

## **A Report on the October Section and Class Weekend (19.10.23 – 21.10.23)**

*From the Perspective of a Participant from North America*

When I traveled to Dornach for the Section and Class meetings, I did not know what to expect. Several years have passed since any representative from the North American Section for the Literary Arts and Humanities of the School for Spiritual Science in North America had traveled to Dornach to attend these meetings or to share a report on Section activities in North America (Canada and USA).

What a surprise it was to discover that the experience felt like a homecoming! It took very little time for the group to come together as friends, colleagues, and as a dynamic discourse community within the School of Michael. We were inhabitants of a common spiritual homeland, although as individuals we had journeyed to Dornach from different countries.

I was also very delighted to quickly discover that our work during the long weekend breathed and moved with an inner spirit of artistic sensitivity, imagination, and contemplative insight. And our serious moments were not lacking in humor, which shone upon the proceedings like startling bursts of October sunlight, to accentuate form, color, and qualities. While the shared meeting-language was German, I was happy, too, that the English language had found a place amid that choir of voices.

### **Spirit Remembering**

Christiane Haid began this weekend, which commemorated 100 years of Section activity in the world, with a retrospective of the Section's history. She used her essay on the History of the Section as a reference point. This historical gesture is one that I appreciate, especially from the perspective of the work in North America. The contrasting names of our Section in German and English point to a unique quality of the Section's identity and methodology. I frequently confront puzzled expressions when I attempt to explain what the literally translated German name of our Section means in the context of contemporary North American English. «Beautiful sciences?» We discussed this during the weekend, with meeting participants noting that even Rudolf Steiner had seemed somewhat puzzled or dissatisfied with the adequacy of the term beautiful sciences. «Belles Lettres?» Perhaps, but not quite! We noted that Rudolf Steiner had not been able to give a course of instructional lectures for our Section, as he had done for other Sections before he died. We asked: is this a problem or an opportunity? Christiane posed the question: «If you were to select a collection of lectures by Rudolf Steiner that might help to articulate the meaning and methodology of our Section work, what lectures would you choose?» We did not answer this question immediately during our weekend; it will remain an open question for next year's discussion. But I must wonder: are we at an advantage or disadvantage by not having a course of lectures by Rudolf Steiner before he died? After all, as writers and poets, are we not shepherds of metaphor? Are we not appreciative of the paradoxical qualities of poetic speech, which challenge a reader or listener to intuit meaning through creative leaps of insight inspired by spirit-practice aligned to an intuition of the good, the beautiful, and the true?

## **Spirit Communing**

Each representative gave a report on the Section activities in her or his region. Because North America had not had a representative at these meetings for several years, I took time to explain the many changes in the North American Section work that have occurred since 2019.

Considering the events prior to 2019, however, I referenced those colleagues such as Jane Hipolito who had played such significant roles in calling for the creation of a North American Section and who had shaped the North American Section in the two decades since its founding in 1999 and who had defined the North American Section's initial attitude toward the world. I pointed to the Section website [TheLiteraryArts.com](http://TheLiteraryArts.com), where persons interested in the history of the Section in North America can find much information, including a helpful essay by Marguerite Miller, and I discussed the dramatic changes in our Section meetings that coincided with the Covid crisis in 2020 – how the Section group in Northern California had expanded its outreach dramatically through skillful use of technologies such as Zoom. It is a historical irony that the years of isolation necessitated by Covid resulted in a rapid change and expansion of the North American Section work – and this includes inter-sectional work, most especially with the Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Science Sections. Persons at a far distance from Northern California can now participate in our regular meetings, which occur on an almost weekly rhythm. Likewise, one might say that an entirely new group of persons beyond the threshold have joined our meetings since the onset of Covid. Let me explain: when we occupy ourselves with literature – as scholars or artists, students or practitioners – do we not enter into a communion with the dead? Are we not woven into such larger community by virtue of the practice-ground we have chosen to cultivate? The texts that we ponder, study and meditate, or create – are they not a training in clairvoyance, so to speak – empowering faculties that allow us to inhabit other minds, other times, other climes? In that respect, I shared that Novalis had become especially important to our work in North America during the crisis years of Covid. Friedrich von Hardenberg, named Novalis, entered our Section work at the time of Covid; he had not been present in the previous years. And he seems to have remained active. In fact, here is a fragment from the collection known as *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (1798/1799) that we frequently use in an English translation to start our North American meetings for Section friends and members.

### 470. ARS LITTERARIA.

Everything that a scholar does, says, speaks, suffers, and hears, etc. must be an artistic, technical, and scientific product, or some such operation. He speaks in epigrams; she acts in a play; he is a dialogist; she lectures on treatises and sciences he relates anecdotes, stories, fairytales, novels; she perceives poetically. If he draws, he draws sometimes as an artist, sometimes as a musician. Her life is a novel – and that's why she sees, hears, and reads everything precisely in this manner.

In short, the true scholar is the completely developed human being – who bestows on whatever they touch and do, a scientific, idealistic, and syncretistic form.

## **Spirit Beholding**

The Class Meeting that followed directly after the Section meeting during the long weekend felt woven into the living substance of our time together. Christiane guided our contemplative

discussions of the eighteenth lesson, which she presented as a free rendering. On the next day in the morning, this lesson was read by Michael Türk. Boudewijn van Sluijs led us through eurythmy forms arising from the verse: «Es keimen der Seele Wünsche.» The room chosen for our meeting in the Kleinodienhaus felt perfectly sized to our scholarly, meditative, and artistic activities, and the short walks uphill to the Wandelhalle in changeable autumn sunlight became a welcome circulation of heart and lung and occasions for much conversation and laughter. I should add that while the long weekend had an earnest emphasis, I felt that we were earnest in the sense that Schiller uses the word when he discusses the human being at play. «In the midst of the awful realm of force, and in the midst of the divine realm of law, the aesthetic impulse to form constructs unnoticed a third happy realm of play and of appearance in which the fetters of all circumstance are taken from man, releasing him from everything that could be called either moral or physical constraint.» In other words, the weekend was not lacking in remarks of wise levity or even playful, humorous agreements from the outer world. For example, one afternoon when we exited the building during a break, we found ourselves greeted by one of the Dornach cows. It had struck an attitude of mock solemnity on a nearby rooftop of a building opposite the Kleinodienhaus.

All in all, this long weekend seemed a graceful example of what one hopes to achieve in Section work and Section meetings and conferences – that is to say: a graceful balance of head and heart, soul and spirit. As Rudolf Steiner remarked at the founding of our Section during the Christmas Conference in 1923: we have very many sciences, but where are the *beautiful* sciences? He thought that such «beautiful science» (however we might name her) was greatly needed in our contemporary global society.

*Bruce Donehower*