



Faith in Andreas-Salomé, Lou (1861–1937)

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“Oh bright heaven overhead/ I place my trust in you.” Salomé wrote this opening line of a poem in Finland when she was a girl. The verse continues: “Do not allow desire or dread/ To screen you from my view.” At the end of her life as an old woman she wrote, “the basic feeling behind it [this poem] has coloured all my subsequent actions and experiences.” The verse gives the meaning of faith for her. This same sense of faith erupted later on in her famous *Hymn to Life* that Nietzsche set to music and Freud, not knowing that Salomé, his best student, had written it, snorted at as condoning “the oceanic feeling”. “Heaven overhead” is a metaphor for the oneness of life, “the Encompassing” (*das Umgreifende*) as Jaspers would later call it, or Being (*Sein*) as Heidegger would call it, and prior to both of them, the Open (*das Offene*), as her long term love the poet Rainer Maria Rilke called it.

Faith is not a concept nor something self-evident, but a way of being in the world. Faith means you do not *know*, you *cannot* know, so certainty and Cartesian “clear and distinct ideas” are not possible. Therefore, in English “faith and love” are words that sit well together. Love requires faith and good faith requires love. The word “good” inserts itself adjectivally. Salomé’s faith was to live life – her little part – out of a sense of the whole of life and that behind it all there is a serenity, a peace, a sky that we have clouded with our ideas and actions, our foolhardiness.

Primary Sources:

Andreas-Salomé, Lou 1995. *Looking Back: Memoirs*. New York: Marlowe & Co., 7, 8, 105.

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