My place within this group became mentally unendurable because of the feeling that I knew why I was there but the others knew not.

1. *Magazine for Foreign Literature.*
2. *Magazine for German and Foreign Literature.*
3. *Free Literary Society.*
4. *The Literary Society.*
5. *Education for Matrimony.*
6. *Tarub, Bagdad's Famous Cook.*
7. *Poets' Exchange*

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