

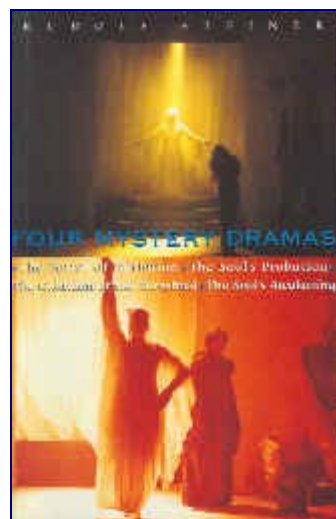
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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Portal of Initiation Volume 1 of 4 Mystery Dramas, GA#14 by Rudolf Steiner

A Rosicrucian Mystery
Translated by Ruth and Hans Pusch
Published by Anthroposophic Press in 1997
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2006



The Portal of Initiation is a play within a play attended by Estella who reports back to her friend

Sophia. It is difficult to form an accurate idea of a play by simply reading it Sophia tells Estella, and then adds, "But I'd be glad if you would tell me what it was that moved you so much." (Page 122) That simulates the difficult position I am in as reviewer of a play I have only once read, but I will do my best to share with you, dear Reader, what moved me in the reading of this play.

When learning something new, it's best to know all about it before you start. With that [rule](#) in mind, I will share with you the concise summary of the action as Estella tells it to Sophia.

[page 123] The dramatic construction was wonderful. The playwright shows how a young painter loses all his creative joy when he begins to grow uncertain in his love for a woman. She had given him the incentive to develop his talents. In her, through the purest enthusiasm for his art, a selfless love had sprung up, and, thanks to this, he was able to develop all his capacities. One might say, he bloomed in the sunlight of his benefactor. As he was often in her company, his feelings of gratitude gradually grew into a passionate love. This caused him to neglect, more and more, a poor girl who had been faithfully devoted to him. His indifference made her realize she had lost the heart of the man she loved, and she finally died of grief. When he heard of her death, the news did not seriously disturb him, because by now his feelings belonged only to his benefactor. Yet he gradually had to come to the conclusion that her friendly feelings would never change into passionate love. This drove all creative joy out of his soul and his inner life became ever more desolate. Now the young woman he had forsaken began to haunt his memory. And what had once been a man of promise became a desolate ruin of one. Without a single ray of hope, he ended in utter despair. — All this is enacted with the most vivid dramatic intensity.

The painter, Johannes Thomasius, undergoes a change due to the presence of a new woman, Maria, in his life. His former love fades away in his memory as the new one rises. He recognizes that he cannot become the person he wishes to be if he remains attached to the "poor girl" who had been devoted to him. In some ways this tale match my own life and I wonder if they may also align with the details of Steiner's life. This is the back story from which this drama launches itself. Sixteen personalities, some are people and some are archetypes, interact during the course of the drama and reveal the spiritual life hiding behind the exoteric events of life.

Maria, Johannes's benefactor and inspiration, explains it this way, "O friend, within this changing play we call existence, a spirit life, eternal, hides itself." (Page 23) And she laments to Johannes, "All that reveals itself to me as purest life in its own inmost truth has brought your spirit only death." He agrees that the

fire of her spirit caused his artistry to bloom, but then "robbed me of my soul forces."

Doctor Strader, who lacks understanding of the spiritual world, interprets all actions by their contribution to knowledge — by which he means the thinking component of knowledge. When Professor Capesius avers that "thoughts are only shadows, nothing more or less, within the realm of life's reality," Doctor Strader objects.

[page 29, 30] "I do not agree quite fully with those last words of yours. And I would emphasize more strongly even that all effects upon the soul which we observe arising from ideas can not in any sense decide their value in the realm of knowledge. . . . Not much indeed is needed to show how utterly this revelation lacks what gives to thought its firm support and lends the sense of certainty. It may well warm the heart, this strange, new revelation; the thinker sees in it mere wishful dreams."

But Philia, a friend of Maria whose archetype is revealed as a Spirit of Maria's soul-forces, objects strenuously, hinting that Strader is in effect trying to squeeze peach juice from a dried peach pit.

[page 30, 31] "Such words will always come from knowledge that has been achieved through dry, prosaic reason. But this is not enough to satisfy the soul that needs to find belief in its own being. It will forever listen to the words which speak to it of spirit and strive to understand what formerly it dimly sensed. To speak of the unknowable may well allure the thinker but never human hearts."

It is paradoxical that thinkers speak of the unknowable in abstract terminology, while spiritual scientists revere only those aspects of reality which one may experience directly. Revelations which warm the heart, rightly understood, may contain more reality than many reasoned expressions of abstract logic.

Luna, like Philia, is a friend and archetype of Maria, also finds Strader's strident claims puzzling, such as when he says, "But, for myself, because I recognized that what all spiritual teaching brought was dream, I had to find the solid ground that only facts and science can impart." and offers this question which one may verily answer for oneself:

[page 33] "But I must often ask myself why it should be that common sense can find the words of spirit so plain and natural and takes them warmly to itself but feels a shivering of cold when it seeks nourishment of soul in words like those you have just spoken?"

Materialists are loath to speak of spirit and will only even think of it if something happens for which their version of science has not given them a logical reason. Strader says as much here.

[page 39] "To speak of spirit is only needed when things are placed before us which do not lie within the scope laid down with such precision by natural science."

But when Felicia Balde, wife of Felix Balde, tells a story, something happens inside of people. Professor Capesius acknowledges this, even to the point of admitting he has no explanation for how she does this.

[page 42] "I do not ask the sources of her words, but this one thing I clearly know: that new life wells and flows into my soul dispelling its paralysis."

When [Dr. Andrew Joseph Galambos](#) proposed a scale of property going from primordial property (one's life), primary property (one's thoughts and ideas), and secondary property (everything that derives from primordial and primary property), he was building for us a bridge from ideas to things. From the fertile seed bed of the inventor's mind to the Telephone, the Aeroplane, to Alternating Current electricity, to Television, etc. Here is a dialogue on the subject between Romanus, archetype of the Spirit of Action, and Professor Capezius:

[page 50] Romanus: "I cannot find the bridge that leads across from mere ideas to actual deeds."

[page 50] Capezius: "One overvalues here the power of ideas, but on the other hand you fail to grasp the course of real life. Indeed it is ideas that are the seeds of every human act."

Gairman, archetype of the Spirit of the Earth-brain, experiences something in human nature that overwhelms dry, prosaic logic and reasoning, something capable of knocking it down as a slight breeze would a house of cards.

[page 51] "An unseen power has laid hold of me, and I have learned to feel what is much stronger in our human nature than the thin house of cards our wits have set up."

Maria knows that "it is the nature of the life we lead to wake the human spirit to expression." And thus she speaks about the power to express the course of a lifetime in a couple of hours during a drama of words and deeds.

[page 52] "What otherwise is brought to light in course of time is here revealed within an hour or two."

I have often visualized the material and spiritual worlds as two horses drawing a chariot. If the left horse be missing the chariot will circle the material world; if the right horse be missing, the chariot will circle the spiritual world. Only by having the two horses side-by-side as companions can we weave our way through the material and spiritual realities of our human existence on Earth. Johannes echoes this thought:

[page 56] "It took me many years to understand that what our senses show is an illusion, unless the knowledge of the spirit can join with it as true companion."

Benedictus, a bearer of wisdom in the play, says to his friends Johannes and Maria that it is a plan of karma that has brought them together, a karmic working out in the lives of the three friends. His words utilize a marvelous metaphor of a loom for the workings of karma. It is as if each of their three lives is a thread woven side-by-side in the cloth of karma and their meeting becomes a knot — a knot of destiny⁽¹⁾. Such knots are the places where the gods intervene in human lives by laying in them the seed of ideas to be carried into the realm of deeds⁽²⁾.

[page 68] "There forms itself within this circle a knot out of the threads which karma spins in world becoming. . . . A great step forward in the evolution is only possible when gods unite themselves with man's own lot. For spirit eyes, which should awake in human souls, can only be evolved when first a god has laid the seed within a human being."

But the human being is more than merely one's works and deeds left behind on Earth — the human being is also a seed which can only grow when like the seed of a plant one's body dies so that from the death of the physical body the spiritual body may rise.

[page 70] Benedictus: "The spirit in you works in everything that can grow ripe in man as fruit for realms eternal. And therefore much it must destroy that only has its place within the realm of time. Its sacrifice in death, however, is seed of immortality. What flourishes for higher life must bloom from death of lower being."

Imagine that all the promises of Darwin that lower animals could evolve into a human were as valid as someone's promise to condense a valley's mist into gold coins for us to live on. And yet this is what we do when we introject wholeheartedly all of materialistic science's views and concepts and expect to thereby gain entrance into a valid knowledge of the true, living human being. Felix Balde tells us in his inimitable

fashion that such knowledge scratches only the surface of things, not its depths.

[page 96] "The merchant would believe his customer had lost his mind who said to him: the mist that rises in the valley can be condensed to current coin, and with it you shall now be paid. No merchant would accept such money out of mist. Yet if he thirst to solve life's highest riddles, he willingly accepts whole cosmic structures made of nebulae, if science hands them him to pay his spirit needs. A teacher who found out that untaught scoundrels wished, without examinations, to rise to heights of knowledge would threaten them with just disgrace. Yet science does not doubt at all that all untutored, void of spirit, the antediluvian animal could of itself become a man."

In this next dialogue between Felix Balde (bearer of the Spirit of Nature) and Theodius (archetype of the Spirit of Love), we can find in Felix's response the words of the author, Rudolf Steiner, describing his own dilemma vis-à-vis the scientific community in his own time a century ago and yet today. While Steiner was taught their science, he did not swallow their materialistic arguments whole because he could see directly into the spiritual world which his materialistic tutors could not.

[page 97] Theodosius: "Why do you not reveal to men the sources of your light which shines from out your soul with such resplendent ray?"

[page 97] Felix Balde: "I'm called a recluse and a dreamer by those of kind intentions. The others think of me as just a blockhead who all untaught by them pursues his own poor nonsense."

This next passage Felicia Balde speaks as my own mother might have to describe what happened to me in the course of my academic career as a physicist. I found little nourishment for my heart and soul from the unleavened bread and dust of my physics curriculum.

[page 102] "But in the dismal shadow of dark science our son's true feeling for the spirit died. The happy child became a man with barren soul and empty heart."

The seeress Theodora speaks to Johannes of "the God descending to the earth as Man who thus conquered death." (Page 116) She reports what Christ would speak to the Child nestled to Johannes' side.

[page 116] "To him there speaks the messenger of Christ: 'Your destiny does not allow that you come near me in this life. Yet I shall wait in patience; your path will lead you to me in the end.' "

At the end of the play within the play, Benedictus shares these words of strength with Maria and Johannes for the task of spirit work they have before them.

[page 111] "The spirit's guidance has united you in knowledge; so now unite yourselves for spirit work. The rulers of this realm bestow on you, through me, these words of strength:"

*Light's weaving essence radiates
from man to man
to fill the world with truth.
Love's blessing gives its warmth
to souls through souls
to work and weave the bliss of all the worlds.
And messengers of spirit join
with purposes of worlds.
And when the man who finds himself in man
can join one with the other*

the light of spirit radiates through warmth of soul.

Professor Capesius re-interprets the dictum of the Temple of Apollo "Know Thyself" as pointing us to a latent power within each of us which remains hidden unless we consciously seek it and become an agent of our own evolution. As evolving beings, our ability to understand expands at each time of our life. This idea leads Strader into despair because he views thinking as something that is timeless, and if thinking is time-bound, then knowledge to him becomes mere dream-stuff.

[page 133] Capesius: "Now I perceive that ancient word of wisdom 'Know thou thyself' in a new light. To learn to know our being, we first must find that power in ourselves that as true spirit is able to conceal itself from us."

[page 133] Maria: "To find ourselves, we must unfold that power first that penetrates into our inmost being. The word of wisdom says in truth: Evolve yourself, in order to behold yourself."

[page 133, 134] Strader: "If one were to acknowledge that Thomasius through the unfolding of his spirit, has for himself won knowledge of the being that dwells invisibly in you, one then would have to say that knowledge differs at each stage of life."

[page 134] Capesius: "That is exactly what I would affirm."

[page 134] Strader: "If this were so then all our thinking is in vain, and knowledge is illusion. I would then have to lose myself at every instant."

To "lose ourselves at every instant" is another way of saying, "Stay in the moment" or "Be here and now" which became watchwords of the 1960s and succeeding decades. Staying in the moment means to remain constantly aware of the [When Index](#) of our lives, as Korzybski called it in his [General Semantics](#). Who we are today is new to the world unless we have striven to keep ourselves unchanged by holding ever before us the unchanging thought of "This is me". Strader, who apparently did exactly that to himself, finds that all his thinking along those lines was in vain and he will never again reach his former temple-like clarity of thought. He is at a loss as what to do, and only the seeress Theodora can see the future Strader and offer him consolation that his time will one day come.

[page 155] Strader: "It seems that I alone am lost. I cannot banish doubt itself, and I shall surely never find again the path that leads me to the temple."

[page 155] Theodora: "Out of your heart soars a glowing light. A human image shapes itself from it, and words I hear this human image speaking. And so they sound: 'I have now conquered for myself the power to reach the light.' My friend, trust in yourself! For you yourself will speak these words when once your time shall be fulfilled."

This is but the first of four plays which form the Mystery Dramas of Rudolf Steiner. The next play in sequence is [The Soul's Probation](#) which is called "A Life Tableau in Dramatic Scenes as Sequel to 'The Portal of Initiation'."

~^~^~^~^~ **ADDENDUM** ~^~^~^~^~



[page 5, 6] **THOUGHTS ON THE SEAL for PORTAL OF INITIATION**

The design displays two different forms, seven times repeated: one is narrowly rounded, opening toward the center; the other, a widely curved form which opens to the periphery, with slightly thickened ends; the opening of the small form has thinner ends. The dynamics here displayed give the impression of a rhythm between contracting and expanding, directed toward the inner and the outer. From the periphery a force can be felt pouring into the receptive gesture of the larger curve. The dominance of such a force from the circumference has its influence on the inner form, turning it toward a central space which is left free.

In moral terms: self-centeredness has to give way to the impact exerted from without. In this dynamic direction from the outer to the inner, responding to an active receptiveness for the outer, we have a distinct characteristic of the genuine Rosicrucian attitude: open your inner eyes and ears to the world of spirit as it is revealed in Nature around you, and you will find an answer to the divine origin and nature of your own being.

To affirm this Rosicrucian approach, certain letters are added, in a dynamic sequence. An E starts on the left side within one of the large curves; then follow, parallel with the circumference, D- N- I(3). With the next three letters the placement changes; they are directed towards the center: C- M- P-. Then, with a final swing around to the center, three letters occupy the free space: S- S- R-. It is the motion of a spiral going from outside into the center. The letters stand for an ancient saying which has been the secret core of genuine Rosicrucianism. In its threefoldness it expresses the essence of the Trinity:

Ex Deo Nascimur (out of God we are born)

In Christo Morimur (in Christ we die)

Per Spiritum Sanctum Reviviscimus (through the Holy Spirit we are reborn).

That these letters are added in such a dynamic way to the seal of the Portal of Initiation connects the drama with the historic current of esoteric Christianity. It is in its spirit that the action moves and proceeds from scene to scene; in these three phases 'of the saying' the characters of the play find their own growth and transformation expressed.

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. R. D. Laing filled his book, [Knots](#), with such "knots of destiny" in which two or more people reveal their intimate connection with each other in curious inter-raveling of their threads of karma.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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**Footnote 2.** In my review of [Three Lectures on the Mystery Dramas](#) by Rudolf Steiner, I was inspired to write a poem on the theme of knots of destiny when I read the passage on page 68 immediately below.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

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Footnote 3. In the design, the J is the curved form of 'I'.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)

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