

The Koberwitz love-letters: genuine or forged?

An analysis of the alleged letters between Rudolf Steiner and Ita Wegman

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As I mentioned in the Rudolf Steiner Handbook, Steiner's reputation suffered a serious set-back in the anthroposophical community as from the 1970's when six letters, supposedly written by Rudolf Steiner to a woman were published. These letters were supposedly written to Ita Wegman, and were published by supporters of Ita Wegman, after her death. These letters partly report factually on the day's events in Poland, where Steiner was lecturing, but they also have sections where there are astonishing expressions of romantic yearning for Wegman. The letters include what appears to be normal reports of the day's events, for example;

“Here there is really a bit too much put into the program...8.30am to 10.30 I accompany Dr. Engel as he sees his patients. 11.30 the Course lecture for agriculturists; 2-3pm, a discussion about the lecture. Then other people have discussions with me; then the trip to Breslau, where 6 to 7 Class lessons will be held, and 8 to 9 Members' lectures (over the 2 weeks).

But then later in the letter such sentences as these occur:

“I meditate within your meditation...and support myself through your love. All this is so nice.”

There are also several letters written to Rudolf Steiner from Ita Wegman, and they too have a very familiar tone, but not as strong as the sweetly romantic tone of those allegedly written by Steiner to her. Doubts as to their authenticity were immediately widespread. This matter is of considerable importance because if they were genuine, they would cast a very poor light on the character of Rudolf Steiner.

The letters give a report on the daily schedule of Rudolf Steiner as he gives the lectures from which the system of bio-dynamic organic agriculture has developed. The venue was a country manor, called Koberwitz, not far from Breslau in western Poland; Rudolf Steiner went there in June of 1924. The letters were made available long after the death of Wegman, by anthroposophists who supported Wegman in the conflict between her and Marie Steiner.

These same people had produced a deeply flawed book in 1976 about the karma of Rudolf Steiner and Wegman. In that book, subjective interpretations of Steiner verses were presented, which lead to a false perspective on the karmic link

between Wegman and Steiner. Some of the arguments in that book were supported by quotes from these dubious letters.

In fact the Koberwitz correspondence is suspected to be fraudulent for a number of substantial reasons. There are several points about these letters which expose them as fraudulent, but even so, the handwriting is an exact copy of Steiner's.

Firstly, in terms of evidence of fraud, we need to note that these letters are 'ghost letters'; that is there are no copies of Steiner's alleged letters to Wegman in the Rudolf Steiner archives – yet he always kept copies of every letter he ever wrote. And the letters allegedly written to Steiner by Wegman also do not exist in the Steiner archives – and yet again all letters received by Steiner were kept and stored in the archives. This is a highly suspect situation. The only source for both types of letters is the Ita Wegman archives.

Further primary reasons for regarding them as fraudulent, in terms of the social context, are:

* That Steiner was self-evidently a high initiate without any interest in romantic dalliances, and Wegman played only a very small part in his life, until the last few years.

* Wegman was known for over-emphasizing a karmic link to Steiner, a past life link that he had indicated briefly to her. She had consequently become antagonistic to Marie Steiner. For example, after Steiner's death she tried to continue his deeply powerful esoteric "Letters to the Members" but after a dozen or so, she predictably, had to stop. In these she over-states the role of Alexander the Great in the cultural evolving of the times and his dedication to Aristotle. For example she tells her readers, "in the very features of the countenance of Alexander there lived the wisdom of Aristotle".¹ But Alexander, although an instrument of the gods, was a man with a dangerous, destructive fury which led to him commit violent acts, including mass crucifixions.

She went to hear Steiner speak early in his career, around 1905, but had no interest in regularly attending his lectures, nor being a part of his immediate circle of students. She moved off to Switzerland and took up her medical studies there, remaining basically separate from Rudolf Steiner and his work until around 1920 when he began to offer medical lectures in Dornach.

She applied to Steiner to set up a medical clinic in the Dornach area in 1919, but he refused permission for her to do this. Later on, when she had been given the position of leading the medical work, a position that was originally intended for another doctor, she was allowed to establish a clinic there, and Steiner was from then on very supportive of her work.

¹ Letter to Members, 24th May 1925.

To inaugurate the first course of medical lectures, and to lead the medical work, Steiner had chosen another physician, whose medical skills he highly regarded, a Dr. Ludwig Noll. But Noll, due to personal failings, actually arrived too late to open the course of medical lectures (he was reportedly visiting a young lady the night before in a neighbouring village, and failed to get the early morning train to Dornach.)

On the day, Steiner waited a while for Noll, and then finally asked Wegman to inaugurate the course of lectures. She became the leader of the medical work from that point onwards and certainly she brought energy and commitment to the work, and was a kindly and engaged physician with her patients. (This assessment of the Koberwitz letters is not attempting to present a hostile picture of her personality.)

It is reliably reported that Steiner told a trusted young student of his, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, when he asked Steiner about the reason for working so often with Wegman in the last couple of years of his life, that “He had developed himself spiritually at the cost of Wegman (i.e., her previous personality) in a past life and must now dedicate his energy to balancing the situation.” This statement is also affirmed by Steiner’s response to other anthroposophists who asked the same question, “From this you see that I too have karma.”

The questionable content

A large part of the letters consist of reports of Steiner’s daily routine during the lecture course in Poland. But interwoven with the reports are more such startling, all-too-personal sweet-heart statements, apparently from Rudolf Steiner;

“And I shall be happy when I can again gaze into your lovely eyes”.

And:

“It is a shame that you are not here -- it would be so lovely for me.”

And:

“Also I have you around me on a soul level, although it is so painful to me that you are not also physically here”.

We shall examine another, even more romantic sentence, later. With regard to her romantic life, Wegman was so ferociously hot-tempered (choleric) that she in fact had to live her entire life without any partner (with the exception perhaps of three years). After Steiner’s death as his ashes were being transported by Marie Steiner from the crematorium to her house, in a private taxi, in the company of Wegman and Steffen, Wegman wanted to take charge of the urn with the ashes. In the interaction with Marie Steiner she harshly told the grieving widow that, “Your civil wedding is over now”. So, without being too harsh in regard to her personality, it appears questionable that gazing into her eyes, as the above text says, would have been a longed-for, tender, romantic experience.

The primary reasons in terms of the letters themselves for regarding them as fraudulent

ONE: half the letters have the wrong date (!!)

All six letters were allegedly written during Steiner's two weeks in Poland during June. Three of the six letters are actually wrongly dated; **they are dated to May instead of June 1924 !!** Yet other, definitely genuine, letters written by Steiner on the same days from Koberwitz to other people have the right date ! This confusion itself is clear evidence of fraud, as Steiner obviously knew very clearly what month and day it was (!) This already indicates that these letters were made by someone else in a confused state of mind, and perhaps over several years, starting a decade or more after Steiner's death.

TWO: Steiner does not know his Christian calendar

One wrongly dated letter is dated "8th May". But not only was the month actually June not May, Rudolf Steiner knew very clearly that the 8th of June was Pentecost day ! For him to then date the letter a month earlier, oblivious to it being the day of Pentecost in June is absurd, indeed it is impossible. For on June 4th, still in Dornach he gave a Pentecost lecture, and then arriving at Breslau on 7th June he lectured for 3 days in what was advertised as a Pentecost Conference for Members of the Anthroposophical Society. After this the lecture course on agriculture began.

This is another conclusive indicator of fraud.

THREE: The wrong date on the letterhead, the right date in the letter

In the above letter of "8th May, Pentecost day" which should read "8th June" Rudolf Steiner writes about the need for travel arrangements to be finalized for a group of eurythmists, and he stipulates that the dates for the tickets are to be "from June 21st to the end of the Tone-eurythmy Course" which he shall shortly be holding, once he is back in Dornach. And since he knew that his trip to Breslau was for about a fortnight, and then the Tone-eurythmy Course would start in Dornach, he obviously knew that he was writing this letter in the month of June, not May !

At this juncture we need to pause and clarify a few points. It appears that sections of the letters contain reasonably accurate descriptions of Rudolf Steiner's activities and meetings, learnt from conversations with Steiner and others, after they returned to Dornach, and then romantic parts were added to this in a clumsy way, creating invalid, inconsistent documents. Quite possibly, Wegman had them made for her own personal satisfaction, and never intended them to be published.

THREE: impossible grammatical mistakes

Throughout the letters in many places a clumsy style is evident, different to Steiner's style. But there are also outright elementary mistakes in German grammar. In Letter Two, Steiner (apparently) tells Wegman about a mutual associate sending off copies of documents to himself and to her, and that therefore

he, Steiner, does not have to also mail a parcel with these documents to Wegman. But in this sentence a tell-tale mistake is made about the choice of a preposition. The sentence reads in translation,

“...because the associate has sent copies to you also”.

But the German text is,

“...da er Kopien auch **nach** dir geschickt hat.” (Emphasis mine)

So in this sentence the wrong preposition was used, for it should read,

“...da er Kopien auch **an** dir geschickt hat.”

To a foreigner, the little word ‘nach’ does seem to mean “to”, for if you look in a dictionary this meaning is given. But in fact it is never used of a letter being sent to someone. Because it actually means “towards” you or “following after” you, or “with respect of” you:

So this sentence is actually saying something like,

“...because the associate has also sent copies towards you”. (!!)

This is the kind of mistake that a person makes to whom German was an acquired language. There are two factors which could cause Wegman to use the wrong preposition here. One is that the word ‘to’ in Dutch can be a similar word, ‘naar’; so in Dutch one can write that one is sending “a letter to (‘naar’) you” (‘een brief naar u’). Wegman was Dutch by birth and upbringing.

Secondly, she would have noted that ‘nach’ is used when talking about sending a letter to another country, and then assumed that it can be used of sending a letter to a person.

But the word ‘an’ has to be used when saying that you are sending a packet to someone in German.

So this sentence actually says, ridiculously, “...because he has also sent copies **towards** you/**following** after you/ **with respect** of you”. (All three are possible.)

This is precisely a mistake that a person would easily make to whom German was an acquired language. This is an obvious evidence of fraud.

But there is another even more obvious mistake.

Four: Grammatical mistake creates a nonsense sentence and a non-Steiner word

In the second Letter, dated 8th May 1924 (should be 8th June) Steiner apparently is writing to her about how interested he is in her meditative life, in supporting her inner development. The sentence has been translated into English as,

“ I call to mind your meditation and am **unceasingly** concerned for your esoteric progress.” (bold fonts by this author)

But the German text is,

„Ich gedenke deiner Meditation und bin unerlässlich auf deiner esot. Fortschritt bedacht....“

So, this German sentence actually says, in correct translation,

“ I call to mind your meditation and am **irremissibly** (or indispensably) concerned for your esot. progress.” (!!)

(Note too, the very unlikely, disrespectful, clunky abbreviation of the word ‘esoteric’.)

This is of course an absurd statement and is recognized as such by Wegman supporters. It could not be “irremissibly” important for Rudolf Steiner to bear Wegman in mind in order for her to succeed in meditation (This goes against the principle of freedom in personal development; and what happens when he has died?). Here again a serious error has been made, as a word was chosen which appears similar to the correct one, but actually it has a very different meaning. One could perhaps imagine Steiner saying that he is constantly, or unceasingly, mindful of a student’s inner development; but obviously not “irremissibly” mindful.

In fact, because the word ‘irremissibly’ is so obviously wrong, when the above sentence was translated into English for inclusion in a Prokofieff book (who did not see the errors in these texts and used them as if they were valid documents) this meaningless word was actually removed and the **appropriate word was substituted** – bringing everything nicely into proper shape, so to speak. (!) And that is how the above English sentence, “ I call to mind your meditation and **unceasingly** am concerned for your esoteric progress”, came into being.

It is actually false. The word for ‘irremissibly’ has actually been **changed into the word ‘unceasingly’** by the translator. (!) This is like buying a blue parrot when you actually wanted a red one, and then painting the poor bird a red colour, hoping the paint will stay a while. So how does this wrong word occur here?

In English “irremissibly” and “unceasingly” are spelt very differently, but not so in German. The word ‘irremissibly’ is unerlässlich; and for the term ‘unceasingly’ there are several German words, one of these is ‘unablässig’. There are only two letters different in these two words. The writer of these love-letters was obviously thinking of ‘unablässig’ but wrote ‘unerlässlich’. A mistake again that a person would make who was not born to the German language.

And this mistake reveals a second error that Wegman made. If she had chosen the word 'unabläßig' this would have made a sensible sentence, at least. And this is how the believers in these letters were forced to interpret (and then discreetly correct) her text; for unbelievably, as we saw above, they substitute the right word 'unabläßig', for the wrong word, 'unerlässlich' !

But if she had actually chosen 'unabläßig' (as the translator 'kindly' does for her) then she, like the translator, would have made the mistake of **using a word that Steiner never used.**

In Steiner life's work, as published in some 350 volumes (searchable on an electronic hard drive database, v.6), he **never ever used the word** 'unabläßig' (meaning 'constantly' or 'unceasingly'). It was never part of his vocabulary. So to assume its presence here, to avoid an embarrassing error, as the translator has done, is still creating a highly suspect situation.

Throughout his life, for the idea of 'constantly' or 'continually' or 'unceasingly', Steiner used the German word 'fortwährend'; and **he used it some 3,089 times**, in some 350 volumes, but never 'unabläßig'. Occasionally he used alternative words of very similar meaning, namely 'unaufhörlich' (60 times) and also 'beständig' (80 times). So in **some 3,400 times** when Steiner needed a word for 'constantly' in a lecture or a letter or a book, over 35 years, he **never used** 'unabläßig' !

Wegman probably heard Steiner use the word 'irremissibly' (unerlässlich) because he used it some 75 times in his lectures, and quoted it in texts derived from other people about 4 times. And Wegman may have noted that Steiner used it especially when he was talking about how important is meditation and associated soul exercises; they are irremissibly important.² Then later Wegman muddled up 'unerlässlich' with the non-Steiner term, 'unabläßig'.

Five: inconsistent language

In letter One Steiner (apparently) calls her "dearest Ita" which of course indicates a close, very loved person, but in letter Two and letter Three she is addressed as "dear Ita", which is a normal greeting among friends. Yet letter Four and Five again have "dearest". This is yet another inconsistency, which is very suspect. For she is either the romantically adored woman or she isn't; and if she isn't then she would always be called 'dear', not 'dearest'. Just like the wrong dates, this inconsistency indicates that these letters were concocted over a number of years, with several years occurring between the creating of them. A sufficient number of years to forget various phrases used earlier (and undertaken in situations where the earlier letters were not examined beforehand).

There are also some other minor elements that make the case for forgery here.

² For example in the Complete Works, books no.13 p. 431 / no. 35 p. 69 / no. 54 p. 204 / no. 55 p.185 and no.130 p. 55 to 56.

SIX: confused knowledge of what was happening.

1: Letter One reports that after the Count, on whose land the Course took place, had given a report about his farm, Steiner says he “would now go to the town of Breslau, for the further events of the day” (emphasis mine). But the Count’s son (whom this author personally met) stated, in his detailed report on the visit by Steiner, that his father’s speech did not finish until 6pm. So the day was over; there remained only one event, not several; it was an evening lecture.

2: Letter Two reports that in the morning of that day he made an inspection of the Count’s farm, but Letter One states that yesterday (hence two days earlier than this letter) he had been on the property in the morning (and inspected it).

3: In one letter the following very striking text, allegedly from Steiner reads,

“The spiritual powers, of whom anthroposophy is an expression, look with good-will, lovingly, at how I support myself on the love that I enclose in myself towards thy soul – a soul so highly esteemed by me.

In the light of all the above evidence for a fictitious concoction, here we are inclined to see the sad result of an emotional insecurity or resentment, leading to an affirmation of Wegman (by herself, to herself). These words are a declaration that the spiritual powers who support Rudolf Steiner’s alleged romantic feelings are indeed, in very truth, those same powers from whom anthroposophy itself comes. (!!)

In other words, the divine powers in the heavenly heights bless the ethically dubious romance. Supporters of Wegman argue that the reason that copies of these letters do not exist in the Steiner archives, nor the letters allegedly written to Steiner by Wegman, is that Steiner discretely burnt them in the privacy of his Koberwitz room. But the above text affirms that, the divine powers in the heavens found no reason to feel guilty about it; so neither would Rudolf Steiner, one could suggest.

And of course the above text seeks to affirm that actually Rudolf Steiner was ultimately supported in his Herculean labouring primarily by earthly romantic feelings for someone outside his marriage. All of these letters with their romantic sentiments are highly suspect, for the reasons given and also since Rudolf Steiner in 1910 discretely described Wegman’s soul as having a particularly strong Double or lower self, more potent than most people’s. It looked like a centaur swaying above her.³

In this article we are not seeking to denigrate this person, nor to deny that Wegman’s normal self, in her professional context brought powerful martial courage and warm dedication to her patients and to the medical work. Her awareness of how evil Hitler was, back in 1933, and her efforts to protect

³ A lecture from 28 Dec. 1910. Steiner explains that a centaur is a particularly horrid astral form.

endangered children in the Third Reich, stand out as evidence of a person with an active moral will. Remember, Wegman did not publish, nor ask that these personal fantasy documents be published, and she is probably deeply upset, from her place in the spiritual realms, that they were so naively published.

Producing forgeries

These forgeries, in which the writing is an exact copy of Steiner's hand-writing, can be produced by two means. A forger can produce such documents; such a person could have been paid to do this. And also a spiritualist medium can produce perfectly deceptive forgeries of hand-writing. Students of Steiner's did know a medium and did at times make use of her for their own purposes. Two of his students once brought him a very strange object, looking like an oval-shaped rock crystal, to test his seership, in a playful way. He at once saw that it was occultly altered (strangely condensed) water; the students had seen the medium turn the water into a hard oval shape before their eyes, a few hours earlier.

It would be only slightly worthwhile to compare the paper on which the letters were written, with the other letters genuinely written by Rudolf Steiner from Koberwitz. The original letters allegedly written by Steiner to Wegman, that we have been discussing, stored with Wegman supporters, were written in black ink, on pages slightly wider than A4 size, and each page has delicate a water-mark imprinted in it; this consists of vertical stripes with a circular pattern, in which the word POST is faintly written.⁴

But in fact a comparison of the letter-paper is probably pointless, as this is a typical German letter-paper of the times, and hence the paper used by Rudolf Steiner genuinely for letters when at Koberwitz was probably the same type of paper.

Rudolf Steiner did want to be a warm friend to others, and indeed was a warm friend of several people; and once or twice actively asked to be someone's friend (to use the close term 'du' instead of 'Sie'). But this is very different to an ethically dubious, romantic liaison expressed in language so incompetent that only a non-German would have written it.

In conclusion, one can be confident that these letters can be ignored, as the evidence for them being forgeries is so substantial, in particular, elementary grammatical mistakes, the use of words that have no rational meaning, non-Steiner words, the wrong dates on letters, and letters which have the right dates inside them, but the wrongly dated.

⁴ As seen by associates of the author in a private house in Amelinghausen, Germany.