

"WELL, I'LL BE OFF NOW"

Walter Spies

Based on the recollections and letters
of the painter, composer and connoisseur of the art of life

by
Jean-Claude Kuner



translation: Anthony Heric

Music by Erik Satie

Announcement:

**"WELL, I'LL BE OFF NOW"
Walter Spies**

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

He didn't like it here at all.

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O-Ton: Daisy Spies

The pretentiousness of the time, the whole movie business, it displeased him greatly.

Announcement:

With Walter Spies, Leo Spies, Hans Jürgen von der Wense, Irene and Eduard Erdmann; Jane Belo, Martha Spies, Heinrich Hauser, as well as texts from the unfinished novel: PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN.

Vicki Baum: Yes, by me, by Vicki Baum

Vicki Baum:

This is going to be an old-fashioned book full of old-fashioned people with strong and very articulate sentiments.

We of that generation know that we were a gang of tough rebels, and look with much smiling pity and a dash of contempt at today's youth with their load of self-pity and their whining for security.

Security, indeed!

O-Ton: Balinese painter Anak Agung Gede Meregeg:

Music John Cage

Meregeg – Translator:

When Walter Spies died we felt like children who had lost a parent.

Vicki Baum:

I just scanned through some of the letters Walter wrote me occasionally and came across a line that was his answer to my well thought-out plans for revisiting his island within three years; after such and such work would be done and such and such things attended to, and such and such contracts expired and what more such complex matters had to be taken care of.

Spies and Vicki Baum:

“Dear Vicki, how can you say.... You don’t know. For all we know we will be dead in three hours... Therefore I advise you to pack your toothbrush and a bottle of medication against malaria in your handbag, that’s all you need, and take the next boat.”

Vicki Baum:

And so I took the next boat and I’m glad I did, because that was the last time I saw Walter. *

Spies:

Something that has been so terribly loathsome to me from the start, because we’re unfortunately human, is Europeans with their stupid, drilled-in need to pass judgement!

Why do humans pass judgement? Who is the arbiter? Who can dare to pass judgement as to what is beautiful and what is ugly?

There is only one great truth, and this truth encompasses everything! One must learn to understand, to empathise, and submit oneself to everything!

To submerge oneself everywhere and into everything, without a word of critique, only then can one understand! That’s life, that’s death! Die a thousand times every day and be born again!

Atmo: Bali

Spies:

I’m going to furnish my bamboo hut in beloved, lonely Ubud and will soon be lost to the world!

My only hope is that I earn so much money from doing nothing that I can continue

doing nothing here – perpetuum *immobile*!

Atmo and music from the 1920s

Vicki Baum:

Even as a boy of 22, in Berlin, Walter had his abrupt retreating into himself. Perhaps he was fundamentally shy, though his manners were too good to show it.

When Walter spoke about himself – as he did a few times under the pressure of his tangled emotions – it gave me a shock, as if a pleasant green hill had suddenly turned into an erupting volcano. He had himself well under control most of the time, but after awhile you learn to know the small storm signals and mannerisms of people you like.

Walter, furious, jealous, desperate, got what he called a cold nose.

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

He was very open-minded. He got along well with people. Not with everyone. There were sorts that he absolutely dismissed. One could say he was very consistent in that respect.

Hellerau 1919

Female:

And who exactly is this Walter that everyone's making such a fuss about?

Ira:

You must join me for tea here tomorrow, then you'll become acquainted with my brother Walter, you artists will especially love him. Kokoschka! You must see his paintings.

Leo Spies:

And he can play piano and compose like no other.

Vicki Baum:

Leo was the youngest, a music student, a very delicate, tall, dreamy youngster who also received his share of the Spies talent. And there were also Ira, and Daisy, the

youngest sister who wanted to be a ballerina and because of her unusual dancing style was often sketched by Kokoschka...

O-Ton: Daisy Spies:

They all played piano: Walter, Leo, my sister Ira. That was normal, they were always playing music.

The Brothers

Music: Piano piece by Leo Spies

Spies:

Ljowa! I've finally figured it out. I'll never worry again about what will become of me. What is meant to be is what will happen.

Leo Spies:

I can hardly remember... If I really did accuse you of cowardice and absconding then I definitively take it all back.

I think that you and I, we've been warring against each other from the very beginning – and as much as we are and remain brothers in every respect, we are also very different.

Spies:

I will never work for the future, only enjoy the here and now, come what it may.

Leo Spies:

Somehow your free, detached spirit, inimical to all inner compulsion, always goads me to dissent.

Spies:

I'm going to do whatever is fun at the moment.

Especially in youth, when one is still fresh and receptive, one must see as much as

possible, experience, enjoy life, because afterwards it's too late.

Vicki Baum:

Well then: I am trying to tell the story of a man who did what we all want to do at times. Walter Spies got away from it all. He did not compromise and he acknowledged no horizons. He was a free man, even though he was caught in the vortex of our times.

Music: Wense

The composer and childhood friend

Hans Jürgen von der Wense

Wense:

He was the most beautiful person I'd seen in his blond abandon, his Russian costume and gestures, his compositions that simply fluttered off like whole gardens of condors...

Music: Walter Spies: op. 1

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

He was devastating in his manner and looks. An eminently beautiful lad.

He was a painter and musician. Painting was essential. But he also wrote much music. A double talent.

Walter was extremely musical. He was really a Renaissance man.

Wense:

Walter and I: we met like two flaming meteors...and when we began to glow it was more alarming than love, as identical as we were and are, as identical as if we came from one essential soul.***

Vicki Baum:

Walter spent his early childhood partly in St. Petersburg, partly on the country estate of his grandparents.

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

We lived for six months in the countryside, on the estate. It was a gigantic wooden house. I can remember the village, the fields of strawberries... We were brought up liberally, and especially close to nature. We lived for six months in the countryside. In that respect the urge for freedom was always there in him...not the urge, but rather the consciousness of having it.

Vicki Baum:

He was nineteen years old when the First World War exploded and his family were like all Germans interned as enemy aliens.

He grew up as a prisoner and in the end he died as a prisoner, yet he never lost the only true freedom, the inner freedom that is indestructible.

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

Live free I'd say! (laughs) Without conventions!

Controversy

Music Cage, Atmo Bali: Forest

Spies:

You've surely heard of the horrible accident already. Kosja got bitten by a shark. His right leg was torn off and nearly all of his fingers and in hospital...hours later, he died.

Stutterheim:

Yes, it's very difficult for you now without your nephew Konrad.

Spies:

Dearest Stutti, I'm in an awful state.

Stutterheim:

You don't want to see that the most terrible things happen all the time, everywhere in nature.

Spies:

What will become of me is a mystery to me! I'm being called back to Europ-papa – but I prefer Bali-mama!

Stutterheim:

You certainly have many scars, that much is clear, although you never really want to fully explain how you acquired them.

Ural 1917

Music: Mossolov, Sonata D-minor

Vicki Baum:

Walter had grown up and lived in a world of men, exclusively. During his most impressionable years men and mountain had been his friends, first the fellow prisoners and the guards at Sterlimatak... And in the years after the upheaval still more men: peasants fleeing or resisting, soldiers of the White and Red armies...hordes of starved boys like himself.

O-Ton: Daisy

That happened outside of my own experience. I knew nothing of it as a child, not even what it was... I think that he probably first experienced that type of sexual freedom during his imprisonment during the war.

Spies:

My birthday is coming, I'll be twenty-two: already an odious old man! But I feel much younger!

At the moment I mostly paint various fantasies, some call them futuristic, but that doesn't bother me, I simply continue painting the same way. Naturally not everyone understands them!!

O-Ton: Daisy

He really enjoyed the time in the Urals to some extent. Free of any conventions and of any sort of commitment, be they familial or cultural.

What others considered an internment was for him a sort of freedom. He got to travel around the Urals and he really liked the people somehow...

Music

Spies:

I am still quite pleased with my local stay here in *the Urals*.

I've been working hard at the Arabic language, found a teacher among the interneers, and now we're searching through old Tartar literature and Bashkir songs, music and text. In a word: splendid, heavenly, paradise!

The best and most beautiful was the last concert, where I played Bashkir and Tartar music with an interesting local singer, with tremendous emotion and soul. I've hardly heard more beautiful folk songs.

The Tatars went simply mad and almost fainted from astonishment and delight that I could play all these songs by heart, with no sheet music, and produced on the piano a couple of fabulous spirited and, as they phrase it, 'heart opening' Tartarian things!

Up until now it's unprecedented that anyone from a foreign country paid any attention to Tartar music, let alone worked on it himself and played it in concerts!

Music Mossolov

Leo Spies:

The Russian Revolution freed you from internment.

In early fall 1918, dressed as a farmer you leave Moscow and slog your way to the front lines, partly on foot.

When you attempt to cross the front, you get turned back in the night by German guards. In a second attempt on the next night, as you are called to by a guard in the darkness you recognise the voice of a German soldier who was interred with you. He lets you through and brings you to headquarters. You get permission to continue

travelling on to Berlin.

You return to us in Berlin as a matured personality. What beforehand was often gruff, contrarian nature now seems more even-tempered, softer.

Your unrelenting love of truth, however, remains unchanged. Your hate can be as great as your love. You can keep unsympathetic people at arm's length by bluntly telling them the most unpleasant truths.

Walter Spies:

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O-Ton-Passage Bali: Iseh; countryside atmo, voices asking for Walter Spies

Vicki Baum:

These memories much too much for a letter and much too fragmentary for a biography.

Spies:

I think I'm going through a major crisis.

(Pause)

I cannot tolerate another minute in Germany!

(Pause)

So I'll go where there are people with soul!

The composer Eduard Erdmann and his wife Irene

Irene Erdmann:

Walter attempted to find his own personal truth, to find an unconventional and uncompromising artistic approach...

Eduard Erdmann:

...which was in keeping with the requirements of the expressionist era.

Spies:

I want to be absolute in everything

Irene Erdmann:

Then came the relationship with Murnau. I believe they met in April 1920. He accompanied him on many journeys. He also worked on his films.

Eduard Erdmann:

We met Walja courtesy of the composer Hans Jürgen von der Wense. They were very close friends. There was nothing but music playing with Wense and Walja.

Atmo Bali Gamelan

Irene Erdmann:

One evening – it must have been 1922 – Walja stormed in, in ecstasy. He had bought a large book by Gregor Krause: “Bali – The Country and its People”, that was almost completely made up of full-page photographs.

Eduard Erdmann:

“I must go there,” said Walja.

Spies:

(reading from the foreword to KRAUSE)

Everything is becoming, is changing, always new and yet ancient, ordained

by the gods.

Irene Erdmann:

It seems to me that shortly thereafter he was on Bali.

Spies:

(reading from the foreword to KRAUSE)

Being at one here is a community of gods, animals, plants and people.

That is Bali and the auspiciousness of this island's fortune, that the natural balance is conditionally at hand.

Dresden 1920

Music: Wense

Wense:

Taking leave from Walja is too difficult. Walja is everything to me.

Travelled to Dresden. Happy.

Deliriously overjoyed.

At night from the heath we looked down onto the city.

We snatched daring chords from the piano, composed into one another and then: we even had the same dreams.

I'm leaving tomorrow.

We were all together once again.

In the evening at a concert with Kokoschka. Mahler's First. Then we strolled through the city. Very serene.

It seemed to us to be on the verge of a great departure.

For everyone...we all walked hand-in-hand.***

Spies:

Right now I have no desire to be in the company of other people.

I'm not writing to Wense.

Wense:

Walja should not sniff cocaine, but rather let his eyes loll in the sun.

Atmo: Lapping of the ocean

Spies:

Two months with Murnau in the Dalmatians, pottering about.

Unfortunately the making of a film was less pleasant.

It isn't until you're outside of Germany that you realise how terrible it is to live in Germany, what a horrible country it is, and what sort of dreadful people live there, how dry and emotionless they are, I cannot stand it another minute! For me, after I saw, experienced and felt real life during the three years of internment with the Bashkirs, it will never again be possible for me to feel comfortable in Europe.

I would much prefer to go away from all these people and attempt to find myself a new home – to live once again with simple people with a different, more spiritual culture than the one here.

O-Ton: Daisy

Murnau was tremendously against popularity. He let no one get close to him. He was very exclusive. And we, the family, he couldn't tolerate us at all.

They were alone for themselves. Always distanced. Dismissive of people.

Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau

Georgette Schoonderbeek:

He lived together with Murnau in a charming villa on Douglas Street in Grunewald.

Murnau had hired a gorgeous grand piano for Walter and set up a part of the large room as a studio. He had his easel and canvas and he could paint in peace and quiet. Murnau did everything that he could to make Walter's life easier – he needed Walter's sunny disposition, his invincible joy of life around him.

Spies:

I want to go before winter comes.

Georgette Schoonderbeek:

Every time when he returned to us from Berlin, we felt as if it couldn't continue this

way.

Wense:

We visited Murnau.

Walter is unhappy and is painting snowy landscapes.

Georgette Schoonderbeek:

The lovely companionship threatened to tear apart.

Spies:

I want to try, however I can manage, as a sailor or a worker somehow, to embark on a steamer and find a place that calls to me, where I should disembark and stay.

Georgette Schoonderbeek:

I went to Berlin and had a long discussion with Murnau, alone, deep into the night; and suddenly this truth became clear to Murnau, such that he could say with complete conviction: Walter must be free to go, I must not try to hold him.

1923 Departure

Harbour atmo

Spies:

Everything's settled, I'm happier than a pig in the mud! The journey starts to England, from there Holland, Spain, the Mediterranean, Suez Canal, and on down to Java. I'll be back in three or four months!

Wense:

I believe he will never return.

Atmo: Harbour quarter, voices, music

Spies:

Mama! What is really unfortunate is that I had to board the ship today, as it will soon

be steaming off this week, and that's why I cannot come to Berlin, but three months won't be long at all!

Now, you must not be surprised when you receive letters from me that are written in a very broken German, I will be speaking the same here the whole time, so that I, *as a sailor*, when I do not immediately understand what to do, I can push it off on my ignorance of the language, it's an excellent excuse!

It's superbly marvellous that I am travelling with Heinrich Hauser...

Hauser:

Walja and I don't have much to do with one another.

Spies:

...alone it would be much more unpleasant and difficult!

Hauser:

That got established right from the very start, because Walja should have his experiences onboard alone, and only very good friends can tolerate the intense, limitless coexistence here, and that we surely are not.

Spies:

And I'll have returned by Christmas.

O-Ton: Daisy

The only person who knew he was leaving forever was me...

Hauser:

It is strange that his femininity is coming out even more strongly in his dealings with these very contrary-contradictory seamen. He's blooming like a rose and is always pleasantly amicably busy – he cannot work, that's the problem, he's a man of 28 years onboard – one of the oldest, and for the sake of his age he is spared having to do things he doesn't understand, and no one says a word to him about it. It's something he cannot understand, because he was always a delightful lad – and so he's become a first-class passenger of sorts.

He's simply travelling on what could be considered an extended train trip from Berlin to Java.

O-Ton: Daisy

I accompanied him to the train. My mother asked me, "Why are you going to the station?" No one knew that he was going away forever!

O-Ton: Wind and weather. The monotone throbbing of the ship's engines.

Spies:

Off Gibraltar, 23 September 1923

Dearest Bruntschik!

You know, I was suddenly overcome with the feeling that it is a crime to know so little of the world and what hubris it is when you think you must accomplish something while you are still so young, and there are a thousand other things in life that seem more important.

You might also find it peculiar that I decided so suddenly.

But my accomplishments with my paintings in Holland and particularly in Munich they're really goading me to just give it all up. The security of knowing that I could earn as much money as I want with almost no effort at all is a very stupid and indecent thought for me – and one I cannot deal with.

I must come to a close, dear Bruno, because my watch post is starting and I have to take the helm.

And then watch for ships and beacons for one and a half hours in the crow's nest way up there, and sing and while away the time. All wonderful, wonderful things that are a thousand times more beautiful than wasting one's time with art for so many years.

Gamelan music

1923 Java

Female (reading):

Perhaps you've already heard that Walja is staying on Java.

Hauser:

I'm much more saddened about that than I thought. The three months that we spent living so close to one another bonded us somehow, even if you don't really notice it.

Female:

Walja's constant raptures are lost on me. But the first night in Colombo was scandalous, when he and I furtively lied our way past police and quarantines and we suddenly, awe-struck, found ourselves standing in the Petuh. Nothing but lights and the air was thick with smoke, full of smells and unexpected sounds. And the eyes everywhere, like dark stars, and the brown bodies, full of rhythm and movement, and the temple with dancing priests and flowers and gongs – it's enough to drive you insane.

Hauser:

We had spoken about it in Colombo, but I didn't really believe it. But next came Padang, and it's really where the fault lies, because it's phenomenally beautiful, like nowhere else I've seen in the world.

Female:

We went ashore on the first evening in Batavia, and Walja said that he would definitely be staying.

Hauser:

We found it would be best for Walja if he disembarked that very night. It was very difficult getting ashore unseen. Walja dressed elegantly and passed through customs without further ado, claimed that he was the third officer aboard the 'Cassel' and had business in Surabaya, and it all went swimmingly.

Mama Spies and Spies:

Dearest Mama, through chance and luck, which follow me everywhere like a fool, I found a room here like no other: with a fantastic view of all the mountains that surround the city.

I've hired a piano and am practicing diligently because I'm giving a concert with Professor Artini, an unbelievably good violinist, on 15 December.

I imagine I can earn money with painting, they pay fantastic prices, up to two

thousand guilders per painting.

The people, the Sundanese and Javanese, are so incredibly beautiful, so slender, brown and aristocratic that anyone who isn't one should be ashamed of themselves. The Dutch here are the most unsympathetic and provincial that you could ever imagine, vulgar, boorish, dumb, narrow-minded, priggish, and I cannot find the words to express my hate for them.

It seems to me that I will be getting into greater conflicts with them because of it!

O-Ton: van Praag

It seemed only idiots came to the Sultan's in Yogyakarta...it was supposed to be a celebration with gongs, dancing, music, the whole night... But they weren't in the least interested. They only came to gorge themselves on food and drink.

Mama Spies and Spies:

Mama! The music here! For god's sake it's glorious! Melodies never heard before on instruments never before seen.

I could go crazy from the thought of how wonderful it is here, and how terrible it is that you are all stuck there in Germany being smothered by mud and dreadfulness.

O-Ton: The palace (kraton) in Yogyakarta and Gamelan

Spies:

The city of Yogyakarta is one of the most interesting on Java because it's the centre of Javanese culture. The sultan resides here with his forty wives and 158 children, and an unbelievable life at court. Everybody that lives behind the kraton's white walls and thus belongs to the palace, including the women and children, is on the upwards of sixty thousand people!

I just started to paint a portrait of a Javanese prince yesterday. The people here are so beautiful that you cannot see enough of them!

The people have physiques, they couldn't be built any better, and everyone mostly walks around bare-chested, brown and appetising, even women, although not in the city but only out in the villages.

Now that I've come into contact with the Javanese and with their incredibly high and amazing culture, I'm almost maniacal! You can hardly imagine that something so beautiful exists!

Oh, I worship them, like I've never worshipped anything else in my life!

Music: Java Gamelan

Vicky Baum:

There was always something ambiguous about him. The same elusive quality you sensed so rightly in his paintings.

He was the warmest, most outgoing, most giving being you can imagine; and at the same time there was such reserved detachment about him that one would never dare to penetrate his invisible walls.

Music: Java Gamelan

Spies:

About two week ago there was a huge festival and ball at the sultan's, and something extraordinary happened there. The old royal Gamelan started to play, softly at first, in drops, deep, convulsive strokes on the gong, so deep they practically make you anxious; and the agitated drumming in between and behind it; and sometimes all of the music simply dissipated and then came back, drop for drop from somewhere, and I was quite mad with joy, I have never enjoyed the music so much.

You can imagine how excited and passionate I was, directly thereafter, to pound out fox trots on the piano, and how sublime and divine it looked when those thick masses of Dutch flesh waltzed all over the place!

And then it came about! The sultan noticed that someone different was sitting at the piano than the time previous, became interested and inquired about me.

On the next morning it happened! I couldn't believe my eyes; carriages arrived in front of my pension, containing princes and their retinues of dozens of servants, with all the ceremonies, golden Pajungs unfurled, carrying gold utensils on golden platters held high, and the princes wanted to speak to me on the sultan's behalf. And what did he want? The sultan let it be asked if I might not be inclined to take over direction of his court orchestra!!!! They are all Javanese, thirty, forty men, strings and brass, and they try to play European music, but without proper information and direction, and to top it all off, they don't have anyone to play the piano!

When I told my friends everything of this they all practically fainted. A European has

never ever received a position inside the kraton!

And who else could something like this happen to!!! What is it that always accompanies me!!! Wherever I go everything happens even more deliriously wonderful than I could ever have imagined.

1925 Bali

Spies:

I've been here on Bali for one month now. I seriously doubt that anyone has become as familiar with Bali in such a short period of time as I have. I did it just as I had planned, I've been going by foot the whole time, often right across the countryside where otherwise only very few go, as there are no roads or paths. And the most important thing was that I only spent nights in Balinese homes. So I learned about the lives and goings-on of Brahmans, farmers, of every type of craftsman, wood carvers, wayang painters and silversmiths. At the prince's, by whom I've been very lovingly received, I was shown interesting dances and performances, and I've been able to take valuable notes and photos of all of it.

O-Ton: Daisy Spies

When he was on Bali he really enjoyed abstract art, so to speak. Basically he never really loved dramatic spectacles or things like that. Film wasn't something that really interested him.

Here art is always emotional, and there it is completely ruled by the form.

O-Ton: Bali – dance event

Vicky Baum:

Walter found the world he was pining for on Bali. Full of music, dance and painting.

And simple people just like he liked them...

It is truly difficult to write about a close friend...

Music: Java Gamelan

Spies:

It's the naturalness of the people and landscape that really interests me terribly.

Being right in the middle of life and to be able to commit every sin out of faith!

Internally resolved, calm, steeped in god; outwardly very delightfully earthly. Everything is simple, no requirements, no doubts! At the same time devoted to everything and mentally to have overcome everything, and rule powerlessly! It's practically Lao Tse-ian! And every simple farmer or Ksatria, Brahman or prince is steeped in the very same!

The painter Anak Agung Gede Meregeg

O-Ton: Bali – painter Anak Agung Gede Meregeg (= 2002):

Meregeg - Translator:

One day Walter Spies came to my house, where I was painting, and asked if I wanted to become his student. That's how I came to Campuan.

Music Cage

Spies:

I haven't really painted very much, I'm still waiting until I can completely settle down! Strangely, it's just like in Europe, but the paintings just fly out of my hands. This is particularly favourable, because I hate when things are hanging around and ruining the atmosphere for me.

O-Ton: Bali – painter Anak Agung Gede Meregeg (= 2002):

Meregeg - Translator:

He talked about our paintings and encouraged us to make them better. Once they were finished he assisted us in getting them into exhibitions and in selling them. Balinese painting wouldn't have developed as it did without Walter Spies.

Music: wild Gamelan

Spies:

Today is a feast day on Bali. Everything is decorated and is hanging full of yellowy leaves and colourful flowers. You walk along as if beneath flags and high bamboo arches. Rice offerings, flowered with many tassels, hang like tall chandeliers.

Vicki Baum:

He, the master of doing nothing, an artist of leisure, was likewise animated by a desire to create that was ever eager, always awake. There was nothing that couldn't inspire him. **

Spies:

Wild tiger-lions and elephant-boars clatter in the kampongs, and gamelans walk in behind them. On every corner and everywhere left around the corner. However, the legs don't know who they should be following, so it's a wrangling in every direction, you want to multiply yourself, or make square roots of eye, ear, nose and bliss.

The Dancer I Wayan Limbak

O-Ton: Steps. Balinese voices.

Limbak - Translator:

I met Walter Spies in 1929 and we immediately became good friends.

I was 20 years old at the time and was studying dance. He often painted or drew my face and my body. I had a pretty face, long hair and beautiful long fingernails.

O-TON: van Praag

I remember going back in '72, and I spoke with a father of one of his lovely boys, who he'd had, and he was still crying about Walter's death. He had always been so good to the family and the son. The Balinese find it completely normal. They do that when they're young and later they marry a wife.

Limbak - Translator:

One day Spies went to Bedulu and there saw the Sangyang Trance Dance followed by the Kecak Dance. It was a religious dance. At that time there was an epidemic in Bedulu and many people had died, probably of cholera. That is why they danced the Kecak around the village, calling 'cak cak cak'.

Limbak - Translator:

Spies encouraged me to perform the Kecak for tourists with a 20-person troupe. We wore coconut-shell hats and the group received ten rupees after the performance.

Spies divided the money so that everyone received the same amount, which was very good, because it prevented the leading members from being corrupt.

O-Ton: van Praag

We did a lot together between 1936 and 38.

Everyone came to Walter. He was the one who knew everything. Not just about painting, but about the culture, the music. He was a really fantastic fellow.

Spies:

I'm trying to catalogue all of the various types of Gamelan by their characteristics, because that is what's wonderful about Balinese music, this unbelievable diversity. This allows the old music to be kept separate from the very modern, which can further develop of its own accord.

Alexandre Tansman: Third Sonatine, in memory of Walter Spies 1933

Music Tansman

O-TON: van PRAAG

We always went together watching dances or listening to gongs in the temples with Vicki Baum or Beryl de Zoete. He was a very pleasant person, was very quick to sympathy or antipathy to others, in which case he showed no more interest in them at all. He had his house and an atelier, and two or three bungalows. Vicki Baum stayed there for two years.

Vicki Baum:

Was Walter actually my friend?

Yes, I think of him as one of my best and certainly one of the most important friends. He helped me with work, he gave my life a new direction, away from Hollywood and the movies and the easy successes, he taught me without teaching to accept everything with equanimity, and see things in their true proportions, which makes most of them pleasantly unimportant.

He was nobody's friend or everybody's. *

O-TON PRAAG

And then all sorts of important people arrived...

Spies:

Today I'm expecting Lord and Lady Beatty ...

Barbara Hutton ...

Leopold Stokowski ...

Margaret Mead ...

Alexandre Tansman ...

Colin McPhee ...

Noel Coward

Noel Coward:

O W' Dear, Oh W. Dear

Please don't neglect your painting

Neglect Dear W if you must

Your pleasure in the native's trust

And when, at last, you madly rush

To squeeze your paint and grab your brush

Do not neglect in memory

To give a kindly thought to me

Noel Coward

O-TON: van Praag

He didn't have a private life. He had so many commitments he couldn't always do what he wanted.

Spies:

I've been sitting here in my hermitage, in my studio in Iseh, in the hills and paint in defiance of death.

The house in Ubud is being managed by Dreesen and Lindner, and they're taking care of all my 'guests'. Unfortunately they are becoming ever more numerous...

Vicki Baum:

Walter lived in a world which he made as undemanding as possible, even his own genius as a painter was allowed to lay no heavy duties on his spirit. If a visitor in Bali wished to order a Walter Spies painting, he made a painting. In between for

many months he would do other things.

Ethnomusical and archaeological studies, scientific research, assistance on books and films. And: Bali tour guide for the famous.

But the peaceful climate suddenly turned at the end of the 1930s. We, Walter's friends, including Jane Belo and Margaret Mead, were worried.

Radio (in Dutch):

The moral campaign against pederasty, prostitution and homosexuality has begun on Java. First arrests of immoral person on Java took place in autumn. Among them journalists, artists and foreigners.

Margaret Mead:

Walter and four others have been in prison in Den Pasar since January 1st 1939.

Mama Spies und Spies:

Bali, 4 March 1939 (from prison)

Dear Mama!

I personally couldn't be better, and I don't give a damn about anything, am in a better mood than ever, am working like a madman, and couldn't be bothered with 'what might have beens' and 'what should have beens'.

Radio (in Dutch):

Many Westerners are leaving the island of Bali.
End of December Walter Spies arrested.

Margaret Mead:

A witch-hunt against homosexuals broke out in the Pacific. Many of our friends and associates in Bali were under attack. We had intended to meet Jane Belo in Sydney only to talk over with her plans for her own further research, but in the unsettled situation it did not seem safe for her to go back to Bali alone.

Spies and Jane:

My dearest Jane!

Today I wasn't well at all – I had to write my mother a letter. You can imagine how that went, she who knows not a thing about it and cannot even imagine it.

I provided her all possible explanations and reasons – naturally without mentioning the most important one. She would never understand, I fear.

That is why I had to write something – and not about dragonflies, gamelans and the jungle. And I wrote her that nothing that could happen to me could ever make me sad or unhappy, and that she shouldn't forget that happiness is always in and around me – and that there's a reason for everything in life and that there's good in everything that happens.

Walter Spies and Jane:

Surabaya (in prison), 27 June 1939

Jane! My dearest of all!

When I think about everything on the whole, I cannot help but see the good in everything.

Vicki Baum:

The world was getting ever darker. Campuan became silent. »If Germany attacks Holland, all the Germans here will be arrested,« Walter sighed. Friends advised Walter, who had hardly ever lived in Germany, to change his nationality. It was in vain. He could never resolve to act on these types of issues. **

Atmo: Bali today

Hans Neuhaus:

All of us on Bali had absolutely no interest in politics and so were completely unprepared for the sudden internment.

Spies:

(Java), 29 May 1940

Every day here is just like the day before, and the same as tomorrow.

Actually it's very boring.

27 November 1941

Today was another bad day! Nothing works! A portrait I began has failed! I lost in ping-pong! I have no more butter! The last Russian book is read through!

Leo Spies:

Three transport ships holding internees left Sibolga harbour on 19 January 1942. Soon thereafter, they were attacked by Japanese submarines. Two ships escaped to India, one was torpedoed.

Beryl de Zoete:

London, 6 February 1946

To Daisy Spies

I am terribly sorry that your mother had to hear the news of Walter's death. I heard later from a friend in Siam, that he had met someone who saw him die. He sat very peacefully and was smoking his pipe as the ship went down.

Yours,

Beryl de Zoete

Spies:

(very dry)

There is sure to be a place somewhere, where no gas masks and no tanks are necessary. If it isn't here, then it must be somewhere else!

I've always been fortunate in life.

The world is like a fairytale for me, and always has been.

Everything is best just as it happens!

Notes:

* Quoted from Vicki Baum's unfinished novel PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN

** Text not by Vicki Baum

*** From: Jürgen von der Wense, *A Boyhood History, Diary 1919 and 1920*, Ed. Dieter Heim; Matthes & Seitz, Munich 1999 – ISBN 3-88221-824-5