

“But even if one should never reach the goal of finding the form out of the colour -- in lifting the ‘Veil of Isis’ -- , the process, the practice itself, is a path towards becoming truly human and whoever notices it cannot help but continue on the path.” -Gerard Wagner

*His Beloved St. Ives. The Painter Gerard Wagner at the Cornish Art Colony, 1924-1925*

In this study, Caroline Chanter sketches the life and work of the painter Gerard Wagner (1906-1999), and the path that he followed. After an impressive schooling with John Anthony Park in St. Ives (Cornwall), as well as time at the Royal College of Art, Gerard Wagner came to Dornach in the summer of 1926 and settled down there. In the surroundings of the Goetheanum, Gerard Wagner schooled himself further in the feeling and perception of colour and in objective colour experience, in order – as he said – “to come, through methodical working with the colour, to painterly insights.” He embarked upon an impressive path of inner and outer work, in complete devotion to this work and in great – yes in greatest seclusion -- before students found their way to him, deeply impressed by his artistic ability and knowledge, his way of painting, and his way of being. Caroline Chanter begins her exposition with one of these encounters -- her own – in order to show where and how Gerard Wagner began his painterly way of working – in a special fishing village at the remotest corner of Southwest England.

There are, as yet, only a very few biographies or biographical studies of a great artist in Rudolf Steiner’s circle or at the Goetheanum, which reveal in detail the artist’s “pre-anthroposophical” time, the essential teachers and accompanying circumstances – the path which an artist trod *before* he or she came to Dornach. The original edition of this study was published last year by Iris Books, and was by no means meant only for anthroposophical readers. Not only was Caroline Chanter able to write lovingly and exactly about the Cornish Art Colony and awaken a memorable impression of the life and milieu there at the beginning of the 1920s, but also, in this same slim volume, to reveal how Wagner’s path led him in a consequent way further, on towards the Goetheanum, without his ever having to renounce his beginnings. Austin Wormleighton, the biographer of Wagner’s teacher John Anthony Park, writes in his introduction to the English edition of this book still more: Wagner’s path to Dornach “seemed preordained and characterized by a rare clarity of vision.”

Caroline Chanter’s monograph is not all encompassing and is to be understood as a preparatory sketch for a more comprehensive study of Gerard Wagner’s life and work. In her brevity and exactitude, though, she brings to light a biographical contour and way of working of especial goodness, without coming too near to Gerard Wagner at any point. His life, being, and work continue to remain hidden in many respects, under the protection of a ‘veil of mystery’, and yet they do come gently nearer, in their own very individual manner. Near the end of her book, in the chapter ‘Hidden Treasure’, Caroline Chanter quotes from a description by the teacher and artist Hermann Koepke, who lived for seven years as of 1965 in the same house as Gerard Wagner: “At sunset, he would go out into the garden and look around in his quiet, discerning way; he hardly seemed to touch the ground when he walked.”

For the anthroposophical movement, for the research into its historical foundations, and for the spiritual and artistic Goetheanum, it is to be hoped that Caroline Chanter can continue her studies further, and one day produce an encompassing volume on the life and work of Gerard Wagner.

Peter Selg

Translated from the German by Ashley Cox