

E. Vietinghoff

Egon von Vietinghoff's Ancestors and Parents (Jeanne de Vietinghoff und Conrad von Vietinghoff)

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1 Jeanne Céline Emma von Vietinghoff born Bricou

Born: December 31, 1875 in Schaerbeek, today district of Brussels, Belgium

Died: June 15, 1926 in Pully near Lausanne, Switzerland

1.1 Biography

Jeanne von Vietinghoff was the daughter of the Belgian architect (other source says wholesaler) Alexis Pierre Joseph Bricou (1825-1877) and his third wife Emma Antoinette Isaure Storm de Grave (1841-1933) from Dutch patrician family. Jeanne was only 18 months old when her father died. She grew up as the only child at her mother's villa in Brussels (at rue du Progrès 121) where there are now office complexes near the Northern railway station.

For several years she attended the convent school Sacré-Coeur at Jette on the outskirts of Brussels. As a protestant she was allowed only to be a day student. Her best friend there was Fernande Cartier de Marchienne, the mother of the future writer Marguerite Yourcenar.

The remarkable sensitive, somewhat chic beauty from a prosperous home was eager to learn. Early on she joined together with the Swedish count Sten de Lewenhaupt. The long engagement of chastity stressed him so much that his mental condition deteriorates until he had to be hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic. During those years, young Jeanne prayed ardently for his spiritual salvation during which she experienced the conversion from pain into intense introversion with a deep religiosity.

After the engagement with the Swede ended tragically, she met the five years older German-Baltic baron Conrad von Vietinghoff, the father of the painter, at a lecture in spiritual circles in Dresden. They shared many views and similar experiences with congruency in modesty, compassion and sensibility. On the occasion of their engagement, Jeanne and Conrad visited his father Arnold Julius in the Baltic region and were married in The Hague, Netherlands, on 1902, April 17. In this transpersonal union there was love based on spiritual and emotional congeniality and it brought forth two sons: Egon (1903), the painter, and Alexis (1904). **A deep reciprocal appreciation, as well as their mutual love of art, ethics and religion, united her with Conrad, the painter's father.**

She painted two small landscapes and made several pencil sketches before her marriage which were kept by Egon for filial love's sake. Nevertheless, they are quite excellent for an exercise done by a 17 year old girl. Later, Jeanne devotes herself to thoughts and writing. She seems to have passed onto her son Egon some of her talents.

Wherever she went, people were impressed by her outstanding personality. **She was the personified mix of beauty, dignity, intelligence, integrity, originality, spiritual depth, and human warmth.** For 25 years, she generously donated their socially active homes in Paris, Wiesbaden, Geneva and Zurich which served as meeting places for intellectual encouragement and exchange of ideas on art. Jeanne maintained scholarly relationships also with the literature Nobel Prize laureates Romain Rolland and Maurice Maeterlinck, and with the author Guy de Pourtalès, while Conrad maintained connections to the cellist Pablo Casals and the conductor Carl Schuricht. Besides the many receptions, the house was the location for occasional local concerts by Conrad as pianist.

While Jeanne was busy visiting her mother in Holland and with family journeys with the children and sometimes their governess to France, Italy, Germany, Livonia and to Switzerland, she found time to write five books. They are **psychological and philosophical contemplations on life, the nature of the soul, chances offered by human crisis, the importance of spiritual development, and the divine dimension of being.** Consistently, she developed the point of

view of a woman of unshakable inner strength with formulated values worth living for. In the course of writing, she expanded her original denomination-bound view and to encompass the most essential human virtues; driven by the horrors of the First World War and by the personal experiences of her marriage.

Did this intensive life and her responsibility for her highly sensitive husband and her children kill her prematurely? She died in her 50th year, of cancer of the liver. Her gravestone at the cemetery of Jouxkens near Lausanne, over the lake of Geneva, is removed. On the memorial slab there was engraved “*Son nom était Amour et Bonté*” (“Her name was Love and Goodness”).

Remark

The biographer of Marguerite Yourcenar, M. Goslar, is somewhat judgmental and surprised that Egon hadn't taken care of his critically ill mother despite his strong affectionate closeness to her. What could have been the reasons for this phenomenon? A real enthusiast of Paris, Egon was absorbed in the artist life in the town; he was immersed in his experiments, the studies of the Old Masters, his own still life painting and portrait commissions. His parents knew that and especially his mother would be the last person who would burden him with her illness; she was not the one making a lot of fuss about herself or even would have “yammered”. Certainly, she did not want to distract him or to hinder his youthful vigor and artistic departure with worries over her. In addition, it was a kind of family tradition to spare the beloved ones bad news about the own physical condition. Thus, the hints about Jeanne's health which reached Egon were probably restrained or even appeasing. Therefore, the news of her death was a shock for him; if he had been informed about the process of her illness and her serious final condition, he would not have been shocked to such an extent. He seems completely unprepared for this stroke of fate. The son, just 22/23 years old, couldn't really help her anyway and could imagine her with a good medical support or in a “health cure” and relaxation program to recover at Lake Geneva. Should he leave everything behind him due to scanty and vague information?

Hélène Naville wrote in the obituary: “*She felt tired and was ailing for a long time when the first symptoms of the illness manifested in the course of the fall 1925 and finally took away her full vitality. After some months of illness without any improvement Jeanne von Vietinghoff demanded from her doctors the truth about her state of health. Due to her persistence, they confessed that she could only be cured by a miracle. She accepted the verdict heroically.*” The period from fall 1925 until June 1926 is about eight months and it appears that “*after some months*” refers to 3 or 4 months. How much of the information actually reached Conrad and Egon, two people whom Jeanne surely wanted to spare? In addition, cancer of the liver was almost incurable at that time and progresses quickly so that Egon recognized the finality too late. Could he have been aware from the distance? It happened in the summer time and Egon may have vacationed outside of Paris and been difficult to contact. However, it cannot be precisely determined anymore. It seems as he was faced with a *fait accompli*.

1.2 The Obituary of Jeanne de Vietinghoff

Jeanne von Vietinghoff was born in Brussels on December 31, 1875. She was only 18 months when her father died. Her mother, Mrs. Bricou, born Storm de Grave, was of Dutch origin; she lavished on her daughter all her affection. The child was her consolation in grief and she became the focus of her mother's tender care. Jeanne was always surrounded by the most affectionate attention, and great care was taken in her education.

She lived in town during the winter and in the country in the summer – a time she particularly enjoyed. Her love of nature, which later she considered a friend and an inspiration, dates from her youth and, without doubt, from this first contact. She was a reflective child, eager to learn and know, already deeply sensitive.

The society she was born into was rich and generally thought to be worldly; Jeanne, therefore, continued her studies in a Catholic convent in Brussels and completed them brilliantly. As a Protestant, she now tasted the charm and sweetness of a secluded life; yet she possessed an independent spirit which would, however, not succumb totally to this influence. She left faithful to the religion in which she had been raised. It was the Reverend Mayhoffer who had the privilege of giving her religious instruction and of receiving her into the Church.

At the tender age of 17, as a beautiful girl with a pensive and searching countenance, Jeanne entered society where she was accepted with enthusiasm. She possessed a precocious and brilliant spirit; gifted with exquisite charm, pervasive throughout her person and manner, she immediately attracted all who surrounded her. She was lively, good-natured and friendly; she loved to talk and, most especially, to exchange ideas.

Count Sten de Lewenhaupt from Sweden met her and was smitten with her. He asked her to marry him. The marriage was postponed because of her youth. During this waiting period, the count's health deteriorated and he was committed to a mental institution. A mental illness had overcome him. Jeanne's pain and despair were enormous: however, with the courage, which she had always shown, she fought for his recovery. Convinced that the force of her entreaties to God would allow her fiancé to get well again, she prayed for years with all the perseverance, fervor, and tenderness she was capable of. But the miracle never happened. Though she never lost her faith, this was, no doubt, her first experience with life's painful times, with many more to come, but the nature of her religious sentiments was modified.

A long time after this, she met Baron von Vietinghoff in Dresden in a society of a very elevated moral and intellectual level, where the focus was uniquely on questions and problems of a serious nature. The Baron had experienced sadness and difficulties in his youth too. An instinctive sympathy brought them together. They confided in each other with utmost openness about all their sufferings, disillusionments, aspirations and thoughts on life and its purpose. And they decided to unite their existence in order to work together towards the relief and the reclamation of humanity, tending towards happiness without selfishness which did not simply seek joy. The marriage took place at The Hague in 1902.

The knowledge of several languages and numerous trips throughout France, Germany, Livonia, Italy, and Switzerland contributed greatly to the young woman's development. Intelligent, lively, and beautiful, possessing of goodness, endless patience, and great sensitivity, she was everywhere surrounded, sought out, and admired. The perfect modesty which had never left her and which marked her character prevented any trace of arrogance.

It was at Wiesbaden that Jeanne von Vietinghoff wrote her first book, *Impressions d'Ame (A soul's impressions)*, which appeared in 1909. She had gone to this town where she had many friends in order to rest after her husband's severe illness for whom she had cared with great devotion. This also provided her husband and sons, delicate children, with healthier air than that found in Paris, where they lived otherwise. This first effort revealed the spiritual development of the author, the accuracy and originality of her thoughts, her gift for observation, and her goodness of heart. It was well received by the public and favorably cited by the critics. Encouraged by this success, which she had not counted upon in her extreme modesty, Mrs. von Vietinghoff published *La Liberté intérieure (Interior freedom)* in 1912 which is undoubtedly the jewel of her crown. It marked a giant step forward. Jeanne von Vietinghoff was no longer content to look around her, to observe and to acquire impressions from which she would learn and gain charming images; in her ever intensifying desire for more freedom, she felt it must be sought within oneself by repeated personal victories over oneself and, when conquered, be carried out in the light of goodness, beauty, and truth. She gave us the means of acquiring it in our turn. *L'Intelligence du Bien (The Understanding of Good)* was published in 1915. These first three volumes are the ones which should be read and reread as they constitute, for kindred spirits, resources upon which we can gain strength in times of difficulty.

In 1923/24 Mrs. von Vietinghoff published a novel, *L'Autre Devoir* (*The other duty – History of a soul*) where one finds exposed at length, illustrated by facts, a thesis which must have been dear to her heart, which is that all human beings have not only the right, but the duty, to achieve the maximum of intellectual, moral and physical development in order to ensure all the happiness which they can lay claim to without interfering with that of other people. After vain attempts to adapt to her destiny, the heroine renounces an existence which holds her prisoner by its narrowness of spirit. After experiencing great joy, she runs into even greater disappointments; she returns, resigned, to the hearth which she had abandoned and devotes herself to her duty with a greater soul, persuaded by the relativity of all things.

Au Seuil d'un Monde Nouveau (*On the Threshold of a New World*) was a more considerable work than its predecessors. It was inspired by the turmoil of World War I and was published in 1921. In view of moral and material disaster which seemed irreparable, Mrs. von Vietinghoff searched for themes of hope, internal renewal and reconstitution; calling for all the greatness, courage, brotherhood and good will which humanity possesses, she elaborated a generous project of spiritual efforts, aiming at aiding in the reconstruction of ruins.

Mrs. von Vietinghoff dedicated this book to her two sons. She was for them an affectionate and caring mother. In spite of her work, her travel, the increasing numerous friends and admirers who besieged their home, she always had time for her children. She cared for them, followed their growth and raised them. Her best way of influencing them was by the example she set. She understood them at all times, and they had no secrets from her; she never hindered their growth, the freedom of their opinions, and their lives. Indeed, their communion was so complete that they understood each other without speaking.

She had felt tired and was ailing a long time before the first distinct symptoms of the illness manifested in the prime of life and talent in the fall 1925 and finally took away her full vitality. She was working on a new collection of ideas which she could not finish and whose scattered pages were later piously collected by her family. In the pages that follow this brief note, this noble lady showed herself to be always more sincere, more courageous, and of a higher standard. There are pages of exquisite tenderness and of painful irony; there are adorable descriptions of countrysides, illustrated by just a few lines, aspirations towards the ideal and flights of thought where one senses the author has nearly reached perfection.

After a few months of illness, where nothing seemed to improve, Mrs. von Vietinghoff asked her attending physicians to tell her the truth about her condition. Upon her insistence, they acknowledged that, short of a miracle, she would not recover. The decree was heroically accepted. Maybe she kept in her heart some remote hope of recovery which helped her to pass, without weakness, the long months of suffering and agony. Maybe she found within herself the admirable strength, valor and serenity of which she gave proof in these tragic circumstances. Death came slowly and well ahead of her time, a cruel death she accepted with resignation and sweetness. Almost unable to speak in the end, her deep eyes and her white, weak hands made for caressing still expressed her tenderness and her hopes for her loved ones who had the sad privilege of assisting her.

The most remarkable about Jeanne von Vietinghoff was neither her talent nor her abilities, however marvelous they were. It was the attraction and the influence which she exercised on everyone who approached her and who aspired to intellectual or moral progress. She transmitted to them the strength to walk in her footsteps; she opened the way for them. *“By real literary gifts she was capable of showing the noble feelings that animated her and of sharing them with an elite; she was the soul of many of her contemporaries and her oeuvre will stay alive.”* Blessed are they who, like her, bring to the world the conformity of what is good, the love of work and the desire for progress for oneself and for everybody.

1.3 Bibliography

1.3.1 The book of Christine Mary McGinley

The Words of a Woman – A literary mosaic

Crown Publishers, New York 1999 (English, Original)

First the author develops her own thoughts, then she turns to the world literature written by women. Around one third of the aesthetically presented book consists of quotations from famous female writers, such as Lou Andreas-Salome, Hannah Arendt, Jane Austen, Simone de Beauvoir, Charlotte und Emily Brontë, Doris Lessing, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, George Sand, George Eliot, May Sarton, Gabriela Mistral, Katherine Anne Porter, Simone Weil, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Virginia Woolf. We also find evidence of the spirit of Marie Curie, Isadora Duncan, Florence Nightingale, Beryl Markham and Aung San Suu Kyi. The author was led to the English translation of Jeanne von Vietinghoff's book *The Understanding of Good* by a quotation in Marguerite Yourcenar's work. An entire quarter of all quotations is devoted to the mother of Egon von Vietinghoff. In the chapter *Words About the Women* Christine Mary McGinley confesses:

“Yet of all the hundreds of great works I consumed, it was with hers that I grasped the purpose of writing our deepest truths. For if one person in all of time is affected by our words as I was affected by Jeanne de Vietinghoff's, then our contribution to life has been immense.”

“Her love and her faith knew no boundary; they filled the whole of her, and radiated from her like a life-giving force from the infinite source she served. I know of no other way to express my praise than to say that because I have known her I will never be the same.”

Thanks to Christine Mary McGinley's initiative, her emotional appreciation of Jeanne's work *The Understanding of Good*, this book is again available in English. It will be reprinted in the U.S.A., in 2016, some hundred years after its first publication (French 1910, German 1919, English 1921, Dutch 1924).

1.3.2 The books of Jeanne de Vietinghoff

Original titles in French

- 1) *Impressions d'Ame (A Soul's Impression)*, Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, 1909 (4 editions)
- 2) *La Liberté intérieure (Interior Freedom)*, Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, 1912 (8th edition 1925)
- 3) *L'Intelligence du Bien (The Understanding of Good)*,
Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, 1915 (8 editions)
- 4) *Au Seuil d'un Monde Nouveau (On the Treshold of a New World)*,
Librairie Fischbacher, Paris, 1921 (2. Auflage 1923)
- 5) *L'autre Devoir – Histoire d'une âme (The Other Duty – History of a Soul)*,
Editions Forum, Geneva, 1923 (1924?)
- 6) *Sur l'Art de vivre (On the Art of Living)*, Librairie Fischbacher Paris, 1927 (posthumous)

English translation

- a) *The Understanding of Good (Thoughts on Some of Life's Higher Issues)*,
John Lane Company, London and New York, 1921
- b) Reprint by Christine Marie McGinley, 2016

German translation

Die Weisheit des Guten, Rascher edition Zurich, 1919

Dutch translation

De Wijsheid van het Hart, Ploegsma, Zeist, 1924

2 Conrad Adalbert Egon Baron von Vietinghoff

(also known as Konrad and Adelbert)

Born: December 29, 1870 in Salisburg in Livonia, today Mazsalaca in North-Western Latvia

Died: January 11, 1957 in Zurich, Switzerland

2.1 Conrad and the Vietinghoff family

Baron Conrad von Vietinghoff was a descendent of a **German-Baltic aristocratic family** known for more than 750 years. In the 14th century, some of his ancestors left their family domains on the Lower Rhine (today near Essen in North Rhine-Westphalia) and marched with the Order of the Teutonic Knights to the Baltic region, with the aim of Christianizing and trade expansion. The many branches of the family owned and managed large estates. For a time, 1346-1561, the country was an independent territory of the Order and part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Later on it came under the rule of Poland and Denmark, Sweden, and finally Russia, in 1710.

Until the end of the 19th century, many members of the large Vietinghoff family continued their migration from the Baltic region westwards to Scandinavia (mainly Sweden and Denmark) and Poland or eastwards to the interior of the Russian Empire. Some others eventually returned to the German territories and from there some later wandered to Austria. But **the family branch of which Conrad was a part remained always in the Baltic provinces**, whose mainland consisted of the historic regions Courland, Livonia and Estonia. Conrad's ancestors lived in Livonia (in Latvian: Vidzeme); his home was situated some 150 km northeast of the capital Riga and some 80 km east of the Gulf of Riga. Upon foundation of the republics of Latvia and Estonia in 1918/1920, Livonia disappeared from the map as it was divided, the southern part to be joined to Courland and forming **today's Latvia**, the northern part joining Estonia.

Members of the Vietinghoff family, writing their name in various ways, were not only mentioned in **different ranks of the knightly Order but also in royal civil and military services**, at courts or in battles of numerous other countries: in Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Russia, Austria, France, Spain, Netherlands, Württemberg, Saxony, Prussia, Courland, Mecklenburg, and Bayreuth. In short: they have helped to shape European history and have suffered for it, by the commitment of their times as was similar for many other German-Baltic families. Ranking from cadet to general, they are found on the battle fields of all decisive wars fought all over Europe during the last centuries – sometimes even on both sides of the hostilities at the same time. In 1945, a Colonel General, who was a member of the Vietinghoff family (but not a relative of Conrad) negotiated independently the German surrender to the Allied forces in Italy (signed on April 29, in effect on May 2), hoping to prevent the bombing of Rome. At that time, ironically, he faced another Vietinghoff from an American mother who worked as an interpreter on the American side. **If they were not military men, they acted as chamberlains, Privy Councilors, judges, and chief administrative officer of their district. In addition, they managed their large farms and woods.**

A particularly impressive personality was Baron **Otto Hermann von Vietinghoff** (1722-1792), not a relative of Conrad as well. His career started as a Russian military officer and culminated as the general director of the Russian Medical Committee which corresponds to the position of a health minister. He owned several factories and up to 30 manors; in addition he built the first theater for the city of Riga from his own resources. For a long period, the theater was considered as one of the best stages in German-speaking countries, where he maintained an orchestra as well (today Richard Wagner Street 4). Therefore, unofficially he was called *The half king of Livonia*. His marble bust by of the most important

portrait sculptor in Europe at that time, Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828) is shown at the Bode Museum in Berlin. The artist also created the portraits of Gluck, Molière, Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Napoleon and of Catherine the Great. Otto Hermann isn't, however, a direct ancestor of Conrad and Egon von Vietinghoff.

But let's not forget **Juliane von Krüdener** (1764-1824), one of the daughters of Otto Hermann. She was an author and the confidante of the Russian tsar who sent her in behalf of him to the Congress of Vienna. She was called the *Mother of the Holy Alliance* against Napoleon, the *sun woman* against the anti-christ (Napoleon I). In addition, she triggered a European fashion wave with her novel *Valérie*. Her portrait created in 1786 by the famous Angelika Kauffmann (1741-1807) is exhibited in the Louvre Museum in Paris. Later, she independently financed and operated a food program in Basel and in Württemberg for the people impoverished by the Napoleonic Wars. There she moved the masses with her mystic-pietistic speeches to such a degree that she was finally expelled as being too subversive. Finally, she was rejected by the tsar and died poor and isolated on the Crimean Peninsula.

There are hardly any written records of the less showy characters, as can easily be understood. Still, tradition names one Vietinghoff as assiduous student of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, many ladies-in-waiting and canonesses, several abbesses, and one female family member as student of Beethoven in Vienna. **Since the 20th century, the descendants have numerous modern professions in all parts of society. Today, there are family members known to live in twenty countries in Europe and overseas.**

2.2 Conrad goes his own way

Apparently, this was a tradition which weighed rather heavily on the extremely sensitive Conrad, youngest of four brothers. Gradually he distanced himself from it in order to cultivate his **unique talent for music**. Also, he preferred to read the New Testament in Greek or the scores of symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms. Or even better, he played them with his cousins eight-handed on the two grand pianos standing in his parent's manor house Salisburg! For the concert hall of Riga or Reval (nowadays Tallinn the capital of Estonia) were hard to reach by horse-drawn carriage and, in 1888, CD players were not yet on sale ...

First, Conrad von Vietinghoff started to study agriculture and economy in Dorpat (today Tartu in Estonia), but soon he turned to the South-West (Leipzig 1891). Now, aside from his studies, he took piano lessons, and moved to Berlin later on, because of the famous piano teacher Oskar Raif. Here, he changed his major to history of music (1893-1899).

In 1902, he married Jeanne Bricou of Belgian-Dutch origin. By doing so, **he broke away from the strict tradition of his family** and his social class for it was the first bourgeois marriage in 16 generations! In German-Baltic aristocracy there was an unwritten law that a marriage was regarded as befitting one's rank only when all prior generations of both partners were of the same rank. For Conrad, it meant he must find a daughter of a baron in the Baltic provinces whose ancestors fulfilled these expectations over 16 generations. Conrad and Jeanne moved to Paris, France.

He received his share of the family's fortune in 1904 – fortunately! The family domicile, Salisburg Manor in present-day Latvia, was burned during the 1905 Russian Revolution, together with some 300 other manor houses, and would remain a ruin for the foreseeable future. Until 1945, all of his brothers lost their properties.

As can be proved, he gave only two public performances on the occasion of one charity concert in Fribourg, Switzerland, in 1923. He was just too shy and sensitive to play for a grand public. Yet he gave private concerts at his home several times. Conrad von

Vietinghoff **put extremely heavy demands on himself, was not stress-resistant and much too shy to take the floor in public concerts.**

Without his knowledge, he was used as the model for the character of *Alexis* in the first novel of the same name written in 1926 by Marguerite Yourcenar, whose parents were friends of the Vietinghoff family. Yourcenar named her character after Conrad's second son, the younger brother of the painter. However, *Alexis* is doubtless Conrad.

Until the early death of his wife in 1926, the two took part in the illustrious social life in Paris (France), Wiesbaden (Germany), Geneva and Zurich (Switzerland) led by the aristocracy, the higher bourgeoisie, different star artists and their patrons. **The 30 years following his wife's demise, Conrad, shy and almost ascetic, lived alone in small flats – lost in philosophy, literature and the world of sounds.** After about 1925, there were only a few people who heard him sometimes playing privately. They said he was simply brilliant and absolutely incomparable when he played on his Blüthner grand piano, pieces by Bach, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms or both his contemporaries, two years his junior, Reger and Scriabin. Not one tone from his mellow touch on the keys was ever registered, nor one time of his singing interpretation was ever recorded ... At 86 years old, he passed away peacefully in Zurich of old age, destitute and in obscurity.

The Germans living in the Baltic region, especially the noble ones, had the reputation of being real originals. Their distance to the homeland, the changing authorities, their social status floating above that of the Latvian-Estonian population, and their economic independence may have contributed to it. And also the frequent marriages within the same families... The eccentricities of some are material of unwritten novels. Despite a strange combination of "ignorance", education and a peculiar kind of intelligence, their thinking was positively open to the world, refined, generous, and self-confident. They distinguished themselves by a liberal way of life, civil courage, a superior distance to everything that was common, whimsy, absent-mindedness, lack of closeness to life and realism, naiveté, cordiality, a story-telling genius, but also by melancholy, from which they knew to save themselves again by involuntary funniness and a humor heightened to self-irony. The Livonian Germans are also marked by a special earnestness, sense of responsibility and exaggerated commitment. Much of this is also typical of Conrad and Egon von Vietinghoff.

2.3 *Hommage to Conrad (at the occasion of his 70th and 80th birthday)*

Article from a friend, pastor Ernst Merz in ... from ...

Only a few people knew his superior manner in playing the piano and his perception of art as he very rarely appeared on stage in front of the public. He allowed his soul to breathe through the work of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, and Reger. When his artistic soul mates gathered in like-mindedness at his home, **his grand piano resounded and sang in such way that everyone was moved tremendously to their core.** His touch to the keys was soft and tender like himself; but when his passion lit up he was like a commander of chords and sounds, sitting in front of the piano and conducting an entire orchestra to channel his tumultuous emotions into eternal laws. I have never listened either to such a **unity of exquisite tenderness and the most powerful passion** nor such an understanding and overcoming of all woe immersed in the heavenly world.

Conrad von Vietinghoff did not cultivate modern music but rather the high tradition of classical music. He never played one of the mighty composers against another one – though Bach, Brahms, Reger, and Chopin stood especially near to his heart. Due to his exceptional level of sensitivity, he became immersed to the heart of a masterpiece and was able to interpret and perform it with a wide spirit and with the beauty which he acquired in his inner struggles.

The picture of this man would not be complete without remembering the many links which kept him in touch with such worthy people in many European cities during different periods of his life. Love for mankind was planted deep in his heart. Therefore **he preached true humanity, peace and goodness wherever he could.** He was always engaged in the harmony of individuals and nations, as he was an enemy of any war and any degradation of human beings, vivisection (animal testing) and all kinds of political and denominational delimitation. **He was a passionate opponent to those who violate the reverence for life, and I never saw him so outraged as when faced with the violation of human dignity. Personality and freedom were sacred to him; this is the reason why the former Baltic-German baron became a convinced democrat and Swiss citizen.** Far from any aspiration to be a member of the ideological master race, he was goodness itself, and if he had not thought of his son, he would have given away all his fortune, in the manner of Saint Francis of Assisi.

2.4 Memories from his doctor

2.4.1 Letter from 3rd of October 1989

Excerpt from two letters from his doctor, Dr. Otto Alb in Zollikon (Zurich, Switzerland), to Madame Michèle Goslar in Brussels (Translated from French).

Madame,

I treated the Baron Conrad von Vietinghoff as his family doctor [1] over the course of his last six years, precisely from 1951, February 11 until 1957, January 12, his day of death at the age of 86. At that time he lived in Zollikon, a suburb of Zurich, in a small two-room apartment with a nice view of the lake. Its character was old-fashioned luxury, somewhat similar to the style of Vuillard, full of carpets and old, obviously neglected furniture, including the grand piano and a lyre shaped music book cabinet stuffed with yellowed books of music, but not of his own composition – this was never spoken of [2].

... It seems that Conrad von Vietinghoff never gave a concert in public [3] (I do not remember having seen newspaper cuttings in his flat in Zollikon); however, he did so frequently on the occasion of (private) evening receptions of the high society, in Zurich as well. I myself participated on similar occasions, the last time in Küsnacht where Conrad von Vietinghoff's eightieth birthday was celebrated and we played together excerpts of the violin concerto of Max Reger (C.v.V. had a preference for Brahms and Reger among others). **Even in old age, the baron proved to be a remarkable and experienced pianist – even more so as a true musician who gently and deeply reached the core of a piece of music.**

Physically, the baron was tall, skinny, a little gaunt, but in good condition for his age, with a lively spirit, intact memory and an often sarcastic sense of humor. It is true, that with his falsetto voice, indeed he gave a somewhat feminine impression of great sensibility and fineness. He loved to emphasize his infirmities of old age. He rarely went out, remained more and more in his bed and provided himself with several blankets and a fur hat at the slightest change of weather, even in summertime. For our medical visits, he offered tea and small pastries. He said: *Doctor, please do not come next time; it is too strenuous for you.* And when I announced my absence due to a holiday: *That is such a pity; I will surely die during that time.*

I knew Mister von Vietinghoff solely in the last years of his life but I never forgot his gentle and discreet nature...

(Letter from October 3, 1989)

2.4.2 Letter from 26th of November 1989

Madame,

I was surprised and touched by the confessions of *Alexis*. In my opinion, C.v.V. is astonishingly present – even with his pinch of insincerity as homophiles like to do. ... As far as I remember, C.v.V. secretly had a similar view to the German poet Hermann Hesse who thought that *psychology is a weakness of our time*.

The *Coup de Grace* seems to me to have less value than the admirable *Alexis* and is not so important for the understanding of C.v.V. – particularly if one remembers that he never saw his homeland in Estonia [4] again after his departure. [5]

... His last address was Farenweg 16 in Zurich-Enge [6], where he remained in the care of a young male nurse from 1956, where I furthermore made my visits and where he peacefully passed away due to a great arteriosclerotic weakness.

(Parts of the letter from 1989, November 26)

2.4.3 Remarks and corrections on the letters

- 1) Dr. Alb was temporarily the doctor of Conrad, Egon and Alexander von Vietinghoff
- 2) The doctor was correct: **Conrad never composed**. That he would be a modern composer is a literary invention of Marguerite Yourcenar.
- 3) This memory is correct, apart from a charity concert in Fribourg (Switzerland), together with a cellist in 1923.
- 4) In this point the doctor's knowledge is not completely precise: Conrad's homeland was that part of the former Livonia which actually belongs to Latvia. However, he studied in Dorpat (Tartu), which is still a university town in Estonia.
- 5) It is certain that Conrad visited several times (how many?) his parents in his Baltic homeland after he moved his studies from Dorpat (Tartu) to Leipzig and Berlin. It is verified as well that he visited his parental home after his studies another three times: on the occasion of his engagement in 1902, and with his children in 1904 and 1906. After that perhaps once alone, but surely not later than 1913.
- 6) The Farenweg is not located in Zurich-Enge but five minutes drive distance from the domicile of his son Egon in the quarter "Wollishofen".

2.5 Memories from Liane, his daughter-in-law

2.5.1 „Strings...“

After his death, when we packed up his household, I found a box with the inscription ‘*Strings too short for use*’.

Comment:

Conrad grew up in a great manor with 62 rooms where many things were either produced by themselves or were only be procured by horse carriage in far off provincial towns or even in the distant capital. In addition, **he experienced the years of crisis due to the Russian Revolution, World War I and II, the great inflation and finally lost a part of his fortune due to his naivety and generosity.** Even though he did not really need to economize during his first 60 years, he was always conscious that even small things had their value and could be very useful. To throw something away was a “pity” and therefore an inner overcoming.

2.5.2 „The door-to-door peddler...“

In 1950, Conrad moved to a small private rest home and Miss E. of the high society in Zurich helped him to pack. On this occasion, she pulled a black and a pink lady’s garter from a drawer. He was already 80 years old and certainly never received lady visitors, unless of devotees of his piano playing and his daughters-in-law. In view of his ascetic way of life, quite astounded by this discovery, she dumbfounded held these two pieces out towards him with inquiring eyes. *The peddler did not have anything else*, was his embarrassed and helpless answer.

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Partly in process or to be reviewed (2016)

Overview

- Brief illustrated introduction
- Leaflet in three columns (without illustration)
- Text of the Concise Website

Biography

- Biography, Chronology, Bibliography
- Egon von Vietinghoff's Memories
- Anecdotes about Egon von Vietinghoff
- Jeanne de Vietinghoff (mother)
- Conrad von Vietinghoff (father)
- The Vietinghoffs and Marguerite Yourcenar

Technique and craftsmanship

- Technique and Craftsmanship of the Multilayer Oil-resin Painting – A European Cultural Heritage.
- The Translucency of Color – The decisive phenomenon
- The Handbook of Painting Technique (out of print)
- The Genesis of a Painting and the Different Brushstrokes

Philosophy – Transcendental Painting

- Resemblance to Nature contra Naturalism – The big misunderstanding.
- The School of Pure Vision – The contemplative way to an artistic vision.
- Vietinghoff – The mystic and his contemporaries.
- The Nature of Visual Arts (only the table of contents of the manuscript)

Work

- General Impression, Subjects and Style
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- Statistics

Gallery

- Illustrated Painting Descriptions of 30 Works
- Each of these painting descriptions can be separately downloaded directly from the Gallery

Foundation

- The Egon von Vietinghoff Foundation – Objectives, Publications, Board members

Sale of Works

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