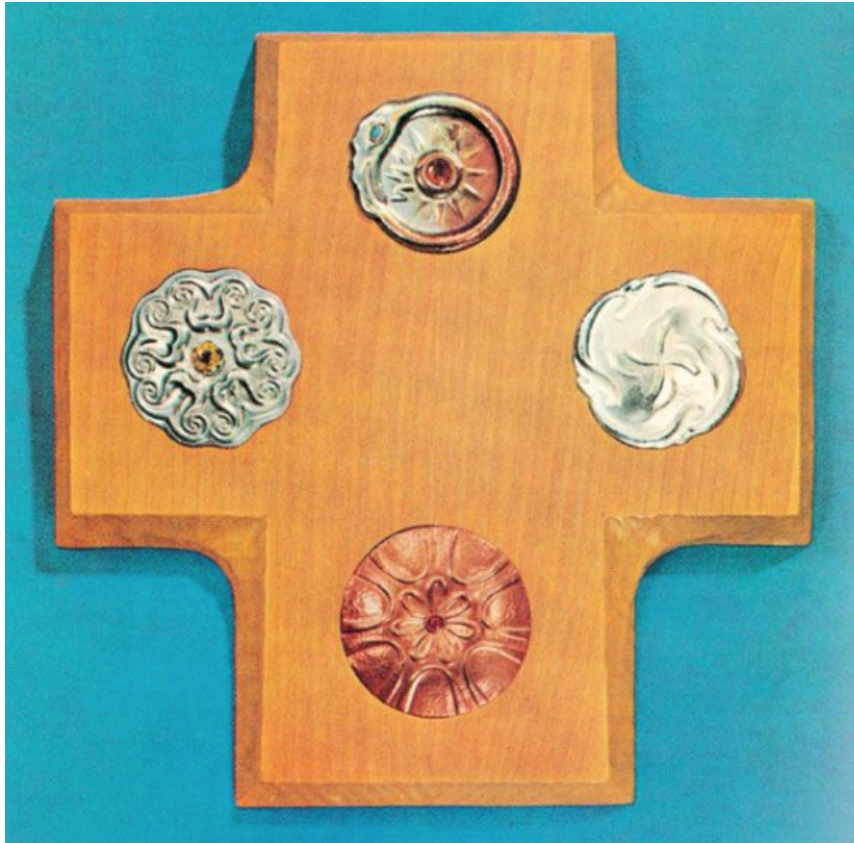


# Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Mystery Dramas

## The Capesius and Strader Characters



Seals of the Mystery Dramas

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Much of what Rudolf Steiner explained about the spiritual streams that weave behind the scenes of history is a matter that could, and most often does, take years for people to figure out and reach a living understanding. The vision of history that Steiner developed, and illuminated with new meaning, is one that addresses the individual with a sense of relevance, even urgency. This is because, in light of the revelations of spiritual science, we can develop a feeling that history is an unfolding in which we all take an active part. All of us who recognize ourselves behind the relevance of the Michaelic call will start to recognize that history does not just belong to great individuals of the past but to eternal individualities who periodically reincarnate and bring forward progressive impulses for the Earth's future. While they are the great leaders, or initiates, we single individuals play a role in recognizing their spiritual impulses and eventually awakening and uniting ourselves with their destiny on Earth.

### **Karma and Reincarnation in Action**

Much of what Rudolf Steiner said about karma and reincarnation from a general standpoint of broad, general laws, was first given flesh and bone, so to speak, with the four Mystery Dramas he wrote from 1910 to 1913 and interrupted at the outbreak of WWI, before the later revelations in the lectures titled *Karmic Relationships* of 1924. It is remarkable that in these plays we can recognize individuals whose soul make-up varies greatly and who collaborate with each other for the advancement of humanity, in spite of periodical difficulties. Their karmic history has united them with Michaelic impulses which, although serving the Christ impulse, could at times oppose each other and fail to understand their respective standpoints. History carries a number of such instances, and the Mystery Dramas bring forth the example of the opposition surging, even at the leadership level, between Dominicans and Templars. This opposition generates estrangements and alienation between individuals whose life happens to find itself in one or the other stream, or even caught in between them.

An example of the above is that of the monk of the Benedictine Order who, though genuinely united with the Christ impulse even from the time of the Hibernian Mysteries, fans the flames of opposition of the Dominicans against the Templars. In a new incarnation of the monk, the one who goes by the name of Maria recognizes the role she played at the time and the repercussions that her stances on doctrinal issues had at the level of concrete individuals and their personal relationships. She then strives to pay off her karmic debts with admirable dedication and perseverance.

In the Mystery Dramas anyone of us who has a keen interest in social matters can realize that the veil of karma clouds the reality of strong feelings we bear against other individuals, most notably when we are engaged in significant spiritual initiatives. The energy with which we shield ourselves behind pure external appearance, often with great personal investment, would gradually fade if we had but the opportunity to see behind the veil of destiny the events that link many of us to each other in previous incarnations. We would then realize that the rationale of our present conflict pales in weight in relation to the real events that we lived through and caused all sorts of estrangement and unfinished business, carrying the consequences in the present incarnation. This alone should render the Mystery Dramas mandatory readings/viewings for those who want to work in the field of applied social sciences. We need to be able to fathom, if not understand, present events under a new light, if nothing else suspend judgment more often than not.

Over the years I have seen the entire production of the plays three times and some of the individual plays even more. At other times I have read them. I would say that the most important realization lies in having a feeling for the qualitative fruits of social impulses as seeds that take time to germinate, but have nevertheless profound and lasting reality.



Our impatient, materialistic civilization measures everything by causes and effects, and in that wake social change agents almost exclusively look at happy ending stories. They pay little attention to the nature of spiritual evolution. Otherwise they would know that an earnest failure can be a potent seed for future evolution. The Grand Master of the Templars, facing the ending of the order which had done so much to Christianize European social reality, soberly assesses that his demise and eventual death will not stop the reality of the impulse that has been implanted on European soil. It will reemerge as surely as a new plant comes forth from the seed of a wilted one, only here in a metamorphosed fashion. The Grand Master of the Templar Brotherhood believes in it so confidently as to affirm “In all this hatred which pursues us now I do but see the seed of future love.”<sup>1</sup> (*The Soul’s Probation*, Scene 8)

It is under this light that I want to revisit the question of the contrast between Aristotelians and Platonists—as I have done elsewhere<sup>2</sup>—only now in a dynamic fashion between two individuals, whose lives we can follow in three incarnations. These are the drama characters who take the names of Capesius and Strader in modern time, and who have also known each other during the time of decadence of the old Egyptian Mysteries and at the time of the demise of the Templar Order. This is therefore an essay which makes sense most of all to those who are familiar with the dramas. It has been inspired by Harry Collison whose writing, *A Commentary on Rudolf Steiner’s Four Mystery Dramas*, first alerted me about the nature of the relationship between Strader and Capesius.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Evolution of the Plays**

Unique among literary efforts, the plays show us the evolution of eight individualities linked to a spiritual master by the name of Benedictus.<sup>4</sup> Each one of these takes on earnestly the teachings of the master and then undertakes to transform her life through a living integration of the teachings, meditations and exercises that the Master recommends her. As we know in these instances, progress is all but linear and the characters reveal extremely unique tendencies, each different from the other. An individual

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<sup>1</sup> In everything that follows we will use the Ruth and Hans Pusch translations of the four Mystery Dramas.

<sup>2</sup> See *Karl Julius Schröer and Rudolf Steiner: Anthroposophy and the Teachings of Karma and Reincarnation* and *Aristotelians and Platonists: A Convergence of the Michaelic Streams in Our Time*, at <https://millenniumculmination.net>.

<sup>3</sup> See particularly his footnotes in relation to *The Portal of Initiation*, Scene 4.

<sup>4</sup> The numbers of individuals vary from one play to another; there are eight whose development unfolds most consistently from the first to the fourth drama.

whose soul make up and spiritual development comes even close to the ideal is rather the exception, and such one is Maria. Practically everybody else follows a very personal development far from the average, standard course that Steiner outlines in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* or *Theosophy*. In fact through the dramas Steiner wanted to show that personal development follows completely unrepeatable individualized patterns, but also that individuals have a tremendous influence on each other's personal development. Obviously, the latter is even harder to generalize about than individual human development alone. Here examples speak for what generalizations hardly can. Another indication of the importance of the Mystery Dramas lies in forging the ability to lead the social scientist to be able to differentiate over and over again and work out of the living reality of any given situation, as much as he can, and indeed must, bring forth the tools of the trade, so to speak.

## The Portal of Initiation



The first play, *The Portal of Initiation*, follows most of all the development of the artist Johannes Thomasius as a central nexus of karmic relationships. All the individuals do in effect have a relationship to him which will be revealed in the successive plays.

In the first play we are introduced to a cast of individuals reunited around the teacher Benedictus, whose stature is not without reminding us of some of Steiner's own attributes and capacities. From scene one we are introduced to two modern scientists, the historian Capesius and the natural scientist Strader. And in the first scene the seer Theodora introduces the epochal revelation of the reappearance of the Christ in the etheric, setting the stage for the very modern place of the plays in modern consciousness. In the first play we are primarily concerned with Johannes Thomasius' struggle in his spiritual development and in relation to his life partner Maria. At first Johannes struggles in recognizing and facing the world and alluring call of Lucifer.

Another important dimension of the play appears in scenes 5 and 11, first in the subterranean rock temple, the hidden Mystery Center of the leaders of humanity. Here two of the individuals of the play find a place in representing the spiritual forces of the four directions. These are the reclusive Felix Balde, who can communicate with the nature spirits and the Other Maria whose strong heart forces have healing qualities. This is the first step in bringing temple knowledge openly to the whole of humanity. In the second step (Scene Eleven) the Sun Temple comes to the surface of the Earth. This step marks the progress of the souls of Johannes and Maria on top of



Felix and the Other Maria, who work out of more atavistic soul faculties. Capesius and Strader cannot enter the temple in full consciousness yet.

The first Mystery Drama introduces us to the circle that has formed around the personality of Benedictus, the spiritual teacher. Among these we find primarily the seven individuals whose lives will interweave in the following plays: the painter Johannes Thomasius and his companion Maria, undoubtedly one of the most advanced pupils of Benedictus; the Balde couple formed by Felix, the recluse who can contact the elemental spirits of nature and his wife Felicia, who can create objective imaginations in the form of fairy tales. Just as the above are grouped two by two so are the remaining ones who interest us most. Capesius and Strader are two academics; Capesius a historian, Strader a scientist. They form the polarity to which we will turn most of our attention. Close to Strader we then find the seeress Theodora, whom Strader will eventually marry. In the first play two additional characters appear whom we will not meet in the later plays; Helena of whom we lose sight after the first scene and the Other Maria, whose archetype represents the soul of love, and who offers short but pointed remarks of value to the two individuals of our essay.<sup>5</sup>

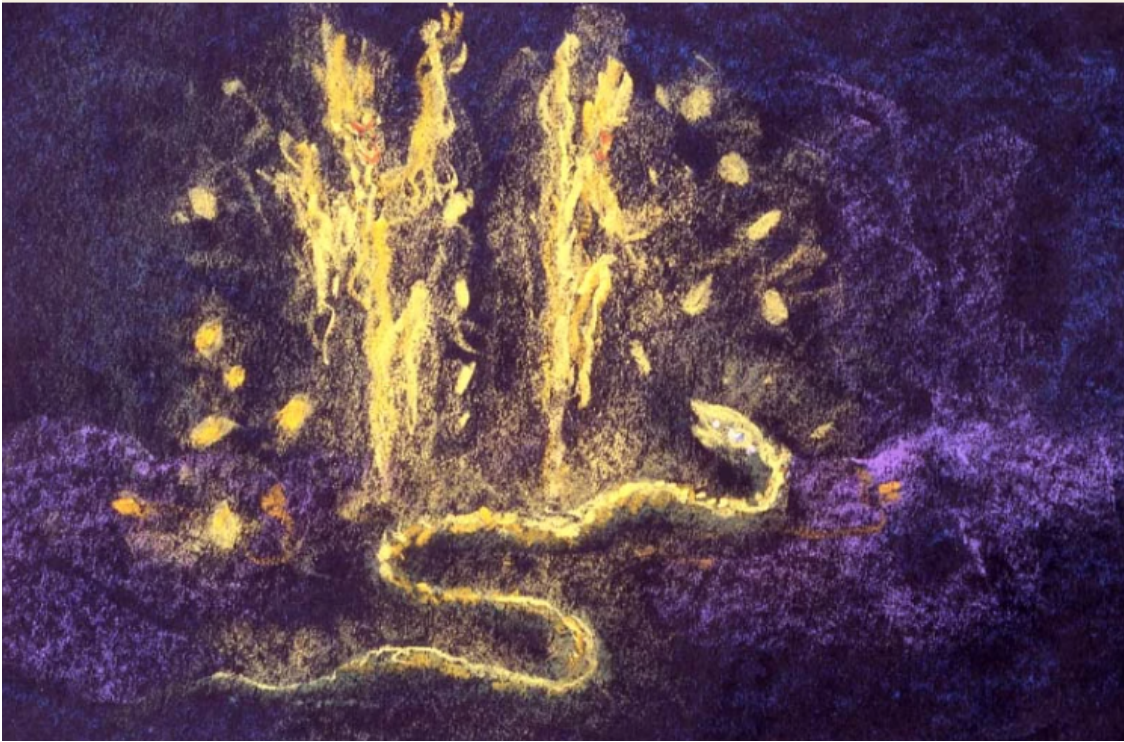
The inner path of Johannes takes centerstage in the first play, especially in relation to his companion and mentor, Maria. Due to what unfolds in relation to previous incarnations Johannes has developed a weakening dependence on Maria as his artistic muse. When Maria realizes she has become a crutch to her companion, she withdraws from him in a healthy way but leaves him bewildered and feeling powerless. Faced with his own abyss the painter manages to take the first steps of spiritual development.

We will now follow the evolution of Strader's and Capesius' spiritual journeys more in depth. It is interesting to place these two stage characters in relation to Goethe's fairy tale of *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. We know that Steiner did not claim authorship of the first two Mystery Dramas. These appear written *through*, not by Rudolf Steiner, and the first play was subtitled "A Rosicrucian Mystery Drama." It is in fact written in such a way that to each character in Goethe's tale corresponds one from *The Portal of Initiation* and to the events of the tale correspond parallel events in the play. Steiner even envisioned initially to keep the same names of the tale. Here are some examples of the parallels between tale and drama: Maria corresponds to Goethe's Lily, Johannes to the Youth, the

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<sup>5</sup> The soul quality of the Other Maria is revealed in Scene 1 of *The Portal of Initiation*: "An inner urge has guided me to dedicate the rest of my whole life to those whose destiny has brought them suffering and need. And it was oftener my task to ease the pain within their souls than suffering of body."

Other Maria to the Green Snake, Benedictus to the Golden King. It is of great interest that Capesius and Strader are portrayed as one, or twins, in the two Will-o-the-wisps. They play out as a single role, representing at first that earthly wisdom, woven with disjointed and confusing threads, which tries to separate itself from the sensory world, meanwhile scattering its gold and causing upheaval in the elemental world.



The Will-o'-the-wisps by David Newbatt<sup>6</sup>

Scene 1 starts just after a lecture given by Benedictus. Capesius is left skeptic, Strader all the more so given his grounding in the sciences. He cannot fathom how to reconcile them with such a foreign-looking thought content. However, an event calls his attention and will cause quite some reverberations in the time to come. In an altered state, Theodora communicates her vision of the coming of the etheric Christ, and for Strader the impact of the phenomenon is something he cannot shake off or deny with rational explanations. We can sense that it is his inner relationship with spiritual science—which is to say his pre-birth relationship with the Michaelic cult—that causes such an impact in the depths of his soul, even though it is something that he still cannot consciously reconcile.

On his side Capesius entertains the idea that Theodora's vision could have another origin: "We have to do then simply with a fact such as occurs at

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<sup>6</sup> For more works by the artist see: <https://davidnewbatt.com/>



times, conflicting with all the laws of nature, and which we must regard as illness." To this Strader counters "And yet we have a fact before us! It certainly must be important what was just said to us. We might be forced—if we discard all other theories—to take transference of ideas through psychic power in earnest." For Strader this is the beginning of wonder in matters spiritual, that opens new possibilities for his soul. Wonder, however, is also mixed with apprehension, anticipating the pains of personal growth: "Already I can feel that painful days are coming in my life. For since the time when in my cloister's loneliness I made a first acquaintance with that knowledge [science] which struck relentlessly my deepest soul, has nothing moved me more than the encounter with the seeress." Already a karmic turning point is set in motion for Strader, one that will change his life—first through the seeress' vision then through Theodora herself.

To balance things out we learn in the same scene something that will play an important part in Capesius' coming years: the impact that have Felicia's stories on his soul: "... I must truly say I owe to this good lady my deepest gratitude. She gives me of her gifts so richly, as no one else can do." And further: "Felicia tells me many a tale, in pictures fabulous, ... The tone in which she tells of them recalls *the bards of ancient times*. 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." (emphasis added). We cannot fail to notice that the two are affected by stories, one a tale, the other a vision. For professor Capesius what sounds like an echo of "ancient times," for Strader the tenor of things to come—the reappearance of Christ in the etheric.

Capesius and Strader appear next as they are apprehended in the elemental world in Johannes Thomasius' meditation in Scene 4. Strader, younger in years, figures as the older man he will become, Capesius as he was in his youth.

Before beholding the two friends Johannes hears the voices of Lucifer and Ahriman followed by that of the Spirit of the Elements. Johannes apprehends the effects that the two individuals' intellect-bound thinking have upon the elemental beings of nature, provoking their opposition in the form of thunder and lightning. Such is the reaction they have to the proud words of the two, who mix truth and error without being able to differentiate them.

At the end of the scene the Other Maria appears, who through her love can transform the impact that Capesius' and Strader's words have upon the world of the elements. She prophesies to them the two ways either of them can take. In what seems addressed to Capesius she offers: "If you will give your souls to all the pure delights of my existence, you will soar forth on

spirit wings toward primal origins of worlds." To this Strader reacts: "This is no way for us. ... We want to stay upon the ground, not fly into the cloudy heights." Here, according to the Other Maria, the one who wants to go the other way "... must renounce [his] haughty spirit. Forget what reason must dictate. Let Nature's mood first conquer you. In manhood's breast let the childhood's soul, untouched by shadow-images of thought hold sway, naively true."

In the intervening three years, which lead us to Scene 8, Johannes has become Capesius' pupil, moved by a desire to learn modern science. Inspired by his further studies of spiritual science his paintings have acquired new depth. In this scene Johannes surprises and awes Capesius with a portrait of his master of which he can say: "My brush was guided by the powers, which [Capesius] unfolded from former lives on earth. And if I've thus unveiled for him his inmost self, my picture has then rendered the service which I had in mind." Johannes has been able to ally painting technique with vision of the spirit.

Both Capesius and Strader continue their "schooling through wonder". New questions can emerge in their souls, but for each in a different way. In Strader contemplating Johannes' painting, as on the previous occasion of the seeress' vision, to wonder is added doubt. Once more what outwardly appears as a "miracle"—since it cannot be explained by modern science—will subvert Strader's world until he will be able to build a bridge between natural science and the science of the spirit. In the painting he beholds an objective phenomenon of cognition since it affects Strader's knowledge of Capesius deeply: "In this picture here Capesius, whom I thought I knew, is for the first time revealed to me.... the portrait shows me clearly how little I have really known of him." He then comes to the unescapable conclusion that knowledge must change in nature at succeeding stages of life. But this brings him to the false dilemma of "If these were so then all our thinking is in vain, and knowledge is illusion" or to the unfathomable challenge that if this is so "I would then have to lose myself at every instant." These words echo the gentle admonition of the Other Maria: "Renounce your haughty spirit ... Let nature's mood first conquer you."

Scene 11 takes place in the so-called "Sun Temple", where are revealed the most significant secrets of world spirit-guidance. Here in addition to Benedictus, who incarnates the Spirit of Wisdom, we find the individual known as Theodosius, whose archetype represents the Spirit of Love, and Romanus as Spirit of Action. In addition Retardus is present in spirit, a being of hindrance, who wants to keep the Mysteries in their ancient form,

divorced from the scientific spirit of the time, as it is reborn in spiritual science.

Retardus was hoping that Capesius's and Strader's training in academic sciences would put a break to a further evolution of the Mysteries in modern time, that it would keep things as usual in this domain. Instead, the two have started to engage on the path of personal spiritual development. In so doing they have paved the way for Johannes and Maria to enter the temple. Johannes has been changed in taking up the scientific method through Capesius; Maria has discovered what unites her to Capesius and Johannes.

Though both scientists have only taken the very first steps, Benedictus can see how significant these are and is confident of their further progress. In relation to Capesius he affirms: "He has begun the path. He feels the light and he will win the power to fathom in his soul what until now Felicia has created for him." Out of inner vision Theodora comes to the rescue of the doubting and perplexed Strader: "Out of your heart sores up 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!'"

## The Soul's Probation



The key concepts of karma and reincarnation and a set of spiritual experiences—the events of a Middle Ages incarnation—take centerstage in *The Soul's Probation*. From the details of the recall it is possible to give these a precise setting and time: the castle of Burg Lockenhaus in the Austrian Burgenland at the time closely following the death at the stake of the Templar Grand Master Jacques de Molay in 1314. These events affect Maria, Johannes and Capesius in different ways and, indirectly, all the other characters.

Johannes recognizes his previous self in Thomas the miner, around whom are gathered all remaining six characters. He discovers the threads that united him to Capesius, his then father, a Templar knight; the monk, previous incarnation of Maria, under whose sway Thomas felt estranged from his father; Theodora as Celia, the sister to whom Thomas felt very close; The Keane couple, previous incarnations of Felix and Felicia, who had adopted both Thomas and Celia. On his side Simon the Jew, previous incarnation of Strader, formed a peripheral, functional connection with the Knights Templar. Capesius has achieved a first breakthrough into spiritual reality and in so doing he perceives his soul forces outside himself. Of note is the fact that Philia takes the form of the "Other Philia," a retarded spirit, as we will see further on.

For both Johannes and Capesius the impact of the revelations triggers an apparent setback; neither one of them can escape for a time the realm of Lucifer, due to both their inner nature and the tenor of the recollections.

Maria's courage and steadfastness meets the events with more equanimity, steeling the resolve of offering compensation to Capesius and Johannes. The resolution brings the play to a parallel conclusion to *The Portal of Initiation* in the Sun Temple.

Capesius and Strader are differently affected by the question of reincarnation and karma. Here we can see that, in keeping with Theodora's prophetic insight, Strader has progressed further than it appears. Although Capesius will relive his Medieval life, it is Strader who allows him to recognize beforehand the inevitability of the thought of previous lives when scientific logic is pushed to its extreme consequences. This emerges in Scene 4.

On the other hand—notwithstanding his insights into the reality of reincarnation—Strader's deep doubt has cast a spell of despair over his soul. He has apparently resigned himself to a drab existence devoted to utilitarian, technical goals which can serve his fellow human beings. This decision reflects the state of mind which pervades his soul: "Our life is far from able to point out goals that men can clearly understand. It is a treadmill, a mere engine, that pins us by its whirring wheels and hurls us, wearied, into darkness when the measure of our strength is spent." Here a deterministic view of karma replaces its vibrant, living essence.

However, a glimmer of light is illuminating Strader's soul, witness his confession: "Renunciation will I conquer for myself; the strength which it demands may give me the ability to follow in another way the path of research,... if perhaps my life on earth repeats itself." Strader's recognition of karma and reincarnation can become a seed, a living force in the soul: "There is no way around it—the repetition of our life on earth: our thinking neither can nor dare deny it, unless we break with everything that steady research has discovered throughout the course of time." Though Strader doesn't welcome the idea of reincarnation in relation to his present life, he has followed with courage and coherence the discipline of thought suggested by *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, the exoteric path on whose foundation the esoteric path can be built. And in so doing he has offered support to Capesius' quest and path.

Soon after seeing Strader's progress the geometry of the Mystery Dramas draws our attention to the "twin soul" of Capesius and we can follow closely the souls' polarity in Scene 5. We find the professor at the Baldes' cottage where he often retires to offer his weary soul spiritual nourishment. Here he vainly tries to follow the instinctive clairvoyance of Felix Balde, offering insights he directly perceives but cannot formulate as logical thoughts that could be followed through the scientific outlook. Try as he may Capesius has difficulty piecing together Felix Balde's assertions. He trusts however



that Felicia can help him understand his wise words: "Now help me, dear Felicia, as so often you've done before, so that my soul may turn itself to pictures and is able, enwarmed by living images, to grasp [Felix'] words as rightly they should be." To this Felicia answers obligingly, having just received an imagination, which she trusts, may render Felix' words more understandable. She weaves the tale of the child who can behold three spiritual beings—"three women's forms"—who come to his help. The assurance that the three fairies have offered the youth is, however, threatened by a "fierce dragon." When he grows to adulthood the youth is then able to withstand the threat of the dragon.

The tale has served Capesius as a bridge between the material world and the world of the spirit. It does so because the tale is the artistic word form least attached to the reality of the senses. Through Felicia's words Capesius reaches to imaginative knowledge, and this in turn opens the way to his recollection of previous lives. The three fairies of Felicia's fairy tale will create the bridge through which Capesius will be able to converse with the three objectified soul forces of Philia (Other Philia in his case), Astrid and Luna. The Other Philia denotes a retarding element in relation to Philia, one more bound to the senses.

Through his newly found inner strength, Capesius can regain certainty of thought and compassion toward his fellow human being. Thus transformed he chances to meet Johannes deeply troubled by Maria's announcement that she needs to temporarily separate from him in order to allow him space for inner growth. This empathic resonance creates in Capesius the ground of soul through which he can be transported to the otherworldly perception of the tableau of a previous incarnation, in which he was in effect deeply connected with Johannes' soul. What Strader has understood conceptually with great courage, Capesius is more armed to undertake through the help of imagination and compassion.

Though in Scene 6 Strader plays a peripheral role, we gain nonetheless some important insights about his soul make-up. Here, unbeknownst to the consciousness of Strader, his previous incarnation appears to Capesius as that of Simon the Jew. Simon experiences the scorn heaped upon those of his race, a hatred that feels most undeserved. His proximity to the Knights Templar highlights the contrast between the hatred he experiences because of external factors and the hatred that the knights can willingly confront out of the inner necessity of their spiritual path. Under the protective wing of the Templars, Simon has dedicated himself to the knowledge of the properties of plants and the art of healing. We could say that the theme of

karma forces itself upon his soul and will subsequently reverberate with a primeval, existential urgency.

In the following scene the first preceptor of the Templars—earlier incarnation of Capesius—faces a challenge similar to that of Simon. He is directly confronted by the impact of a shattering revelation of his shortcoming during his Middle Ages incarnation. The preceptor's soul has a double challenge that his brethren do not have to confront. The first is the weight of his recognition of the shattering effects of the choice of abandoning his wife and children. The second is immediately related to the first: because of the weight of his guilt his restless soul cannot accept the fate heaped upon the Templar brethren.

The first preceptor learns that his wife died heartbroken soon after his departure and that his son Thomas fell under the influence of the Dominican monk, Maria's previous incarnation, who misguidedly though in good faith alienated him from the Templars and therefore from his father. The weight of all of this leaves Capesius' soul overwhelmed, and captive in the realm of Lucifer.

Scenes 7 and 8 keep following the first preceptor's soul struggles. Capesius witnesses his conversation with the Grand Master. The local Grand Master, and many of his brethren, can serenely confront the prospect of death, knowing that what dies in one life will sow seeds for another, that the impulses they have woven into European history and soil will be transformed and resurface in later times. Such thoughts cannot offer solace to the preceptor's soul weighed by guilt and far more concerned with his own fate than with the collective one. The contrast between purer and guiltier souls is wisely highlighted by the Grand Master of the order in the difference between personal and world karma and how each of these can be apprehended: "[Capesius'] erring course of heart and mind will find atonement through the sufferings he has to bear in service to the whole. On him who bears no guilt from his own deeds yet has to walk the thorny path marked out by karma for our Order, pain will bestow new strength to raise himself to higher life." Individual karma stands juxtaposed with the karma of the brotherhood.

Capesius reaches a full understanding of the extent of his debt in Scene 8. This is rendered possible by Joseph's Keane's, the earlier incarnation of Felix Balde. After prefacing that the Keane's have adopted both Thomas and Celia, he reveals "But long years after Celia's mother died, these papers came to us. They make it clear who is our foster-daughter's father. I do not know if he is known to you." The father is none other than the preceptor himself.

Capesius registers the full extent of incurred karmic debt, both through the magnitude of past events and the obligations they lay upon him for a future (now present) incarnation: "So nothing else remains for me to do but to ensure that they shall hear the truth about themselves, and then with resignation to await the penance laid upon me by those powers which keep account of our life's right and wrong." This early recognition, anticipating *kamaloca*, allows the preceptor to face his Double and start taking responsibility in the Templar incarnation.

In the continuous symmetry between the evolution of the two souls, the same scene sees Strader confront another inner hindrance, one more subtle, that will still take time to uncover, since at this point Strader doesn't undergo the experience consciously; he is only present to the consciousness of the Grand Master and of the First Preceptor (Capesius' earlier incarnation). The Master reveals that external opposition, the one he experiences as a Jew, has its roots in his heart. It corresponds to an opposition originating in his soul from earlier times. What happened in a previous life at the time of Christ is described by Simon as a waking vision: "... when I walk alone through wood and field, often before my soul appears an image which I can no more master with my will than any object which my eye beholds. There stands before me then a human being who lovingly extends his hand to me. And in his feature is revealed a pain which I have never seen on any face. The greatness and the beauty of this man take hold of all the forces of my soul; I want to sink upon my knees, and humbly submit myself to him, a herald out of other worlds. But all at once the violent rage flames up within my heart... And I must have thrust away the hand so lovingly held out to me."

The inner tug-of-war in relation to the figure of Christ that rages in Simon's soul, and will still haunt Strader in new ways in his later incarnation, is expressed further "I've had to recognize within this Spirit Being [Christ] the primal form of man. Yet my own nature holds me back defiantly when I would turn to Him in faith and so I must experience within myself a war that is the prototype of outer strife." The Grand Master confirms to Simon the correctness of his vision. As in the case of Capesius, but here in a radically different way, the recognition of this guilt will spur Strader to undertake its transformation before coming to the experience of *kamaloca* in the afterlife. And doubt is what emerges in the later life. By the end of the scene we have beheld both Simon and the first preceptor having to come to terms with the workings of karma.

In Scene 10 we see Capesius' soul alone before the two reappear at the closing of the drama in the thirteenth scene. In addition to the previous life Capesius now has an experience of the intervening time in the spiritual world before his present incarnation. He experiences the previous tableau explored above as a memory, no longer as something re-lived. In front of his memory surges a certain feeling of terror, which points to the difficulties of the coming incarnation, due to the fact that he was not able to fully preserve memory of his own ego at the moment of trial of the Cosmic Midnight, the midpoint of the soul's journey in the spiritual world: "A moment that now seems eternity poured storms of agony into my soul as only a full life can bring with it. Before these yearning's terror seized me, there rose what had created it for me. I felt myself expanded to the universe bereft of my own being ... But no, it was not I who felt this way, it was another being, sprung from me."

Capesius at this point cannot complete the retrospective gaze upon the previous lifetime. However, he still has kept enough inner strength to contemplate how karma would play out in his coming incarnation. This leads in the present incarnation to a sentiment of oppression, which weighs on him as a burden: "O this strange countryside! A bench, a cottage [of the Baldes] and a glade before me.... They bear down as a heavy load upon me, though they seem real. No all this is but an image woven of soul fabric. I know these images were formed out of the thirst and yearning of the soul." This feeling of oppression will determine the fate of Capesius in Lucifer's realm from now on: "the picture that revealed itself to me is settling like a heavy mist of soul in front of everything my senses now perceived. It's changing to a nightmare, the picture that so weighs on me" In all of this weighs Capesius' voice of conscience wanting to stir in him a strong response in the life to come: "... perceive the tasks of life with sight empowered soul. But if you fail in this, to empty nothingness forever are you bound." These ominous words prophetically indicate Capesius' confrontation at the abyss, which will unfold in the next play.

Nothing is said again of the two souls until we reach the end of the play in Scene 13, which takes place in the Sun Temple. At this stage Ahriman has been recognized and defeated by Maria, and in Strader appears the force which will soon do the same. Benedictus expresses it thus: "The sleep of knowledge still envelops him, but a summons of the spirit has already sounded in his unconscious depths of being. What they have spoken to his inmost soul will soon pierce through into his spirit hearing." Looking at the polar relationship between the two characters, H. Reimann characterizes Capesius' stance as a "karmic situation" (associated with a deed) and Strader's one as a "karmic constitution" (associated with a soul make-up).

Capesius has a long confrontation with Lucifer ahead of him; Strader shows that he will be ready to confront Ahriman in his domain.<sup>7</sup>

The third and fourth Mystery Dramas announce a turning outward in the cultivation of Mystery knowledge to all accounts and purposes parallel to the way spiritual science developed historically: first the cultivation of the epistemology and of the individual path, then the applied disciplines. The Mysteries want to become more accessible on the surface of the Earth. They want to offer their fruits to all who are of good will; they may understand and appreciate the fruits even if they may not yet be able to recognize the plant upon which they grow. In the fourth play part of the group of people we are following will join in a common economic pursuit, which will highlight the involvement of spiritual knowledge in the social field with the concrete goal of furthering human evolution under every possible aspect.

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<sup>7</sup> Hugo Reimann, *Commentaires sur les Drames-Mysteres de Rudolf Steiner d'après les notes de Mathilde Scholl*, 181.



## The Guardian of the Threshold



The third drama brings various individuals across the boundary guarded by the Guardian of the Threshold, and therefore to the meeting with the adversaries, Lucifer and Ahriman. In *The Guardian of the Threshold* the movement of opening to the wider social world starts with the impulse that brought Johannes Thomasius to publish a book on spiritual science in which spiritual content is brought to light in the spirit of modern science; this has been, among other things, the fruit of Johannes' studies under Professor Capesius. On the other hand, Strader will announce his research on the powering of machines through what amounts to moral technology, working through etheric vibrations that depend on a person's moral nature. On his side Felix Balde has agreed to come out of his seclusion to convey his natural perception of spiritual and elemental beings to throw light on the deeper workings of Nature. The brotherhood wants to present the result of this work to an archetypal group of twelve "laymen" who have varying degrees of interest in spiritual science but no direct involvement. The drama starts with the anti-climax of Johannes revealing, to the dismay of the brethren, that he knows his work can be made use of by Ahriman for his own purposes due to his inability to gain full control over his lower self. This assertion follows from Johannes having met with Ahriman in the spirit just beforehand.

In contrast to Johannes, Capesius is still under the sway of Lucifer in his domain, where he is met in spirit by Maria. She realizes that Lucifer also

has a hold on Johannes' soul and is using him to fan the flames of a passionate and destructive love for Theodora, now become Strader's wife. This will soon lead to Theodora's death and Strader's consternation.

The bereaved Strader seeks comfort at the cottage of Felix and Felicia Balde, where he meets Capesius, who is absent to his physical surroundings under the spell of Lucifer. From time to time he can offer useful revelations from the spiritual world, particularly for the benefit of Strader. Capesius will manage to release himself from Lucifer's spell thanks to the fruits of his discipleship with Benedictus and once again thanks to one of Felicia's tales, that of "the child of light."

With Maria's help and vouchsafing Johannes can cross the threshold and enter the icy fields of Ahriman. Strader likewise enters Ahriman's domain in full awareness and acquires a grasp about how Ahriman makes use of the laws of number and measure to manipulate groups of people.

By the end of the play Capesius and Strader have become full pupils of Benedictus and are led to the new Rosicrucian temple. Here Benedictus assures a direct connection with the supersensible and offers responsibility to three individuals who have now acquired direct supersensible experience: Maria, Johannes and Capesius. They are joined by Felix and Felicia who, however, operate from a more naturally endowed kind of spiritual perception.

In Scene 1 Doctor Strader appears briefly, announcing that he wants to completely unite the results of his research with the aims of the Brotherhood. We recognize in Scene 3 that Capesius is in a realm in which present and future have lost all relevance. Rather, he is completely immersed in the experience of his past, including what has emerged from his previous life recollection. This is due to the fact that as soon as the soul ascends to the spiritual world it only knows and carries with it its memories. To begin with there is no present and no future for the soul. It must first remember what it thought, felt and willed in the physical world. For a time "... you can no longer see nor hear, no longer are able, to think or feel or desire anything new. Every kind of life activity stops. You would know only what you remember. In exactly this situation you find yourself, when you rise into the spiritual world with clairvoyant consciousness. There is nothing there at first that will provide new perceptions. Your understanding comes only through remembering."<sup>8</sup> However, for Capesius everything about his past life appears to him as if in a dream and his body feels to him like a prison; he fears it. Maria tries to call his attention back to the present, but

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<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *The Secrets of the Threshold*, lecture of August 29, 1913.

the memory of his ego duties causes him fear and pain. Capesius has fallen completely victim to Lucifer's power. He cannot oppose him yet.

Maria, acting out of her higher Self, can stir him in the direction of strengthening the necessary soul capacities to develop the desire to face his karmic obligations. Maria herself acts out of a desire to fulfill her karmic debt toward Capesius, and although this causes him suffering, Capesius understands her motivation and accepts her help: "Duties also are revealed. You have conversed with that soul-being that calls itself Capesius in the body. This spirit insight you have gained into a former life shows that you owe Capesius much through your own karma. Therefore you should beg Lucifer that he, the great light-bearer, let you give protection to Capesius on earth." And soon after he adds: "This duty you must surely wish to do, and this can only be with the help of Lucifer. But look! He comes himself, the Spirit of the Light." Maria is receptive to these words because she has in herself the forces that can resist Lucifer, forces of sacrifice that she has already placed at work in helping Johannes become independent of her.

Immediately after in the drama, but many years later in real life, we see Strader and Theodora celebrating their seventh wedding anniversary in Scene 4. Theodora has had a crucial influence in dissipating Strader's doubts and activating his soul forces, but presently she loses her access to spiritual revelation due to Johannes' insidious desires. This is a fanning of the flame that existed between Thomas and his sister Celia in the Medieval incarnation at the time in which they still ignored being siblings, a passion that Lucifer can rekindle in the present life, even causing an occult love of Johannes on the other side of the threshold after Theodora's death. Now Capesius, in Lucifer's domain, can contemplate the effect of his karmic trespass in a previous life, where he was the cause of the separation of the siblings and of the incestuous love that had grown between them afterward. He will thus be summoned to awaken his ego and be present on Earth to repay his karmic debt.

Scene 5 takes place after the death of Theodora. To alleviate his grief Strader seeks solace in the cottage of the Baldes. Here he is reunited with Capesius still estranged from himself. At times, however, due to his presence in the realm of Lucifer, Capesius can interject startling but genuine insights, due moreover to the fact of his karmic proximity to all individuals involved. These, however, at first scare Strader and only the help of Felix and Felicia can help him make sense of what he hears. Capesius can offer a background to the occult nature of the events and Theodora, appearing in spirit, can confirm what he says. She rallies to the help of Johannes, adding herself to what Maria has vowed to achieve in the same direction.

Strader accepts his wife's request to add himself to the effort of helping Johannes, celebrating the possibility to be still united to her in spirit.

Capesius indicates to Strader that his research is more important than ever, not only for what humanity can derive from it, but also for Johannes' further evolution: "Thomasius, however, will be turned with certainty away from evil paths, if Strader gives himself to aims that in the future can change all human knowledge in a spiritual way to bring it closer to the knowledge of the gods."

Strader's path, from this moment onward, obliges him to keenly feel an inner loneliness which, however, can school the soul toward a feeling of immortality and union with the divine. It is one that Strader will follow with great courage from now on. This loneliness is the avenue to the realization that humanity has deserted its spiritual home and the gods. Such a soul as his can then come to the realization of the importance of the Mystery of Golgotha and the resurrection forces that it carries for the Earth and the human being. Furthermore he can recognize that these are the same forces that offer resurrection to our dead thinking and that can imbue even the technological realm with new, etheric forces, which is what Strader has come to fathom. We need to keep in mind that Strader's solitude also derives from a definite and precise relationship to the Christ impulse, forged in a previous life. This is a source of hindrance that only emerges with clarity in the last Mystery Drama.

Just as the previous tableau placed Strader at its center, we move in Scene 6, in a familiar rhythm, to the twin soul of Capesius coming to grips with the effort of freeing himself from Lucifer's domain and regaining love for his earthly ego.

We find the two souls again in Scene 6, which takes place in the etheric world. Capesius is still estranged from the sense world. However, Maria's entreaties and faithful commitment have left an imprint on his soul. With all this willingness present, Benedictus can inspire Capesius from the spirit, recognize his progress and enter into relationship with his higher self. He does this out of the inner obligation of the teacher to offer help to his disciples when these are ready to take on a new step. He encourages him thus: "But, not yet freed from thought, you cannot see your own true being in the spirit's sphere. You can well lay aside your sense-bound body, but not the fine corporeal web of thought. You'll only see the world as fully real when nothing of your personality remains to dim the clearness of your vision. He only who has learned to see his thinking outside himself—just as the powers of seership behold the body as a thing apart—can penetrate to spirit actualities." Capesius comes to realize and question his dependence

upon Luciferic inspiration: “[The soul] sees not Lucifer from whom thoughts spring to life, and from whom feelings flow. Thus it believes it is alone with them. Why does it give itself to such illusion?” He now doubts that he can originate thoughts that are not bound to Lucifer’s influence.

Finally, under the guidance of Maria’s questioning Capesius can finally come to recognize and separate the domains of Lucifer and Ahriman, specifically recognize that fear emanates from Ahriman’s being and hatred from Lucifer’s domain. By the end of the scene, thanks to the help of Benedictus and Maria, Capesius can find himself anew and reconnect to his destiny on Earth: “I may belong in future to myself again. Now I will seek myself, because I dare, beholding myself in cosmic thought, to live.” Thus inwardly reconnected Capesius can receive from Felicia a tale about the child of God who brings to Earth the gift of ‘fantasy’ to help the human beings who strive for truth, though the opposition he receives on Earth causes him pain. Felicia’s tale renders possible for Capesius once more to apprehend the soul forces of Philia, Astrid and Luna, followed by the retarding force of the Other Philia.

Strader’s confrontation, still in Scene 8, takes place in Ahriman’s domain. The scientist recognizes where he is and why: “The hints that Benedictus gave to me—that I should cultivate my power of thought—have led me to this kingdom of the dead. I hoped, when lifted into the spirit, to receive the truth from radiant worlds of wisdom!” Strader can recognize how Ahriman can manipulate souls on Earth to accomplish his aims. He recognizes his coldhearted, ruthless logic: “You must think thus, and I can only find all that you said just now to be the truth; but only in this place is it the truth, and for the earthly world it is all error, if there it proves to be what here it seems. I may not here go further with my human thinking ... For it is at its end. In your rough words there is the sound of pain in you; and they cause pain in me as well. I must lament—beholding you—can only weep.” Strader who needs knowledge from the realm of Ahriman for his technical inventions, shows that he can wrest insights from this domain without succumbing to its imperatives. He will learn to use the laws of number and measure without succumbing to Ahriman’s logic.

By the time we reach Scene 10 Capesius has learned the secrets of number and measure too. He understands that between two polar opposites must be sought a third integrating element, that this is the secret of how polarities are everywhere at work. It is possible to assert this through an interesting detour. The dramas’ characters have such an intrinsic, lawful soul development that Steiner could follow them offstage, as it were. In the lecture of August 28, 1913 he explains something that belongs to Capesius’



soul development which is not presented in the dramas.<sup>9</sup> Here too, an awakening takes place through one of Felicia's fairy tales. As in previous instances her intervention follows one of Felix' explanations that Capesius cannot fully grasp; it concerns the nature of atoms and the relationships they establish between substances according to number and measure. The more complex the story becomes the more Capesius has difficulty maintaining wakefulness. Felicia comes to his rescue with a tale that he treasures in the following days and weeks, one that finally brings about a breakthrough. Through it he can understand the nature of polarities under the sway of Lucifer and Ahriman and of the third element that can bring a resolution. In relation to Capesius' striving, Steiner offers the example of the contrast between thinking on one's own and writing on the other. In thinking we have to separate ourselves from others and here Lucifer can find an entry point through human egoism. In writing thoughts are held firm, they become permanent. Ahriman retains, holds firm what is living and tends to disappear. He gains a foothold in human culture to the point that "Libraries, great and small, are Ahriman's strongholds, the fortresses from which he can control human development in the most powerful way."<sup>10</sup> Between the two poles we find a middle ground in the spoken word, through which we are brought into communion with other human beings. Over time the Word has lost much of its original power; still it can be reclaimed and find a position between Lucifer and Ahriman. It is in fact through the living Word, given a new life by Felicia, that Capesius can find nourishment and understanding.

Capesius' maturity is reflected in Benedictus remark which includes him as well in Scene 10: "My pupils have unlocked their souls, each in his own way, in order to receive the spirit light according to his destiny. What they have conquered for themselves each one shall render fruitful for the others. But this can only happen if their powers, *in harmony of measure and of number*, form willingly a higher unity together at this sacred place. This unity alone can waken to true life what otherwise could merely stay as single bare existences." (emphasis added). Benedictus, working in the name of Christ, can work socially with measure and number without infringing on human freedom, contrary to Ahriman.

Capesius is learning to investigate the world of soul and spirit; Strader can turn his spiritual investigation to the world of the senses. He has recognized how Ahriman can seize the thinking of other human beings in the example of the twelve individuals that the brotherhood has invited (first appearing

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<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Secrets of the Threshold* (GA 147).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, lecture of August 28, 1913.

in Scene 1), and with whom he senses a karmic connection. These are the reincarnated peasants who expressed their relationships with the Templars in Scene 6 of *The Soul's Probation*. Like Simon the Jew they held a peripheral position in relation to the Templars.

In the last scene is indicated the new step of the opening of the Mysteries which came to a false start at the beginning of the play. The pupils of Benedictus can enter the temple and replace the hierophants of the "League," a traditional formal brotherhood surviving from the past, such as would be a Freemasonic Lodge. Although the new pupils have not completely transformed their lower nature, they vow to put their lower ego at the service of the higher Self. Johannes enters the temple and occupies a place to the East as a bearer of the spiritual element, Maria to the north as a bearer of the element of soul, Capesius to the south as the bearer of the element of devotion [sacrifice] now freed from the Luciferic imprint, Strader to the West as a bearer of the element of will, having known Ahriman's domain without succumbing to his power.

## The Soul's Awakening



The last drama indicates that the karmic grouping has reached a new level of awareness and intimacy. They can now seize a new opportunity, through the offer of Hilary True-to-God of a factory in which they can put to the test the ideas of spiritual science in the economic and social realms.

The factory produces furniture and wooden products. In it Strader will offer his expertise in the technological realm, Johannes in the artistic element. In addition Hilary wants to create a center for spiritual science, for which Capesius also offers his contribution while Maria, as it will turn out, stands in the background, ready to help where needed.

In the play we will see Johannes, Capesius and Strader sorely tested in their readiness. Johannes is the first in whom is reactivated the "Spirit of his Youth", that part of his Double linked to an event in a previous incarnation, that outwardly manifests in his soul dependence upon Maria.

Capesius shows that he can keep Lucifer at bay but hasn't yet completely overcome him. At the hand of a fortuitous clairvoyant experience he starts doubting the adequacy of his new commitment. On the other hand, Strader's continuous progress in the previous plays takes him now at his own abyss in the crucial modern confrontation with the powers of Ahriman.

Early in the play Maria faces a retrospect of the time before her incarnation. Then both Maria and Johannes prove able to reach with a high degree of awareness the experience of their cosmic midnight in the Saturn sphere.

Partly for this reason, the original play was called “Maria’s and Johannes’ Awakening of the Soul.”

Maria and Johannes relive their Egyptian incarnation, in a time of decline of the Mysteries. At that time Maria was the neophyte seeking initiation, Johannes the woman who loved him and feared losing him. She managed to partake of the ceremonies involving the neophyte in a state of trance. Capesius too played an important role as the hierophant who realized that the neophyte was not ready for initiation and, moreover, started questioning the appropriateness of the Mysteries at this time of cultural decline.

Little by little the group loses cohesion because of the trials each undergoes. Maria renews her commitment through her unwavering capacity for sacrifice. So does Strader, who conquers all residual doubt and fear. However, due to the fact that he is now isolated and precluded from taking his ideas out into the world, the spiritual world calls him to an early death. Not unlike Maria’s sacrifice his commitment cements the strength of the larger group—including Hilary, his wife and his secretary—with inspirations flowing from the spiritual world. It also offers the critical help Capesius needs to overcome his Luciferic, introverted mysticism.

In Scene 1 we witness an important turning point influencing the rest of the drama: the opposition of Hilary’s business manager to the merging of spiritual endeavor and business enterprise. Though he is devoted to spiritual science himself, he views the attempt with apprehension. Here already a theme is introduced that weaves through the drama: the generally favorable impression Strader makes on people, regardless of their position vis-à-vis the group’s intentions.

In the following scene Johannes seems to fall back on old patterns, in amplifying nostalgia toward his old self, the illusions about Maria and other traits that made him feel comfortable in the past. Maria and Benedictus come to his help, Maria most of all by renewing her vow to renounce the light of Lucifer in her efforts to safeguard cognition from egotistic gratification.

Johannes’ experience is shared in Capesius’ consciousness, just as the two approach each other. This gives Capesius the chance to verify that he is correct in his experience: “There lived in me the being of his soul. I saw him young again as he perceived himself through spirit error, and as he blamed with spite the ripened fruits of his own spirit.” Capesius takes this to be an important step in his spiritual development, though it is due in great part to the karmic proximity between the two souls. Something

similar happened when Capeius saw Johannes, in a semi-conscious vision, deeply troubled by Maria's decision to temporarily separate herself from him in Scene 5 of *The Soul's Probation*.

Lucifer finds here another opening, just as in the case of Johannes, for seducing Capesius and distracting him from his earthly pursuits and his present commitment. He now believes that his spiritual growth requires of him seclusion from earthly pursuits: "What in this fateful hour I just lived through has fully changed the purpose of my soul. Now every earthly activity and work would rob me of my wakened seer forces." He believes he has to follow Felix Balde's solitary path as his own model.

Maria's degree of spiritual development allows her to recognize the karmic necessities at work both in Johannes' and Capesius' souls and behaviors. She manages to stir inner activity and restore resolve in Johannes' soul, no doubt closer to her than Capesius is.

Following his inner "conversion" Capesius now finds himself in Scene 3 celebrating his closeness of views with Felix Balde. On his side Strader feels bewildered: "I often understood... what you are saying... I took it then for wisdom... but no word of what you say has meaning for me now. Capesius and Felix, both... to me... conceal ... meaning in transparent words..." This has a shattering effect in the immediate for Strader: "It is not hard to bear the opposition which from outside is threatening my work. Yes, even if my will were to be shattered by opposition ... still I'd uphold myself. But I can never do without your world." And he has the insight to read through the veil of destiny, beyond their words to their origin and to the consequences these have upon the forming of karma: "I wonder if these words of yours are merely the outer cloak of forces ... of soul forces that exile me from you into those worlds which lie remote from all your spirit paths?"

This scene is crucial for the understanding of the two paths that were prophetically uttered by the Other Maria in *The Portal of Initiation*. The attitude that Capesius expounds is brought to a one-sided extreme in the words expressed by Felix: "To strive for nothing... wait in peaceful stillness, one's inmost being filled with expectation... that is the mystic mood." In contrast Strader expresses: "... spirit vision rises in me only when I devote myself to thoughts of action. My soul is flooded then with living hope to build an earthly home for spirit deeds, a place in which the light shall be enkindled to radiate and warm the spirit worlds, the light which through man's sense-activity will seek anew a home in earthly life." Since nothing he can say can find an echo in Capesius' and Felix' souls, Strader keenly feels his loneliness on the spirit path.



The focus Strader carries, forces him to look into his own abyss, into Ahriman's realm, describing it thus "Two forms confused? They change, yea, and they tear, one at the other tears—a battle now—the phantoms fight each other furiously—destruction reigns, and from it gloom is born—from out the gloom now issue other shades with ether's light around them—flick'ring red; one of the forms quite clearly leaves the rest; and comes to me—sent from the dark abyss." It is Maria stepping in vision out of the abyss, standing for Strader's higher Self, that pronounces the words that will remain impressed in Strader's mind, stimulating his growth at the abyss: "Where is your light?... you radiate fierce darkness. Perceive your darkness, round about yourself ... you pour confusing darkness into light, you feel it pouring forth through your creating, yet you can never feel what you create." at the same time encouraging him to go further: "Whereas you would forget creating's thirst, unknown to you it dominates your being because your cowardice holds back your light." In essence she is summoning him to transform his deep desire in thirst for knowledge.

It is once more Maria who can offer Strader a higher perspective in which both Capesius and Strader's stance are seen as polarities and reconciled: "While Felix tempers for himself the weapons which shield him against danger, one who walks your paths of soul must use another kind. The sword Capesius forges for himself and bravely wields in battle with his foes must change for Strader to a shadow-sword were he to start with it that spirit war which powers of destiny ordained for souls who mightily must turn the spirit-being, matured for deeds, to earth activity. You cannot use their weapons for yourself, but you must know them so that you can forge your own from out soul-substance thoughtfully." In effect Capesius fights to free himself from Lucifer's hold on his soul; Strader has to penetrate and redeem Ahriman's realm.

Much of what happens in relation to Strader's life can be understood in relation to the "model" from whom Strader emerged in Steiner's consciousness, the one known to history as Gideon Spicker, which casts some light on "Strader's darkness" and his being "afraid to ray out light." To grasp this we will turn in the conclusions to a previous incarnation of Gideon Spicker, the individual known to history as Heinrich von Of-terdingen.

Strader is still sorely tested in Scene 4, and from two sides. On one hand he hears from Benedictus that Johannes doesn't have the strength to carry his task further. Benedictus' revelation concerning his own work seems even harder to bear: "I saw you joined with special kinds of beings who would work evil if already now they would take hold of human spheres of

action." Strader realizes the weight of Maria's call to courage and that even such a blow of destiny will forge the sword Maria spoke about. With great inner strength Strader speaks to his spiritual teacher "... but that will come which is to come about." Strader has come to a very important step in his spiritual development, that of unwaveringly accepting the decree of karma. Benedictus' response affirms his level of maturity: "These words express the grade of your maturing. They do not find, however, in the souls of other spirit-friends, an echo."

We find again Capesius' soul in Scene 7, which takes place in the old Egyptian initiation Mysteries. At the time Capesius' previous incarnation is that of a hierophant who carries the responsibility of realizing that the prescribed candidate—a former incarnation of Maria—is not fit for initiation because still full of unresolved passion: "Strong passion surges still throughout his being; the cravings of his senses are not curbed. ... But when the senses' urge conceals itself and revels mystically in veneration's mask, it causes thought to lie, perverts the will." Capesius carries the weight of such knowledge in his soul, for which he is ready to take a courageous stand. He fears that due to a wrong emotion, raised during the initiation ceremony, destructive forces will hold sway around him. He feels an oppressive burden weighing upon him, all the more so in relation to the highest hierophant, an earlier incarnation of Benedictus, who holds silence on the matter.

Scene 8 shows us how justified Capesius' doubts are when the initiation of the neophyte turns awry, causing alarm and surprise to the highest hierophant himself, who invokes sacrilege. In effect the neophyte does not receive a spiritual vision; rather, he expresses all too human feelings. An example: "I saw the body that I wear on earth as other being stand outside myself. Though wrapt in bliss, and conscious of the light of spirit round me, yet I could regard my earthly sheath with longing and desire." Somehow Capesius receives confirmation of what he has felt in the previous scene. The hierophant has refrained from taking a step in the ritual: "I barred myself from thinking of that word which ritual customs have enjoined on me, the word which, sent forth from my thinking, should work in spirit on the neophyte." After confessing taking this momentous step in recognition of a turning point of time he concludes: "You may punish me, I had to do what shocks you into fright. I feel the time approaching that will free the single ego from a group-bound spirit and liberate his individual thought." The hierophant has taken a courageous stand, whose weight he will carry across the threshold.

This time we will not find Strader again until Scene 11. Here he sees his future plans, and even his life mission, hitting unsurmountable obstacles, particularly through the opposition of various co-workers. However, he also realizes that the forces he wants to harness may bring destruction if they are unleashed before the right time. He recognizes that Maria's earlier call for courage is correct; he knows he's going to need much of it going forward.

Strader is able to accept blows of destiny through imaginative pictures that affect and transform his ordinary consciousness. He sees himself onboard a ship in which he holds the rudder while Benedictus offers his guidance. With them are Maria and Johannes, whom they are taking to their destination. The ship is approached by another one with onboard Romanus and a friend of Hilary. When they start fighting each other Strader sees that Ahriman is helping his adversaries. Theodora comes then to his help and offers relief. Strader is left wondering about the image. Benedictus indicates that it still needs to evolve to give him strength: "I feel that you can strengthen still the power which showed the image to your spirit eyes."



**Strader in the Realm of Ahriman**

Scene 13 shifts attention to Capesius, who now grows able to recognize his Luciferic mistake which precluded him from being able to collaborate with Strader. He now gives value to his friend's perception: "This [mystic] mood comes often in our quiet hours, *in heat of action, too*, but then it wants the soul not to withdraw in thoughtlessness from gently viewing spirit

happenings.” (emphasis added). This realization prompts the presence and confirmatory words of Philia, now replacing the Other Philia: “... to your inner sight will be revealed what you can comprehend as earthly man. Then I myself shall lead you to the Guardian who at the spirit threshold keeps his watch.”

No more is said about Strader until his sudden death, which is an awakener of consciousness for the whole group. It has a particularly strengthening impact on the soul of the office manager.

## Conclusions

In the Mystery Dramas, especially in the first two plays, Capesius and Strader often appear in tandem, a little like the Will-o'-the-wisps in Goethe's fairy tale of *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. Gradually they tend to appear in the same scene or consecutively, and more and more separately as we move to the last play.

### The Two Paths

The first time the paths of the two are announced is in Johannes' perception of the two friends in the elemental world. The Other Maria appears to correct the disharmony the two provoke among the elements. She outlines a path in which: "If you will give your souls to all the pure delights of my existence, you will serve forth on spirit wings toward *primal origins of worlds*." The first seems addressed to Capesius. The second one the candidate must "Let nature's mood first conquer you. In manhood's breast let the childhood's soul, untouched by shadow-images of thought hold sway, naively true." This advice challenges Strader who fears losing the solid ground that science provides him.

Already in *The Soul's Probation* we recognize the marked polarity which will continue to the end of *The Soul's Awakening*. Capesius will enter a long trial to disentangle himself from Lucifer's domain. The technically-oriented Strader has to wrest his knowledge from Ahriman's domain, while learning to recognize that what is true in his domain has to be changed in earthly consciousness and transformed through moral forces.

In Scene 9 of *The Guardian of the Threshold* Capesius learns to recognize and integrate polarities in thinking. He has understood the laws of number and measure. The historian Capesius can see the interplay of polarities in history and in the realm of time.

Strader sees something similar in Ahriman's domain. He recognizes how the Prince of This World can make use of the laws of number and measure in recognition of the twelve-foldness that reigns in the realm of space, as in the example of the twelve senses or the twelve-foldness of personal orientations. He sees that Ahriman can serve himself of twelve individuals because in them is reconstituted an effective unity. This can be put to use on Earth with the use of moral forces that Ahriman does not possess.

Capesius and Strader also have different orientations when it comes to the dramas' central element of karma and reincarnation. Strader reaches the

inescapable conclusion of the soul's schooling in the stream of time, which leads to the inevitability of its return to incarnation. Thinking, pushed to its ultimate logical conclusion imposes upon him an idea which does not offer him solace, quite the contrary. He has to face the abyss of what karma reflects in his own life of estrangement, isolation and difficulty in carrying out his own mission. Strader cannot pierce through to the objective reality of a previous lifetime other, no doubt, than what Theodora can communicate through her visionary abilities.

Capesius proceeds, quite otherwise, on an imaginative path. The breakthroughs are paved by the imaginative contents of Felicia's tales. Then he receives an experiential perspective of his eternal individuality in Medieval and Egyptian times. Capesius the historian can understand his own "history," so to speak, and find grounding in the present. He too faces the guilt due to the knowledge of his shortcomings in a previous life. Whereas for Capesius the shortcomings are directly visible through experience, for Strader these shortcomings appear clearly in the beholding of the challenges presented in the current life, through the power of thinking. It is this contrast that leads Hugo Reimann and Mathilde Scholl to recognize a "karmic situation," associated with a deed in the case of Capesius and a "karmic constitution" associated with a soul make-up in the case of Strader.

Strader will have to face the desolation of a life apparently void of pleasure in the pursuit of what almost amounts to a Kantian sense of duty, at least until he can build a bridge between his scientific outlook and the path of spiritual science. He will have to overcome exile in the fields of Ahriman, so to speak. Quite different is the shock generated in Capesius' soul, polar opposite in fact. The professor decides to avoid earthly obligations to the point of escaping even the notion of an ego; Lucifer is keeping him captive in his domain.

The polar contrast between the two souls is already present in seed in a previous incarnation. Through their proximity with the Templar Order the two souls receive revelations about karma, which very few would otherwise have met in the Middle Ages. The first preceptor, Capesius' earlier embodiment, suffers with regret the consequences of fleeing from the burden of earthly duties. Simon the Jew receives the inkling that what he suffers in his present life comes from having refused the light of Christ in a previous incarnation.

It is Maria in Scene 3 of *The Souls Awakening* who recognizes that the two souls have to forge their own swords, and that they are not interchangeable. Capesius can in effect unite the world of the spirit with the light of thinking, a challenge that requires most often a distance from the



world of the senses. Strader needs to find inspiration that can descend in the midst of action in the sensible world.

We are coming here to the differentiation between the Platonic and Aristotelian outlooks that Steiner characterizes artistically in his dramas, very closely or parallel to what he outlined to Walter Johannes Stein in his The Hague Conversation of 1922. It is as if what Steiner experienced in a unified fashion in his soul after the writing of *The Philosophy of Freedom* is here retraced in the figures of the Platonist Capesius and the Aristotelian Strader. This polarity could not be more archetypally pure than in the difference between historian and natural scientist, which Steiner contrasts specifically in his 1922 conversation with W. J. Stein in The Hague in 1922. We will see that this is even more than a simple analogy by the end of our explorations. Quoting at length from this conversation we read:

*"In his Autobiography, Rudolf Steiner said that his own path led to spiritual vision. What stood before his soul was what had developed as his destiny from earthly life to earthly life. His mission was to develop this further in concrete ways. But the world first required something else of him, namely the transformation of natural-scientific thinking. The germinal thoughts that are to be found in Goethe first needed to be brought to life. In truth, however, this was Karl Julius Schröder's task, and not his. Thus Steiner decided for the time being to relinquish his own task in order to do what the world needed; he took on Schröder's mission. "By coming to that decision at that time, I experienced true freedom. I was able to write my Philosophy of Freedom (The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity) because I experienced what freedom is." (emphasis added)*

We know that Karl Julius Schröder is not just the quintessential Platonist; he is the reincarnated Plato himself. Steiner goes on to contrasting historic/literary consciousness (Platonist) with natural-scientific consciousness (Aristotelian) thus:

*The actual knowledge in these domains is this: Natural science comprehends ghosts with its thoughts. You only have to take the word in its original sense. What the cosmos spins, what the planets weave, this is what natural-scientific thinking comprehends. Historical thinking, on the other hand, comprehends "demons," but this word also taken in its noble sense: in the way that Socrates speaks of his daimonion, as a guiding spirit, a spirit such*

as Plutarch speaks of as a good star that men can follow. *Each historical fact is a demon in the sense of the Greeks. And when one grasps these two forms of knowledge together, approaches both in their most noble form, then a path opens up. Yes, a true path. Historical thoughts are tentative thoughts, thoughts of an experimental nature. One must ask the world of spiritual beings to ensoul them. Then they correct themselves and become truth over the course of time. And natural scientific thoughts are also thoughts that are thought by way of experiment. One must present them to the cosmos; then they become artistic pictures, Imaginations.*

And then, *when one treads both these paths simultaneously and achieves natural-scientific Imagination and historical Inspiration, then life itself undergoes change; destiny is transformed. Then, sacrificing, and celebrating one's destiny, one places oneself into the stream. That is the path, that is anthroposophic knowledge, that is anthroposophic life.*" (emphasis added)<sup>11</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> From: Walter Johannes Stein, Rudolf Steiner, Dokumentation eines wegweisenden Zusammenwirkens : W.J. Steins Dissertation in ihrem Entstehungsprozess und in ihrer Aktualität; mit Briefen und Aufzeichnungen Rudolf Steiners Korrekturen und Ergänzungen sowie dem "Haager Gespräch" von 1922, Thomas Meyer editor, translation by John Barnes.

It is not mere coincidence then that the Aristotelian Strader follows the path of natural scientific Imagination and the Platonist Capesius that of historical [and literary] Inspiration. This contrast can be followed further by exploring the polarities between the Platonic School of Chartres and the Aristotelian stream of Scholasticism. It will add new differentiating elements.

The School of Chartres was characterized by Steiner, “not so much [for] the actual content of the teachings, as [for] the whole attitude and mood-of-soul of the pupils who gathered with glowing enthusiasm in the ‘lecture halls’—as we should say nowadays—of Chartres.”<sup>12</sup> And these souls are contrasted with the Aristotelians Scholastics thus: “All these souls afterward came together again—*those who with fiery lips had declared ancient and sacred teachings in the School of Chartres, and those who had wrestled in the cold and clear, but heart-devoted works of Scholasticism, to master the true meaning of Intelligence.*”<sup>13</sup>

The contrast between “those who with fiery lips had declared ancient and sacred teachings in the School of Chartres, and those who had wrestled in the cold and clear, but heart-devoted works of Scholasticism” is very much present in the polarity Plato/Capesius and Strader. The School of Chartres gathered in itself the best of the past, from ancient Egypt, Greece (Plato, Pythagoras) to Sufi and Celtic wisdom, the streams of the past before the end of the time of the Intellectual Soul, culminating in the cultural revolution of the Gothic cathedrals and paving the way to the future-looking impulse of the Knights Templar. The Scholastics prepared the human soul for the future time of the Consciousness Soul through the Christianizing of thinking and the redemption of Aristotle’s opus, wrested from the Luciferic coloration impressed upon it by Arabism.

We can find the above contrast encapsulated in a key imagination of the two twin souls in *The Portal of Initiation*, Scene 4, through Johannes’ experience in the elemental world. In the physical world Strader is younger than Capesius. In the elemental world Johannes beholds Strader as the older man he will become, Capesius as the youth he was. To Strader’s future-looking impulse is contrasted the gathering of the past of Capesius the historian. To the youthful expression of Capesius’ will-imbued enthusiasm is contrasted the mature power of “cold and clear, but heart-devoted” thinking of Strader.

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<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Volume 8, lecture of August 21, 1924.

<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, Volume 3, lecture of July 28, 1924.

We are now ready to take a look behind the veil of destiny of the two figures.

### The Archetypal Models and the Previous incarnations

In the Mystery Dramas Steiner adopted certain historical individuals as soul models for his stage characters. So let us look at each character, first in relation to what Steiner says of the correspondence of the archetype in the drama, then in relation to their previous incarnations. These are the incarnations discovered through spiritual research; they don't fully coincide with the previous incarnations in the dramas. Since we have already seen Capesius' model in Karl Julius Schröer we will start from him.

#### *Capesius / Karl Julius Schröer / Plato*

In a couple of places Steiner has allowed us to identify the archetype behind the figure of Capesius. One of these is a lecture specifically given about *The Portal of Initiation*: "I have taken especially the figure of Professor Capesius, who has grown quite dear to my heart, directly from life."<sup>14</sup> In the cycle of *Karmic Relationships*, Steiner becomes more specific: "Certain features of Schröer, not the whole individuality, but certain features, were taken over into my character Capesius, Professor Capesius, in the Mystery Plays.<sup>15</sup> It is certainly no coincidence that many of the features of Capesius' soul in the Mystery Dramas are those we notice in the same lecture in which Steiner mentions Schröer's archetype in relation to Capesius. An example: "Had [Schröer] attained intellectuality, had he been able to unite it with the spirituality of Plato, anthroposophy itself would have been there ... Anthroposophy would really have been [Schröer's] calling.... The very thing which he bears within him from a former incarnation, if it could enter into the intellect, would have become Anthroposophy; it stops short; it recoils, as it were, from intellectualism."<sup>16</sup> By refusing to discipline his thinking, Schröer never felt fully at home in his body, and later became what Steiner calls "feeble-minded." Schröer's inability to renounce his intuitive perceptions—the relics of atavistic consciousness—and to move beyond his entrenched sympathies and antipathies could have been corrected by the development and transformation of his intellect.

The very same lecture illumines with further meaning the tendencies of Capesius to withhold from incarnation, in relation to Plato himself in the

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<sup>14</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Three Lectures on the Mystery Dramas*, "On the Rosicrucian Mystery, The Portal of Initiation" lecture of 31 October 1910.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, volume 4, lecture of September 23, 1924.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

afterlife. We hear that Plato experienced difficulties in relating to what survived on earth as Platonism. Neo-Platonism was but a pale reflection of what lived at its origins. According to Steiner "...it was for [Plato] only too frequently a dreadful disturbance in his supersensible life of soul and spirit." In a sense, like his counterpart Capesius, he held himself back from incarnation. He recoiled from returning to earth in the Christian epoch in a body in which he might not be able to carry forward the Greek quality of soul, steeped as it was in the artistic element. Instead the following civilization was permeated through and through by the Roman legalistic and materialistic element. All of this added difficulties in Plato's soul seeking re-embodiment.

Both in Plato's and Schröer's instance we recognize the danger that the intuitive soul faces in the spiritual world of leaving its ego unprotected and thus exposed to the regressive Luciferic temptation. For this only the tempering of the power of thinking offers a protection.

#### *Strader / Gideon Spicker / Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

Steiner also offered us concrete indications of the origin of his Strader character. "In my life, I became acquainted with a number of such persons like Gideon Spicker, and I have tried to reflect such characters in the picture of Strader in my mystery dramas."<sup>17</sup> And we can trace Spicker's incarnational history back in time through some other indications of Steiner.

The first step lay in grasping the significance of a previous incarnation of Gideon Spicker, the individual known to history as Heinrich von Ofterdingen, who allied himself with the magician Klingsor in the Wartburg contest that took place among minstrels in 1207. The contest pitted von Ofterdingen and Klingsor against the representative of the Grail impulse, Wolfram von Eschenbach. "Klingsor puts Wolfram to the test, and succeeds indeed, with the help of the spiritual being [that he has summoned], in proving that Wolfram (though indeed he has a star-less Christianity, a Christianity that no longer reckons with the cosmos) is quite unlearned in all cosmic wisdom. This now is the point. Klingsor has proved that the Minstrel of the Holy Grail, even in his time, knows only that Christianity which has eliminated the Cosmic Christianity. Klingsor himself, on the other

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<sup>17</sup> "The Human Soul in the Supersensible Realm and Its Relationship to the Body," lecture of 18 October 1917 in *Freedom, Immortality, Social Life* (GA 72).



hand, is only able to appear with the support of spiritual beings, inasmuch as he possesses a wisdom of the stars."<sup>18</sup>

In Spicker's incarnation the results of a previous life re-emerge in the individual who enters the Capuchin Order but cannot align his soul with a true understanding of Christianity: "Darkly in the unconscious life of this man the unchristian cosmology still showed itself, but in his ordinary consciousness he evolved a rationalistic Christianity which is not even very interesting."<sup>19</sup> Rather, more significantly, it is in this incarnation that Spicker kindles a deep interest and understanding of science.

Von Ofterdingen's fateful, tragic choice to ally himself with Klingsor's cosmic knowledge engenders the conditions of doubt, uncertainty and confusion vis-à-vis Christianity. "Now with the human being who was the archetype of Strader, something peculiar occurred. It was as though he was simply unable to approach the Moon-region unhindered and undergo that life of soul which follows directly after death. There were perpetual hindrances, as though the Moon-region simply would not let this individuality approach it." Strader hears his soul called upon by the primeval Teachers of mankind thus: "Thou must wait, and first repeat and recapitulate many things that thou didst undergo not only in thy last, but in thy former incarnations. Thou mayst not know anything at all of the stars and their real being, till thou hast thus prepared thyself."<sup>20</sup> The figure of Von Ofterdingen doesn't appear in the Mystery Dramas. Instead, in *The Soul's Probation* we witness the condition of doubt and ambivalence vis-à-vis Christianity that lives in Simon the Jew.

There is a remarkable polarity between the soul types, both in their achievements and shortcomings. We can turn to the latter here since the whole of the essay until now turned to their strengths in relation to what they have to overcome. We could ask ourselves: "Did Steiner strike a careful balance between the souls in order not to privilege one at the expense of the other?" It is a legitimate question, though probably what we read in the dramas is simply the result of an organic/archetypal necessity, since theory or teaching purposes were far from Steiner's mind in a purely artistic endeavor.

Be it as it may, we can but marvel at the careful symmetry of the two souls, even in their shadow side. Capesius/Schröder can stray from his mission at the experiential level, in the temptation/illusion of "trading fates" and thus falling prey to Lucifer. The root sin of the first preceptor is that of

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<sup>18</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, volume 4, lecture of September 18, 1924.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Karmic Relationships*, volume 4, lecture of September 18, 1924.



believing that he can lay personal destiny aside without consequences and trade for a “better life.” It’s a renunciation of the burden of his personal fate. The first preceptor does this by leaving his family for a life of adventure, only to find that karma immediately follows him, so to speak, and forces him to face the consequences of his egotistical choices: realizing his wife died of heartache, and finding his son Thomas estranged from him. Schröer did it by avoiding the burden of the transformation of the intellect, Plato by recoiling from incarnation.

Strader’s temptation is of a wholly other nature, that of greedily pursuing knowledge at the expense of the moral element. Concretely speaking Klingsor’s temptation is understandable because it offered the necessary, complementary aspect of knowledge of the stars that would eventually enter Christianity anew. In Strader’s case the one-sided and perverted knowledge of the stars estranges his soul, most notably, from the celestial spheres he encounters in the afterlife and delays his connection with a living, cosmic Christianity that the Aristotelian soul yearns to acquire. This is the Ahrimanic temptation of seeking knowledge for earthly aims, of seeking it before its time.

To a Capesius who wants to preserve the atavistic spirituality of the past is offered as a contrast the soul of Strader who prematurely embraces a knowledge turned to the future needs of Earth, but not yet permeated with the sufficient, necessary moral forces.

Whether by lucky coincidence or by design Capesius and Strader—or rather the corresponding individualities that serve as their partial archetypes—have a definite relationship to spiritual science. Capesius/Schröer stands as the one upon whom historically befell the task of bringing spiritual science into the world. He failed to do so when the time came. On the other hand, in *The Philosophy of the Count of Shaftesbury*, Gideon Spicker argues that the highest goal of philosophy should be called “anthroposophy” and Rudolf Steiner adopted the term from him. Here, well before the turning point of the Age of Michael, was a soul who yearned for a higher epistemology, for something that would form a culmination of, or a next step to philosophy, that something which finds its form in anthroposophy.