

15 Rue de POISSY.

P A R I S . V .

16 Dec . 1958 1

Dear Mr Roerich.

Thank you for your letter enclosing a synopsis . I am constantly corresponding with Sina Fosdick and have received some books which are useful, if I am to write this biography, which your Father himself discussed in some of his letters to me.

I must say however that it came to me rather as a shock when I realised that all the books written by your Father are now out of print and circulation. And the same of course is the case with the " Master of the Mountains" There were a number of these books at the American library here twenty years ago but all have disappeared. One of the reasons for writing this biography, apart from its intrinsic interest would be to salvage what is essential in all these books. Quotations from them all would , so to speak, save the loss of a great deal of interesting material.

I shall have to try and organise my time which is very scarce. After four or five hours on foot I often have to work on to the early hours of the morning. We have over one hundred exhibitions a month to look after in addition to the official shows.

There have been more changes in art , here, during the last 30 years than in the previous 300 years. The art of the 19th cent is altogether dislocated . Your Father's work like that of many other good artists, looks out of date. In Russia they have been kept so long in the 19th cent attitude that these paintings may even seem to them ' advanced'. To me your Fathers work remains a fine and inspired type of art that will hold its own.

Our position however is much more complicated and changing than is generally supposed.

It is interesting to hear that you are creating a museum at Naggar. It would be interesting if you could supply me with short notes and reminiscences of the life in Naggar when you were resident there with your parents. I had a letter from Dr Cousins who spoke of the intense beauty of the place when he saw it , which I may quote in the book.

Moreover there would be an interest in mentioning that this property has now become a centre and museum.

If you know of any good monthly publication in India which would publish an article of mine on your Father I might find time to set out the significance of his achievements from the contemporary point of vision. 'Swatantra' in Madras asked me for articles on contemporary French artists and I supplied them with over thirty of these.

This paper however has changed hands and I heard was bought up by a politician.

Should you still be in touch with Shibayev please give him my kind recollections saying I should like to hear from him.

With all best wishes for your work at Naggar in the coming year.

Cordially yours.

Harvey L. Lister

Jan 19/59.

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Dear Mr Roerich.

I was pleased to hear from your last letter that the article on the Pact is to appear in India. As for a remittance I did not take this into consideration when I wrote it and there is no immediate need for you to send it on. It is good of you to have thought of it.

For some time now I have been considering how your Father's art and life could best be presented in our entirely changed and sophisticated world. When I was with Sina Fosdick she mentioned that you much preferred there should be no theosophical associations brought into the book. Here I quite agree, Anglo-theosophy of the Leadbeater type is not by any means an art phenomenon. The theme of Shambhala however is something far older than theosophy, in this sense, and I always held that it was one of the most important conceptions in your Father's career, as his writings show. I hope eventually that his 'Shambhala the resplendent' will be found somewhere. Sina Fosdick is trying to find a copy. In going through the correspondence I had with your Father I found a letter dated Aug 24/39 in which I wrote "I had thought of Shambhala as a subtitle for the biography - Nicholas Roerich and the Way of Shambhala" - to show that your work from the start, is a steadfast reflection of the sacred conception of Shambhala". In his reply your Father wrote :- "I am in full agreement with your ideas about the biography. In the subtitle which is so sonorous one could even omit the word "and" keeping it as a separate subtitle." A little later, as you know, I was arrested by the Germans and spent 4 1/2 or more years in a camp. On being released I found myself in a maelstrom of activity, acting as Art critic, Theatre reporter, Book reviewer for the Daily Mail which I kept up for eight years till they closed the Paris office. To-day I shall have to fight to make time to write this book as I would like to do. Things are very different and completely changed to what they were when I wrote "A master of the mountains". The enormous drive (except in the east) to eliminate all but abstract types of art tends to change the public taste. The public are being gradually led to look upon all work of the past as a form of illustration. Therefore I have to reconsider the whole matter and find another way of approach outside of painting and its technical problems. These are interesting but, for the most part, the contemporary artist has only his technique with which he believes he can arrive at some sort of meaning. In short no life background of inspiration. I think I am right in saying that the essence of your Father's genius was a remarkable intuition of the all-important place of Legend in the world's history. He is one of the very few in modern times who had sufficient depth of insight to perceive this. I keep a large volume of Homer on my table and often dip into the fluent Greek, even if only for a minute or so. This book which is three thousand years old is by some species of miracle younger and fresher than all mother books. Its substance is nothing but legend since, as you probably know, the war of Troy never took place, as it has recently been proved. Its legendary meaning transcends the world of facts. How many civilizations, how many religions have come and gone and still it is here in all the freshness of Spring! It is perhaps nothing less than the victory of Poetry over all, and poetry like rhythm is indefinable. Twenty years ago I published an article in the Studio on your Father's work. In looking it up a few days ago I found that the title read "Nicholas Roerich and Arts legendary future". I had completely forgotten this title which shows I always realised the importance of legend. It is from this legendary inspiration then, that the Roerich paintings take their value. It is in revealing this that one lifts them up above all the technical and historical claims of contemporary art. Both your Father's career and his paintings are a part of legend. This can only be done in a biography.

I see that you are in touch with Indian reviews. I will try and let you have an article on your Father's work from a new standpoint if you will post me a copy of the Review you have in mind. This will enable me to see the length of the articles. Perhaps we could induce a Review to run an article in two parts, that is in two numbers. This later could be used for the book or parts of it incorporated. 3

I ran a series of articles in Swatantra for two years. They asked me to write articles on contemporary French artists and gave me two pages and a photo. I contributed over thirty or more articles. As you are aware Indian reviews have no money. I consented to accept only 1/5 of what I get here. Even then I found they were not eager to settle. This review has changed hands. The question of being paid is not the chief matter and if you can find a review ready to take regular articles on the Paris art world and on contemporary French artists I would be ready to consider it. They can give what they can provided I receive two copies of the article. In this way I thought it might be interesting to write on the artists I find for the Roerich gallery in New York. Sina Fosdick no doubt has mentioned that I presented several to her, some of whom might be interesting for the gallery. I will post you an article of mine in Swatantra which will show you the type of contribution I am proposing. These Indian articles could then be shown at the New York exhibition.

With all good wishes to yourself and Mme Roerich.

Cordially yours.

Baruch E. Conlon

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COPY OF PORTIONS OF A LETTER FROM BARNETT CONLAN TO SINA FOSDICK

"I have just managed to find a moment in which to answer your letter of Dec 31 which I was glad to have. Yes, I am kept very busy all the time. Yesterday I had to be out at 8am to see our agent, after which I examined three hundred pictures at a salon and from then on it was a race to catch the last mail for New York. I take it very much as a sport but it prevents my giving more time to serious matters.

"...If you cannot find Altai-Himalaya then I will have to fall back on five or six pages of notes which I took from it when I was a member of the American library. This curiously enough, was before I had met with the Roerich society!

I have few book! 'Trails to Inner Asia'; A Master of the Mountain'; Selivanovas book and a number of small booklets - Duvernois, Brinton, etc. There is however a large collection of articles for Indian reviews, which on account of their faulty English I entirely re-wrote for Prof Roerich and which will be certainly useful.

We must get 'Shambhala' in one way or another. Have you no contact whatever with any former members of the society who bought these books? There must be a thousand copies at least somewhere. I have every reason for wishing to compose the book around this theme, and as you saw in my poem 'The Magi', already I had a vision of it. Moreover I know that Prof Roerich also thought in this way and I generally find that in most things he ran very parallel with my own inspirations. In my correspondence with him concerning this biography he suggested that the title should be "Nicholas Roerich and the Way to Shambhala". Without this transcendent background his work would differ little from those who also did decors for Russian Ballet. Moreover I cannot be satisfied with just a compilation in chronological order, nor do I consider dates, facts and documentation as the all important thing. These items are of course necessary but they are little more than the dry bones of the business. I have really to discover a way of approach that takes into account all the world changes that have come to pass in the last ten years. All China and India are rapidly changing towards a modern machine-made world which was not so ten years ago. The whole scheme of life is moving so fast, values are being altered so rapidly that centuries become almost obsolete in a few years. The atmosphere of Old Russia, old India, old China, old Mongolia and old Tibet which enveloped the art and life of Prof Roerich is rapidly transforming, rapidly being driven out. A world wide machine-made Corbusier world is invading every country backed by air speed. An international movement is on everywhere to make Art abstract and scientific.

We have, therefore, to take all this into consideration in order to show Roerich's art in its timeless implications. I have now come to the conclusion that the only way of approach is that of Legend. In this way it is possible to evoke Shambhala and all those reservoirs of Art and Poetry which Prof Roerich touched on in his art, writing and travels. Poetry is something incomparably more important than anything else, more everliving, more unchangeable, because it is synthesis itself. The same can be said of legend. Even Science and all its findings is relatively superficial and all religions are less enduring. Unfortunately, what is now known as poetry is often enough quite trivial and legend is looked upon as something untrue, like fairy tales, something very negligible compared with Science.Shambhala is legend and legend is older and more profound than all this. More than twenty years ago I published an article on Prof. Roerich's art in the London - 'Studio' which was well illustrated in colour. I have only one copy. I had almost forgotten this article. When I looked it up yesterday I was surprised to find that

the title was "Nicholas Roerich and Arts' Legendary future". Evidently then, I always had this idea but it came to be subconscious. I therefore adopt this way of approach.

I had a nice letter from Svetoslav who received the Pact article which he is publishing in India and also sending to his brother. He offers to place any articles I write on Prof Roerich and a little later I may send him one which will help to strike the note of this book."

Barnett Conlan