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# The Course of Dr. Strader's Life

## The Open Biographical Secrets of Rudolf Steiner's Drama Characters, Part I

“Das Was bedenke, mehr bedenke Wie.”  
(Consider the What, consider more the How)

– J.W. von Goethe, *Faust II*.

*This essay on the character of Dr. Strader, as well as the accompanying one on Theodora, form part of a larger research project on the real-life models or historical personalities behind Rudolf Steiner's mystery drama characters. Although Steiner himself was for the most part silent regarding the main prototypes for his characters, the following two essays argue that the identities of these real-life personalities are not actually hidden, but are open secrets in the sense of J.W. von Goethe. To see this involves a methodical consideration of Steiner's own artistic, historical, and biographical indications.<sup>1</sup>*

### Interpreting Steiner's Dramas

Rudolf Steiner's third mystery drama, *The Guardian of the Threshold* (1912), especially contains a depiction of the path of knowledge of the scientist Dr. Strader; whereas in the fourth drama, *The Souls' Awakening* (1913), the character of Strader dies. What is the significance of Strader's destiny, and how are we to understand his name, work and death? Answers to these questions can be found directly in the biography and works of Rudolf Steiner on the one hand, and in the biographies and works of the various historical personalities who form the basis for this drama character on the other.

However, there could be a fundamental objection to our investigation from the outset: one might be of the opinion that it is inadvisable to interpret poetic works of art in general, much less subject the mystery dramas to some kind of historical and biographical reading, particularly since they deal with spiritual themes and realities. Someone holding this view might believe that these dramas should be simply accepted as they are, as imaginative dramatic texts, and not be intellectually dissected using all kinds of abstract theories. – “I have always found it distasteful to atomize with the intellect the weaving of the imagination”

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<sup>1</sup> This essay on Strader originally appeared in English in *New View*, Summer 2013, pp. 54-63 (in an abbreviated form). I thank the editor Tom Raines for his permission to reproduce this article here. A German version (translated by Ariane Eisenhut) was published under the title “Dr. Straders Rosenkreuzerpfad” in *Das Goetheanum. Wochenschrift für Anthroposophie*, No. 28, 13 July 2013, pp. 6-11. I would like to acknowledge the funding division of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany who earlier generously provided a nine-month stipend for this research project in 2011. Lastly, I would also like to thank Barbara Messmer and the other members of the Arbeitszentrum Frankfurt/Main of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany for their support and enthusiasm. The writing of this essay on Strader was made easier due to a one-month grant provided by this centre at the beginning of 2013.

(Rudolf Steiner, *The Course of My Life*).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to note that Steiner himself was not against the interpretation of poetic writings, even in a historical sense, and over the course of his career he interpreted numerous artistic and dramatic texts, especially Goethe's *Faust* and *Fairy Tale*.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the issue seems to be not so much *if* one should or should not interpret poetic works such as the mystery dramas, but *how* to interpret them. One of Steiner's own responses to the problem of interpreting his dramas was given in a lecture in September 1910:

Now, I ask you not to find it at all strange when I say that I have actually nothing against interpreting this Rosicrucian Mystery [Drama], in such a way as I myself have already occasionally interpreted other poetic works in our circles.<sup>4</sup>

In other words: for Steiner the most fruitful interpretative approach would be one that takes into account his own method of poetic analysis. Steiner added here two further important qualifications. First, he made the claim that if the first mystery drama of 1910, *The Portal of Initiation: A Rosicrucian Mystery*, were understood in its entirety he would not have to give any more lectures, even *esoteric* ones: "that many, many things in the domain of esotericism, in the domain of occultism, would no longer have to be spoken about, and that it would not be necessary for me to give any more lectures, if everything that directly lies in this Rosicrucian mystery were to have an effect on the souls of our dear friends and other people."<sup>5</sup> And second, a point which follows from the first: any genuine interpretation of these plays would yield results that do not contradict Steiner's other presentations on spiritual science, but would be in harmony with them, yet that these new insights might take years to discover:

On the one hand, this Rosicrucian mystery is to be, as it were, a trial of how everything that moves our anthroposophical life can flow into art. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that this Rosicrucian mystery contains a great deal of our spiritual scientific teachings in such a manner that it will perhaps be years before it is worked out. [...] One will find in it many of the topics that I have elsewhere lectured on.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, a fruitful interpretation of the mystery dramas would furthermore include Steiner's views on their significance and intentions in relation to his own work. In any event, it should be clear: Steiner does not at all object to the interpretation of his mystery dramas, and though research in this domain might only produce results after the passing of years, it will reveal that the dramas contain the teachings of spiritual science in an artistic form. Finally, for the most fruitful reading of these dramas Steiner advises bearing in mind the method that he himself had employed in the interpretation of other poetic writings,

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<sup>2</sup> R. Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang* (GA 28: 179). ("GA" refers to the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, the collected works of Steiner in German, published by the Rudolf Steiner Verlag in Dornach, Switzerland. Unless otherwise stated, all the translations in this and the following essay are my own).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see R. Steiner, *Goethes Geistesart in ihrer Offenbarung durch seinen 'Faust' und durch das Märchen von der Schlange und der Lilie* (Berlin: Philosophisch-anthroposophischer Verlag, 1918) (GA 22). Essay one stems from 1902, essay two is a reworked version of an essay from 1899, and the third essay is from 1918.

<sup>4</sup> R. Steiner, lecture: "Über Selbsterkenntnis, anknüpfend an das Rosenkreuzermysterium «Die Pforte der Einweihung»" Basel, 17. September 1910, in: *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125: 103).

<sup>5</sup> R. Steiner, lecture: "Einiges über das Rosenkreuzermysterium «Die Pforte der Einweihung»" Berlin, 31. Oktober 1910, in: *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125: 125).

<sup>6</sup> R. Steiner, *ibid.*, lecture: "Über Selbsterkenntnis, anknüpfend an das Rosenkreuzermysterium «Die Pforte der Einweihung»", Basel, 17. September 1910 (GA 125: 92).

particularly Goethe's works. The question now of course is: what is Steiner's method and conception of art, and how does he himself interpret these dramas and their characters?

Just a few words about a number of prevalent tendencies in Steiner research before answering these questions. – The present author is of the view that it is imperative to make the effort to critically read and understand Steiner's early writings *on their own terms* before one can pass judgement on questions such as their continuity or rupture with his later spiritual science. In Steiner research it is typical to divide up his career into a philosophical period lasting to approximately the year 1900, and then an esoteric period after the turn of the century. There is no doubt that Steiner only became a *public* esoteric teacher around 1902, and in this sense the general division is certainly justified. But does that mean these two periods of his life are completely unrelated to one another, or that there are no essential interconnections between the different works and phases of his career, as is often claimed?<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, an objective and thorough study will show that it is a preconception and intellectual indolence to make such a claim. Even more: that it is impossible to *fully* understand the deeper esoteric truths of Steiner's later period without taking into account his earlier Goethean and philosophical writings.

### **Characters as Goethean “Open Secrets”**

Not long after the premiere of the first mystery drama in Munich in August 1910, Steiner gave without doubt one of his most important indications concerning the genesis of the dramas. He remarked that the “seeds” of the first play, *The Portal of Initiation: A Rosicrucian Mystery*, reach back 21 years to the year 1889, and that the development of it additionally underwent a transformation every seven years:

If I may remark upon it, there was a long spiritual process that led to this mystery [drama]. When I reflect on or survey it, then its seeds, so to speak, go back to the year 1889. This is not to say approximately, but with an exactness that can be observed in things of this nature, I am led to trace the seed of this Rosicrucian mystery back twenty-one years. I personally can exactly follow the paths that these seeds traversed during these three times seven years, and I might add, that it was without me doing anything in particular, insofar as they led their own life during these three times seven years.<sup>8</sup>

This statement concerning the year 1889 (as well as the years 1896 and 1903), may be understood in a number of senses: for example, in the light of events in Steiner's biography, as well as his own writings, and as a reference to the lives and works of the other people connected with them. Indeed, our earlier investigations into the drama characters Frau Balde and Professor Capesius eventually led to two people who Steiner apparently first met in Weimar and Hermannstadt respectively, in the summer and Christmas of 1889 during his first trips abroad.

With regard to Steiner's own writings from the beginning of this 21-year-cycle, the latter include his *Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik* (Goethe as Father of a New Science of Aesthetics, 1889). One should not allow Steiner's later comments on the year 1889 to

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<sup>7</sup> In relation to the mystery dramas, for an example of a contemporary historian and critic (Helmut Zander) systematically claiming rupture in Steiner's works yet repeating failing to subject Steiner's earlier texts and biography to a genuine historical-critical analysis, see my essay (freely available on the website of the electronic journal *RoSE*), David W. Wood, “Plaidoyer for Historical-Critical Steiner Research: Using the Methodological Example of Rudolf Steiner as a Possible Character in the *Mysteriendramen*” in: *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education* volume 3, number 2 (March 2013): 17-27.

<sup>8</sup> R. Steiner, lecture Berlin, 31 October 1910, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), Dornach 1992, p. 124.

influence one here, but rather ask the question: Could it be necessary to first understand the precise nature of Steiner's views in his most extensive published text on art before trying to grasp the inner workings of his dramatic productions? – Even common sense would say that it might be. As the title of his text suggests, its central theory is Goethean in nature, and Steiner's presentation builds on the celebrated words of Homunculus from *Faust II*: "Consider the What, consider more the How." For Steiner, interpreting a poetic or artistic work involves two crucial elements. Firstly, one starts with the elements from the physical, sensible world, which may be termed the "What" of an art work. Secondly, the artist strives to be active and to transform the sensible, to give it a new form. This may be viewed as the most spiritual element or the "How" of an art work. Steiner explains the crux of his view in this 1889 text:

'Consider the What, consider more the How.' It is clearly expressed what the essence of art is. It does not depend on the embodiment of the super-sensible, but on the transformation (*Umgestalten*) of the sensible-factual. The real world should not be reduced to a mere means of expression: no, it should continue to subsist in its full independence; but it should receive a new form, a form that satisfies us. [...] Consider the *What*, consider more the *How*, for it above all depends on the *How*. The *What* remains a sensible element, but the *How* of the appearance becomes something *ideal*."<sup>9</sup>

That is to say, although the artist starts by basing his work on sensible elements or images from the physical world, the most important aspect is how he or she *transforms* these sensible images in their imagination, to present something wholly spiritual, *a new form or composition*. Thus, it is not a question of implanting an external idea into the sensible material or putting forward some kind of theory, but of beginning with the sensible world and reworking and transforming it in such a way that it becomes an expression of the spiritual. Understanding a work of art therefore requires taking into account both these aspects: tracing its origin back to the sensible world (the *What*), as well as seeing how the true artist has fashioned from this world a brand new composition that did not previously exist (the *How*).

One will see that this Goethean transformational process directly holds for the mystery dramas, insofar as Steiner specifically explains that all the characters are based on real-life people from the sense world that are personally known to him: "And these people are living people – not fictitious people. For example, they are very well known to me. By 'known', I do not mean thought up, but living and breathing. They are real – and [...] drawn from life. And it is *our* world."<sup>10</sup> However, the mystery dramas should not be conceived as merely conventional biographies projected onto the stage, but the lives and destinies of these real people have all become artistically refracted through the prism of Steiner's imagination. Who exactly are these people who originally formed the models for the mystery drama characters? During his lifetime Steiner scarcely mentioned any of them by name. It is as though he wished readers and spectators of the dramas to draw the links for themselves. As we will see, unraveling the identities to these real-life people involves bringing Steiner's Goethean aesthetic method into connection with his biographical and artistic indications for each drama character.

Consequently, Steiner did not wish passive interpreters of the dramas. An interpreter needs to actively ask the appropriate questions, carefully examine the original sources that lead out of Steiner's life and work over to the lives and works of different historical personalities, before finally comparing them again with the characters of the dramas to see if

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<sup>9</sup> R. Steiner, *Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik* (Vienna: Engelbert Pernerstorfer, 1889), pp. 13, 15 (cf. GA 30, pp. 39, 43).

<sup>10</sup> R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), p. 129.

they form a unity. If the artistic method and initial biographical indications for the mystery drama characters can be found in Steiner's own works, and the people in question are all personally known to him, then the identities of the real-life people behind these drama figures could be viewed as "*offenbare Geheimnisse*" or *open secrets* in the Goethean sense. For Goethe, an open secret in nature was one in which the phenomenon could only be pierced if one had asked the right question or found the right perspective. If this is correctly done, one then perceives that the explanation to the phenomenon is not really hidden at all, but lies in plain sight for everyone to see. The true artist is similarly inspired by the mysteries of Nature, as Goethe famously says in his *Maxims and Reflections*: "Anyone to whom Nature begins to reveal her open secrets feels an irresistible longing for her worthiest interpreter, art."<sup>11</sup>

Rudolf Steiner's first Rosicrucian mystery drama of 1910 is furthermore a metamorphosis of the events and figures in Goethe's *Märchen* or *Fairy Tale*. In the latter the figure of the Silver King asks the Old Man with the Lamp what his *most important* secret is. The Old Man replies: it is the "open" secret. One will see that this also holds for the real-life identities of Steiner's mystery drama characters – it is above all a matter of viewing them from the right vantage point in order to perceive that their most important secrets are not hidden at all, but are entirely *open*. Let us look at the character of Dr. Strader for a concrete example of this.

### Individuality and Features

According to Steiner, in each drama character one has to make a distinction between the one real-life individuality (*Individualität*) behind it, and the other people who supplied certain additional traits or "features" (*Züge*). It is important to grasp this distinction, because it is of course the *individuality* that reincarnates over different earthly lives – a process also artistically portrayed in the dramas. For example, scenes six to nine in the second drama *The Soul's Probation* show the former incarnations of the main characters around the years 1300-1333. Although poetically transformed, these scenes are likewise to be understood in a realistic sense: "*The Soul's Probation* is especially an attempt to present the way in which the idea of reincarnation works in the soul-life of the human being in a realistic manner."<sup>12</sup> This distinction between the main individuality of each figure and their defining traits can be understood by examining Steiner's remarks on Professor Capesius. In the final complete karma lecture of 23 September 1924 Steiner disclosed that his early Vienna teacher Karl Julius Schröer had supplied "a few features" for this drama character, but was not the central individuality behind it: "Not the entire individuality, but precisely a few features of Schröer have passed over into my Capesius in the mystery plays, into Professor Capesius."<sup>13</sup> Steiner did not directly say who the main individuality for Capesius was, but left the question open.<sup>14</sup>

The situation may appear different with regard to the drama character of Dr. Strader, but it is in fact strikingly similar. "Consider the What, consider more the How" (*Faust II*). In another 1924 karma lecture Steiner remarked that friends had recently discovered the real identity of Strader: "Friends have found, have guessed, who the real model of Strader is, and with a certain noble devotion have endeavoured to research in the literary estate of this real-life model of Strader."<sup>15</sup> The main personality behind Strader is the German philosopher

<sup>11</sup> J.W. von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, in: *Werke*, volume 12, *Kunst und Literatur* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989), p. 467.

<sup>12</sup> R. Steiner, lecture 19 December 1911, *Die Mission der neuen Geistesoffenbarung* (GA 127), p. 192.

<sup>13</sup> R. Steiner, *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*, vol. 4 (GA 238), Dornach 1991, p. 163.

<sup>14</sup> I have attempted to uncover the identity of this character in my essay: "Rudolf Steiner and Professor (Josef) Capesius" in: *New View* (London), Winter 2010/11, pp. 53-63; German translation in: *DIE DREI* 02/2011 and 03/2011.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*, vol. 5 (GA 239), Dornach 1985, p. 134.

Gideon Spicker, who was born in Reichenau near Lake Constance in 1840 and died in Munster in 1912. However, it is interesting to note not just *what* Steiner says in his later lectures about Strader, but *how* he talks about the relationship between the real-life personality and the character. Although it is now granted that Steiner was referring to the philosophy professor Gideon Spicker, in the karma lectures from 1924 Steiner in fact never directly mentions Spicker by name. He simply refers to the “original model” (*Vorbild*) or “archetype” (*Urbild*) for this drama figure, and traces his karma and individuality back to a legendary poet in the middle ages, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, and to the Wartburg castle: “To begin with one is led – in any case I was led – to the *Battle of the Minstrels at the Wartburg Castle* in 1206 – to [...] Heinrich von Ofterdingen. And in this Heinrich von Ofterdingen I found again the individuality who formed the basis for the archetype of Strader.”<sup>16</sup> Heinrich von Ofterdingen is a figure connected with the Grail saga, and in the *Battle of the Minstrels at the Wartburg castle* he was pitted against the *Parzival* writer Wolfram von Eschenbach and other poets. In addition to visiting Weimar in preparation for his Goethe work in his first trip abroad in August 1889, Steiner made an excursion to the Wartburg castle too, also famous as the place where Luther had translated the Bible. The spiritual and historical atmosphere of the Wartburg made an extraordinary impression on the 28 year-old Steiner: “It is a wholly peculiar feeling to have under one’s feet the earth that has borne the greatest German masters. I do not only mean Weimar. For I have to tell you, I have experienced few moments in my life as I did yesterday when entering the Luther room at the Wartburg. It was as though I experienced the spirit in all its directness, as if it were the enlivening fluid that had flowed out in our entire German development in the last centuries. There are surely few points in Germany that can work upon us like the Wartburg, which is bound up with so many historical memories.”<sup>17</sup>

The above-mentioned process, in which Steiner never directly says who among his contemporaries is the *Urbild* or central individuality for each character, but refers at most to their first or last name, or to the town or area in which they lived, seems to hold for all the drama characters. Of course, Steiner does indeed occasionally point out that a particular person is connected to a specific character, as he did with Karl Julius Schröer and Capesius; however, he does not usually state if they are the main individuality or have just furnished certain features. This manner of working – which completely leaves it to the reader or spectator to actively draw the connections between the historical figures and drama characters – likewise holds for his comments on the historical personality behind Felix Balde. In a lecture from June 1919 Steiner stated that the real-life person’s first name was Felix, i.e. exactly the same first name as that of the character.<sup>18</sup> And in a second lecture from August 1919 he gave the name of this man’s village and said that he was the main historical model: “All these people [in the dramas] are drawn from reality. I recently mentioned, on account of a certain occasion, that a Felix Balde really existed, in Trumau, and the old shoemaker who had known the archetypal figure (*Urtype*) of Felix Balde, is called Scharinger, from Münchendorf. Felix is still present there in the tradition. Thus, all of these figures, which you can find in my mysteries, are real individual personalities.”<sup>19</sup> In his autobiography *The Course of My Life*, Steiner describes in relative detail this man’s life and personality, yet once again he does not give his name. Unfortunately, the above 1919 indications from Steiner were not

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, lecture 18 September 1924, *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*, vol. 4 (GA 238), p. 115. This reference to Ofterdingen may appear to contradict Steiner’s description and dates in the second drama of Strader’s earlier incarnation in the middle ages as “Simon”, but a comprehensive examination – including Novalis’s literary text on Ofterdingen – will show that this contradiction is only apparent and can be overcome.

<sup>17</sup> R. Steiner, letter to Richard Specht, 9 August 1889, *Briefe I* (GA 38), p. 204.

<sup>18</sup> R. Steiner, 22 June 1919, *Geisteswissenschaftliche Behandlung sozialer und pädagogische Fragen* (GA 192), p. 205.

<sup>19</sup> R. Steiner, 26 August 1919, *Erziehungskunst* (GA 295), p. 54.

properly followed up, partly because the name of the village had not been correctly noted or stenographically deciphered. It was only in 1958, over 30 years after Steiner's death, that Emil Bock finally made the discovery of the full name and identity of the man behind Felix Balde – it was Felix Koguzki, originally a herb-gatherer from the small Austrian village of Trumau.<sup>20</sup>

When investigating the identities of the characters it is therefore crucial to recall Steiner's Goethean artistic method and specific indications. Accordingly, the scientist and engineer Dr. Strader is by no means merely a photographic representation of Gideon Spicker, but an *artistically transformed* portrayal of his life and destiny:

This figure of Strader is drawn from life. There was a personality in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and who then lived on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose life is reflected in Strader, but in an artistic and poetic manner, not like a photograph. Now, as a personality in life this personality interested me very strongly. This personality was at first a Capuchin monk, then he changed professions and became a philosopher, and also stayed for a while in a monastery in Dornach. I have reworked and transformed this personality, who was of great interest to me in life. He lives as Strader in my mysteries – he is only similar, not the same.<sup>21</sup>

Again, although Gideon Spicker is not directly mentioned by name in this lecture, all the above biographical details hold for him. In his autobiography *Vom Kloster ins akademische Lehramt* (From the Monastery to an Academic Chair, 1908) Spicker relates his inner struggle to harmonize two different worldviews, the “religious Christian” outlook and the “scientific-philosophical” perspective.<sup>22</sup> Outwardly his life path did indeed lead him from being a Capuchin monk, staying for a brief period in a monastery in Dornach, to becoming a professor of philosophy. This early monastic upbringing is directly reflected in the testimony of the drama character of Dr. Strader, in scene one of *The Portal of Initiation*: “I was then educated in a monastery, and monks were my teachers.”<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, unlike Gideon Spicker himself, the character of Strader was never actually ordained a monk: “I was on the verge of being ordained when a chance event drove me out of the monastery. Yet I am grateful to this chance event; for my soul had long been robbed of its peace and tranquillity when this chance event saved it.”<sup>24</sup> Why in this first drama does Strader speak of a “chance event” that saved him from the monastic life and gave a new direction to his destiny? Is this not a contradiction with the biography of Gideon Spicker? Is Steiner here merely poetically re-imagining Spicker's life, or is there something else that one needs to look at so as to fully understand Strader's destiny?

### “A Series of People”

In order to answer these questions one has remember the possibility of *other people* supplying *additional features* for each character. Regarding the figure of Strader, this point is expanded upon by Steiner in a 1917 public lecture in Basel, while describing the struggle of Gideon Spicker and other natural scientific thinkers to obtain genuine knowledge:

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<sup>20</sup> See Emil Bock's essay, based on a lecture of 26 November 1958: “Aus Rudolf Steiners Jugendzeit: Der Kräutersammler Felix” in: *Rudolf Steiner. Studien zu seinem Lebensgang und Lebenswerk* (Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben, 1961), pp. 15-38.

<sup>21</sup> R. Steiner, *Das Initiaten-Bewußtsein* (GA 243), Dornach 1993, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Gideon Spicker, *Vom Kloster ins akademische Lehramt*, Regensburg, 1999, eds. Harald Schwaetzer and Henrieke Stahl-Schwaetzer, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> R. Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, in: *Vier Mysteriendramen* (GA 14), Dornach 1998, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

In my life I have met a series of people, who, like Gideon Spicker, were wrestling with knowledge, and I have attempted to depict cognitive characters of this kind in the portrayal of a personality in my mystery dramas, in the portrayal of Strader.<sup>25</sup>

What are the names of these other cognitive characters? Steiner does not specifically designate them precisely at this point in the lecture. Nevertheless, in his further remarks he sheds important light on *the types and natures* of their personalities, as well as trying to remove some misunderstandings. The dramas characters are not based on the actors who played them, but on people who are struggling with the riddles of *cognition*, and who demonstrate the *necessity and justification* of spiritual science in the world:

Whereas the personalities in these dramas – I would like to say – in these ‘dramas of knowledge’ (*Erkenntnisdramen*), are presented and drawn from real life, from all walks of life, particularly the sphere of life that is to demonstrate the necessity and justification of spiritual science in the other domains of our present existence, there were a number of curious people who believed that I had written these roles for the actors who played them, while my aim of course could not have been further from this.<sup>26</sup>

Again, it is interesting to note that here in 1917 Steiner does not explicitly state that Gideon Spicker is the main individuality behind Strader, but merely brings him into connection with this character. It is only in 1924, after some friends had already made the discovery for themselves, that Steiner elaborates on the precise nature of the relationship. In any case, this 1917 public lecture in Basel reveals that in order to *more fully* understand Strader one has to look beyond the life and work of the philosopher Gideon Spicker to a “series” of other real-life historical personalities, who were also wrestling with problems of knowledge. In this same Basel lecture, just before his remarks on Gideon Spicker, Steiner had spoken in relative detail about another philosopher, Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807-1887). He underscored F.T. Vischer’s battle to try and overcome certain contradictions and cognitive limits in the natural sciences.<sup>27</sup> Now, anyone who is aware of Steiner’s Goethean method of open secrets could ask: why does Steiner specifically mention the cognitive struggles of Vischer here? If Gideon Spicker is the main model for Strader, could Vischer perhaps have supplied certain of his other features? Or is Steiner’s mention of Vischer here purely coincidental?

An examination of Vischer’s biography shows that Steiner’s remarks here are not coincidental at all. One also notices an intriguing and unusual fact: F.T. Vischer’s main autobiographical text from 1874 is called *Mein Lebensgang – The Course of My Life* – i.e. exactly the same title that Steiner would choose fifty years later for his own autobiography.<sup>28</sup> This fact alone is worthy of further research. Friedrich Theodor Vischer was born in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart in 1807, and like Gideon Spicker, he grew up in an extremely religious and monastic environment before eventually becoming a professor of philosophy. Vischer’s father had been a Protestant pastor (*Archidiakonus*) and the son Vischer, after initially dreaming of becoming a painter, subsequently entered upon the “theological career path”.<sup>29</sup> From 14 years of age onward he was educated by monks, first in the monastery of

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<sup>25</sup> R. Steiner, *Freiheit, Unsterblichkeit, Soziales Leben* (GA 72), public lecture in Basel, 18 Oct. 1917, Dornach 1990, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> R. Steiner, *Freiheit – Unsterblichkeit – Soziales Leben* (GA 72), pp. 34-35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-31.

<sup>28</sup> F.T. Vischer, *Mein Lebensgang* (1874); reprinted in *Kritische Gänge*, vol. 6, ed. R. Vischer, Munich: Meyer & Jessen, 1922, pp. 439-536.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.



Blaubeuren in Baden-Württemberg, and then at the Theological Seminary in Tübingen. The latter period was particularly difficult for Vischer: “We were in a monastery and were therefore like monks [...] I was intensely occupied with thoughts of suicide at this time.”<sup>30</sup> Vischer’s intellectual mood began to brighten after his introduction to a drama – Goethe’s *Iphigenie* – and “faint rays of the first inklings of a pure and ideally ensouled world of forms began to dawn.”<sup>31</sup> It was through Goethe’s works that Vischer was eventually led to study natural scientific thought: “The name [Goethe] led me, along a path less direct than one might imagine, to the natural sciences.”<sup>32</sup> His interest in philosophy was then awakened, and he found himself on the road of “German philosophy from Kant through Fichte to Schelling.”<sup>33</sup> Recalling the above-mentioned fateful event that caused Strader to exit from the monastery, one sees that in 1834 the young Vischer too was overwhelmed by “an unexpected chance event.”<sup>34</sup> – He was nominated against his will to be pastor in the town of Herrenberg, a position that meant completely working and living as a Protestant priest. Vischer was now at a cross-roads in his life and had to make a decision: “This unlucky conjunction had the salutary effect of maturing my self-knowledge, of making me clearly realize that I was already inwardly separated from my earlier inner state of mind.”<sup>35</sup> He therefore renounced the priestly life and became a teacher of philosophy instead.

At this point one could ask: why did Steiner incorporate elements from the biographies of these two philosophy professors into the drama character of Strader?

### Opening the Temple Doors

To answer this question, one has to recall that Steiner’s character of Dr. Strader is a metamorphosis of one of the gold-devouring will-o’-the-wisps in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and Beautiful Lily*. This transformation holds for nearly all of Steiner’s characters – they are not just based on real-life people, but as mentioned above, they are furthermore metamorphoses of the different figures in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*. Despite their frivolity, pride, obstinacy and egotistical natures, the *skills* of the two will-o’-the-wisps are absolutely necessary and unique – for it is they and they alone who are able to unlock the golden portal to the temple in the *Fairy Tale*. Steiner interprets the will-o’-the-wisps as representatives of modern scholarly and scientific life, and comments on why Goethe chose them to open the doors of the temple: “Indeed, it is a further profound trait of this enigmatic fairy-tale that Goethe allowed the will-o’-the-wisps to open the temple doors. Selfish wisdom is not without purpose; it is a necessary transitional stage. [...] Goethe did not underestimate science; he was well aware that it is science that unlocks the temple of wisdom; he knew that one has to examine everything, take everything up and judge it in pure knowledge, and that one cannot penetrate into the temple of the highest wisdom unless one does this.”<sup>36</sup>

That all the drama characters are open secrets in the Goethean sense can also be realized from their names. There is nothing superficial about Steiner’s choices for the names of the characters: “What can be found in this Rosicrucian mystery in terms of designations is not arbitrary. Designations such as ‘The Other Maria’ [another character in the mystery dramas] and so on, all refer to very definite relations.”<sup>37</sup> What does the name ‘Strader’ refer to? It literally means path, road or way. As we saw, in the above-mentioned 1917 public

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 446, 447.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 450.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 467.

<sup>36</sup> R. Steiner, lecture 4 April 1904 in: *Goethes geheime Offenbarung in seinem Märchen von der grünen Schlange und der schönen Lilie*, eds. Hella Wiesberger & Ulla Trapp, Dornach 1999, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), Dornach 1992, p. 149.

lecture in Basel Steiner also called the mystery dramas, “dramas of knowledge” (*Erkenntnisdramen*), because they all dramatically depict people on the path of initiation, which is just another name for the path of knowledge. Hence, from the perspective of the scientific relationship between Steiner, Spicker and Vischer, a new question could now be asked: What is the *right path* for attaining genuine knowledge according to these philosophers?

In Gideon Spicker’s eyes, if one wishes to understand the work of a universal thinker such as Goethe, then one has to follow a comprehensive or multi-sided approach, one that as much as possible takes into account all their works. Writing in a 1887 letter to Steiner, Spicker says: “I above all see the difficulty in the fact that a complete picture [of Goethe] can only be gained by means of the totality of his being. [...] With Goethe one has to take the whole into account, and here one easily ends up on false paths.”<sup>38</sup> Spicker himself had demonstrated the fruitfulness of this comprehensive approach in his own 1883 book, *Lessings Weltanschauung*, a text highly valued by Steiner.

With regard to Vischer, what aspects of his approach to knowledge did Steiner appreciate? It was Vischer’s ability to objectively enter into a system, to immanently find its contradictions, even in his own writings, and then to try and critically overcome them. In his own unfinished autobiographical text *The Course of My Life*, Steiner relates how he found in Vischer a thinker with many affinities to his own cognitive strivings. Through another philosopher, Steiner was led to study “the writings of the celebrated aesthete at that time, Friedrich Theodor Vischer. [...] In particular I was always joyfully stimulated when I found in others the same epistemological concerns that I was struggling with.”<sup>39</sup> Steiner’s engagement with the work of Vischer had begun in his youth. On 20 June 1882, the 21-year-old Steiner sent Vischer a letter accompanied by a short text entitled: “Einzig mögliche Kritik der atomistischen Begriffe” (Only Possible Critique of Atomistic Concepts).<sup>40</sup> The young Steiner’s letter is highly autobiographical and outlines how his own cognitive path had helped him overcome a number of contradictions in the atomistic worldview: “I first of all completely entered into the mechanical-materialistic conception of nature; I too had sworn by its truths, just as many others currently do; but I have also *personally experienced* the contradictions arising from this conception. Thus, what I put forward is not mere dialectic, but my own inner experience. Because I know what I thought at that time, I can recognise the deepest aspects of this worldview, and see its deficiencies much more easily than others who have passed through a different course of study.”<sup>41</sup> In other words, Steiner’s own early path of knowledge likewise involved objectively entering into a conceptual system so as to understand it from within, as well as realizing that any inherent contradiction can only be overcome by first critically determining its limits and then if possible moving out beyond the system.

Seven years after the first drama Steiner once again discussed the emergence of cognitive limits in the natural sciences, in his 1917 book *Riddles of the Soul (Von Seelenrätseln)*. He takes two thinkers as modern representatives of people who had struggled with precisely these kinds of problems. Who are these two thinkers? – They are Gideon Spicker and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. For Steiner, to overcome the cognitive limits highlighted by these philosophers means passing from an “observation of thinking” to a heightened *experience* of thinking. Or to put it another way, it means passing from philosophy to *anthroposophy*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gideon Spicker to R. Steiner, 4 August 1887, *Briefe Band I: 1881-1890* (GA 38), Dornach 1985, pp. 155-156.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, Dornach 2000, p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> In *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* no. 63 (1978), pp. 5-10.

<sup>41</sup> R. Steiner to F.T. Vischer, 20 June 1882, *Briefe Band I*, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, *Von Seelenrätseln* (GA 21), Dornach 1983, pp. 135-138.

## Origin of the Name ‘Strader’

F.T. Vischer’s autobiography *Mein Lebensgang* furthermore reveals that the name of “Strader” is not some abstract invention on Steiner’s part. For the name does not have its origin in a preconceived idea, but in an *image (Bild)* from Vischer’s autobiography. What is most striking about this passage is its direct affinity to the will-o’-the-wisps in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale* and Steiner’s interpretation of them as academic scholars. This image occurs when Vischer describes how he was first introduced to philosophy. It was not an auspicious introduction, for the professor began by interpreting the classical poets – here the first Pythian Ode of Pindar on the golden lyre of Apollo – in a wholly pedantic and philological manner:

In my first year I encountered philosophy in the form of a lecture from Sigwart on anthropology – it was horribly tedious. This first year was primarily devoted to philology, and Tafel was our professor. [David Friedrich] Strauß has already provided a description of him, I will just add the following image of his lecturing style: With regard to the beginning of Pindar’s Ode χρυσέα φόρμιγξ – : “χρυσέα, gentlemen, χρυσέα means golden, from gold, not gilded, – golden, from gold!” Concerning the word ὁδός: “ὁδός, path, Straße, via, strada, chemin, street, Weg, Straße” etc.<sup>43</sup>

This image in Vischer’s text combining “gold” and “path” allows us to glimpse a little how the figure of the gold-seeking will-o’-the-wisp in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale* was able to become transformed in Steiner’s imagination into the character of the knowledge-seeking scientist Dr. Strader. Steiner’s own philological work in Weimar has been occasionally criticized, and from his adaption of this image one could believe that he did not have much respect for the subject of philology. On the contrary. The term literally means *love* of the *word*, and Steiner often voiced his respect for *genuine* philology.<sup>44</sup> This aspect is crucial for appreciating the *language* of the mystery dramas: “The emphasis is occasionally hinted at in the words, which contain a lot more than one might perhaps initially imagine. [...] In fact, the words [of these dramas] can open the door to the spiritual world.”<sup>45</sup>

With regard to certain features of the life and work of Friedrich Theodor Vischer playing a role in the character of Strader, one should not forget the crucial fact that the mystery plays are also dramas of reincarnation and karma. We have already seen how Steiner’s teacher Karl Julius Schröer furnished some of the features for the figure of Professor Capesius – a fact mentioned by Steiner in the very last full karma lecture of 23 September 1924. Moreover, we saw that the individuality of Gideon Spicker is likewise discussed at length in these 1924 karma lectures. Steiner had commenced this detailed cycle of lectures on the destinies of real-life historical figures at the beginning of 1924. Whose destiny did Steiner chose to be the very first one to open this large cycle of lectures with? – It was none other than the life and destiny of Friedrich Theodor Vischer.<sup>46</sup> In other words, there seems to be an intimate connection between the real-life personalities behind the mystery drama characters and the karma lectures of 1924.

To conclude this section: if we are to seriously take these indications relating to the cognitive methods of the philosophers Gideon Spicker and F.T. Vischer, some of the key elements on the path to knowledge are: 1). to adopt a comprehensive and multi-sided study to

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<sup>43</sup> F.T. Vischer, *Mein Lebensgang*, p. 447.

<sup>44</sup> Just to name one example: his deep admiration for the philologist August Fresenius’s work elucidating the chronological development of Goethe’s *Faust*. See R. Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang* (GA 28), Dornach 2000, pp. 295-297.

<sup>45</sup> R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen*, pp. 142, 147.

<sup>46</sup> See R. Steiner, lectures 8 and 9 March, 1924, *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*, vol. 1, (GA 235), pp. 117-150.

a topic; 2). not to approach the works of a person with preconceptions, but to objectively enter into them first, trying to understand them from the inside and on their own terms, before moving out beyond them; 3). to critically acknowledge contradictions and cognitive limits, and seek to overcome them in a scientific manner; 4). and to pay careful attention to the exact words and language of a text. This allows one to overcome a typical misunderstanding of Steiner's path of knowledge. One frequently hears that Steiner did not value rigorous and critical thought. On the contrary, as one can see here, Steiner not only valued critical and rational thought, but for him it forms the *foundation of all cognition*, both ordinary as well as spiritual-scientific cognition. In harmony with Goethe's view, the doors to the temple of knowledge can only be unlocked by genuinely rational and scientific thought, and this is why Steiner chose thinkers like Gideon Spicker and F.T. Vischer as representatives of the path leading to a science of the spirit.

If the above methods can help unlock the doors to the temple of scientific knowledge, could they perhaps also help to unlock some of the secrets to the works and biography of Rudolf Steiner himself? Steiner thought so, as he wrote in a 1903 letter to Johanna Mücke: "Whoever seeks to survey *everything* of mine will discover harmony; whoever does not survey everything, will only find contradictions."<sup>47</sup>

### **An Engineer**

If one looks at the figure of Strader solely from the perspectives of the two philosophers Gideon Spicker and Friedrich Theodor Vischer, then one would quickly arrive at a number of other contradictions. Because in the mystery dramas Strader is not only a scientific or philosophical thinker, but an *engineer* too, who builds machines, contributes to the organisation and running of a factory, and is part of a small group of people who are interested in Rosicrucian spiritual science. The thinker Strader tries to unite in his soul the natural scientific worldview with the reality of the spirit: "The entire conflict that arises through this discord and at the same time through the longing to unite the two antitheses of nature and spirit in the human being may be seen in the soul of Strader in the Rosicrucian drama."<sup>48</sup> Here is another apparent contradiction: for the engineering traits and belonging to a Rosicrucian group do not seem to explicitly hold for either Gideon Spicker or F.T. Vischer. Once again, these contradictions can be overcome if one recalls Steiner's above words that a "series of people" like Gideon Spicker have been artistically incorporated into the drama figure of Strader. Thus, in addition to Vischer, it appears necessary to look for further personalities who could have provided additional features for this character. This is also clear from Steiner's words of 1911: "These Strader souls are very common at the present time."<sup>49</sup> We do not have the space here to demonstrate the following in detail, and features of other personalities also come into consideration, but suffice to say that a comprehensive search reveals that it is insightful to additionally examine the character of Strader against the life and work of one of Steiner's closest collaborators, the engineer Dr. Carl Unger (1878-1929). (Further elements connecting Carl Unger and a number of other personalities to Strader are outlined in the accompanying essay: "Theodora's Prophetic Revelation").

Carl Theodor Unger was born in Cannstatt near Stuttgart into an educated family of Jewish ancestry, in which his parents held more a natural-scientific and agnostic worldview than a religious one.<sup>50</sup> He was an engineer by trade, who had studied mechanical engineering

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<sup>47</sup> R. Steiner to J. Mücke, 22 September 1903; quoted in Christoph Lindenberg, *Individualismus und offenbare Religion*, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> R. Steiner, *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen* (GA 129), Dornach 1977, p. 56.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> The following biographical details are based on Renatus Ziegler's two valuable articles "Carl Unger" in: *Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert. Ein Kulturimpuls in biografischen Porträts*, ed. Bodo von Plato (Dornach

(*Maschinenbau*) at the Stuttgart Technical College, receiving his doctorate in engineering in 1904. The city of Stuttgart was to remain the main centre of Unger's life and work. Unger became a member of the German section of the Theosophical Society in October 1903, and one year later was accepted into Steiner's esoteric school, before being elected to the executive committee of the German Section of the Theosophical Society in 1908. With the change to the Anthroposophical Society in 1912/1913, Unger was again nominated to its central committee, a position he held until the year of his death in 1929. To begin with, the reconciliation of the natural-scientific and spiritual worldviews was not easy for Carl Unger, and he had difficulties with several elements. However, discussions with his older friend Adolf Arenson, and long reflections and study, eventually helped him overcome many of his scientific reservations.<sup>51</sup>

Similar to the philosophers Gideon Spicker and F.T. Vischer, Steiner frequently expressed admiration for Unger's methodical and scientific attitude to cognition. For Steiner, it was above all Unger's rigorous approach to knowledge that could serve as a model and foundation for a genuinely modern spiritual movement:

And if precisely here in Stuttgart we have found a worker of extraordinary significance (Dr. Unger) in this [epistemological] field, then it is to be viewed as a beneficial stream within our movement. For the deepest parts of this movement will not attain their validity in the world through those people who only wish to hear about the facts of the higher worlds, but through people who possess the patience to penetrate into a cognitive method, who create a real foundation for genuinely solid work, which fashions a skeleton for working in the higher worlds.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Rosicrucian Path**

In 1907 Steiner asked Carl Unger to give a talk at the Munich Congress, which was the first conference to be artistically presented under the sign of the Rose Cross and the Rosicrucian motto.<sup>53</sup> As Steiner relates in *The Course of My Life*, this Munich Congress of 1907 set the foundations for his later Rosicrucian mystery dramas of 1910-1913. What was the title of Unger's lecture at this 1907 Congress? It was none other than another image for the figure of Strader: "Die Wege der theosophischen Weltanschauung" (Paths of the Theosophical Worldview). Unger's talk had grown out of his study of Steiner's 1904 book *Theosophy*, and it appeared shortly after as a small brochure entitled *Ein Weg der theosophischen Weltanschauung*. Its main purpose was to present the "first steps of the Rosicrucian path."<sup>54</sup> According to Unger the true Rosicrucian path of knowledge consists of logical and rational thinking: "Now, in modern times a path has been indicated to us [...] *It is that of the power of thought*. And this path consists in an education of the power of thought, so that eternal truths can be revealed through it."<sup>55</sup> Carl Unger concluded his talk by underscoring the practical nature of the Rosicrucian path: "We have to *apply in practice* what we have experienced in thought. In this sense we could call the path that we have to follow:

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2003) and "Carl Unger – Biographie" in: *Jahrbuch für anthroposophische Kritik* 2003 (2004), pp. 136-157; as well as Ronald Tempelton's detailed biography, *Carl Unger – Der Weg eines Geistesschülers* (Dornach 1990).

<sup>51</sup> See Ziegler 2003, p. 139.

<sup>52</sup> R. Steiner, "Philosophie und Anthroposophie", in: *Philosophie und Anthroposophie. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1904-1923* (GA 35), Dornach 1984, p. 94.

<sup>53</sup> The Rosicrucian motto is: Ex Deo Nascimur, In Christo Morimur, Per Spiritus Santus Reviviscimus (From God we are born, in Christ we die, through the holy spirit we are reborn).

<sup>54</sup> C. Unger, *Ein Weg der theosophischen Weltanschauung*. Berlin: In Kommission ‚Besant-Zweig‘ der Theosophischen Gesellschaft (1907), p. 3. (A second edition appeared in 1929 under the title *Ein Weg der anthroposophischen Weltanschauung*, Dornach).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5.

*the path of practical self-knowledge.*<sup>56</sup> Indeed, what separates “The Path of Knowledge” presented in Steiner’s book *Theosophy* from countless others is precisely its logical and rational foundation. To anyone who thinks this sounds too abstract or that logical and rational thought is not necessary for spiritual insight: “To them one can say, *no one* in the higher sense (that means truly) can become a ‘seer’ who has not previously worked their way into the world of thought.”<sup>57</sup>

Unger’s views harmonize with Steiner’s own conception of Rosicrucianism as a form of open esotericism, and one above all based on rigorous rational thought. Here Steiner was adamant: the results of *genuine* Rosicrucianism do not require any sort of spiritual knowledge to understand them. To research them yes, but to understand them no. Hence, there is absolutely no appeal to the authority of some kind of secret or higher knowledge, including an appeal to the authority of the ancient name and tradition of Rosicrucianism itself, but simply a direct appeal to reason, conventional logic and a deepened knowledge of culture. And if certain teachings cannot be verified using the accessible cultural documents and sources, or if they contradict logic and the results of the other sciences, then these teachings are clearly *not* genuine Rosicrucian teachings. Thus, according to Steiner, any reader or researcher who fails to understand the presentations of a true Rosicrucian nature has merely not researched or exercised their ordinary faculty of rational thought enough: “for up to now and also for a long time into the future, no true Rosicrucianism will teach in an exoteric manner anything that cannot be grasped using ordinary logic, the general logical intellect. This is what it all depends on. [...] The Rosicrucian teacher does not stand in any other relation to his student than the competent mathematician to the student of mathematics.”<sup>58</sup> All this is highly relevant at the present time, where there is a wealth of people claiming to present original spiritual research in line with, or even improving on, certain long-established Rosicrucian principles. The easiest way to tell if these presentations are completely illusionary, deceptive or false, is to see if they contradict ordinary logic and genuine science, or if they make an appeal to the authority of the person’s supposed ‘higher’ knowledge instead of to rational thought, or if no support can be found for them in the openly available cultural documents and records.

In December 1911 Rudolf Steiner called into being the “Gesellschaft für Theosophische Art und Kunst” (Society for Theosophical Method and Art), a small artistic circle that according to Steiner was to stand directly under the protectorate of Christian Rosenkreuz. Here he nominated Carl Unger to be its secretary.<sup>59</sup> At the same time Unger took on the chairmanship of an “Association for the Cultivation of Rosicrucian Spiritual-Science” (Bund zur Pflege rosenkreuzerischer Geisteswissenschaft) that was to support the work of Rudolf Steiner.<sup>60</sup> From 1915 onwards Unger was regularly in Dornach as part of his administrative leadership for the building of the first Goetheanum. According to Unger the original purpose of the Goetheanum was to perform the mystery dramas: “The building of the Goetheanum was originally undertaken for the mystery plays; everything else came later.”<sup>61</sup>

*The Guardian of the Threshold*, Steiner’s third mystery drama of 1912, is especially an artistic portrayal of Strader’s path of initiation. Carl Unger gave three lectures in Munich to accompany this third drama, lectures on the topic: “On the Path to Spiritual-Science.”<sup>62</sup> In his own lectures to accompany the third drama Steiner remarked how pleased and delighted he

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<sup>56</sup> C. Unger, *Ein Weg der theosophischen Weltanschauung*, Berlin 1907, p. 24.

<sup>57</sup> R. Steiner, *Theosophie* (GA 9), Dornach 1987, p. 174.

<sup>58</sup> R. Steiner, 22 May 1907, *Die Theosophie des Rosenkreuzers* (GA 99), pp. 15-17.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, *Zur Geschichte und aus den Inhalte der ersten Abteilung der Esoterischen Schule 1904-1914* (GA 264), Dornach 1996, pp. 428-432.

<sup>60</sup> See Ziegler 2003, p. 143.

<sup>61</sup> C. Unger, *Esoterisches*, Dornach 1929, p. 42.

<sup>62</sup> Unger’s lectures were on the 19, 21 and 23 August 1912. Cf. GA 264, endnotes, p. 158. R. Steiner, *Von der Initiation* (GA 138), Dornach, 1986, p. 106.

was to stand “shoulder to shoulder” with such an independent thinker as Unger.<sup>63</sup> Carl Unger’s technical work might also be viewed in the light of the mystery dramas. In 1906 Unger had founded his own company – a factory for producing precision grinding machines and tools. Like the drama character of Strader, in Unger we find a spiritual seeker whose research involved the design and manufacturing of machines: “Unger constructed many of the machines himself and owned two patents for inventions that were made in his company.”<sup>64</sup> Unger’s work as leader of a company of technical machines later took on an innovative social dimension when in 1919 he joined it to Steiner’s newly founded movement for social renewal. “He was one of the first people to transfer his well operating factory with 120 employees to the organisation Der Kommenden Tag AG, an association of various enterprises based on Steiner’s threefolding ideas.”<sup>65</sup>

Many researchers have brought Strader’s technical work on machines into connection with the “motor” of the American John Ernst Worrell Keely (1837-1898).<sup>66</sup> Although Steiner did not personally know Keely, this seems to be a fruitful perspective, especially for understanding the broader spiritual implications of what is sometimes termed “mechanical occultism”.<sup>67</sup> – That is to say, types of future machines that need to be grasped in conjunction with the moral forces of their builders. Steiner said of this field in 1918: “You can find a small indication of this connected with Strader in my mystery dramas. These things are currently coming into being.”<sup>68</sup> Steiner’s brief indications on the existence of an enigmatic “Strader apparatus” or Strader machine can be found in *The Guardian of the Threshold*. According to the stage directions of scene four there are various “mechanical models” present on the table in Strader’s workroom.<sup>69</sup> In line with Rudolf Steiner’s instructions, first provisional models of these machines were built for the third drama by someone who is surely another “Strader soul”, the chemist Dr. Oskar Schmiedel (1887-1959).<sup>70</sup>

In the first scene of this drama Strader admits that he is attracted to the thought-world of spiritual science, especially when he can bring it into connection with technology that he himself has built: “However, I felt I had best understood this spiritual method when I had given myself entirely over to the being binding me with the mechanisms that I myself had created.”<sup>71</sup> In this same scene Strader likewise speaks of the practical benefits of his technical work, emphasizing that it aims to improve *the social conditions and dignity* of his workers: “No longer will men be forced to dream away their existence, plant-like and in an undignified manner, on narrow factory floors. Technological forces will be distributed in such a way that everyone will be able to comfortably use and determine what he needs for his work, in his own home.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> R. Steiner, *Von der Initiation* (GA 138), Dornach 1986, p. 24.

<sup>64</sup> Ziegler 2003, p. 144.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. Steiner’s ideas on the threefold organisation of society into the economic, political and cultural spheres are developed in his book: *Towards Social Renewal: Rethinking the Basis of Society* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2000).

<sup>66</sup> Regarding Steiner’s view of Keely, see *The Temple Legend* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 2002), p. 285.

<sup>67</sup> For further on the topic of mechanical occultism and the relation to Strader, see the essay by Georg Unger (the son of Carl Unger), entitled: “Über den ‘mechanischen Okkultismus’”, in: *Mitteilungen aus der anthroposophischen Arbeit in Deutschland*, Nos. 68, 69 (1964); translated into English under the title “On Mechanical Occultism”, and available electronically on the Rudolf Steiner Archive homepage.

<sup>68</sup> R. Steiner, lecture 1 Dec. 1918, *Die soziale Grundforderung unserer Zeit* (GA 186), p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> R. Steiner, *Der Hüter der Schwelle* (GA 14), p. 324; cf. pp. 278-283.

<sup>70</sup> See Number 107 of the *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (1991) for more details of this Strader-Apparatus, which contains reports of some of the verbal indications Steiner gave to researchers.

<sup>71</sup> R. Steiner, *Der Hüter der Schwelle* (GA 14), p. 291.

<sup>72</sup> R. Steiner, *Der Hüter der Schwelle* (GA 14), p. 283.

## The Death of Strader

The character of Strader dies in the fourth and final mystery drama of 1913. This is because the main real-life personality on whom the character was based – the philosopher Gideon Spicker – had also died, the year before, in July 1912. Steiner relates how both the life and death of this individuality had keenly interested him: “[Strader] dies out of a certain inner necessity. So that one might even be surprised at Strader’s death in the mystery dramas. Strader dies at a certain moment: I had the feeling that I could not treat Strader further in the mystery dramas. Why was this the case? Indeed, my dear friends, you have to understand that in the meantime the original, if I may call him this, had died. And you can imagine how deeply I was interested in the developmental path of the original person, who had formed the basis for this figure of Strader. The original continued to interest me, even after he had passed through the gate of death.”<sup>73</sup> The philosopher Friedrich Theodor Vischer had died much earlier in September 1887. In a lecture from 1917 Steiner stated that “the first seeds of what I here call spiritual science or anthroposophy” can already be found in the above-mentioned essay on atomism that he had sent to Vischer in June 1882, precisely because it examines the nature of cognitive limits. Steiner furthermore expressed the belief that he and Vischer could have worked together on a spiritual worldview, but Vischer passed away before the realization of this: “I am of the belief that people like Friedrich Theodor Vischer, who still stood within the traditions of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, could indeed have found a connection, on account of their science and philosophy, to spiritual science. [...] Unfortunately, Vischer died not long after. And so the spiritual science that I have represented, and on which my writings and lectures are based, came into existence without his assistance.”<sup>74</sup>

In Carl Unger, Steiner found a personality with a natural scientific background with whom he could work. Throughout their careers Unger and Steiner often gave lectures together on spiritual science, including the above-mentioned ones at the 1907 Munich Congress and in 1912 during the period of the third mystery drama. In 1922 Steiner characterized Unger as an autonomous technical thinker and philosopher, underlining how he had independently further developed the theory of knowledge outlined in Steiner’s own early philosophical writings: “For many years Dr. Carl Unger has been the most ardent and devoted colleague in the anthroposophical movement. In The Hague he spoke as a technician and philosopher on ‘The Social Tasks of Technology and the Technician’ and ‘On the Philosophical Foundations of Anthroposophy’. Early on Dr. Unger saw that anthroposophy especially requires a rigorous epistemological grounding. Out of a profound understanding he took up what I myself had been able to give many years ago in my writings *A Theory of Knowledge in the Goethean Worldview, Truth and Science* and *The Philosophy of Freedom*. He independently developed these indications further.”<sup>75</sup>

Some of Carl Unger’s most important philosophical texts include: *Die Grundlehren der Geisteswissenschaft auf erkenntnistheoretischer Grundlage* (The Basic Teachings of Spiritual Science on an Epistemological Basis, 1910), *Gedanken zur Philosophie des Widerspruchs* (Thoughts on a Philosophy of Contradiction, 1911), and *Die Autonomie des philosophischen Bewußtseins* (The Autonomy of Philosophical Consciousness, 1921).<sup>76</sup> In addition to his works on epistemology, Carl Unger also wrote many works on spiritual science, including his well-known *Aus der Sprache der Bewußtseinsseele* (From the Language of the Consciousness Soul, 1930), as well as giving many lectures. His work also aimed at a

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<sup>73</sup> R. Steiner, *Esoterische Betrachtungen*, vol. 4 (GA 238), p. 109.

<sup>74</sup> Steiner, 11 June 1917, in Leipzig, in: *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* 63 (1978), pp. 12-13.

<sup>75</sup> R. Steiner “Meine holländische und englische Reise”, May 1922 in: R. Steiner, *Damit der Mensch ganz Mensch werde* (GA 82), Dornach 1994, pp. 247-248.

<sup>76</sup> For a complete list of Unger’s writings, see Ziegler 2003, pp. 148-157.



deeper understanding of the mystery dramas. In a September 1928 lecture called “Esotericism” Unger expressed the view: “What did Steiner himself hope to achieve through the mystery dramas? [...] Rudolf Steiner wanted to introduce an esoteric aspect into the work; he did this through the mystery dramas. To those people who were prepared to accept esotericism on account of studies that had already lasted many years, he was able to give them this esotericism through the art of his dramas.”<sup>77</sup> This lecture on esotericism was one of the last ever given by Unger. On the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1929 a deranged man shot Carl Unger dead in Nuremberg. He had been about to give a talk entitled “What is Anthroposophy?”

In the work of Carl Unger we see him trying to wed clear rational thought and the methods of natural science and technology with a science of the spirit, in which the latter is to be understood as a transparent modern path in keeping with the scientific spirit of the times. That is to say, not an outdated traditional form of hidden esotericism for a select and private circle, but an esotericism that is completely logical, rational, and now above all *open*:

Rudolf Steiner once said: people are simply unaware that every one of my lectures, including the public ones, contains an abundance of esotericism. The lectures only have to be taken up in the correct manner. [...]. Another time he said: I will direct your attention to an esoteric book, which, although it lies before everyone’s eyes, has not been understood as such, namely Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*. In the same sense Rudolf Steiner designated the logarithmic table as esoteric [...]. It has to be realized that the spiritual world has its own laws, and anyone who does not have the will to prepare themselves will not be able to approach it. A person has to make great effort, and the relations and state of consciousness make sure that any unauthorized person is unable to approach these things. *The mystery is protected by means of itself; it no longer needs any other means, neither that of magic nor that of secrets.* Rudolf Steiner hid the protection for the mystery in the methodology of the path to esotericism.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> C. Unger, *Esoterisches*, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> C. Unger, *Esoterisches*, pp. 49, 51.