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## SOME NOTES TOWARD A LIFE OF BERYL DE ZOETE

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### BERYL DE ZOETE'S MAJOR WORKS

#### I. Translations

Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*. 1930.

——, *As a Man Grows Older*. 1932.

Alberto Moravia, "Agostino." 1947.

#### II. Original books

With Walter Spies, *Dance and Drama in Bali*. 1938.

*The Other Mind: A Study of Dance in South India*, 1953.

*Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon*, 1957.

*The Thunder and the Freshness*, 1963.

*The Special Collections of Rutgers University Library possesses a miscellaneous group of books and manuscripts, letters and cards which once belonged to Beryl de Zoete and Arthur Waley and which represent, though not in any systematic way, the activities, interests, tastes and friendships of these two devoted companions. Of the pair, it is Arthur Waley who is the better-known; his name is familiar to every student of Chinese and Japanese literature, and to many other educated readers, as that of the scholar whose fine literary sensibility and lyric gifts, supported by his broad and profound learning, gave the Western world translations of East Asian classics free alike of pedantry and amateur exoticism. The full measure of his achievement has yet to be assessed, but it is by any standard a great one. Beryl de Zoete was also a remarkable and, in several respects, distinguished person. She was a translator, chiefly from Italian but also both from and into German; she was a dance critic and researcher, the author of three splendidly observant books on South Asian dancing. Unlike other investigations, her books are not the product of ethnographic training but rather of an understanding eye and an appreciative ear and of the ability to be moved by what she saw and experienced. Interestingly, all of her important work was written after she had passed the age of fifty; she was one of those people who seem to have discovered their precise métier only after entering middle age. But she is worthy of a biographer's attention for additional reasons. She was one of a number of women of her time who, each in her own way, found liberation and fulfillment as well as livelihood in the practice of the arts. In part through her study under Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, she was strongly influenced by the sentiment, which was making headway among both dancers and musical performers, in favor of the unconstrained, unartificial use of the body, attributing to the freeing of the body physical, artistic, and spiritual benefits. To be sure, she must have been drawn to such ideas by pre-existing sympathies. Her circle of acquaintances crossed national and artistic boundaries, and to the end of her life she was engaged with what was beautiful and vital. She was always very much herself, trusting her own instincts and devoting herself unreservedly to people and things that inspired her generous enthusiasm; at times she tended to be rather insistent, to the irritation of her friends, and she could be silly. The enthusiastic lady is a comic sexist stereotype; the example of Beryl de Zoete, who united an enthusiastic temperament with energy, a hardy intellect, and a sense of fun, and whose accomplishment, if not "major" by the usual yardsticks, was nevertheless substantial and unique, shows how unfair such stereotypes can be, how inadequate to the variety of human genius. If Beryl's books elude categorization, so does she.*

*I never met Beryl de Zoete; I am sorry I did not. I began this study with a predisposition to like her; nothing I have learned about her in the course of my research has tempted me to like her any less. The point is worth making because some of the things written about her now that she is no longer alive to defend herself have been neither kind nor true. This first attempt at a biography is based in considerable part on the papers at Rutgers. She had no notion that these papers would be preserved to be read by strangers; they reveal her without any cosmetic tidying-up intended to conceal flaws of character or missteps from posterity. There are no horrid secrets in them; when she errs, she does so innocently and almost always out of generosity. The papers document some periods in her life much better than others, however, and they say nothing, for example, of her own dancing—of which I, in turn, say virtually nothing but which cannot have been quite so unimportant to her. This material has been supplemented through a close reading of her published writings and of character sketches of her, some more reliable than others, that appear in other people's memoirs; and also, especially, by correspondence with people who remember her well.\* The reader should nevertheless be warned to expect not a seamless narrative but a series of vignettes.*

\* For so short an essay I am indebted to a great many people: for information about Beryl de Zoete and comments on a draft, to Carmen Blacker, Celia Goodman, Daniel Waley and Pamela J. Waley; I am also obliged for information to Sir Harold Acton, Nicolette Gray, Donald Keene, Douglas Kennedy, Francis King, Sir John Pilcher and others, who are mentioned in the text and notes. Hilary Spurling responded with praiseworthy good manners to a pair of queries. For material help and encouragement, I am particularly grateful to Francis Johns, Joanne Laffer, and Ruth Simmons. "A Collection of Papers of Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete," by Mr. Johns, in the *Journal of the Rutgers University Library* 29, no. 2 (June 1966), 59-61, describes the manuscripts. A note from Charles E. Hamilton first suggested the project to my mind, and a letter from Medha Yodh in praise of Beryl de Zoete's *The Other Mind* determined me to continue. All of the staff of the Special Collections department of the Alexander Library at Rutgers deserve my thanks, as do the reference librarians at Mills College in Oakland, California. Support for my visits to the collection at Rutgers has been provided by two Faculty Research Grants given by the University of California, Davis. Daniel Waley, who is Arthur Waley's nephew, kindly allows me to say that my desire to correct the false portrait of Beryl de Zoete which has gained currency through Alison Waley's memoirs is shared by the Waley family. I alone, however, am responsible for any errors that appear here.

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Beryl de Zoete and an  
unknown admirer.

“**I** AM not at all good at being learned,” Beryl de Zoete wrote in the Preface to her *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon*, the third of her three books on the dancing of South and Southeast Asia, “but everything I speak of I have seen with my own eyes and felt with my own heart.”<sup>1</sup> By most standards she was, in fact, remarkably learned, fluent in French, German and Italian and familiar with other languages as well, endowed with an openness of temperament which made her sympathetically receptive not only to Asian dance but to a wide variety of modern

<sup>1</sup> Beryl de Zoete, *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1958), 14. The original edition was published by Faber & Faber, London. (Citations throughout are to the editions consulted by the author.) Abbreviated *Ceylon* in citations.

literature, but—she is quite right—she was not good at *being* learned. She is responding to a “criticism of levity” made by Dr. Raghavan,<sup>2</sup> professor of Sanskrit in Madras University, “the learned reviewer” of her previous volume. “There are far more scholars than poets and I must leave it to the scholars to instruct, while I go ahead with my poetry.” Arthur Waley, whose life and many of whose interests she shared for over forty years, as he shared hers, wrote in his Preface to the first of the three books praise of her “ability to convey feelings as well as facts, and her instinct for perceiving just at what points the methods of the analyst ought to be replaced by those of the poet.”<sup>3</sup> In his Preface to *The Thunder and the Freshness*, the collection of her essays which he put together after her death in 1962, he speaks of “the three kinds of writing at which Beryl excelled—descriptions of dancing, descriptions of landscape and architecture and inspired vignettes of people.”<sup>4</sup>

To claim, or induce one’s friends to claim, that one is a “poet”—unless one is engaged in composing poetry, and sometimes even then—suggests the search for an excuse; the excuse is one commonly used for faults ranging from absent-mindedness to slovenly research or running up unpaid bills. In Beryl’s case, however, the claim is accurate. The best of her prose is written with the precision as well as the imaginativeness of the poet—and there is so much of this best that it is a deprivation to be limited to only a few examples. I shall mention a few favorite passages.

She is describing the Balinese temple dances *Gabor* and *Redjang*, danced

in every degree of perfection, from tiny girls going through their paces to old, withered hags . . . flapping their skinny wings like crows, and dancing with a kind of absorbed intensity which is often even beautiful. The oldest generally leads, her white hair bound perhaps in yellow silk, rather like an old English lady going to the opera, to keep it from the wind. They will go on dancing dreamily up and down in front of the main altar, after the procession has broken up, after the priest who has led them, dancing with his incense brazier delicately in half circles, has climbed up among the offerings on the high altar, and the tinkling bell which followed him is silent; they will

<sup>2</sup> But, typically, she says that she prefers “the rebuke of so learned and kindly a man” to the praise by another which seems to insult her hosts.

<sup>3</sup> Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies, *Dance and Drama in Bali* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938, reprinted 1952. A later reprint was issued in 1973 by Oxford University Press.) Abbreviated *Bali* in citations.

<sup>4</sup> Beryl de Zoete, *The Thunder and the Freshness* (London: Neville Spearman, 1963). Abbreviated *TF* in citations. The title is a phrase from Keats describing the Ambleside waterfall and had been her original choice for the title of *Ceylon*.

dance on through the deafening noise of three *gamelans* at once, the *rebab* and flute of *Gamboeh* whining above the clash of gongs and drums and cymbals.

(*Bali*, 46-47)

The words suggest the mixture of opposites that the ceremony presents to the viewer: the rhythms of the final sentence itself mimic the insistence of the old women. The simile of arms as crows' wings is ordinary but just; but then there is that exceptional moment of *seeing*: the English old lady revealed in her Balinese counterpart. And where you or I would have written "they go on," she has delicately balanced "they will go on," with its implications of on the one hand, the slightly exasperated surprise on the part of the viewer and on the other, the willfulness of the elderly dancers.

"Beauty," "beautiful," "lovely," and "enchancing" are favorite words: she bestows them unashamedly, sometimes twice in a sentence. Of an open-air party in Ceylon, she says: "The garden is glorified by the most beautiful banyan-tree I have ever seen, a forest of pillars, very straight and of great beauty. It is a complete temple." She continues: "The branches spread very wide over the lawn and over the tea-table, so that it provided—beside grateful shade—a generous scattering of bird-droppings, which fell mostly on me" (*Ceylon*, 179).

In Bali, an episode in the *wayang wong* performance of the Ramayana:

As Sita is borne drooping forward [by the demon Ravana] Jatayu, the faithful bird, appears at the far end of the ground, in a mask with bulging eyes, large beak, and long rows of teeth, a motley bunch of stuffs round his body, a fine spreading tail of gawdy feathers made from stuff or paper, and painted leather wings in his hands. He rushes up and down the ground with lovely airy motions, uttering strange cries. . . . [Ravana] draws his kris, and advancing in huge swirls of movement beats down the fluttering bird. . . . The death of the bird, swaying strangely before its final passionate fall, was very moving. It rose and was led off.

(*Bali*, 158-59)

Sometimes her irony is explicit; more often, as she said of the humor of Italo Svevo, for whose reputation among English-speaking readers her translations are largely responsible, it "seems to lurk just beyond the quotation" (TF, 139). Far from undermining the impression of beauty she wishes to convey, the ironies sustain it, as we see the narrator's delight in the scene before her yield only slightly in the face of physical discomforts and humiliations. Incongruities, including those that arise from the dis-

parity between the world of illusion that the dancers create and their mundane being, exist to be transcended.

The three dance books are, each in a different degree, blends of travelogue and investigation. A number of Beryl's acquaintances—by no means all, certainly not all of those who knew her best—have represented her as prone to be “trying,” or “affected,” or “pretentious”: as a writer, however, she is exceptionally egoless. Beautiful in youth, young-looking in middle age, gypsyish, with dyed black hair and rings on every finger, in old age, possessing at least a normal degree of vanity about her appearance, she includes no photograph of herself in any of her books, although the temptation is one that few who write about their travels to exotic places can resist (even her friend and colleague in Indonesia, the equally remarkable Claire Holt, succumbed).<sup>5</sup> The only photograph in which she appears which she was responsible for publishing accompanies the memoir of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, which she wrote in 1950 for the journal *Ballet*; taken in 1920, it shows the master surrounded by a group of his students, including not only Beryl (front row right), but her teacher Ethel Driver, her friend Marie Rambert, and another friend, Annie Beck, whose musicality and charm she praises.<sup>6</sup>

Travel writers such as Isabella Bird and Paul Theroux become characters in their own stories, solid presences whose collisions and ricocheting against other human presences in the alien environment form the thread of their narrative. Colin McPhee, the American composer and musicologist who was working in Bali shortly before and shortly after Beryl's period of residence there, tells how he finds a house, hires servants, gradually gains access into the musical life of the community, influences Balinese musicians, makes gifts to them, and learns from them.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Beryl's narrator is transparent—or the term might better be translucent: her intent is to make us see not herself but what she sees, colored by her feelings about it. Of Beryl herself there is at most the shadow, object of her gentle self-mockery. The narrator, good-humored, is devoid of all affectation. If she has been inattentive, she does not hesitate to tell us so.

“My ‘field-work’ is apt to be somewhat desultory, for my attention wan-

<sup>5</sup> Claire Holt, *Dance Quest in Celebes* (Paris: Les Archives Internationales de la Danse, 1939). I am indebted to Benedict Anderson for information about Claire Holt.

<sup>6</sup> The originally 2-part essay is reprinted without illustration, under the title “A Tribute to My Master, Jaques-Dalcroze,” in *TF*. The date of the essay given in the “Contents” to *TF* is a misprint.

<sup>7</sup> Colin McPhee, *A House in Bali* (New York: John Day, 1946).

ders if I am bored, and I cannot pretend to have been equally interested in all that happened, and most probably did not grasp it all" (*Ceylon*, 45). She is attending an all-night ceremony of exorcism; at times it is tedious even for the participants. Dances are performed, offerings presented, incantations recited, an image laboriously made, only to be discarded. A live rooster, with bound feet, which "totters rather miserably about" is one of the exorcists' props; Beryl repeatedly takes notice of it, a hint that its discomfort somehow encapsulates hers. (A favorite technique is to describe the emotion of the observer diffusely mirroring that of the performers.) At one point, the young pregnant woman for whom the ceremony is being performed drops off to sleep. Beryl records her notes:

9:30 . . . After one and a half hours of dancing, incantations and drumming, these suddenly stop and. . . .

. . . .

*The whistle sounds again.* I am comforted by the orange-tree above our heads, which is overgrown with betel leaves.

(*Ceylon*, p. 49)

If she can make us enter into her sensations when she is tired and bored, how much more, when she is absorbed, do we share her absorption. Her descriptions make deliberate appeal to multiple senses, including the kinesthetic. We move with her toward the spectacle, which in turn comes to meet us:

The huge Cathedral Square was filled with stands of numbered seats, and one might watch the whole series of processions if one waited long enough. But this was a very remote way of participating in the *Semana Santa*; it was far better to wander in the lovely, winding, narrow *calles*, and suddenly surprise a Calvary emerging from a side street, massed crimson carnations gleaming in the candlelight round the feet of the Crucifix. . . .

("Holy Week in Seville," in *TF*, 111)

But how can one hope to reproduce in words the living sensations [of the *Ardja*, Balinese opera] . . . ? Perhaps it is necessary to have been awakened at 2 a.m. by the moon shining in one's face through the open door, to have climbed the bright, empty road to the great square in front of the palace, to have heard from far off the flute and drum and wailing cadences. . . . Room will be made for one among the crowd of women and children. . . .

(*Bali*, 202)



The form of her writing impressed at least one unnamed critic as “chaotic” (*Ceylon*, 14), and it is true that she went to school at a time before paragraphs quite came into fashion. Her thoughts flow onward from their starting point until the stream exhausts itself; then she begins anew. The destination is never so important that she cannot pause to incorporate some lengthy, wonderful quotation, describe an encounter, remember a friend, or retell a memory. Toward the end of her book on Ceylon, she could not refrain from a moment’s ridicule of the serious scholars whose gaze was so fixed on their notebooks that they had scarcely a glance to spare for the dances they were supposed to be recording, and among the things that scholars aspire to with which she was clearly impatient was the logically constructed essay; it is no sneer, considering her goals and temperament, to say that she may well have been incapable of it. (That she nevertheless had means of shaping her work will be shown in due course.)

What Beryl de Zoete valued most in an experience was its openness to the imagination. She preferred Balinese dancing to Javanese, for that reason. The latter was acknowledged the most perfect in the world, but in Balinese there was always room for the unexpected. She revered dance as one of the noblest of the arts; she was thrilled and excited by the perfection of movement that only years of arduous practice can effect. She was persistent in her research (it says nothing against her that it coincided with her pleasure), sometimes too persistent for the comfort of her hosts. But she distrusted on principle attempts to be definitive, or to replace the individual instance, with its direct, sensuous content, with the generalization about it. “It will be seen that it is impossible and would in any case be tiresomely pedantic to insist on keeping one kind of temple dance carefully separated from another when on any real occasion they so easily tend to pass into each other,” she avers in describing them. “It would be hard to know whether the name *Gabor* or *Mendet* should be applied to the following dance, and it really does not matter” (*Bali*, 51). She seems, if anything, pleased when the information the systematic scholar would consider fundamental is found to be unknown to the native participants themselves. A play begins but not all of the performers have arrived; only after it is well underway will the story be decided on. A *Barong* performance enacts “a definite drama . . . , but even the head of the *sekaa Barong* had no idea what the story was. They had it long ago from another village, and now its meaning was lost” (*Bali*, 100). Her taste for what is not yet, and perhaps never will be, fully defined or polished manifests itself in other ways, as

well. In her introduction to "Two Letters of William Acton," which she had published in *Ballet* as a memorial to their author, she praises these informal if lengthy communications as "better than professional criticism which can seldom avoid the search for a fatuous finality, a judgment. In dance criticism this judgment is particularly futile and presumptuous."<sup>8</sup>

In Bali, nothing ever took place according to plan, but "something always happens in Bali to revive your spirits if something has happened to depress them, and as we sit disconsolate on the loggia of the priest's house we are told a version of a play which opens up a new world to our investigation." Long after nightfall, the dance that the travelers expected to see in the afternoon "is really starting, and it proves so good that we forgive it for not being the one which we spent all the day in trying not to miss" (*Bali*, 10). "The best things always come by chance," she said a decade later in a letter<sup>9</sup> to Arthur Waley written from her visit to Ceylon and India in 1949. What lay behind the remark was not an eccentric's fondness for disorder but the proven conviction that just beyond the surface blankness lay a rich store of delights capable—if one were lucky and patient enough—of revealing themselves to the receptive mind. Her patience was fretful and ardent; on the occasion, she delayed month after month her scheduled return home.

Beryl Drusilla de Zoete was born in London on August 17, 1879.<sup>10</sup> Her birth certificate gives her father's name as Edward Frank de Zoete, his occupation as stock jobber. Drusilla was her mother's Christian name; her mother's maiden surname was Kent. Beryl was the second of four daughters. In 1917, when her father wrote his will, their names were noted as Florence Manser, Beryl de Zoete, Alice Elliot, and Beatrice Swire. It was Florence, nicknamed "Queenie," to whom Beryl was evidently closest, at least in adult life. It was Florence who introduced her to the eminent Ceylonese Buddhist scholar Dr. G. P. Malalasekara. She was

<sup>8</sup> The originals of these lengthy letters (published in *Ballet*, Vol. 2 No. 3; Aug. 1946) along with a typescript revision, presumably Beryl's work, are in the Rutgers collection. Their author was emotionally unstable and perhaps alcoholic. Beryl was extremely kind to him. The collection also includes a letter which she wrote to him but never sent, apologizing for having failed to open the door to him on the previous evening, when he had come knocking at midnight, and forgiving him. One memoirist says they studied Urdu together. See also below, in text.

<sup>9</sup> 6 February 1949.

<sup>10</sup> I should like to reiterate my thanks to Joanne Lafer, for her kindness in procuring copies of the documents cited here.

the only one of the sisters to have a child; her son, of whom Beryl was very fond, was killed young in the First World War. Florence herself died at the end of 1952; one would like to know more of her, as of the other members of the family.

Beryl's paternal great-grandfather was Samuel de Zoete, who immigrated to England from Holland "about 1789. He seems to have been a hat-maker." His son, Samuel Herman de Zoete, was a stock jobber, highly successful: leaving, upon his death in 1884, a fortune of £199,928.0.8. Of his sons, Beryl's Uncle Walter prospered greatly in his father's profession; the others she calls "hopelessly unsuited to it." Her father, dying in 1929 (he survived his wife by six years), left effects valued at £14,833.3.3.

There is a photograph of the young de Zoetes in *The Thunder and the Freshness* on the lawn of their house at Streatham, everyone squinting happily into the sun. The girls are all charmers. Florence, old enough to wear a necklace, must be about ten, Beryl seven or eight, the other two—the elder on her father's knee, the plump little one in her mother's lap—might be six and three. Father is clean-shaven except for a mustache, and Mother wears glasses. The girls are dressed in their starched best and—one is glad to report—their hair is wavy; it is not, however, *curled*. The family aire-dale (?) has been made by his master to sit! but not quite to hold still for the photographer.

It is not safe to assume too much of Victorian families. Beryl's, one would guess, was rather more liberal in its views than not. Living sometimes with them, sometimes in rooms near them, was Edward's elder brother, Reginald Julius ("Skipper"), conspicuously omitted from the list of executors of his father's will. He had married Drusilla's elder sister, a pious churchgoer, and offended her with his irreligion, so that she left him. He was also a heavy drinker, who struggled with periods of depression. Beryl's mother nevertheless retained a liking for him; both Edward and Drusilla seem to have gone to some pains to be kind to him. He had been a great traveller and liked to boast to his nieces that he had made thirteen voyages around the world. Even more important was the passion for Bach which he had acquired as a student in Dresden. Beryl recalled that the little girls would visit him and spend the day with him "playing duets—all the organ works of Bach, Haydn symphonies and so on. That was how I learned to read music." What she may have learned from him also was the beginnings of that sensitivity to contrapuntal patterning—sound against sound, sound against movement, movement against move-

ment—which enriches her observation of Balinese dance. A vase with fresh violets stood under the portrait of Bach in his rooms all year.<sup>11</sup>

Beryl had “Skipper’s watch” with her during her travels in 1949; during her last decades, however, she had few if any contacts with living persons named de Zoete. Only twice in her six address books in the collection at Rutgers does a de Zoete appear—with illegible first initial, entered under Z, in one book; “Rupert De Zoete,” entered under D, address illegible, in another.<sup>12</sup>

The adult Beryl was fluent in French and German as well as Italian. There are letters written to her as a child by fond relations in German script, which she herself could write. French was a usual part of young ladies’ education in nineteenth-century England, and it would not be surprising if she began to learn Italian in childhood too. In middle age she studied Persian, writing out vocabulary lists in the orderly hand—almost unrecognizable as hers—which she sometimes used for things she was especially in earnest about. Her Persian teacher was a Professor Dau’ud; he appears in a dream that she recorded (*TF*, 160). Her only reference to her schooling that I have come across is the remark that “an indulgent headmistress allowed me to take a class in Greek conversation, on the model of the Perse school, when I was myself only at the learning stage. I suppose it was frivolous of her (and of me), but we all enjoyed it and it certainly brought some of those lovely words to life” (*Ceylon*, 109). Again one would like to know more. She attended Oxford—similarly suggesting an advanced outlook on the part of her parents, since college education for women was still the exception. There were only two women’s colleges—Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall—in Beryl’s time, and prior to 1920 women students were not granted degrees. In 1901 she took a Second in English at Somerville College.<sup>13</sup>

In 1902 she married Basil de Sélincourt. De Sélincourt, born in 1876,

<sup>11</sup> The account of Skipper appears in Arthur Waley’s introduction to *TF*, which is based largely on an uncompleted short autobiographical essay by Beryl. Was the family Jewish? Beryl was thought to look Jewish by Gerald Brenan, but when asked about it she replied with vehemence that her family were high-church Anglicans (Gerald Brenan, *Personal Record: 1930-1972* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1974], 94; the character sketch of Beryl, to which other references will be made, appears on pp. 94-100). To Celia Goodman, to whom she did not look at all Jewish, she mentioned that she had one Jewish forebear (letter to the author).

<sup>12</sup> A grandson of Walter de Zoete was Beryl’s next-of-kin at the time of her death. She had never met him.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary Spurling, “Introduction,” in Alison Waley, *A Half of Two Lives* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), xvi. Future references to Hilary Spurling pertain to this introduction.

likewise in Streatham, of a French father and an English mother, was described by his second wife as “of the *gypsy* French type—the swarthy skin, black hair, jutting aquiline nose, wide lips; but in character (with amusing little variations) he is intensely English”<sup>14</sup> He was a literary man who became a frequent anonymous contributor to *TLS*. He wrote a book on Giotto (1905) while married to Beryl and, later, books on Blake (1909) and Whitman (1914). He was an enthusiastic amateur musician, and that may have been one of his attractions for Beryl.

Beryl—unconventional, undomesticated, demanding, yet guileless and wholly generous—was the sort of person around whom legends easily grow; moreover, those who have described her, even those well-inclined, have generally been more concerned with establishing a “character” for her than with factual accuracy. Gerald Brenan’s story of the marriage takes her side, but it was told him a good many years after the fact, and recorded by him decades after that:

. . . They had agreed that, as sex was so coarse, it should be a platonic marriage, based on a vegetarian diet and on the study of music and literature, but after they had been living together for a few months her husband brought another woman into the house with whom he proceeded to spend his nights while at the same time he switched over from milk and vegetables to beer and beef steaks. Beryl put up with this for a while and then left him.

Brenan adds that shortly after this she set up housekeeping, again on a platonic basis, with a very young man named John Hope-Johnstone, but frightened him away by impulsively kissing him.<sup>15</sup>

Basil’s full view of the matter we are even less likely to know, but how he wished it to be regarded appears in a letter written by his second wife, Anne Douglas Sedgwick (1873-1935), to a friend a few days after her wedding, in the discreet reference to “. . . the peculiar and in many ways painful circumstances of his first marriage.” In a letter written eighteen months later (also quoted above), she calls him a man who “has been through a great deal; suffered a great deal . . .”; that may take in a good deal of ground, but no doubt the earlier marriage is to be included.<sup>16</sup>

Basil’s second wife, whom he married to the temporary distress of her

<sup>14</sup> *Anne Douglas Sedgwick: A Portrait in Letters*, chosen and edited by Basil de Sélincourt (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), 103-104.

<sup>15</sup> Brenan, 95. Another version of the story was that the couple lived up several flights of stairs and *she* had left because Hope-Johnstone made her bring up the coal.

<sup>16</sup> *Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, 97, 103.

relations on December 11, 1908, was an American-born novelist with connections in literary Boston, who had spent much of her life in France. She is now almost forgotten but in her time was hailed by some, mistakenly, as the successor to Henry James. She is worth a digression, because she was the proper literary lady that Beryl failed to be, and because Basil's selection from her letters suggests what he must have assumed conventional-minded readers would find tasteful and agreeable. Time has shown parts of them to be obscene. Jews and sparrows displeased her; the company of one of the former, an asthmatic municipal official, "blighted the day," and a yet worse trial was a temporary secretary, "a stout, auburn young Jewess," beyond vulgarity.<sup>17</sup> "Do you know anything about Walter Rathenau [German statesman and advocate of democracy, assassinated in 1922 by right-wing fanatics]?" she writes in 1931. ". . . I am reading his life with the greatest interest, feeling him an unattractive but intensely tragic figure—as a Jew must always be who has identified himself in passionate sympathy with the very elements in a country that most completely reject him. It is very difficult to imagine what the attitude of an idealistic Jew should be in such a country as Germany. I sometimes wish they would all die in their sleep; there are many problems I should like to solve like this,—Jews, Hindus and sparrows, all to pass away peacefully." "I do wish I could painlessly exterminate sparrows—by a *wish!*"<sup>18</sup> On modern literature, March 1919: "Have you ever attacked [i.e. read] 'Du Côté de chez Swann'?" Even after these intervening years my impression of that does not fade; the first, the little-boy and country-town, part. I hated the second [Un Amour de Swann] almost too much to care for the three or four magical evocations it contains."<sup>19</sup> (Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete, by contrast, were eager readers of Proust.) Anne was an admirer of Arthur Waley's "ravishing Chinese poems,"<sup>20</sup> however, and had the fine taste to prefer the third of his volumes of the *Genji* to the first. To her credit, she nursed the wounded in France during the Great War, and she bore her own final illness, a paralytic affliction, with fortitude. After her death, de Sélincourt married one of her friends. He lived to the age of 90; upon

<sup>17</sup> *Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, 147, 204.

<sup>18</sup> *Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, 219-20, 180.

<sup>19</sup> *Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, 158.

<sup>20</sup> Admiration did nothing to disturb her belief in the inferiority of the Chinese as a "race." See *Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, 232-33. Younger readers may be surprised, not at the existence of such prejudices at that time, but at the degree to which it was considered fitting that they be expressed in print. As regards Waley, Anne had heard, falsely, that he was a disciple of Lytton Strachey.

retiring from journalism, he took up market-gardening. An obituary tribute in the *Times* (March 4, 1966) says that upon parting from Fleet Street he seemed “deliberately to have turned over a new leaf.” Putting things behind him may have been a talent.

Beryl wrote two books under the name of de Sélincourt: *Homes of the First Franciscans*, 1905,<sup>21</sup> and *Venice*, 1907,<sup>22</sup> the latter with a co-author, May Sturge-Henderson, who as “My friend M. G. Sturge Henderson” is also the dedicatee of the former. In design (if that is quite the word), *Homes of the First Franciscans* is already the mixture of travelogue, anecdote, history and quotation she would later excel at, if not in the same proportions, or with—one hopes—the same conviction. The style is ecstatic. Saint Francis is the poet and lover of beauty: “. . . no cloud of sin was allowed to mar the serenity of his pantheistic vision. . . . His poet-mind saw no division between animate and inanimate in Nature. . . . His attribution of conscious life to what we are accustomed to call inanimate nature was no doubt in practice developed to excess, but it was an expression of his truly poetic realisation of the great principle of love which binds together all members of the vast universe, the spirit of the air and the gnome of the cave, man and the clod of clay, in the great brotherhood of life” (p. 8)—and so on, for 300 pages more. Already she is the experienced traveller, and she can make her sentences jump and leap about, do cartwheels and handstands—but if she believed very much of this even the biographer is tempted to some sympathy with Basil. And if she believed none of it—?

*Venice* is even handsomer in format, with pictures reproduced in color, in place of the sober photographs of the earlier volume. It is still sticky going, to a modern taste intolerant of turn-of-the-century effusions, but at least the subject allows the diminution of *religious* ecstasies, which strike one as particularly inauthentic in Beryl’s case, though she may have caught them from her friend.

<sup>21</sup> “Homes of the First Franciscans: In Umbria, the Borders of Tuscany and the Northern Marches, by Beryl D. de Sélincourt. With 13 Illustrations from Photographs.” The book, published in London by J. M. Dent and in New York by E. P. Dutton, has a preface by Paul Sabatier, who had also lent her his library and unpublished notes. Sabatier was the French Protestant pastor whose *La vie de St. François*, enormously popular, was responsible for the modern reawakening of interest in the saint. The photographs were taken by Mildred Bicknell, “whose management was responsible for the success of the journey.”

<sup>22</sup> “Venice, by Beryl de Sélincourt and May Sturge-Henderson. Illustrated by Reginald Barratt, of the Royal Water-Color Society.” The New York publisher was Dodd, Mead, and the London, Chatto & Windus.

It must have been Beryl who did the actual writing. The co-author, in later life Mary Sturge Gretton, J.P., B. Litt., wife of the historian Richard Gretton and sister to the first woman mayor of Oxford (a point of great pride), may have been an Oxford acquaintance. She represents a rather different type of emancipated woman from Beryl. Four years older than Beryl, she was deeply interested in social reform and rural problems and active in social work. Her people were well-to-do, well-connected Quakers. As a child, she had known George MacDonald and imbibed some of his mystical ideas; she knew and revered George Meredith. The first of her two books about Meredith<sup>23</sup> appeared in the same year as *Venice*: it is hard to imagine anything more unlike. Prominent among her concerns as a literary critic were questions of propriety and moral courage. The four chapters devoted in it to Meredith's poetry are by Basil de Sélincourt; her Preface acknowledges in addition to his aid that of Miss Anne Douglas Sedgwick and of Mrs. B. de Sélincourt, among others. Both her later volume on Meredith (1927)<sup>24</sup> and her autobiography<sup>25</sup> make pointed reference to the friendship of "Anne Douglas Sedgwick (Mrs. Basil de Sélincourt)." The autobiography reveals its author as a formidable old lady, with strong opinions on subjects ranging from the American conduct of the Korean war to eating between meals, and a bit of a name-dropper. Of Beryl, or *Venice*, or for that matter Venice, the autobiography contains not a whisper. And again, one would like to know more—much more.

In 1909, the name Beryl de Zoete appears as translator, from the Italian, of Volume 2 of Dr. Giulio Carotti's *History of Art*.<sup>26</sup> With its long list of illustrations and numerous loose bibliographical references to be carefully identified, the book is a testimony to Beryl's capacity for attending to necessary detail, and for sheer hard work.

Letters she received during the next few years, preserved in the collection at Rutgers, provide some information about her life during that time, but they are not numerous. Ignorance in a biographer is not a virtue, although—taking a leaf from Beryl—one may be comforted by the reflection that the life of an individual is always richer and more various than

<sup>23</sup> Mary Sturge Henderson, *George Meredith: Novelist, Poet, Reformer* (London: Methuen, 1907, 1908).

<sup>24</sup> Mary Sturge Gretton, *The Writings and Life of George Meredith: A Centenary Study* (Oxford University Press, 1926).

<sup>25</sup> Mary Sturge Gretton, *Re-cognitions* (Oxford: Printed by Hall the Printer, 1951).

<sup>26</sup> G. Carotti, *A History of Art*, Vol. II (Part I) *Early Christian and Neo-Oriental Art; European Art North of the Alps* (London: Duckworth, 1909). All three volumes had female translators.



would appear from its documentation. And if she is at times a puzzle to the biographer, she must also have been one to her earnest-minded correspondents. A letter on black-bordered stationery, from the year 1912, was written by one "F.," recently bereaved, who is translating the Iliad; addressing her as "my dearest B.N."<sup>27</sup> and "my dear B.N.," the writer speaks of Beryl's "bravery" and "independance" (sic). She expresses the hope that Beryl will "settle down." (Beryl is now past thirty.) Beryl must have been told of a good many such hopes; the self persists to be manifested in various ways, some of them inconvenient to our friends, and those who found her willful and unreasonable in this way or that in her later years might with justice have reflected on how much strength of will had been needed earlier to maintain her identity under the onslaught. By 1914 her friends at Oxford had become aware of her involvement with "rhythmic gymnastics,"—considered by many to be modern, advanced, and (perhaps in part because of the leotards and tunics worn by its practitioners) a bit "fast."

"Rhythmic gymnastics"—not to be confused with the present-day Olympic event—was an early name for Dalcroze eurhythmics, the system of musical training through bodily movement originated and taught by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), whom Beryl was to salute as her master. The "irresistible little professor," as Beryl called him, was one of a number of important figures in the history of musical pedagogy whose aim was to replace the mechanical, superficially "correct" mode of performance taught in the conservatories with a more natural technique and a more felt approach to musical content. What distinguished Dalcroze from others of like conviction such as the pianist Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1915), who were concerned with the virtuoso performer, was his eagerness to use his method of training to awaken and develop the innate musicality of the ordinary person. Underlying all of his teaching was the conviction that the emotion inherent in music must be experienced and expressed by the whole organism. The dance of his day he criticized as too often a series of static, two-dimensional, ornamental poses assumed without continuity or awareness of space; but characteristically, while he praised Isadora Duncan for freeing the body, he complained that her performances lacked rhythmic discipline.

In many of his essays there is a messianic streak, which in person must have been tempered by his lively personality. "In my judgement, all our

<sup>27</sup> The nickname is unexplained.

efforts should be directed to training our children to become conscious of their personalities, to develop their temperaments, and to liberate their particular rhythms of individual life from every trammeling influence"<sup>28</sup> was a typical statement. Whether or not liberated from trammeling influences, people who took Dalcroze classes as children generally have pleasant memories of performing exercises in which, for example, the arms would beat a time signature (as the student advanced, the two arms beat different time signatures simultaneously), while the legs would move to the duration of the notes. There was much jumping about. "It didn't make a dancer of me, but it was great fun," in the words of an informant. Jaques-Dalcroze began his experiments in 1892, gave his first public demonstration in 1905 while a professor at the Geneva conservatory, and gave his first training course for teachers in 1906. In 1911, with the help of wealthy enthusiasts, he opened his "Bildungsanstalt," with its beautiful, airy, modernistic hall and classrooms, at Hellerau, near Dresden. The clientele, judging from published lists of those who attended his courses, included a goodly number of non-German students, including some from places as far away as California. They were predominantly female. Some number of them intended to become Dalcroze teachers of children.

Dalcroze gave his first demonstrations in England in 1912, although it would be surprising if Beryl had not had some contact with his teaching earlier. In 1913 she enrolled at Hellerau, which she describes as "a huge school of very mixed talent, varied ambitions, and a babel of tongues" (*TF*, 21). In May, June and July of 1915 she took a second Dalcroze course, this time in London. She kept the homework from it to the end of her life, and it is in the collection at Rutgers—long, complicated exercises in the neat handwriting that one can scarcely recognize as hers. Teaching used to be less an exercise in tact than it is now; the comments in red ink, by Ethel Driver ("the famous Ethel Driver, sister of the well-known"<sup>29</sup> broadcaster" [*TF*, 24]) are severe. The instructor frequently shows impatience with Beryl for having written more than necessary, and she makes praise of her written work the opportunity to scold her for her failings in performance. "Alas! that you are so far ahead in the writing down and less so in the playing" (June 15). Improvisation on the pianoforte was an important subdivision of Dalcroze's teaching and evidently the most diffi-

<sup>28</sup> Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, *Rhythm, Music and Education*, trans. Harold F. Rubinstein (New York and London: G. F. Putnam, 1921), ix.

<sup>29</sup> "Well-known" is probably Waley's editorial correction; the original essay has "once famous"—an example of Beryl's occasional lack of tact.

cult; in her "Tribute to My Master," Beryl finds words of excuse for the otherwise kindly man, endlessly inventive himself, who was given to ridiculing the hapless pupil devoid of inspiration at the keyboard. Similar strictures delivered by another must have been painful.

If Beryl continued to write and translate at this time, I have as yet found no record of it. She had some inherited capital invested; and she earned some portion of her living teaching Dalcroze eurhythmics and ballroom dancing. There is a story that she once taught ballroom dancing to Herbert Asquith. A former pupil, who studied eurhythmics with her as a girl in the early 'twenties, remembers her as a "formidable, rather remote figure unlike anyone else in looks or clothes"—but fascinating and to be admired. She could instil some sense of time even into the unmusical.<sup>30</sup> Toward the end of that decade inherited money enabled her to give up teaching.<sup>31</sup>

In her mid-thirties, she was still very young-looking and attractive—and to "A," the unidentifiable young man<sup>32</sup> whose passionate love-letters call her "B.N.," she was more than that. He is full of praise for her beauty; it is with him that there took place the incident of the lovers climbing, naked, up two adjoining trees and leaning out until the branches touched. The story became part of the Beryl myth—but the peculiar nature of this consummation was perhaps due less to the sexual squeamishness which, so Gerald Brenan later speculated, accompanied her "cult of the body" than to the fact that the poor fellow was, in any event, impotent. By the last of the series of letters, written in 1914 and 1915, he is complaining that he will never be able to father a child, consoling himself with the memory of having held her naked in his arms, and excusing her for not having had time to look him up on her recent visit to Manchester.

Other aspects of the affair aside, it might be observed that "A" belongs to that long line of people who felt sorry for themselves and who found in Beryl some special signs of patience, loyalty, and sympathy, conjoined to her own enviable good fortune, which inspired them to pour out their self-pity into letters. There was her German friend Ilse Molzan, who complains (in November, 1929) about the boredom and narrowness of her life as a hausfrau in Breslau and says how she envies Beryl's freedom; there was Mary Tongue, who complained repeatedly of frustration, isolation, pov-

<sup>30</sup> Nicolette Gray (letter to the author).

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Waley, "Arthur David Waley, 1889-1966: A View from within His Family" (unpublished), 19. Margaret Waley is the widow of Arthur Waley's younger brother Hubert. A ledger book from 1923, with entries for oil stocks and the like, is in the collection at Rutgers. It has the look of one of those conscientious projects that are soon laid aside.

<sup>32</sup> "A" could not have been Arthur Waley, as will shortly be apparent.

erty, boredom, heat and racial hatred in South Africa (letters from Mary Tongue in the Rutgers collection begin in 1941 and cover over a decade, and she is still in Beryl's address books in the late 1950s); there were numerous Indian artists and performers: among them, a rejected playwright sent her a verse drama with the request that it be given to T. S. Eliot to read. Gifted friends trusted her understanding. The collection includes a long, literary account of army life written and entrusted to her during World War II by the dancer and designer of ballets William Chappell (b. 1908). She had not only sympathy but patience beyond the ordinary with people who were troubled—for example, with William Acton, the “gifted and eccentric artist,” as she called him, whose early death she sincerely mourned.

As with the strength of will which preserved her independence, this generosity had a side that could irritate her friends, especially as she grew older. “She had an awkward habit of sending home to Arthur some outlandish local genius—once her protégé was a deserter from the Foreign legion—whom she happened to have picked up,” Peter Quennell recalled.<sup>33</sup> During World War II, Edith Sitwell expostulated that Beryl had “become a *midwife!* She is always delivering unwanted babies into other people's houses. She has just sent us someone whom Osbert can't stand and I haven't seen for 15 years, to try and get in here. She has an invariable flair for the people one least wants to see.”<sup>34</sup> But it was the same habit of Beryl's that helped provide Kurt Jooss, founder of the Jooss Ballet, and his troupe with a place of refuge and perhaps also helped save his life, when he had to escape the Nazis in 1933: it was Beryl, then at his summer school at Essen, who urged him to go to Dartington Hall, in Devon. Earlier that year she had first introduced him to its owners, the millionaire social reformers Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst. In 1940 she directed members of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, including Frederick Ashton and Robert Helpmann, to Dartington as a refuge from the bombing.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Peter Quennell, *The Marble Foot: An Autobiography, 1905-1938* (London: Collins, 1978), 158.

<sup>34</sup> Edith Sitwell, *Selected Letters, 1919-1964*, ed. John Lehmann and Derek Parker (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1970), 88. The letter is dated 10 January 1942. Arthur and Beryl both greatly admired Edith Sitwell; Beryl was apparently unaware of Edith's dislike of her. I cannot help wondering whether it was really so great or unabating as has been assumed (by Hilary Spurling, among others): Francis Johns notes that Edith dedicated her *A Notebook on William Shakespeare* (1948) to Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete; and the collection also includes a pleasant letter from Edith to Beryl, written from Montegufoni in 1956. See Francis A. Johns, *A Bibliography of Arthur Waley* (Rutgers University Press, 1968), 157.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: The Creation of an Utopian Community* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). Dorothy Payne Whitney Straight Elmhirst was

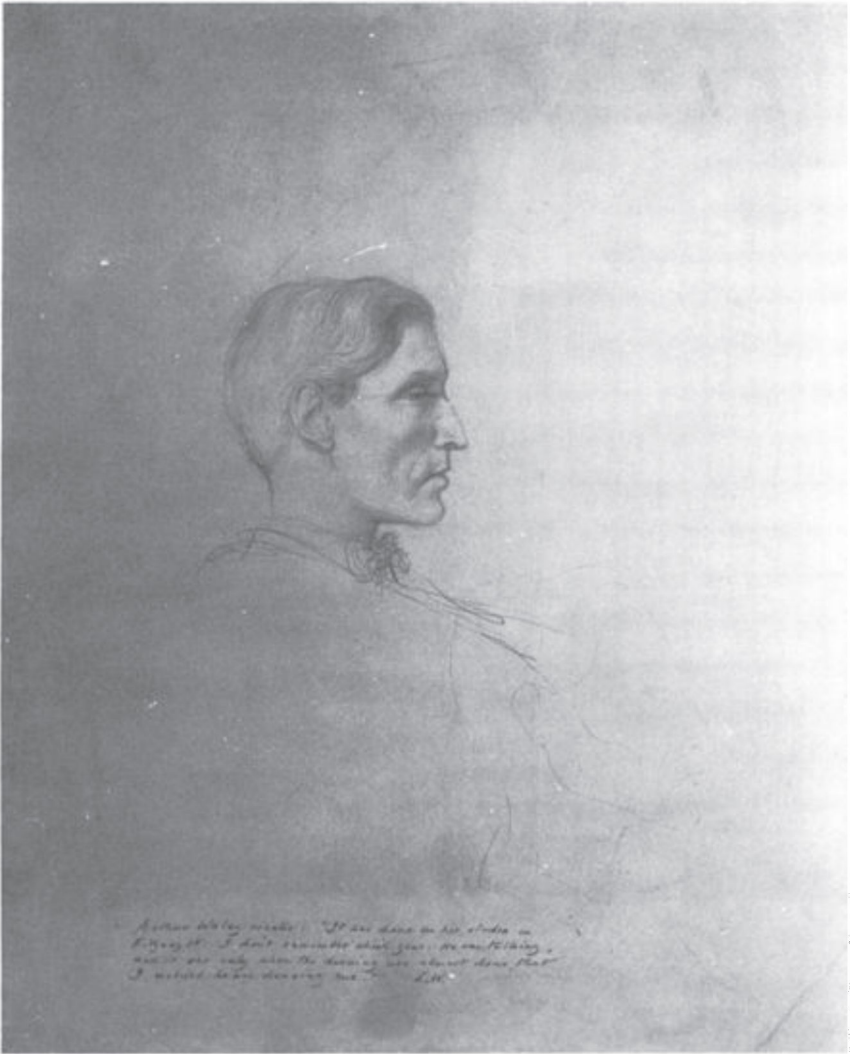
Beryl de Zoete first met Arthur Waley in the Fall of 1918.<sup>36</sup> (As it happens, it was quite likely at a party at Edith Sitwell's.) Ten years younger than Beryl, of Jewish ancestry on both sides of his family, the second of three gifted brothers, he had been at King's College, Cambridge, studying Classics, but had left before completing his degree when an illness left him blind in one eye. He was thought exceptionally shy; at the same time, he had an exceptionally wide circle of friends, and it is most probably through an early friendship with Ezra Pound that he first became acquainted with Chinese and Japanese verse, and thought of making his own translations. If he lacked Pound's poetic daring, he was incomparably the better linguist and scholar. He had a dislike of the grandiose and pompous which extended from personal relations to literature to music, and he was proud of the fact that his translations could touch the ordinary reader. One of his gifts was the conviction—not so common among scholars or translators as one might think—that the works he translated must make sense; and he translated works not because they were on official lists of “masterpieces” but because he was powerfully drawn to them. His translations in a sense constituted a personal quest. Beginning with Chinese poetry (an abiding interest), they included the masterwork of Japanese fiction *The Tale of Genji*, with which he was chiefly occupied from 1925 to 1933, fundamental works of early Chinese philosophy rendered with great human sympathy, and the work of such Chinese poets as Po Chü-i, made into biographies again distinguished by Waley's imaginative sympathy. At the time of the meeting, he had just published—a few months earlier, in July—his first full-length book, the epochal *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*;<sup>37</sup> unfitted by his partial blindness for service in the War, since 1913 he had been Assistant Keeper in the Oriental Sub-Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. He was known for the silences which could intimidate those who were not his intimate friends and for his lack of small talk, and he had been unfortunate in love.

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the widow of Willard Straight and co-founder of *The New Republic*. The Elmhursts' venture at Dartington began as an educational and social experiment but soon came to include the arts. Their biographer describes them as “the last substantial private patrons of the arts in Britain (along with the Christies of Glyndebourne).” Progressive educational principles and rumors of nude bathing caused Dartington, like eurhythmics, to have a reputation in some quarters as “fast.”

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Waley, 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Item 2A in Johns, *Bibliography*. It was preceded by his privately printed *Chinese Poems* (1916), a pamphlet of 16 pages. See also Francis A. Johns, “Manifestations of Arthur Waley: Some Bibliographical and Other Notes,” in *The British Library Journal*, 9 (1983): 171-84, for a summary of his career.



National Portrait Gallery, London  
Copy in Special Collections Rutgers University Libraries

A portrait of Arthur Waley by Rex Whistler

By all reports, Beryl de Zoete promptly fell in love with Arthur Waley. In the words of his sister-in-law Margaret Waley, "She immediately offered him the absolute and uncritical admiration and love which was his constant need. . . ." Mrs. Waley's judgement of the relationship is of great interest:

Highly educated and extremely presentable she came from a background analogous to his own. Above all she was content to take second place to his work and required neither marriage nor children nor to share his home or even all his leisure.

After some hesitation he came to see this as a solution to his problems and grew extremely fond of her. Slowly he allowed the nature of their relationship to be generally known. He even allowed her to tidy him up and take him to parties though he never enjoyed them and never learnt to dance himself.

I thought then and I still think that Beryl was an excellent thing; I am sure his make up would not have fitted him for an ordinary marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Arthur and Beryl formed one of those couples whose members are described as "complementary" in temperament; more accurately, one suspects, the idiosyncrasies of the one make possible the continued idiosyncrasies of the other. If Arthur traveled to the East only—and by preference—in his imagination, Beryl was the great traveler. It was Beryl who was the conversationalist, who made guests feel at their ease, who compensated for Arthur's lack of small talk. "Beryl had the knack of un-freezing Arthur in his frozen moods," wrote Carmen Blacker,<sup>39</sup> on whom Beryl's beautiful speaking voice left a strong impression. "Beryl's cooing voice covered Arthur's silences like a cloak," wrote Sir Harold Acton; he also describes her as a "lightning conductor" for Arthur's "staccato directness."<sup>40</sup> Surely, the fact that Beryl was what she was helped Arthur to be what he was.

The pair were always much interested in each other's work, although each contributed to the other in a different way. Her books are full of references to things in his. The *Tale of Genji* appears in them sometimes in

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Waley, 18. But Celia Goodman says that they both enjoyed parties; she describes them as "invariably arriving dead on time and usually being the last to leave." "Reminiscences of Arthur Waley (1889-1966)," *Contemporary Review* (July 1976), 33-36. Arthur, or parties, or both, may have altered with time.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to the Editor, *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 November 1982.

<sup>40</sup> Harold Acton, *More Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen, 1970), 29, 25.

contexts that might strike one as incongruous, were Waley's Japan a place rather than a state of mind: "Then we visited an old man lying on his bed in a secluded little house among the trees, who had been paralyzed for the last three years. Round his neck was a gold chaplet or rosary, each bead containing a sacred seed, and he wore a gold locket of beautiful design. Somehow the scene reminded me of *Genji*."<sup>41</sup> Both "*Genji, Tale of*" and "*Akikonomu, Empress*" find their way into the index of *Ceylon*. There are references also to his books of Chinese philosophy—likewise gratuitous from the standpoint of the strict scholar. They are there partly from a childlike pride in her association with the author, but also because, living and talking with him, she had made his concerns part of her own inner world. That she had learned to notice a particular kind of beauty through reading his translations must have been gratifying to him.

She was in a sense Waley's client: even in old age, their relationship as revealed by her letters from Ceylon had an element of teacher and pupil. She asks him for information and books, expects chat about his Sinologist friends, and closes with a Chinese character for "love" which he had taught her. (Alison, who married Arthur Waley four years after Beryl's death and only a month before his, unaware—one would suppose—that the endearment was not hers alone, had her publishers use it to decorate the spine of her memoirs.)<sup>42</sup> He was the scholar and reasoner; she—despite her considerable powers of mind—was most at home with an artistic creed which condemned the evil of "substituting intellectual experience for spontaneous feeling."<sup>43</sup>

Waley dedicated to Beryl de Zoete the first volume of his *Tale of Genji*, published in 1925. *Genji* was that one of his works which most appealed to a romantic imagination, and such a dedication can only have been a gesture of love. In 1942, he dedicated his other translation of a novel, *Mon-*

<sup>41</sup> Beryl de Zoete, *The Other Mind: A Study of Dance in South India* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1953), 83. Abbreviated *OM* in citations. The dedication of this book is to "Prince Idle"—a reference to Arthur Waley's translation of Chuang Tzu. For Waley's translation of the *Tale of Genji* as a polemic on behalf of beauty, set in an unreal place, see Marian Ury, "The Imaginary Kingdom and the Translator's Art: Notes on Re-reading Waley's *Genji*," in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2 (1975-76): 267-94.

<sup>42</sup> Alison Waley, *A Half of Two Lives* (see note 13). The marriage took place on 26 May 1966 (a reproduction of the nurse's daily report for that day appears opposite p. 133; it gives an idea of Waley's condition at the time). Waley died on 27 June. Alison cared for him very devotedly. Donald Keene remembers having received the wedding announcement only after he had already received news of Arthur Waley's death.

<sup>43</sup> *Der Rhythmus: Ein Jahrbuch*, herausgegeben von Bildungsanstalt Jaques-Dalcroze, Dresden-Hellerau, 1 (1911): 27.



key, to Beryl jointly with Harold Acton. (Did “Beasts,” one of his playful names for her, originate in this translation?) And it is of interest that in his *The Originality of Japanese Civilization*, published in 1929,<sup>44</sup> he included her translation of a *Man’yōshū* poem, “The Fisher-Boy of Urashima.” He precedes the translation with the remark that it is “. . . impossible in English to do justice to the delicate, undulating movement which pervades the original.” Faint praise indeed! But the rendering is not inaccurate (with a brief exception); the lines have the rhythmic vigor that translators have often felt appropriate to antique verse. The diction has a hint of the baroque, as does her best prose—and in its own way, it is as good a translation of a Japanese poem as many of Waley’s. To my knowledge, it is her only translation from Japanese. She would not have made it unassisted; even had Waley not been there, there was the example of Chamberlain’s rhymed version, which Waley disapproved of, to provide an outline of the meaning; and it is not unlikely that Waley provided her with some sort of draft. But he also had—or had had—the notion that the Japanese classical language, with its “easy grammar and limited vocabulary” could be mastered in “a few months” and early in his career had compiled a little volume to prove it;<sup>45</sup> and he may have tried it out with Beryl. (An article by Yukio Yashiro, one of those cosmopolitan Japanese who enlivened the cultural scene between the two wars, says that Arthur had taught Beryl to read Japanese; visiting the couple, he heard her recite poems from the *Man’yōshū*, including “Yasumiko etari” [!] and “Kurokuma ni norite.” He says also that Beryl introduced him to the Spanish dancer Argentina and played Bach for him on “the old classic clavichord.”)<sup>46</sup> Whatever the contribution of each to the finished poem, it testifies to mutual enthusiasm and encouragement. And since Beryl’s notable translations were to be from the Italian of Svevo and Moravia, one might take note of Celia Goodman’s belief “that it was on [Arthur’s] suggestion that Beryl translated *The Confessions of Zeno* and Moravia’s novella *Agostino*.”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Waley, *The Originality of Japanese Civilization* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1929, 1941), 12-14.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Waley, *Japanese Poetry: The Uta* (London: Clarendon Press, 1919; Lund Humphries, 1959). The supposedly comprehensive grammar is a matter of not quite 7 pages. Waley’s notion of the easiness of classical Japanese poetry is not incorrect, if the reader can avoid having to deal with *kotobagaki*, allusions, commentaries, orthographic quirks, variant texts, and a variety of conventions.

<sup>46</sup> Yukio Yashiro, “Arthur Waley,” *Bulletin of Eastern Art* (Tokyo) 1940, no. 9:17-19.

<sup>47</sup> Goodman, “Reminiscences,” 35. Beryl’s first translation from Svevo (pseudonym for Ettore Schmitz) was the short story “The Hoax,” published in 1929, the year after Svevo’s death. So far as I can determine, the author and his translator never met.

Certainly, their relationship was unconventional—perhaps even unconventional as “unconventional relationships” go. They kept separate apartments at many periods—at the beginning to mollify Arthur’s mother. Beryl was conspicuously not interested in housekeeping (she was to remark loudly of Alison Robinson, the later Alison Waley, “She . . . COOKS . . . divinely!”—one of the few passages in Alison’s autobiography one is tempted to believe unconditionally).<sup>48</sup> Both “the Waleys,” as one may as well call them, had the reputation of keeping an exceptionally frugal table. Economy of time, more than of money, may well have been the motive; writers who have never had to devote themselves to domestic chores can have little idea of the amount of creative energy they can consume, the example of Emily Brontë to the contrary. Guests invited to supper were offered an invariable meal of tinned beans accompanied by hothouse grapes and good wine, or, more often, taken to neighborhood restaurants, which were of somewhat higher caliber when Beryl was present than when Arthur was the sole host. Was there an element of show in the scanty dinners? Even ascetics need some calories to survive. Celia Goodman once saw Beryl mix a spoonful of sugar into an egg and eat it raw; the combination may not be so unpalatable as it sounds—no more so than unbaked cake batter, and Beryl was always a child at heart. If not in private quite the gourmet, Beryl was by no means indifferent to what she ate. Her childhood memories included the “lovely buns” made by her grandmother’s old family servant (*TF*, 7); her letters to Arthur from Ceylon are full of complaints about her meals. Her fondness for serving weak tea in dainty cups enraged some of Arthur’s friends, who took it as unbearable affectation, and they were enraged further when she forbade tobacco in her rooms and offered herbal cigarettes as a substitute.<sup>49</sup> None of this would deserve much notice were it not that the Waleys’ dining habits figure so largely in other people’s reminiscences.

At the time that she met Arthur Waley, Beryl was living in a flat in Russell Square which she had had for a number of years. In 1936, Arthur, who had been living at the Russell Hotel during Beryl’s extended absence, took a flat at the top of 50 Gordon Square which had just been vacated by Clive and Vanessa Bell; it was to be the couple’s usual home until Beryl’s death. After their move, they had the help of a devoted Irish maid, Mrs. May Thomson, who is mentioned in one of Beryl’s letters and is remembered fondly by the Waley family.

<sup>48</sup> Alison Waley, *A Half*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> Brenan. As in literature, Beryl was ahead of her time.

Whether the couple engaged in physical relations was a subject for speculation by acquaintances. Gerald Brenan thought Beryl's sexual nature "ambiguous"<sup>50</sup>—and then there was the strange history of her marriage. But brief passages from two of the letters from Ceylon suggest that they did—or had done so—or at least that Beryl was not devoid of sexual coquetry toward Arthur. That, in any event, she had "a full sex-life" is the settled opinion of one of my female correspondents. As regards Arthur, more than one of my informants has suggested that there was a homosexual element in his makeup. The novelist Francis King recounts his impression of Arthur as "fastidious, cerebral and (in my view) essentially homosexual," and remembers having been introduced to a "youngish" male with whom, he was told, Waley had been in love.<sup>51</sup> There is perhaps much to be said for the notion. Whether rendered by Waley or, more recently, by Edward Seidensticker, the *Tale of Genji* is one of those works that inevitably reflect a good deal of the translator. Waley's friends believed that he identified himself with its eponymous hero (female friends on occasion went the step further) but failed to perceive that, even more than a second self, the hero is also a love object to Waley. It is Waley who invests him, as a lover invests the image of a beloved, with charm, with humor, with exuberant boyishness and with some portion of the appealing vulnerability that persists in his powerful middle age, and gives him an irresistible voice. English literature would be the poorer had he not done so. The great, sublimated passion of Beryl's old age was the Bharata Natya dancer Shanta Rao—a passion which, to be sure, she shared with other admirers of the beautiful young woman's artistry. In temperament Arthur and Beryl were well matched.

Arthur is supposed at the beginning to have asked Beryl several times to marry him. (When asked at the end of her life why he did not marry her then, he replied, "After so many years, what would be the point?")<sup>52</sup> The relationship remained formally an open one (Alison Robinson, then still Alison Grant, was overjoyed when she first learned that Arthur was not married). And they had their differences. But friends who knew them in their maturity saw Arthur and Beryl as a devoted, happy couple, and this impression is borne out by the series of letters, in the Rutgers collec-

<sup>50</sup> Still suffering from his unhappy love affair with Carrington, Gerald Brenan abstained from sexual relations with his wife during much of their marriage and may have been inclined to suspect his own situation shared by others.

<sup>51</sup> Francis King (letter to the author).

<sup>52</sup> Donald Keene (telephone conversation with the author).

tion, which she wrote to him during her travels in 1948-49 and again in 1951. Her eagerness for his letters, written with as much regularity as hers, is unfeigned—as is her disappointment when they are delayed.<sup>53</sup> She signs herself “Twinkles,” “Beast,” “Beasts,” “Busby.” He calls her “Beasts,” “Beloved Animals,” “Darling Pet Baboon”; also “Minima Egregia” and “Minima.” (An address book which he gave her is inscribed “Animalibus carissimis, Jan. 1957”; another is “Animalibus minibus.”) She calls him “Keeper,” “Beloved Keeper,” “Darling Keeper Takamori,”<sup>54</sup> “Keeper of Beasts.” She speaks repeatedly of her longing to be with him again and to talk with him for hours about her adventures, which, one senses, would mean much less to her without him to tell them to. It is decidedly not for her convenience or on whim that she is away from him: while in Ceylon, she has lost the crowns on two front teeth, has injured both feet but is managing to walk, suffers loneliness, a cold, diarrhea and insect bites. (Her letters are frank about irritations, but in all she complains very little and never asks for sympathy beyond her due, or even up to it. She informs him of what she has seen. She is an admirable traveler; it would be difficult not to like the writer of these letters.)

In the twenties, however, neither had quite “settled down.” A letter to Beryl, dated January 2, 1927, from “Marthe” in France replies to what must have been a request for advice: should Beryl remain with her “friend in London” or should she abandon him for her “friend in Magdeburg?”<sup>55</sup> Marthe says tactfully that when one is over thirty (Beryl is now forty-seven) one looks for other qualities in a man than the ability to inspire romantic love—character, steadiness, etc.—and advises her, should she decide to stay with the friend in London, to stick by her decision. It is hard to know, of course, whether Beryl’s query had arisen from long-standing

<sup>53</sup> Only a few of his letters are in the collection, preserved with hers because they had been returned to him by the post. Whether the remainder still exist or have been destroyed, I do not know. The collection does contain numerous postcards which he sent her from his own journeys; one such, addressed to her at 43 Gordon Square and sent from Majorca in May 1932 says in almost its entirety: “Don’t you think Fiordalisa is a pretty name? It is borne by many women in Marco Polo’s family.”

<sup>54</sup> Evidently an invention. The given name Takamori appears half a dozen times in Haga Yaichi’s standard Japanese biographical index, but none of its bearers was a well-known poet or the like. A “hunch” that Takamori might be a character in one of Waley’s *no* plays turned out to be unfounded.

<sup>55</sup> Very probably the conductor Walter Beck, with whom it seems almost certain that she had an affair. The letter from Ilse Molzan, discussed earlier, links him with Magdeburg. It is of interest that she remained on good terms with Beck, from whom there are letters and cards in the collection extending over two decades after this time.

unhappiness or from a moment's impulse; it is important that she valued the reply enough to save it.

Arthur and Beryl traveled both separately and together to places on the European continent. He was an enthusiastic skier, and after he retired from the British Museum in 1930 he would generally spend the first three months of the year in Switzerland; April he would often spend with Beryl—if she was not off on a longer journey—in Italy. They would also visit Kitzbühel together, or Davos, where they stayed with her friend the Indologist Alice Boner and Alice's sisters. But they traveled only once together outside Europe, in Autumn of 1927, for six weeks to Istanbul. One quite understands Arthur's impatience at being separated from his books and work for so long a time; in Switzerland he could ski during the day and work at night. Thereafter, she made her longer journeys without him. It is natural to wonder whether her fondness for them may not—at least initially—have caused dissension. He, for his part, found other female company during her long absences. In 1929, while Beryl was in Morocco, he began affairs with two young women, one known to his relatives as "Australia," the other as "New Zealand"; when she returned, he broke off with both of them. She brought him a silver ring which he wore for the rest of her lifetime.<sup>56</sup> This was the same year in which he published her "Urashima" poem.

Beryl de Zoete's journeys to Africa and Asia gave her spiritual sustenance. From the late 1920s, and increasingly throughout the years prior to World War II, the Indonesian archipelago in general, Bali in particular, was a gathering-place for talented researchers: Claire Holt and her Dutch companion, the art historian Dr. Willem Stutterheim ("Stutt" in Claire's letters); the anthropologists Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson; Miguel and Rose Covarrubias; the musicologist and composer Colin McPhee and his then wife Jane Belo; Beryl de Zoete. Under Dutch government, Bali was still relatively "unspoiled," although its visitors invariably expressed fear that it would not long remain so, a half-primitive, half-sophisticated tropical paradise whose inhabitants were artists by nature. It was visited by cruise ships and the yachts of millionaires, by Cole Porter and Leopold Stokowski. Host and guide to scholars, celebrities, and millionaires was Walter Spies. He was Beryl's instructor in things Ba-

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Waley, 19.

lines and in this way collaborator in her book, which his photographs illustrate. A museum in Bali honors his encouragement of native art.

Spies (1895-1942) was to die when the ship transferring him from war-time internment in Sumatra to internment in Ceylon was torpedoed by the Japanese; in Bali, a museum honors his encouragement of native art. He was a multiple expatriate: born in Moscow of a German family, he was interned in the Urals during World War I, although his family had been settled in Russia for centuries. After the War, he and his brothers and sisters—all except one musician—moved to Hellerau and studied at the Dalcroze school; it was probably there that Beryl first made his acquaintance. At the home of the pianist-composer Eduard Erdmann, Spies met the musical greats: in addition to Artur Schnabel, under whom he studied piano, Busoni, Pfitzner, Hindemith, Krenek, Haba, etc. He took painting lessons from Oskar Kokoschka. In Berlin, where he had gone intending to take up the study of ancient Egyptian and Coptic, he came by chance in contact with the film world and began to work as artistic adviser to several of the filmmakers. In 1934 he received a bequest from F. W. Murnau, large enough for him to live on for two years. Charlie Chaplin, who visited him in Bali, is among the contributors to a memorial volume.<sup>57</sup> Spies was one of those people who seem to have been gifted at birth by the fairies, combining a degree of genuine achievement in several fields with an unaffected charm that made his friends eager to think him even more talented than he was.

In 1923 Spies, “disgusted” by the atmosphere of the film world and feeling generally ill at ease, set out on his travels and—again by chance, he says—became “Kapellmeister” at the court of a Javanese sultan. In 1927 he moved for good to Bali. The photographs taken of him there show him impeccably blond, impeccably handsome, vigorous. He was buoyantly cheerful; but there is a hint of sardonic humor in the lines of his face, and it is enormously attractive. He supported himself in Bali by painting and by unabashed sponging on the rich. A certain Mrs. Corrigan, for example, arrived in her private yacht, made his acquaintance, and paid some of his debts. So did Barbara Hutton. He would rent out his house when he was short of funds, moving into humbler quarters; when he had money—

<sup>57</sup> Hans Rhodius, *Walter Spies: Schönheit und Reichtum des Lebens: Eine Autobiographie in Briefen mit ergänzenden Erinnerungen* (Den Haag: L. J. C. Boucher, foreword dated 1964). The volume of over 600 pages includes letters by Spies and reminiscences and sketches by more than forty contributors. It is the work which Rhodius proposed that Beryl compile (see below) and is the source of my biographical information on Spies.

generally from a patron—he would build a new one, and thus gradually he accumulated a stock of five or six guest houses which could be let for pay. Beryl was one of his tenants.

Guests came; they also departed. Like Arthur Waley, whom in some respects he resembled, he needed to maintain his distance. He disliked authority, intimacy, and being thought to take things seriously. When his paintings were praised, he would emphasize his amateur status.<sup>58</sup> The denial of seriousness was self-protective, a counterpart to Waley's sometimes public displays of absorption in his oriental texts. "Walter Spies's choice of Bali, and of a continuing light involvement with Balinese male youth, seemed part of his repudiation of the kind of dominance and submission, authority and dependence, which he associated with European culture. . . . The very dissociated impersonality of Bali gave him the kind of freedom that he sought," was Margaret Mead's assessment of him.<sup>59</sup> Claire Holt said much the same thing but also suggests the idea of his being—in an opposite way from Beryl—transparent: if he avoided intimate involvement with anyone, he also made no demands.

It is unfortunate that the collection at Rutgers contains no letters written by Beryl at this period: one would like to know what she said about Spies, especially to Waley, as well as everything else that could not have found its way into the book. One can imagine the collaborators together: pure will in the company of pure disengagement (itself the manifestation of an experienced will), each of the co-workers, for different reasons, refusing to view life apart from play. In a letter to his mother, written shortly after the book had been published, Spies speaks of having "andauernd Zankereien und Streitigkeiten darüber." But despite the quarrels, "jetzt ist alles wieder gut," and he would like to write another book with Beryl. He declares her style unbelievably good: "sehr lebendig und teilweise sehr schön."<sup>60</sup> He was indeed well pleased with the volume, was delighted with the good reviews it received, and wrote—repeatedly, one would guess—to friends, apologizing for its expensiveness, which prevented his making presents of it. (Beryl made presents of it, expensive or not.)

She had an affectionate relationship with Claire (who called her "Dear-

<sup>58</sup> McPhee, 57, thought his paintings "enchanting and dreamlike . . . half Persian miniature, half Rousseau." Many of the paintings were sold to Hollywood collections; Rhodius reproduces a number of them. Spies made a point of painting only when he felt like it. He was nevertheless pleased when the art critic Kaspar Niehaus wrote seriously about his pictures (Rhodius, 386-87).

<sup>59</sup> Rhodius, 359.

<sup>60</sup> Rhodius, 378.

est Brilliantinchen"). Margaret Mead, by contrast, resented her with a vehemence that years must scarcely have diminished. The small colony of foreign researchers was divided into the aesthetes and the social scientists. Together with Bateson and a Balinese secretary, Mead was engaged in timing Balinese trance-dances with a stopwatch. Much later, she wrote:

This brought us into some conflict with our artist-hosts, a conflict that was intensified when Jane Belo first arrived and rebelled against what she called "cold and analytical" procedures. Beryl, who had an acid tongue and a gift for destructive criticism, effectively satirized this conflict between science and art, and I identified her with the witch, a prevailing Balinese figure. And so, periodically, I would note moments of special felicity in my diary with the initials *r.p.*, which stood for *rangda padem*—the witch is dead—and conveyed my feeling that the influence of Beryl and the malign influences of Balinese culture, which emphasized nameless fear as a sanction, were temporarily in abeyance.<sup>61</sup>

The passage is quoted in part by Hilary Spurling, who neglects, however, to mention that Mead, humorless, never forgot or forgave a slight: more than fifty years after the sorority girls at De Pauw University had spurned her and made fun of her clothes, she still felt the hurt, and recorded the details in her autobiography. Beryl, by contrast, kept personal grudges, if she had any, out of her writing, rising above even material injuries with graciousness. At the worst, as in the case of a former hostess who refused to return her notebooks, she might omit to accompany your name in the index with an effusive description. Whatever she may have said in her letters home, she says nothing of Mead in print, not even by indirection.

Celia Goodman, who first met Beryl in Kitzbühel in March of 1938 (shortly before the Indian journey of that year) says: "She could be rather sharp. . . . By 'sharp' I mean crushing and disapproving. But I did not ever find her malicious." But she was "very affectionate: it was her warmth that first drew me to her so strongly. I always found her lovable." She describes her also as "unconventional and unworldly. . . . Immensely generous. . . . Beryl had a great sense of fun and a wonderful sense of humor. She could be very funny, though not exactly witty. . . ." <sup>62</sup>

It was not her sharpness that annoyed some of Beryl's circle, but other

<sup>61</sup> Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earliest Years* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 321. Unlike Beryl, who perceived beauty in the dancing of old women, Mead was greatly pleased when, for her benefit, beautiful young women were made to substitute in a dance traditionally performed by old women.

<sup>62</sup> Letters to the author.



qualities. If she could overlook an injury, she could also ignore suggestions and hints—sometimes strong ones. Sir Harold Acton thought her “possessive: she tried to appropriate the people she liked and keep them under her wing. She was wont, as Berenson put it, ‘to stake a claim.’ If she liked a house, apart from its proprietor, she resolved to stay there indefinitely.” Elsewhere, the same author, who emphasizes his fondness for her “despite the minor irritations,” characterizes her as one who “could be strangely insensitive to the convenience of others, as she could be to her own. . . . She could be very demanding, and she lost friends in that way.”<sup>63</sup> Gerald Brenan mentions that while a guest during World War II, when fuel was rationed, she would thoughtlessly use up all the heated water or sunbathe in her underwear, to the scandal of passers-by. It was said earlier that she was often thought affected; at fault may have been—at least in part—a theatrical presentation of self, in social contexts the inappropriateness of which she failed to observe; or, along with the black, fantastically dyed fringe of hair, affectation may have belonged to an exceptionally determined denial of time: women do not have many resources in this area, unlike Brenan, for example, who took a young mistress. Of what she wanted to have thought graces she was not always able to gauge the effect. In his obituary Tribute in the *Times* (March 21, 1962),<sup>64</sup> Acton speaks of her “curious charm, so primevally innocent . . .”; what some saw as affectation was the other side of it.

Beryl’s silliness—another charge against her—was in flower during World War II, in the form of her enthusiasm for Russia and Stalin. (The reports of it are well borne out by her notebooks of the time, in the Rutgers collection.) There were many who shared it with her, including Waley, on both sides of the Atlantic. The impatience that was felt at the failure of the Allies to open a Second Front was, in Beryl’s case, compounded with admiration for a government which deemed ballet an “art essential to life,” in contrast to the British, who drafted into the army their best choreographer.<sup>65</sup> Waley, as might be expected, was the more quickly disillusioned by the Soviet Union, but by 1947 Beryl was publishing acerbic comments about a Russian visitor to England.<sup>66</sup> Her letters from Trieste in 1951 are even more disapproving of the Communists. But it was her enthusiasms that impressed her friends and that they remembered.

<sup>63</sup> Acton, *More Memoirs of an Aesthete*, 29; letter to the author.

<sup>64</sup> As an example of her “humorous caprices” he mentions a well-known instance: demanding yak’s milk at a party.

<sup>65</sup> “Frederick Ashton,” in *TF*. The article was originally published in *Horizon*.

<sup>66</sup> “A Russian Opinion on Sadler’s Wells,” in *Ballet*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (January 1947).

One of Waley's great favorites among Beryl's writings was the lecture she gave at Dartington in March of 1941, in which she recalled her visit two years earlier to Siwa.<sup>67</sup> The essay exemplifies the form of her best writing: musical, or perhaps choreographic. What matters is pace, variety, tone, contrast, and spaciousness. Motifs are sounded, repeated in rondo form, developed with repetition; and there is the kind of kinesthetic appeal I have earlier mentioned. She liked to incorporate in her books sections of her diaries (sometimes, confusingly, diaries written years apart, in any case haphazardly dated, sometimes "15 March 1939," sometimes "Saturday"). Here, save for a prefatory paragraph, the essay consists entirely of diary entries—one would guess well amplified, since it seems unlikely that she would have had the time or opportunity on the spot to copy out, as she did, a long quotation from another's notes.

Siwa is an oasis in the Libyan desert; in ancient times it was the seat of the oracle of Jupiter Ammon, visited by Alexander the Great. There is a prelude, in which Beryl and her companion, the woman doctor Mrs. Garvice, are driven to Siwa from Mersa Matruh, where there had been howling winds and military barbed wire. The approach invokes sensations ("We rose shivering above the sand dunes"), sounds ("Once too, we heard a great sound of birds, like seagulls"), colors, tastes, and recollections ("When we passed among [the mountains], they were no longer blue; their pink or golden crests curled over milky white walls, rather like those toadstool cakes one used to buy").

Siwa itself is a contradiction: in its center the earth-colored towers of its houses; in the distance mountains that have "a visionary quality; the white in them shines out." Here are those moments of movement that Beryl renders so well. As the travelers climb up through the streets into the town, "A man on a donkey mounted too; fowls flew into the upper openings in the walls, a woman in splendid blue cloth, completely muffled, rushed into shelter directly we appeared; a little girl's face appeared in a tiny square window, her hair beautifully plaited in myriads of tiny plaits, hanging in a mat over her forehead. Little boys followed us. . . ." They meet the characters of their story: the heavy-handed, vulgar Egyptian governor; an old man named Ali Ford (sic), with a blind mother who is a weaver; and Aisha, the former wife or mistress of an Englishman. Unable to bear returning to the life of a Siwa woman, unable as a woman to live alone, "which in Siwa is as shocking as it would be in England for her to live with

<sup>67</sup> Published posthumously in *TF*.

ten husbands," Aisha has solved her problem by declaring herself a man, wearing man's dress and entertaining men at night by dancing and singing. She is strong-minded and original, her face "somewhat coarsened by drinking methylated spirits." There is a visit to the caravan-leader's womenfolk. A visit to the "incredibly slovenly" club of the Egyptian functionaries provides a vignette of Beryl's companion which Waley quoted as "inspired": "Mrs. Garvice, very precise in appearance, sat waiting under her small flowered parasol for English radio news which did not come." Dancers are brought and villagers gather around them. In the account of the next day the motifs of the previous ones are repeated more richly: ascents, domestic interiors, dancing, strong drink, Aisha's coarseness and intelligence. She quotes song-texts, noting at one point "*Repetition of one element of the melody, a sort of accumulation of energy. . . .*" The next morning Aisha "this lonely woman," to whom Beryl has "taken a great fancy," and who, it is not hard to see, must represent to Beryl an aspect of her own spirit, comes with a gift to say goodbye. With each repetition, a motif is expanded, its implications unfolded further; and here, with her last appearance, we learn the full meaning of what it is for Aisha to earn her living as a man: that she has made herself a male prostitute.

And then there is a serene coda. In the afternoon, Beryl bathes in one of the warm circular springs in the oasis. In its depths she sees a scene that is exquisitely varied and beautiful: "An emerald fairy forest, lovely glades with tall swaying green stalagmites . . . a bubbly cushion of moss . . . A pale green snow-field, washing up against green peaks. . . . Bubbles perpetually rise in a crystal fountain. . . . One can sit for hours . . . and then plunge in again and swim in the sunshine and complete solitude."

During the war years, Waley volunteered for employment at a patriotic and tedious job in the Censor's office; Beryl remained with him in London throughout those dangerous times. In 1943, one of the two young women with whom Arthur had had affairs during Beryl's absence in 1929 re-entered his life and resumed her pursuit of him. Alison Robinson had recently separated from her husband of a dozen years, with whom she had spent the early years of the war in New Zealand; she brought with her to London her son, John, born in 1932. At the time of the affair, she had been an attractive, slender, young woman, not yet thirty, with dark hair, long limbs, and heavy-lidded eyes. Born in New Zealand, she had come to England with literary ambitions. Characteristically, she claimed to have attended the same grammar school as Katherine Mansfield; she also

claimed to have trained to be a dancer until her career was cut short by a spine injury at the age of fifteen. This may be true, but one cannot help feeling that if Beryl had been a nurse, Alison would have remembered having been educated to be a doctor. If Beryl hobnobbed with the likes of Kurt Jooss and wrote for *Ballet*, then Alison must have it that she herself had written an article on Kurt Joos (sic) for *Ballet Today*.<sup>68</sup> She was able to convince herself that Beryl had no claim on Arthur; beyond that, that Beryl made life difficult for Arthur—and there must at times have been much truth in the latter contention, when old age no doubt had exacerbated the extravagant side of Beryl's manner and symptoms of an inexplicable illness on occasion took the form of irrational, destructive behavior. Most of us, however, would be apt to be difficult if we found our companion of many years the object of another's obsession.

It may be unfair to judge the younger Alison by the older, bitterly triumphant self who wrote the autobiography in self-justification.<sup>69</sup> But—so much granted—intellectually, imaginatively, and emotionally, her horizons were narrow where Beryl's were wide. She had a bad habit of popping people into categories (the French, the English, etc.), and, rather worse, one of pretending that fiction was fact.<sup>70</sup> After Beryl's death, Arthur took her with him when he went to visit Ivy Compton-Burnett, among others, and Compton-Burnett's friends enjoyed her company; they attributed her penchant for saying things that were patently untrue to some terrible hurt she must have suffered.

Alison had the normal instincts for domesticity, in contrast to Beryl, who had none at all and for decades was content to live without an oven. If she went on an excursion with you, she could be counted upon to bring

<sup>68</sup> Alison's spine injury: *A Half*, 107. The article on Kurt Jooss: *ibid.*, 79. If the article was published, I have not been able to find it.

<sup>69</sup> Some subjects of self-justification: her new Zealand origin, her lack of friendships among the literary great, the warmth and normality of her family life, the possibility of her son's disapproval of her affair with Arthur Waley. Not the least of the lurid passages is one in which lifting a heavy object at the command of Beryl—or of Beryl's phantom, since it is not clear from the vague chronology of much of Alison's narrative whether the two women have met yet—brings on a miscarriage. From such chronology as does emerge, she must be close to fifty. Her son visits her in her sickroom and expresses his regret that now he will not have a half-brother by Waley. Other subjects for self-justification are the narrator's prominent mustache, to which two amusing chapters are devoted; and her culpability in the automobile accident in February 1966, in which Waley injured his spine, already weakened by cancer. This is not to say that her self-justification may not be correct, at least in some instances; it might be said, rather, that the topics that she addresses are those that cause her anxiety. For this reason, her chapters recounting Waley's distaste for "buggers" are highly interesting.

<sup>70</sup> This was stated independently of each other by a number of my correspondents.

sandwiches. She worshipped Arthur, although she understood his work no better than did many. (Did he really start up from her bed, crying “Yugao . . .”)? It is typical that in identifying Yugao as a character in *The Tale of Genji*, she gets the chapter number wrong.)<sup>71</sup> She perceived him from the first as in need of domestic attention. During the War, she gave him her own meat ration, which she dropped, already cooked, into the letter-slot of the flat at 50 Gordon Square.<sup>72</sup> The cold mutton-chop on the mat: could the offering be a metaphor for the relationship? One does wonder about his response.

Alison was brought to see Edith Sitwell, who wrote that she

thinks one has to be screwed up to the pitch at which one writes, the *whole* time,—otherwise one isn’t a writer. I told her if one was always at that pitch, one would have died a long time ago. And that I, personally, am an incredibly lazy (physically), greedy, platitudinous person, liking sleep and comfort in my off moments. And that I advised her to be the same. I understand that she is now making Arthur’s life hell, and that Bobbysoxer Beryl is furious. Poor girl, and there is something very nice about her, really.

(Letter of 29 April 1948, to William Plomer)<sup>73</sup>

Alison’s own narrative contains much evidence that Arthur tried to free himself of her. Ultimately, he may have been prevented not only by her persistence but by feelings that one can surmise: gratitude for favors and good times; compunction, towards her as well as Beryl; guilt for having at one time encouraged her or letting her think that he was doing so; compassion; some tenderness. Perhaps also fear of what she might be inspired to do if he broke off. If he dedicated entire books to others, he wrote out individual poems for her and told them he was dedicating them to her—so she says—and he slipped verses into her mailbox. He helped her decorate her flat with Georgette Boner’s illustrations to *Monkey*. He would take her on jaunts, hoping not to meet his friends. He must have felt he had found a solution, even if it was an uneasy one.

Whatever the disturbances in her private life—and surely she was disturbed<sup>74</sup>—Beryl’s writing can hardly have suffered. The obituary tribute by Dame Marie Rambert describes her as “for a time ballet critic for *The Daily Telegraph* and *Spectator* [error for the *New Statesman*]” (*Times*,

<sup>71</sup> Alison Waley, *A Half*, 26.

<sup>72</sup> Goodman, “Reminiscences,” 35.

<sup>73</sup> Sitwell, *Selected Letters*, 159.

<sup>74</sup> Alison claims that Beryl at one point offered to pay her way “to South America—to Mexico” (*A Half*, 106). The claim is not implausible, though the geography is not a strong point.

19 March 1962); her dance criticism appeared with some regularity in the *New Statesman* from 1946 through 1948. Some of her best and wittiest writing in the early postwar years appeared in Richard Buckle's *Ballet*.

Buckle ("Dickie" in Beryl's letters) published the first two issues of what was then a bimonthly (it later became mostly a monthly) in 1939, when he was twenty-three; whereupon he suspended publication "until after the War" and joined the army. He resumed promptly in January 1946, though the size was temporarily reduced to 8 pages because of the paper shortage. Three pages of the issue (No. 3) are devoted to "Genji Dances at the Festival of Red Leaves," an excerpt from Waley's *Tale of Genji* translation, accompanied by a drawing by Mervyn Peake of the naked torso of a dancer who looks decidedly Polynesian.<sup>75</sup> By the middle of the following year, the journal looked sleek and prosperous, with colored advertisements for "Feminine Hygiene—free booklet by Nurse Drew," cigarettes and cold preventives, in addition to announcements from dance academies. Throughout its existence, it drew distinguished contributors: Lincoln Kirstein, Edwin Denby, the photographer Baron, Ronald Searle, Boris Kochno, Duncan Grant, Cecil Beaton, Ivor Guest, Sacheverell Sitwell, Lucian Freud, etc. etc. Buckle paid his contributors well, exhausting his personal fortune and such additional support from his friends as he felt he could accept. The journal went into bankruptcy shortly after the October 1952 issue. Beryl joined the group of creditors at the liquidation proceedings and "in the middle of a mildly heated argument about procedure," Buckle wrote, "waived her claim to the hundred pounds we owed her—which she could ill afford to lose—and in the still, clear voice I have never known her to raise, began to pay an intermittently audible tribute to me. . . . 'Absurd to talk of failure . . . tremendous success. . . . Money naturally of no account. . . . fatal on the other hand to separate music from dancing. Ballet . . . opera . . . Nietzsche . . . Mozart . . . the *Ramayana* . . . .'"<sup>76</sup>

Buckle said that he liked to think of Beryl "sitting at her desk in the calm apartment<sup>77</sup> above the trees . . . the eight cabbalistic silver rings on

<sup>75</sup> Waley had thoroughly disliked the colored frontispiece, quite of the wrong period, which accompanied some editions of his *Genji*, but by this time he must have been inured.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Buckle, *The Adventures of a Ballet Critic* (London: Cresset Press, 1953), 269. I have omitted the opening words of Beryl's remarks, which are along the same lines as those quoted. Ellipsis points in the quotation of her speech are in Buckle's original.

<sup>77</sup> The East Asian art historian James Cahill, who met Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete early in 1956, describes it as "wonderfully disheveled." Beryl, probably not well, was uncharacteristically silent, but Waley was amiable and forthcoming, and the visitor's memory is of a very pleasant meeting.

her fingers clinking together comfortably as her practised fountain-pen traversed the paper." After her death, he described her as "a kind of intellectual Circe . . . the Witch of Gordon Square."<sup>78</sup> He was fond of her, introduced her to close friends, and went to the theatre with her.

The journal maintained a decidedly frisky tone, mixing satires with history, reportage, criticism, cartoons, and reviews. Among Beryl's contributions is an illustrated review of the Harringay Circus (Vol. 9 No. 2; Feb. 1950), written under the name of Opal Overtone. "Gilbert Houcke's sextuplet of tigers, though they roar at their glamorous trainer from time to time, have an air of only doing it to oblige. . . . [One wonders] how he found time to train himself as well as them into such perfect physical form and temper."

She contributed, altogether, more than two dozen items, of various lengths, subjects, and degrees of seriousness. For the first postwar issue, previously mentioned, she wrote a delighted notice of "Gene Kelly in 'Anchors Aweigh,'" comparing his dance with a child partner to the Balinese "Leko" she had seen danced by Mario and Goesti Raka. (Vol 2 No. 1; June, 1946), the first full-sized issue, published her translation of Heinrich von Kleist's "Puppets and Dancers" (reprinted in *TF*), together with "The Dancing Horses," a translation from the Chinese by Arthur Waley. She wrote about a performance by amateur Javanese dancers (Vol. 2 No. 3; July 1946); on an exhibition, at the British Museum, of photographs of Indian sculpture (Vol. 4 No. 3; Sept. 1947); on Katherine Dunham's "Caribbean Rhapsody" (Vol. 5 No. 7; July, 1948), mentioning that in Malabar in 1938 she had seen demonstrations of a self-defense technique of which a dance from Martinique reminded her. She wrote on the Edinburgh Festival of Folkdance and Song (Vol. 5 No. 8; Aug-Sept. 1948—it reminded her, though just in passing, of some things she had seen in Bali), "Folklore in Switzerland" (Vol. 6 No. 3; Dec. 1948), and "Macedonian Dancers in London" (Vol. 11 No. 2; March 1951). There was a warm portrait of Vera Volkova, the great ballet teacher who was recently deceased (Vol. 11 No. 1; Jan.-Feb. 1951). Beryl saw the great Russian ballerina Galina Ulanova in Florence early in June of 1951 and reported on her glowingly, although there were other aspects of the Maggio Musicale which disappointed her (Vol. 11 No. 8; Sept. 1951). The same issue contains, separately, a one-sentence riposte to Edwin Denby; writing of Ulanova in the previous issue, he had said that Beryl, more enthusiastic than he, had "exclaimed . . . that she had never seen dancing before." "If

<sup>78</sup> Richard Buckle, *In the Wake of Diaghilev* (London: Collins, 1981), 60.

I were not familiar with Eastern dancing," Beryl says in reproof, "I might have made the remark Edwin Denby attributes to me . . . but all our talk was of classical ballet in the West." Reminiscences of some of her travels, including portions of her books in progress on India and Ceylon, were published in a series titled, at Buckle's suggestion, "The 1,000,000 mile Journey."<sup>79</sup>

As a critic, Beryl tended more to like things than not; when she disapproved, however, she was very frank. Her admiration for Ashton did not prevent her judging his *Illuminations* a "smart masquerade" unsuited to Rimbaud (Vol. 10 No. 2; Sept. 1950). Discussing Uday Shankar ("The 1,000,000 mile Journey: I," in Vol. 9 No. 2; Feb. 1950),<sup>80</sup> she remarks that Ram Gopal's "study has been profounder, though his gift for choreography seems to me less than Shankar's . . .," and she speaks finally of the dances of both as "translations" in which "something indispensable has been lost." Strictures of this nature seem mild enough but were strongly felt by Ram Gopal, for one. Gopal was unabashedly vain, so that his friendship could be a two-edged sword.

The journey to India and Ceylon which began at the end of 1948 and culminated in Beryl de Zoete's last two books would have tried the endurance of a younger, less determined traveler; Beryl passed her seventieth birthday in the course of it. Reference has been made previously to her letters to Arthur written on this journey; Rutgers possesses almost 60 of them, probably the majority. India gave her Shanta, and also Balasarawati; Ceylon, scenes of beauty that enriched the imagination but, ultimately, frustration. Under one aspect, her Ceylonese adventure might be described as the lengthy series of attempts to witness a full-scale Kohomba Kankaria, the great Kandyan magic drama—"almost an obsession," in her words: the final chapter of the book bears the rueful title "The Wounded Boar Flies Home," an allusion not solely to her physical state.<sup>81</sup> In Ceylon,

<sup>79</sup> She was unenthusiastic about the title, but Waley supported Buckle. There are 8 installments, and there might well have been more had it not been for her illness and the collapse of the journal. Her last contributions were printed in September 1951; others wrote about the visit to England of Balinese dancers, in 1952.

<sup>80</sup> Another Dartington connection; Shankar was at Dartington in 1934. The article also includes the description of her early airplane journey mentioned in the Chronology.

<sup>81</sup> "I believe that as many as 60 dancers and 120 drummers may take part in a really first class *Kohomba Kankaria*, and from the magnificence of the much smaller spectacle I saw I can imagine what the grandeur of the ritual can be. . . . I long to have the privilege of assisting at a complete performance of this astonishing and beautiful ritual. . . . It was on the fantastic hill of Hantana which dominates Kandy that the first *Kohomba Kankaria* was held, and the rock of



she lodged at first with a couple called Elston and Frieda Fernando (disguised in the book as "Ignatia and Leston Mendez"), to whom she had been recommended by Ram Gopal. She arrived there on December 1. On February 26, shortly before her first departure for India, she unwittingly offended these hosts. The incident ended in tears on both sides, and her pain is recorded candidly in the book ("I was . . . shattered by the discovery of my alienness, and of all the susceptibilities I must have hurt in return for so much kindness"), as well as in her letters of February 26 and February 28.

The letters give an interesting impression of her concerns and of the ways she spends her days. In Ceylon, she moves constantly between Colombo and Kandy, with repeated side excursions into the hills (for example, to see rock sculptures), or along the coast. Harry Pieris, glossed in the index to the book as "painter, my favourite companion in Ceylon," is described in the letter of January 24. He had studied in Paris and London, is one of ten children and is "very leftist." She liked him very much, his paintings rather less so, and was much interested in his family, who saw nothing wrong in squeezing the peasants. One of the many visits that he made with her was to Kenneth Clark, who was on the ship *Orcades* as it lay in harbor. The meeting with Clark gives rise to the infrequent catty remark: Harry had "hated" him, and the ship was "a kind of floating Butlin's camp" (February 15, 1949). (Beryl, it appears from another letter, owned Butlin's shares.)<sup>82</sup> There are directions to Arthur regarding financial matters: some bonds must be attended to—and have the cheques come from *Ballet* and the *New Statesman*? Meeting the American dancer Ragini Devi, she can't help noting that the dancer is being supported by a Rockefeller grant, whereas poor Beast—! She muses about house-painting—perhaps the rooms should be done at the same time as the exterior, and her bedroom is to be cream, but it can wait if Arthur would rather not bother. Responding, presumably to a query: "Chocolate will keep—but do give some away. Mo will like it for her son—and perhaps herself—and May might have a month's company for Barbara." "Mo" is her name for Ali-

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Urugalle . . . still bears the mark of the arrow with which the Male Raja killed the boar under whose guise the god Rahu had lured him over the sea to Lanka" (*TF*, 135; the essay, "An Episode in Kandyan Dance," was first published in *Asiatische Forschungen*, 1954).

<sup>82</sup> Beryl on the subject of these holiday camps sounds not unlike the embarrassed idealist who finds himself expediently obliged to support sweatshops or a dictatorship: "Voluntary obligations have quite a winning air; one has heard that at Butlin camps, the costly substitutes in our industrial world for religious pilgrimages, injunctions which at ordinary times provoke rebellion are cheerfully obeyed by the initiates" (*OM*, 60).

son: nothing said here about Alison that does not express good will, whatever Beryl's private thoughts on the matter. In a letter of September 29, responding to one of Arthur's: "You did not tell me . . . whether Mo's son had returned. But of course he must have." In contrast are her feelings on the subject of the Ceylonese librarians and museum officials who obstructed her work: "They are dreadful people—the chief officials—of a dog in the mangerness hard to beat." With the logic or illogic of a lover, she adds, "How different from my Keeper."

Arthur writes frequently, but the mail is unreliable. Throughout, Beryl longs for his letters. From late February to mid-March, he is staying with the Boners in Davos. On March 8, she writes to him from the YWCA in Madras. A visitor has asked her age; asked, in turn, to guess, he says, "'70.' . . . So you see what an Eastern journey has done for my appearance."

March 12: She is in Calcutta. She will visit Dora Barry's grave in memory of William Hickey. (Is there anything that Beryl and Arthur *haven't* read?) April 26: She will fly to Bangalore on May 6. A "remarkably good" Bharata Natya dancer is there, to whom she has an introduction. The dancer is Shanta, of whom Beryl writes on May 11 that she is a "marvellous creature," reminding her a little of Argentina. In general, Beryl, who had been uncomfortable in the heat and worried about expenses, is very much happier now that she is in Malabar. Alice Boner comes to join her. Arthur, soon to be off to Paris, is bade convey her love to Wm. Lemaître "and of course to Poulenc if you see him."

The address portion of her July 17 airletter is annotated "Not at 26 Woburn Square." Beryl's handwriting *is* rather a challenge, and she has omitted the house number. On July 17 and July 28, she writes from Mahabalipuram, where she has bathed nude at nightfall. An embarrassing colic does not stop her from going to admire a Jain mural. Arthur has gone to stay at Dartington, as he and Beryl often did, for weeks at a time in the summer, and Beryl says that she wishes Elmhirst would "take the plunge about Beichan." "Beichan" is "The Ballad of Young Beichan"—doubtless the "ballad play for puppets" which Richard Buckle mentions,<sup>83</sup> a drama in agreeable verse, with an Eleanor Farjeon—esque plot. (The hero, who has a dog named Hector, is saved by his true bride from marriage with a false one.) Beryl also wonders whether Elmhirst might not help with making up Shanta's company: she is already beginning to gather support for Shanta.

<sup>83</sup> Buckle, *Adventures*, 19.

Another great dancer, Balasaraswati, had been ill but gave her first recital in three years on July 23, for Beryl and Ram Gopal. "What an artist," Beryl writes on July 27. A great rupture was to take place between Beryl and Ram after her return to Ceylon, but there is no hint of it in *The Other Mind*; rather, there is nothing but praise for him. He is "the only first-class male exponent" of *Bharata Natya* (*OM*, 176); it is his "irresistible charm" that persuades Balasaraswati, upon their meeting, "to show us some mimed passages from a Krishna song. . ." (*OM*, 184). Was it because a reconciliation had taken place; or was it that no cloud must be allowed to obscure the memory of the moment when Balasaraswati danced and "Ram Gopal, who sat next me [sic], murmured the translation of the *mudras* into my ear. How beautifully he did it, quite lost in delight at her dancing!" (*OM*, 186). The letter is postmarked Colombo; she has returned to Ceylon and is staying with Harry Pieris's brother Richard and Richard's wife Sheila, whom she likes very much. (Conscious of having offended in other quarters, she will be pleased indeed when, following a second jaunt to India, she learns that they want her back.)

In Ceylon, she is increasingly unhappy and irritable. Frieda's husband has had a nervous breakdown, and Frieda herself had failed to answer Beryl's note suggesting a meeting. On August 26, a storm breaks; Beryl has received two letters, from Ram and from Frieda, accusing her of having slandered them in a letter written to someone in England: Frieda never wants to see her again.<sup>84</sup> (There is only one reference to this in her published writing. On August 28, she hiked up Hantana Hill through spikey grasses. "This journey . . . cleared my mind and put me out of reach of the spiritual arrows which have so plentifully rained upon me" [*Ceylon*, 289]. The thorns tore half her skirt away and left her legs severely scratched.)

She saw Shanta again in Malabar in September, with even greater delight; returning to Ceylon before the month's end to see—at last—a grand Kohomba Kankaria, for which she had offered to defray the expenses, she learned that no preparations had been made for it. It never took place. By October 1, she had a bad cold and a cough; her letter says that she is staying indoors reading Gogol. There is much mention in the letters from about this time on of her friend Pipsy Wadia in Bombay, one of Shanta's staunch

<sup>84</sup> Who the supposed recipient of the offending missive was supposed to be is never said. In consequence of the rupture, Frieda failed to return Beryl's notebooks, which had been left with her for safekeeping. (It is possible, however, that they were returned later.) Beryl also suffered the loss of some diaries in India.

supporters, and there is a paean to the learned Dr. Malalasekara, a steadfast friend to Beryl. Having delayed her departure for England repeatedly, she delays it a few weeks more.

One foot has been infected, and the ankle of the other leg is not yet healed from an injury, but on October 11 she departs on a three-day visit with Sheila Pieris to the animal sanctuary at Yala. It is the occasion in the book for some of her most vivid writing. "Marvellous sunset flaming behind the Akasa Cetiya. A leopard was seen, but not by me, crossing close by the car. Sheila is extremely timid of her beloved animals, and drinks in greedily every tale of their deprivations" (*Ceylon*, 211). A fortnight later, Beryl finally began her journey home.

On a hot Thursday in August of 1951, Beryl landed in Milan. She had been to Italy at least once earlier the same year, to report for *Ballet* on the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. She was en route to Trieste, with a stop planned at Bertinoro (near Cesena), either going or on the way back. The flight, as she wrote to "Takamori" the next morning, had been "sublime," but she had been feeling rather ill and could not eat the "quite appetizing" lunch. The letter, like the ones that follow it, is full of anxious affection. Too anxious, perhaps. A second letter is dated six p.m. the same day. She chats of "Giulio," who met her at the airport; of "Giovanna" (Giulio's wife), who has been in London and is to meet her at Bertinoro and who, if she rings up, should be asked to bring the blue cotton dress in the box-room; of "Achille," the dramatist. Shanta is much on her mind, and Beryl has lunched with the wife of a rich industrialist, "a sort of Milanese Pipsy," who will be most helpful. She signs herself Busby or Busbies; Arthur—they seem to have parted virtually in mid-conversation, talking of Japanese poems—is *koishiki hito*, you whom I love/you who love.

On Saturday she writes that she will stay in Milan the weekend, in order to see Aurel Milloss and Maurice Cardiff, whose arrival is expected. Both men do arrive, and telephone. "I continue with thyroid . . . Giulio has Curtisol [?] injections—and everyone here swears by Vitamin B." Why had she been taking thyroid, one wonders. The small daily dose of thyroid extract was a medical fad of the 'forties and early 'fifties, addressed to a variety of subclinical symptoms.<sup>85</sup>

On Tuesday, September 4, she writes from Trieste, having come di-

<sup>85</sup> Personal experience of the author: thyroid was prescribed for complaints ranging from obesity to adolescence. The fad disappeared when more accurate methods of measuring the body's thyroid use were invented.

rectly from Milan by motor coach. Her hostess is Svevo's widow Livia, who is kindness itself, aided by Livia's daughter Letizia, whose three beautiful sons were all killed in the war. Montale, the Florentine [actually, Ligurian] poet, wrote a cruel review of Livia's *Vita di mio marito*. It was horrid of him. A telegram, comically misread by Livia as having to do with a "prince" and a "bailiff," has just arrived from Arthur: its news is that Faber & Faber will reprint *Dance and Drama in Bali*. Beryl will go to see the British consul with a view to Shanta's visit.

Two days later: "The family is really angelic." She is enchanted by Livia and her adoration for Svevo, though it means that Livia is incapable of appreciating his works apart from the man and thus has no idea of his greatness as a writer. She remarks on the sufferings of the inhabitants of Trieste at the hands of the Yugoslavs. She will take a short excursion that afternoon, to the frontier and beyond; and—ominously—"I am going to a nephew doctor for an injection before leaving—for I certainly feel rather insecure."

The next letter, dated 20 September, is written on Livia's stationery. "Oh, what joy to find two letters and a card from Takamori, the last dated the 17th." She had been to a folk music festival at Opatiya, Yugoslavia, and gone sightseeing on the way back, with Maud Karpeles (organizer of the festival) and some other participants. The guide had been unreliable. The final day was sheer hell, but Livia was on the platform for Beryl's return. "Oh what joy to rest. I have lovely meals—for a few days—Letizia<sup>86</sup> will give me the injections ordered by the dottoressa [sic] who came yesterday, & I shall stay put in bed. I am only 'pui'—if [illegible], from too much fatigue and too much uneatable food. . . . But it was more than worth while—a most important experience—& such beauty—I adore Arbe! If only it were Italian!" Letizia's husband is a cultured man, with a special interest in Yiddish poets.

Two days later, Beryl writes that she is "resting entirely" and did not even go with Livia to hear Karajan conduct the Brahms requiem. She reiterates that nobody in Trieste understands Svevo's writings.<sup>87</sup> "I don't know how long I shall be here. I hope to pick up soon. I eat a little every few hours & have injections." She has written to Giovanna to ask if Gio-

<sup>86</sup> Beryl sometimes forgets and spells the name "Letitia." "Dottoressa" in the sentence following may be a misnomer, since the word does not denote a medical practitioner.

<sup>87</sup> With some justice; neither did early reviewers of *Zeno* in England quite realize what they had in front of them. It was reviewed twice in *The Spectator*, in 1930: the first time by an anonymous writer who positively disliked it (May 3), the second time with mild approval as part of an overview of the year's fiction, by V. Sackville-West.

vanna can fetch her from Bologna by car. But if it seems too tiring, Beryl tells Arthur that she will “wait for you in Venice. That there is *you* is my great comfort.” Now she attributes her condition to “the discovery of a real iron curtain and of equal incomprehension on either side—added to the impossibility of communication between pedants and aficionados & the use of dance for diplomatic ends.” She does not neglect to ask Arthur to “Give my love to Mo. I do so hope that John [then in the army in Korea] is all right.” She says, for at least the third time, that Livia is offended with Montale. She had not repeated herself in this way in the letters from Ceylon and India. Dulling of recent memory is one of the array of symptoms of Huntington’s disease, though of course there can be many other causes. And she has gotten a dislike for speaking.

Five days later (27 September) she writes from the Sanitorio Triestino/Via Rossetti. She had felt “rather queer” the previous morning and could not face a projected journey, so she has come here for a few days of rest; the Svevos, for their part, will be away till Monday. “It is vexing to feel that I have given them so much trouble.”<sup>88</sup> She longs to see Arthur and tells him that he must not worry. She will spend the next few days in tests. “I shall not speak—that will be a comfort.”

The final letter of the series is written the next day. Her nerves are so on edge that what she would like most is rest—“better than injections . . . not to talk, not to explain would be better than anything.” She has changed her mind once more (having changed it several times previously) about stopping at Bertinoro and will go straight to Venice. “To see you will be heaven.” It is maddening to have to spend her extra allowance (a grant from *Ballet*) in this way, but it can’t be helped. She mentions, for at least the third time (and one would guess that there were others, in the letters that have not been preserved), Letizia’s son who was killed by a bomb; his friend has just paid her a visit. She has tried vainly to telephone Giulio in Milan.

In the last few lines her handwriting progressively deteriorates. All she needs is some warm clothing—the items are enumerated—and a hot water bottle. She will write the Hotel Monaco for a room. “Poor Mo,” are the final words. As always, she writes the Chinese character for “love”; and she signs herself “Beasts” in a great scrawl.

The early, as well as the later, symptoms of Huntington’s disease vary from patient to patient, but general irritability, restlessness, and inexpli-

<sup>88</sup> Such remarks do not match well with the legend that she was oblivious to the inconvenience of her hosts. It may be, of course, that she noticed less, or later, than she should have.

cable fits of “nerves” are often the first, indefinite manifestations, explainable as disease only after more pronounced signs have appeared. Huntington’s disease (the preferred name; or Huntington’s chorea) is not, as it has been called, “extremely” rare;<sup>89</sup> the incidence in populations of European descent has been estimated at 7.5 per 100,000. It is, however, rare enough so that, with the vagueness of its first symptoms, it is easily misdiagnosed. The disease is transmitted by a dominant gene and thus must be inherited from an afflicted parent. The first signs usually appear in the third to fifth decades of life; Beryl’s own case developed exceptionally late, and the lateness, too, may have run in the family, so that it is possible that the parent in question died before developing unmistakable symptoms (which in any event, might have been misinterpreted). She therefore might well not have known that she was at risk.

Huntington’s disease is a degenerative affliction of the brain. The handbook for victims and their families prefaces its first chapter with the words of a patient: “If the Devil himself had set out to create the most cruel of diseases, he couldn’t have done better than this.” The disease is characterized, as it advances, by involuntary muscle spasms (chorea) and grimaces. Death occurs through emaciation and choking, when the sufferer can no longer swallow. It is not inevitably dementing;<sup>90</sup> but many patients do experience psychotic episodes, and these often of a violent nature. The ability to speak is lost, but understanding may remain to the end. There was not much that Beryl was ultimately to be spared. The progress of the disease is slow, however, and though it is incurable, many victims are able to continue to live productive lives for years after its onset (some surviving fifteen or twenty years). This too was to be true for Beryl. Music and dance, two elements in which her life was supremely rich, have been recommended as therapy.

What Beryl remembered and puzzled over was Arthur’s harshness in insisting that she return immediately to England—his “almost savage expression” when, surely already full of sedatives (for what else could the Sanitario’s injections have been?) she pleaded to be allowed to rest and he insisted she come back with him to England. She had read of a sleep-cure—twenty hours of sleep a day—yet he had “rasped” that there was not

<sup>89</sup> By Hilary Spurling, in Alison Waley, *A Half*, xii. Perhaps the best-known victim of the disease in America has been the singer and folklorist Woody Guthrie. A convenient, reliable reference is Dennis H. Phillips, *Living With Huntington’s Disease: A Book for Patients and Families* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); information about the disease in these pages is derived from this volume.

<sup>90</sup> Again contra Hilary Spurling.

enough time. Arthur had originally said that they would spend three weeks in Milan. (The earlier letters show, or at least very strongly suggest, that a joint holiday in Italy had been planned by the couple before she departed from London.) It is clear that she did not understand how ill she was, or how great his alarm.<sup>91</sup> Some months later, back in London, he let slip that Mo, during that time, had been running about Italy on a trumped-up (Beryl's word is "chimerical") newspaper job. Returning to London, Mo had cabled him in Milan: "Return at once"; and the next day he did. (Arthur had resolutely ignored the barrage of notes and letters which Alison had unloosed on him at Nora Winterhalter's villa in Bertinoro, where he had gone with Beryl.<sup>92</sup>) Mo, Beryl supposed, must have been "clamouring." Awaking at 2:30 in the morning not long after Arthur's admission, Beryl reached for a scrap of paper—the back of a letter from Giovanna—and wrote it all down. Arthur had been an angel, she said, except when overcome with remorse or worry. How could she forget? No need to continue, she wrote.<sup>93</sup>

Beryl was ill throughout the Fall; like too many other early Huntington's disease patients, she was thought to have a purely psychiatric problem. Her friends believed that she had had a nervous breakdown. Arthur himself, because he was not legally her relative, was not told the true nature of her illness until long after her doctors did finally diagnose it. After she was brought back to England, she spent a month in a nursing home and then, still ill, was moved to their flat. By the end of the year she was better; at the end of January, she resumed her correspondence with Pro-

<sup>91</sup> Where exactly did Arthur find Beryl, and in what condition? According to some accounts, she was wandering and suffering from amnesia; whether any of these is based on first-hand information I am not certain. Hilary Spurling's account is not trustworthy, since she mingles in it information given her by Alison, not identified as such, with information from less reliable sources.

<sup>92</sup> Though Beryl was—and perhaps remained—unaware of the letters, Alison convinced herself that Beryl had been intercepting them. That is only part of Alison's story. Her book says that Beryl induced Arthur to come by writing him that she had a brain tumor; that Arthur, having earlier refused to accompany Beryl because he could not bear to part from Alison, realized that the reports of illness must be a "ruse," even as he was unwillingly leaving for Trieste. But Beryl's letters show that, far from summoning him to her bedside, she made repeated attempts to reassure him that there was no cause for anxiety. Alison invited herself to Italy on the bases of her "instinct" and an emotional appeal to an Air France employee ("The French . . . are perceptive"). Sleeping at youth hostels and asking—in French, since she was unable to speak Italian—passing priests to pray for her, she must have presented to Waley a considerable threat of embarrassment, whatever else he may have felt for her.

<sup>93</sup> Giovanna's letter, which served for Beryl's notepaper, is unfortunately undated but presumably was sent to her in London.



fessor Tucci about Shanta's proposed tour of Italy. Among her visitors at home in London in 1952 was Hans Rhodius, who had conceived the idea of a memorial volume for Walter Spies and had also conceived the idea that she should compile and introduce it; he wrote that he found her in favor of it and that, shown Spies's postcards from his final internment, she wept. Shortly thereafter, she went to the Netherlands and there spoke with Rhodius again about the project, even more enthusiastically; but back in London again, she changed her mind. The work would have been beyond her strength as well as, one imagines, alien to her gifts. She wrote no more ballet reviews, and after 1951 published one short essay.<sup>94</sup>

But surely, much of her time between 1951 and 1953 must have been taken up with writing and seeing through the press *The Other Mind*. (Her preface calls it the "offspring" of *Dance and Drama in Bali*, which had just been reissued, and says of Spies that "spiritually our collaboration still continues.") In 1954 or 1955 there was a psychotic episode, the first of several; her friends remember that on this occasion she spent a short time at Withymead, a psychiatric center at Exeter subsidized by the Elmhursts, directed by a follower of Jung, and devoted to treatment without shocks or drugs. She was severely disturbed, would hide behind the bed and once climbed out on the roof. But the episode was soon over; Celia Goodman saw her in London not long after and was taken to the ballet by her. Nor did illness prevent her from visiting Brazil for a folk music congress in July and August of 1954. Douglas Kennedy, then Organizing Director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, remembers that she entered enthusiastically into the dancing on carnival occasions in the streets and "was a very enthusiastic and stimulating partner." There is a delighted, if not strictly relevant, recollection in her Preface to *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon* of having for the Congress to fill out a form which bore the question: "Can you read and write?" "There are few now who would take the trouble to decipher my untidy script," she comments (*Ceylon*, 12), and indeed the handwriting in her diary from that journey is even more difficult than usual.<sup>95</sup>

In 1957, Arthur Waley was invited to accompany a delegation to Peking. He sent Beryl in his stead. Her visit lasted two weeks, and she at-

<sup>94</sup> See note 81.

<sup>95</sup> Both this diary and the one from the 1957 journey are in the collection at Rutgers. The extreme difficulty of the hand may be due to tremors and also to the fact that she was writing only for herself. The note that she sent to Frits Staal in 1961 is in a hand not much different from her usual one, except for being larger.

tempted to prolong it another fortnight. Refused by the authorities, she returned via Russia. A souvenir was a blue coolie jacket which, Mrs. Goodman remembers, she always wore from then on.

It was in 1957 that her friends first noticed that she was shrunken and her movements “jerky.” (Anthony Powell, encountering her by chance with Arthur at an exhibition, at some unspecified time in the late 1950s, thought her “brisk enough in her movements” but horribly shriveled, so that she seemed even older than her years.<sup>96</sup> A problem that caregivers of Huntington’s disease victims are told to be prepared to cope with is the characteristic gait and the likelihood that others, including the police, will attribute it to drink. Alison (whose failure to become a ballet dancer has already been noted and who had refused an offer to understudy Madeleine Carroll because Arthur “detested actresses” and “play-acting”) was convinced that the “prancing” gait, the tics and grimaces which began to afflict Beryl could be turned off at will: Beryl, she was very sure, was merely acting. It was all a scheme to keep Arthur away from her. At the same time, she was somehow certain that Beryl had lost her wits. Jealous when *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon* was published in 1957, and witnessing—or claiming to have witnessed—the aftermath of scenes in which Beryl had tossed jewelry and papers about, she decided that it must have been Arthur who wrote it. But there is scarcely a sentence in the book that could be by anyone except Beryl. The form is an easy one: observations, experiences, and ideas in the order in which they took place, with further information, from her reading, inserted as convenient; and if notebooks had been lost, there were still some diaries and her letters to Arthur to draw on. Arthur may indeed have helped her bring her materials together. He had always helped and advised her. If the book is less satisfactory as concerted scholarship than *The Other Mind*, the reason is that the underlying experience was less satisfactory. During the four years between the publication of the two books, she must have searched for ways to make up for the gaps in her research; a closing paragraph suggests as much. Whether much resolve or, rather, some loss of inhibition was necessary before she could publish *Dance and Magic Drama in Ceylon*, one can only be glad that she did. Her childlike delight in the offerings of chance and her sophisticated readiness to weave them into her narrative are there in full flower; the ability of Beryl de Zoete the writer to regard the urgencies of Beryl de Zoete the traveler and seeker with humorous irony remains intact.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony Powell, *Messengers of Day* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978), 163-64. The exhibition was of paintings by chimpanzees.

The periods of acute illness worsened. There were stories of terrible screams heard through the windows of the flat, and of the caller whom Arthur laconically informed that Miss de Zoete had just set fire to the curtains. Yet—whether through sedatives or because of natural remissions in the symptoms—there were still times when she could carry on something like a normal life. She had a visit from Shanta in 1960. Frits Staal, then teaching Sanskrit at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, was introduced to Waley in 1961 (he remembers, by the late musicologist Dr. A. Bake, many of whose photographs are included in *The Other Mind*) and invited for tea on several occasions. They talked about Kathakali, and common friends in India and Ceylon. He recalls that Waley talked a little but that it was chiefly she who—true to the role she had always had—spoke with the guests. He noticed the involuntary motions but did not find them disturbing.

Those who have the responsibility for a brain-damaged person hear a great many “oughts.” If the sufferer has been sent to a nursing home, the merest acquaintances will be overheard to declare loudly that they would never deliver a relative to such a place; while if the sufferer, on the contrary, has been kept at home, friends are certain that he or she “really ought” to have been sent away. Beryl “ought” to have been sent to a nursing home, but she did not want to be, and Arthur was determined that she not be. With the help of nurses, and sometimes without it, he was able to care for her in their flat. The flat was up five flights of stairs and, as he had always done, he went shopping for both of them, although the shops were inconveniently situated. To add to his troubles, he had to contemplate the imminent loss of his flat to its owner, the University of London. He broke his right arm in a fall, and it was in a sling for six weeks. In a letter received by Donald Keene in Japan in November 1961, Waley said that his right hand was still useless for writing. Beryl was “very ill with chorea and in a state painful to suffer and of course painful to witness.” He was reading a great deal out loud to her: Lord Birkenhead’s life of “that monster Lord Cherwell,” Isaac Disraeli’s *Curiosities of Literature*, Harold Acton’s second volume on the Bourbons at Naples, George Sand’s autobiography, a life of Tolstoy.<sup>97</sup> The acute phase of her illness lasted perhaps six months.

In February of 1962, Carmen Blacker, a friend for almost twenty years, heard that Beryl was desperately ill and went to visit her. Narcotics,

<sup>97</sup> Donald Keene, in Ivan Morris, ed., *Madly Singing in the Mountains: An Appreciation and Anthology of Arthur Waley* (New York: Walker, 1970; Harper Torchbooks, 1972). The remaining quotations and reminiscences in the text are from the contributions of the persons quoted to this volume.

Arthur told her, kept Beryl from being violent and possibly homicidal,<sup>98</sup> and though she could not make coherent sounds, she was still conscious. “She was a tragic figure. She seemed to have shrunk strangely and lay screwed up in bed like a withered doll . . . her face skeletally thin, one arm making convulsive movements round her head. With a tenderness I had never seen in him before, Arthur bent over her and said, ‘Look what lovely flowers Carmen has brought, and some more beautiful ones have come from Walter in Germany.’” Downstairs, Carmen Blacker met Alison for the first time. Donald Keene also came calling in February. Arthur warned him not to ask Beryl questions. “She understands everything and will try to answer. Just kiss her and say you’re glad to see her.” But the sight was so heartrending that Keene could only sit there stunned.

On March 4, Beryl de Zoete died. The day following, Arthur went to spend the evening with the Chinese art historian Michael Sullivan and his wife Khoan. “He talked about her for hours and told us how he had read his Chinese poems to her night after night till, he said, only her eyes showed that she still understood.”

<sup>98</sup> If anything, understatement. David Garnett went to the flat for tea with his daughter Henrietta, found Waley absent, and “heard a bloodcurdling scream from the floor above.” He was sure someone was being murdered, until a nurse appeared and informed him that Miss de Zoete was having one of her bad attacks. Garnett is not otherwise a reliable source (he misspells Beryl’s surname and says that Waley eventually moved to Switzerland—an odd mistake in what purports to be a “Portrait” of Arthur Waley), but here he can be trusted. David Garnett, *Great Friends* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), 177-78.

## CHRONOLOGY

This Chronology outlines Beryl de Zoete's most significant journeys, but is almost certainly incomplete. It includes also some other important events.

- 1917 Visits Casablanca.
- 1927 Visits Istanbul.
- 1928-29 First long solo visit or visits to North Africa, in particular Morocco.
- 1930 In May, she is in Fez, Morocco. The account mentions her companions: "my German friend Ganz . . . my Swiss friend Charlie" and "Boris and Germaine" (*TF*, 105-106).
- 1931 Again, Morocco. The journey began March 25, by airplane. (The flight is spiritedly described by her in an article in *Ballet*.) At the Colonial Exposition in the Parc de Vincennes she caught her first glimpse of Balinese dance. Also in 1931, a visit to Seville.
- 1934 "A six-months journey of dance study in the countries which still retain a background of Hindu culture": Java, then Bali. In December, in Bali, she plans a book with Walter Spies.
- 1935 Her first visit to Ceylon and India. April in India (Malabar in early Spring) and May in Ceylon. Later that year, "all over Europe."
- 1936 In Bali, a fifteen-month sojourn, from the beginning of this year through Spring, 1937.
- 1938 April, in India.
- 1939 March, visits Siwa in the Libyan desert.
- 1947 Seville.
- 1948-49 Ceylon and India. She arrives first in Bombay; to Ceylon, December 1. Back to India, end of February. Return to Ceylon, July 27. Shuttles between India and Ceylon until her return to England, repeatedly postponed, at the end of October. First meeting with Shanta Rao, in May.

- 1951 Italy (one of numerous journeys) in May and June; in the late Summer, again, to Milan and Trieste, where she stays with Italo Svevo's widow. First attack of her fatal illness.
- 1953 In Davos with Arthur Waley, in September; one of a great many such visits.
- 1954 Attends International Congress of Folk Music in Brazil.
- 1954-55 An acute attack of her illness sends her to a psychiatric home for some months. There will be several more such episodes.
- 1957 May 14—June 1, visits China; home via Russia.
- 1958 On a summer vacation in Kent with Arthur Waley, she breaks her hip in a fall, but recovers after an operation and 9 weeks in a nursing home.
- 1962 Death, at age 82.