



An Introduction to the Library of Rudolf Steiner, Martina Maria Sam, Chadwick Library Press, 2025, 106 pp., US\$25, ISBN 7981737194767 (Book Review)

John Paull PhD

University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia

j.paull@utas.edu.au; john.paull@mail.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i10.2905>

Abstract

The physical library of New Age philosopher Dr Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) has survived somewhat intact at Dornach, Switzerland. The library as it appears today is a post-mortem assemblage of nearly ten thousand items, mostly books. The first catalogue was made during WWII by Werner Teichert, who used a bespoke categorisation scheme. Martina Maria Sam has created an updated catalogue of Rudolf Steiner's library. She has generally followed the categorisation scheme of her predecessor, and expanded the categories from 19 to 25. Sam produced a catalogue, in 2024, comprising three published volumes. The introduction to that 3-volume work has now been published as a 106-page book, 'An Introduction to the Library of Rudolf Steiner', and is now reviewed. The 'Introduction' is recommended as a worthy acquisition for all Rudolf Steiner scholars and libraries.

Keywords: *Anthroposophy; Dornach; Switzerland; Goetheanum; Haus Duldeck; Archive*

Introduction

Personal libraries rarely survive the death of their owner. A 'personal' library is, after all, a personal matter. An executor will typically lack the ambition, the incentive, as well as the resources, to preserve a personal library. Having taken a lifetime to assemble, a personal library may be promptly disassembled on the death of the owner. Personal effects including a personal library may be despatched to auction (for example) where value is attributed to the individual item, with perhaps some premium due to the provenance. However, the personal library of Dr Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was not despatched to auction, and circumstances prevailed for its preservation.

The New Age philosopher Rudolf Steiner was the founder of Anthroposophy (which he described as 'spiritual science') and of the Anthroposophical Movement (to advance the cause of Anthroposophy). By the time of his death he was a revered figure with a great many devotees in countries around the world. This coterie of devotees included, pre-eminently, a colony of Anthroposophists settled at Dornach on the outskirts of the Swiss city of Basel.

In the years from 1912 through to the time of Steiner's death there were many distinctive and purpose built Anthropop structures constructed, including Goetheanum I, Haus Duldeck, and the Glashaus (Kugler, Zumdick, Pehnt, & Kugler, 2011; Paull, 2012, 2020, 2023). During Steiner's lifetime, Elizabeth Vreede had already established an archive of Rudolf Steiner's lectures. It was a logical step on the death of the master that efforts were made to preserve as much of the legacy of Steiner as possible, and that included his books.

Switzerland was an inspired choice to set up Anthroposophy global headquarters (in 1912) (after the rejection of a building application in Munich, Germany). Having settled on the hill overlooking the village of Dornach, Switzerland, work proceeded apace throughout WWI (1914-1918) on building the new Anthropop colony including its centrepiece, the Goetheanum, its ancillary buildings, and Anthropop dwellings. Building work continued in the interbellum years.

When war came again to Europe in 1939, Switzerland again remained neutral and her neutrality was again honoured by the belligerents to the conflict. One outcome was that archives, libraries, and records held in Switzerland were spared the traumas, conflagrations, seizures, and destruction of war. A vast amount of Steiner material has survived to the present day preserved in Dornach.

The book: An Introduction to the Library of Rudolf Steiner

'An Introduction to The Library of Rudolf Steiner' ('Introduction') is 106 page account of the library, its history, and how it has been assembled, and the scholarship, challenges, and the adopted solutions of documenting the items in the three volume work 'The Library of Rudolf Steiner' ('The Library') (Sam, 2025). 'Introduction' stands as a read-alone work for those interested in Rudolf Steiner, in the generalities of his library, and in the methodology and meta-analysis of Sam's scholarship for 'The Library'. For those interested in the specific books present in, or absent from, the library then 'Introduction' will be the ideal starting place and ultimately will be best read in conjunction with the three volume 'The Library' which lists and annotates individually the nearly 10,000 items (Sam, 2024). For an overview and the methodology read 'Introduction' (Fig.1).

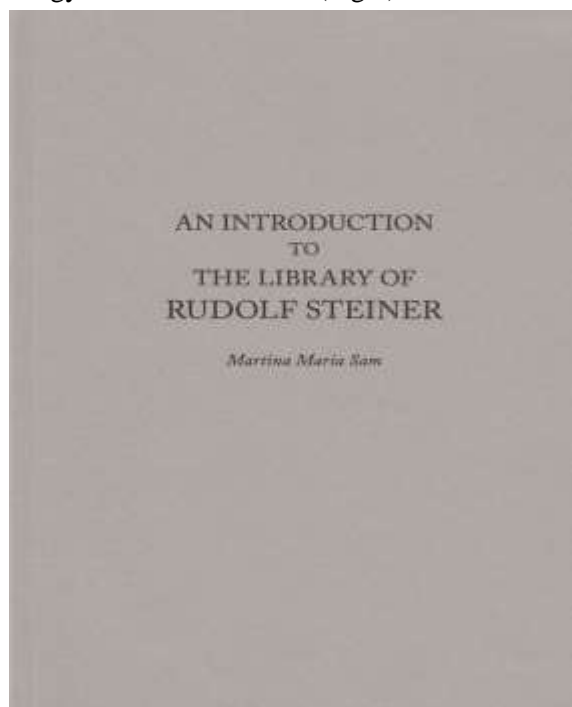


Figure 1. The book under review (image: steinerbooks.org).

Definitive?

The library, as it stands today, is not a library as Rudolf Steiner ever knew (Fig.2). He never enjoyed the luxury of having all his books assembled and shelved in one place. The library is presently housed in the basement of Haus Duldeck (Fig.3), close by the Goetheanum (Fig.4), at Dornach, Switzerland. Rudolf Steiner lived at Dornach, beginning in 1912 and until his death in 1925. During most of that time (until 1923) he still maintained his apartment in Berlin where he had lived since 1903 (Paull, 2019). Most of his time at Dornach he lived at Haus Hansi (Paull, 2018b). The final six months of his life he spent bed-bound in his studio-workshop (atelier) attached to the Schreinerei (carpentry workshop, adjacent to the Goetheanum site) (Paull, 2018a). During his final six months of what turned out to be palliative care, Rudolf Steiner continued his book acquisitions and reading habits (Wachsmuth, 1958, 1989). Only after his death were the Berlin books from Motzstrasse, the Haus Hanzl books, and the Schreinerei books, and others, consolidated. The library is now housed in the climate-controlled basement of the Rudolf Steiner Archive in Haus Duldeck at Dornach (since 2002).



Figure 2. The library of Rudolf Steiner is now housed in the basement of Haus Duldeck, Dornach, Switzerland (image: J Paull).

The library of Rudolf Steiner was first cataloged by Werner Teichert (1900-1955), between 1940 and 1943. The Library has lost some items since the time of Teichert. Some items at that time were not catalogued (e.g. travel items). The library had acquired various works, including the books of Rudolf Steiner's wife, Marie Sievers Steiner; her books that were published up to 1925 (inclusive) have been retained.

Rudolf Steiner was a bibliophile, of sorts. He valued books for their content. He was not the sort of bibliophile who values a book in its pristine, mint, and most collectable state.

Rudolf Steiner's books are generally non-fiction. They were generally not read cover-to-cover. Rather, Steiner was in pursuit of the 'gem' of wisdom in the book, and that might turn out to be on a single page in a book of hundreds of pages. Steiner disassembled books; for the purpose of convenience for travelling,

he took disassembled signature sections. He annotated his books, wrote in the margins, and underlined text. Some books were dog eared, some were ink-splodged, others were burned apparently from his cigarettes or pipe ash.

Provenance

The books in the library were acquired by Rudolf Steiner from his youth - some of his school books have survived. “Rudolf Steiner was an avid visitor of bookstores and antiquarian bookshops” (p.13). Some books are duplicates. His books are commingled with those of Marie Steiner and of others with whom he worked. Sam states that “all books from [Marie Seiner’s] collection with publication dates up to and including 1925 have been incorporated into the library. Some were originally from the library of his first wife, Anna Eunike” (p.56). In addition there are numerous other books from “close collaborators” (p.57). Some books have been lost to the collection, some in his lifetime and some postmortem; Sam states that: “many books that once would have been in Rudolf Steiner’s possession are no longer present” (p.23).



Figure 3. Haus Duldeck at Dornach houses the library of Rudolf Steiner in the basement (image: J Paull).

Categories

The books in the library of Rudolf Steiner are categorised by theme. A bespoke thematic categorisation scheme comprising 25 categories (sections) has been applied (24 subject areas plus one indeterminate). By way of contrast, for standard library cataloging, the Dewey Decimal system has 10 major categories and the Library of Congress (US-centric) system has 21 categories. The prior categorisation of the Rudolf Steiner library used 19 categories.

The Rudolf Steiner library items are categorised as:

- i) A: Anthroposophical authors
- ii) B: Belles-Lettres
- iii) G.: History et al

- iv) Ge: Geography et al.
- v) Gg: Adversarial literature
- vi) Gö: Goethe et al.
- vii) K: Art et al.
- viii) L: Literary studies
- ix) Ma: Mathematics
- x) Me: Medicine
- xi) Mu: Music
- xii) N: Natural sciences
- xiii) O: Occultism and Theosophy
- xiv) P: Philosophy and Psychology
- xv) Pä: Pedagogy
- xvi) R: Travel
- xvii) Re: Law
- xviii) S: Linguistics
- xix) St: Rudolf Steiner
- xx) T: Theology
- xxi) Th: Theatre
- xxii) W: World War I
- xxiii) Wö: Dictionaries et al.
- xxiv) Zs: Periodicals
- xxv) Fr: Unidentified fragments

The section codes derive from the name of the category in German (e.g. Adversarial literature is coded as 'Gg', an abbreviation of 'Gegnerliteratur').



Figure 4. The Goetheanum at Dornach was designed by Rudolf Steiner (the path, in the foreground, leads directly to Haus Duldeck) (image: J Paull).

Languages

Most of the books (>85%) in Rudolf Steiner's library are in German. It was the only language that he ever lectured in. It was the sole language that he was comfortable conversing in. On tour, Steiner relied on translators for non German-speaking audiences. However, there are books in his library in 23 languages. In English there are over 500 items; in French, nearly 400; in Italian “a little over 90”; in Russian, 70; and there are lesser numbers in other languages. Some books are presentation copies by Anthroposophist authors and/or translators.

The library of Rudolf Steiner, but not as he knew it

Sam states: “Rudolf Steiner’s library is in many respects a reconstructed library that was never available to him in this form, but which, according to our current understanding, includes all extant books that had come into his hands in a wide variety of ways” (p.78).

The previous cataloguer Teichert related that: “The large number of incomplete works is due to the fact that Rudolf Steiner often cut out whole signatures from the books to take them with him on his travels, and likely to use them in lectures” (p.27).

In ‘Introduction’, we learn that Rudolf Steiner carried a pocket-knife to slice open the pages of books with sealed sections. Nevertheless, “More than 350 [books] ... have not been cut open” (p.28).

‘Introduction’ includes multiple photos of Rudolf Steiner's book markups. This includes of notes, marginalia, underlining, drawings, and ink splodges. Some books have burn marks from Rudolf Steiner's cigarettes or pipe ash (p.46). “Some text annotations are in “Gabelsberger shorthand” (p.39). About 800 books are inscribed with a dedication (to Rudolf Steiner or others).

Of the 9,407 titles that are documented in Sam (2024), 163 are missing. The three most populated sections of the library are: Belles-Lettres (literary linguistic) (n=1643), Philosophy and Psychology (n=1277); and History et al (historical-social) (n=1099) (p.78).

Verdict

The ‘Introduction’ is a finely printed book with a superior choice of paper stock and font, and it is section sewn. The ‘Introduction’ is recommended for acquisition by all scholars of Rudolf Steiner, and by all library holdings of Rudolf Steiner works. This research work is new and novel and is an important contribution to Rudolf Steiner studies. The body of this book matches the three-volume work from which it is excerpted. The ‘Introduction’ is a softcover book clad in a drab grey card, quite unlike ‘The Library’, which is a sumptuously bound hard cover set of three volumes in a custom slipcase. ‘Introduction’ is not a book to be ‘judged by its cover’ (it is better), although an Index would have been useful. The ‘Introduction’ stands alone for those with an interest in Rudolf Steiner, his library, and also for those with an interest in personal libraries more broadly, but whose interests do not extend to exploring the library contents individually. For those whose interest does extend to the content specifics (rather than the generics) of Rudolf Steiner’s library, then the three volume work is also recommended (Sam, 2024).

Acknowledgements

The review copy was sent to the reviewer unsolicited by the publisher. The Dornach photographs in the present review are by the reviewer. The staff and archivists at the Rudolf Steiner Archive, Haus Duldeck, Dornach, Switzerland, are thanked for the kind hospitality, assistance, and access provided to the reviewer during visits to the archive, and for facilitating the research for the reviewer’s earlier publication: ‘The Library of Rudolf Steiner: The Books in English’ (Paull, 2018c).

References

- Kugler, J., Zumdick, W., Pehnt, W., & Kugler, W. (Eds.). (2011). *Architekturführer Goetheanumhügel die Dornacher Anthroposophen-Kolonie*. Zurich: Verlag Niggli.
- Paull, J. (2012). The Glass House: Crucible of Biodynamic Agriculture. *Journal of Biodynamics Tasmania*, 108(Summer), 18-23.
- Paull, J. (2018a). Dr Rudolf Steiner's Shed: The Schreinerei at Dornach. *Journal of Bio-Dynamics Tasmania*, 127(September), 14-19.
- Paull, J. (2018b). The Home of Rudolf Steiner: Haus Hansi. *Journal of Biodynamics Tasmania*, 126(Second Quarter), 19-23.
- Paull, J. (2018c). The Library of Rudolf Steiner: The Books in English. *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, 9(3), 21-46.
- Paull, J. (2019). Rudolf Steiner: At Home in Berlin. *Journal of Biodynamics Tasmania*, 132, 26-29.
- Paull, J. (2020). The First Goetheanum: A Centenary for Organic Architecture. *Journal of Fine Arts*, 3(2), 1-11.
- Paull, J. (2023). Dornach: In the footsteps of Rudolf Steiner. *Studies in Art and Architecture*, 2(4), 1-11.
- Sam, M. M. (2024). *The Library of Rudolf Steiner*. 3 volumes. Tiburon, CA: Chadwick Library Press.
- Sam, M. M. (2025). *An Introduction to The Library of Rudolf Steiner*. Tiburon, CA: Chadwick Library Press.
- Wachsmuth, G. (1958). The Last Years. In A. Freeman & C. Waterman (Eds.), *Rudolf Steiner: Recollections by Some of his Pupils* (pp. 155-169). London: The Golden Blade.
- Wachsmuth, G. (1989). *The Life and Work of Rudolf Steiner*. Blauvert, NY: Spiritual Science Library.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).