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Theodora's Prophetic Revelation

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

The present text is a continuation of the research approach followed in our earlier article "The Course of Dr. Strader's Life". It seeks to uncover the identity of the real-life historical personality behind Rudolf Steiner's drama character of the seeress Theodora.¹ This character is in turn a metamorphosis of the figure of the Hawk in Goethe's Fairy Tale. Both Theodora and the Hawk unite in themselves two events: they reflect the final glow of a past epoch before catching the first rays of a newly dawning day.

Spiritual Realism

Steiner's very first idea for a theatre play in Munich in the summer of 1910 was not to perform a mystery drama of his own composition, but a dramatized version of Goethe's *Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and Beautiful Lily*. However, the project ran into difficulties. The fairy tale images that were suitable for Goethe's epoch had to be metamorphosed and rendered more realistic in Steiner's time: "It did not work. One had to conceive it in a much more realistic manner. And out of this there arose the *Portal of Initiation*. It is obvious: during Goethe's time the epoch had not yet arrived in which one could carry over what could be seized in fine fairy tale images into the real figures that are in the *Portal of Initiation*."² Steiner designated the art of this first drama as "spiritual realism", because it sought to depict in an artistic manner real spiritual experiences: "It is carried out with a certain aesthetic feeling, everything in it is spiritual-realistic. [...] The Rosicrucian drama has become realistic, spiritual-realistic."³

In this essay we will attempt to uncover the real historical person behind the mystery drama character of Theodora. As we did in our earlier research, in order to understand the identity of the real-life personality behind Theodora we will follow Steiner's own indications,

¹ This essay on Theodora first appeared in print in the 2013 Michaelmas issue of *New View*, pp. 55-66 (in a shortened form). I thank the editor Tom Raines for his permission to reproduce the article here. A German version (translated by Ariane Eisenhut) will appear in the March and April 2014 issues of *Die Drei*.

² R. Steiner, lecture Stuttgart, 22 November 1920, in: *Gegensätze in der Menschheitsentwicklung* (GA 197) 1996, p. 199. (GA = *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, published by Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach, Switzerland). Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are my own.

³ R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), pp.111-112.

which involve understanding at least three different but interconnected elements. First, the drama character of the seeress Theodora is a metamorphosis of the figure of the Hawk (*Habicht*) from Goethe's *Fairy Tale*. Second, the characters in these plays are inspired by the lives and work of people that Steiner personally knew; they are all individuals making earnest efforts to progress on the path of knowledge.⁴ Third, the dramas are poetic and dramatic productions, and any interpretation of them involves taking into account Steiner's Goethean conception of art in which transformed sensible elements point to spiritual realities.⁵ Writing in his 1904 essay "Aristotle on Mystery Drama", Steiner argued that drama is a more powerful medium than conventional biography because it is better able to reveal the hidden laws of destiny: "The Greek philosopher Aristotle said of drama that it is truer than a mere historical account; for whereas the latter only reproduces what has happened by chance during the course of time, the former depicts the actions of human beings, as they should and must be in accordance with their inner reasons."⁶ Hence, Steiner's mystery dramas should not be interpreted as merely historical or naturalistic plays, or worse: in a sterile abstract, symbolic or allegorical sense, but as *artistically transformed images* inspired by the intertwined destiny of a small group of real-life people.

From the Hawk to Theodora

The main *Urbild* or "archetype" of Theodora not only has its origin in a real historical personality, but this drama character is additionally a metamorphosis of the Hawk in Goethe's *Fairy Tale*. In Goethe's text the Hawk has two significant roles. The final rays of the departing day are reflected in the Hawk's feathers, which is interpreted as a decisive sign by the Green Snake: "At last she noticed sailing high in the air, with purple-red feathers, the Hawk, whose breast was catching the last beams of the sun. She shook herself for joy at this good omen."⁷ The following day also sees the Hawk connected with the rising sun. Flying high into the sky with a mirror, the Hawk becomes the first creature to catch the early morning rays. It is a herald of the morning dawn, of the new epoch of the king and the queen, reflecting the morning light back onto the royal group: "At this instant the Hawk with the mirror soared aloft above the dome; caught the light of the sun, and reflected it upon the group, which was standing on the altar. The King, the Queen, and their attendants, in the dusky concave of the Temple, seemed illuminated by a heavenly splendour, and the people fell upon their faces."⁸ Rudolf Steiner's interpretation of the Hawk essentially focuses on this dual aspect of its role of catching and reflecting the evening and morning light. The Hawk is a prophetic representative of two world epochs: "Thus, the Hawk joins one setting world day with another newly dawning world day. The Hawk is that element in the human soul which has a presentiment of what will become a reality in the future."⁹

This dual nature also holds for the character of Theodora in the mystery dramas. As the seeress in *The Portal of Initiation: A Rosicrucian Mystery* she falls into a trance-like consciousness associated with an atavism of the past while also being the herald of a future Christian revelation. Another of the open secrets of the mystery dramas is that Steiner has presented crucial biographical elements of the characters in the first scene of the first drama. For example, an important characteristic of Theodora is that she does not like speaking about herself, and therefore asks her friend Maria to speak on her behalf. Maria relates that at one point everything connected with the course of Theodora's past life suddenly became

⁴ Cf. R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), p. 129.

⁵ See Steiner's text *Goethe as Founder of a New Science of Aesthetics* (1889).

⁶ R. Steiner, "Aristoteles über das Mysteriendrama" (1904), in: R. Steiner, *Lucifer-Gnosis* (GA 34), p. 150.

⁷ Goethe, *Fairy Tale*, translated by Thomas Carlyle.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ R. Steiner, public lecture, 23 Feb. 1905, in: *Goethes geheime Offenbarung*, Dornach, 1999, p. 183.

extinguished. Theodora had also experienced periods in her soul life that were wholly dreamlike, and where she almost lacked the power of memory. She only found understanding for these spiritual experiences after she entered the circle of Benedictus. Over time Theodora's experiences became clearer and clearer, with Maria interpreting them as a prophetic revelation, as an "early proclamation of a later future time".¹⁰ Not everyone in the circle is convinced about the authenticity of Theodora's prophetic revelation, and the historian Capesius inquires whether it could have its origin in the teachings of Benedictus. Maria argues for the independence of Theodora's experiences, saying that she had already had them before learning about the work of Benedictus. How are we to understand these specific elements of Theodora's biography in line with Steiner's conception of the mystery dramas as "spiritual realism"?

A Seeress

In the *dramatis personae* to the mystery plays the character of Theodora is simply designated as "*eine Seherin*" – a seeress.¹¹ However, in the earliest written draft of the text of the first drama Steiner had originally given this character another name: "*Somnambule*"¹² – that is to say, the somnambulist or sleepwalker. In terms of cultural history, Theodora's dream-like visionary abilities may recall earlier figures such as the ancient sibyls, or the tragic Cassandra, depicted in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* in a frenzied prophetic state when possessed by Apollo. Yet Steiner's dramas not only link onto ancient European mystery traditions, but contemporary people and events. Looking again at scene one of *The Portal of Initiation*, Theodora's personality and seership make a deep impression on the character of Dr. Strader: "For since the days of solitude in the monastery, where I was taught such knowledge, and thereby struck to the very darkest depth of soul, not one experience has stirred me so, as this vision of the seeress here."¹³ The encounter leads him to profoundly re-evaluate his hitherto secure scientific views,¹⁴ and eventually the scientist Strader and the seeress Theodora will wed. In an earlier essay we saw it was helpful to understand the figure of Frau Balde in conjunction with Steiner's indications for her husband Felix Balde.¹⁵ Might it therefore be similarly fruitful to consider the mystery of Theodora's identity in connection with her husband Dr. Strader? Steiner's lectures on the dramas seem to particularly underscore the importance of this first meeting between the couple, where Strader is struck by the presence of Theodora: "Karmic threads are hinted at, which therefore arise in the heart of Strader to the seeress Theodora, since he has been especially affected by her. These are all occult threads lying behind what plays itself out externally on the physical plane."¹⁶ Thus, the task of the researcher seems to be one of trying to unravel the karmic and biographical threads linking the figures of Strader and Theodora.

In our essay "The Course of Dr. Strader's Life" we argued that the figure of Strader is principally based on the three real-life thinkers: Gideon Spicker, who is the main historical *Urbild* or archetype, and F. T. Vischer and Carl Unger, who both furnished a number of specific features.¹⁷ – Is an encounter with a seeress perhaps to be found in any of the biographies of these three men? The autobiography of Gideon Spicker does not seem to include such a meeting. However, before looking at the biographies of F.T. Vischer and Carl

¹⁰ R. Steiner, *Die Pforte der Einweihung*, in: *Vier Mysteriendramen*, (GA 14), 1998, p. 26.

¹¹ See first and third dramas, *ibid.* (GA 14), pp. 3, 276.

¹² See R. Steiner, *Entwürfe, Fragmente und Paralipomena zu den Vier Mysteriendramen* (GA 44), p. 15.

¹³ R. Steiner, *The Portal of Initiation*, translated by H. Collison et al. (cf. GA 14, pp. 36-37).

¹⁴ Cf. R. Steiner, *Vier Mysteriendramen* (GA 14), p. 75.

¹⁵ See the essay "Frau Balde and the Library", in *New View*, Winter 2011, pp. 58-70.

¹⁶ R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), p. 130.

¹⁷ See the accompanying essay, "The Course of Dr. Strader's Life", also printed in: *New View* (London), Summer 2013, pp. 54-63.

T. Unger, it is worth recalling again Steiner's words that his choice of names for the characters is not arbitrary. In this respect it is perhaps not without significance to note that the *middle name* of both F. T. Vischer and Carl T. Unger is "Theodor", i.e. the masculine version of the name Theodora. Turning to their autobiographical writings, one finds that F.T. Vischer's autobiographical text *Mein Lebensgang* indeed relates of a meeting he once had with a seeress while he was a young man studying at the monastery. – The woman was Friedericke Hauffe (1801-1829), who became famous under the name "Die Seherin von Prevorst" – The Seeress of Prevorst. Her somnambular visions and short life are described in a book of the same name by the medical doctor and author Justinus Kerner.¹⁸ F.T. Vischer says of his meeting with her: "I only saw and spoke with the Seeress of Prevorst once, she was in a waking state and told me about spirit visitors as though she were speaking about self-evident things."¹⁹ Nevertheless, unlike his theological colleague David Friedrich Strauß, the author of the controversial book *The Life of Jesus*, whose encounter with the Seeress contributed to a questioning of his religious views, Friedrich Theodor Vischer makes it clear that he himself never became overly interested in the trance-like phenomenon of the seeress.²⁰

However, as we saw above, it is precisely the spiritual state of the seeress Theodora that makes a lasting impression on Strader, and causes him to re-evaluate his scientific conceptions. In this regard it is interesting to take into account Carl Unger's testimony. Of course, Unger never personally met the Seeress of Prevorst, for she had already died half a century beforehand. Notwithstanding, in his autobiographical writings he relates how in 1893 the early course of his thinking was given a more spiritual direction after reading Kerner's book on this seeress: "Justinus Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* came into my hands at the age of 15; this book made a huge impression on me on account of its sober and scientific presentation of the experiences of a supersensible world. The impression swept away my childish materialism."²¹

Steiner himself speaks about the Seeress of Prevorst in connection with the history of spiritualism and the origins of theosophy in mediumism.²² Here Steiner does not at all endorse mediumistic or somnambulistic practices, or describe her trance-like state as a higher kind of consciousness. On the contrary, Steiner considers her state as a lower abnormal form of plant-like consciousness, in which the clear centre of consciousness or ego awareness has disappeared and the bodily organs have become conscious instead:

In deep trance states the central consciousness is rendered silent. Then the single organs become conscious and the human being begins to see with the pit of the stomach, with the solar plexus. The Seeress of Prevorst had a consciousness of this kind. She describes correct forms of light, which however can only be observed by the organ consciousness.²³

Although this woman's dimmed dream-like state of consciousness was pathological to the extent that it was rooted in sick bodily organs, she was sometimes able to correctly diagnose her own ailments and those of others.²⁴ Nevertheless, more often than not her chaotic state of mind produced confusion and illusion. Bed-ridden for the last 10 years of her life, constantly in pain and continually plagued by somnambular visions, the Seeress of Prevorst died in 1829 at the young age of 28.

¹⁸ J. Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst*, 2 volumes, 1829.

¹⁹ F.T. Vischer, *Mein Lebensgang*, Munich, 1922, p. 451.

²⁰ F.T. Vischer, *Kritische Gänge*, vols., 1-2, 1844, p. 94

²¹ C. Unger, "Autobiographische Skizze" in: *Schriften*, vol. I, pp. 321-322.

²² Cf. R. Steiner on the Seeress of Prevorst in: GA 52, p. 294; GA 54, p. 387; and GA 33, p. 305.

²³ R. Steiner, 28 September 1905, *Grundelemente der Esoterik* (GA 93a), p. 35.

²⁴ Cf. R. Steiner, *Drei Perspektiven der Anthroposophie* (GA 225), pp. 188-189.

Blavatsky and the Consciousness Soul

What struck the young Carl Unger most was how the experiences of this seeress could be scientifically described and understood. Indeed, this is a character trait of all “Strader souls”. A scientific person of this kind is someone who strives to harmonize the regular natural laws found for example in physics, chemistry and biology, with difficult to explain spiritual phenomena and facts, such as those found in spiritualists, mediums, and somnambulists.²⁵ In this regard Steiner directly refers to the work of a man who should be regarded as a further “Stader soul”, the engineer Ludwig Deinhard (1847-1918). In 1910 Deinhard published the book *Das Mysterium des Menschen* (The Mystery of Man)²⁶, which Steiner praised because it sought a harmony between science and esotericism.²⁷ Indeed, Part One of Deinhard’s book is an overview of the results of modern scientific researchers such as Richard Hodgson, Joseph Maxwell and Carl du Prel into the trance-like states found in spiritism und mediumism.

Ludwig Deinhard was a theosophist who had translated into German parts of Madame Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* and was deeply interested in her revelations of ancient wisdom. Hence, if Deinhard should be brought into connection with Strader, then Madame Blavatsky too could be considered as a model for some of the characteristics of Theodora. Steiner himself never personally met Blavatsky, she died in 1891, so she cannot be the character’s main prototype. With regard to the question of Madame Blavatsky’s seership, Steiner remarked that despite her chaotic soul, Blavatsky was still able to reveal a number of extremely ancient truths. However, he also characterised many of her results as distorted and erroneous, and classified her mode of knowledge as “atavistic”, i.e. as a retrogressive mode of investigation. In fact, after joining the Theosophical Society in 1902 Steiner set himself precisely the task of overcoming all atavistic modes of knowledge that were then present in this society: this “program was necessarily connected with the complete renunciation of all mediumism and atavism”.²⁸ Steiner’s approach also involved a radical break with the Eastern-style principle of the retention of esoteric knowledge to select and private circles, and aimed instead to follow in the Western tradition of Plato and Goethe, to found an entirely open spiritual “movement that linked onto occidental occultism and exclusively onto this, and which tries to develop it further.”²⁹

As mentioned, although Steiner frequently spoke positively of Blavatsky’s deed in revealing certain ancient truths, he believed her state of consciousness to be mediumistic in general, and therefore inappropriate for a modern spiritual movement that was to conform with the demands of scientific thinking on the one hand, and be based on the “consciousness soul” (*Bewusstseinsseele*) on the other. What is the consciousness soul? It is that member of the human being that allows one to have a conscious perception of the activity of the I or ego. If trance or dream-like consciousness involves the dimming or absence of the I, the mode of consciousness connected with the consciousness soul is a strengthening of one’s own inner ego-activity.³⁰ In his autobiography *The Course of My Life* Steiner specifically classifies Blavatsky’s research method as atavism because her state of consciousness had descended below that of the consciousness soul: “For she [Blavatsky] was a human individuality in whom, through a remarkable kind of atavism, the spiritual worked as it once had in the leaders of the mysteries, in a state of consciousness, which compared to the modern state of

²⁵ Cf. R. Steiner, *Weltenwunder, Seelenprüfungen und Geistesoffenbarungen* (GA 129), pp. 57-58.

²⁶ *Das Mysterium des Menschen im Lichte der psychischen Forschung* (Berlin: Reichl & Co., 1910).

²⁷ Cf., among others, R. Steiner, *Weltenwunder* (GA 129), p. 57.

²⁸ R. Steiner, *Die okkulte Bewegung im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (GA 254), p. 48.

²⁹ R. Steiner, *ibid.* (GA 254), p. 48.

³⁰ Cf. R. Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (GA 13), p. 69.

the consciousness that is thoroughly illuminated by the consciousness soul, is dimmed down into a dream-like state. Thus, there was revived in ‘Blavatsky the human being’ something that in ancient times was at home in the mysteries.”³¹

In *The Course of My Life* Steiner furthermore relates that he acquired a better view into the unusual nature of Blavatsky’s soul thanks to a woman he met in Munich who was connected with one of the circles to which Ludwig Deinhard belonged.³² This woman was Helene von Schewitsch (1843-1911), who remained loyal to Blavatsky’s teachings on theosophy until the end of her life. Could von Schewitsch therefore be one of the models for the drama character of Theodora? Steiner pointed to von Schewitsch’s autobiography: *Wie ich mein Selbst fand* (How I found my Self), which recounts how she was once a medium herself during a séance in Saint Petersburg. Frau Schewitsch is above all known for the fact that the celebrated socialist thinker Ferdinand Lassalle died in a duel that had been fought over her.³³ A strong and notable tendency throughout von Schewitsch’s life was in fact to understand the psychic phenomena of Theosophy from a distinctly scientific perspective. Her writings and autobiography engage with the work of many of the scientific figures found in Deinhard’s above-mentioned book. Accordingly, the wedding of Theodora to the scientist Strader could be interpreted in the light of von Schewitsch’s own attempt to understand mediumistic phenomena more scientifically. There is also the fact that Frau Schewitsch died in 1911, while the character of Theodora dies in the third mystery drama of 1912. Some might therefore be inclined to see a parallel situation with Gideon Spicker’s death in 1912 and the death of the character of Strader into the fourth drama of 1913. But as we shall see, there is a further reason for Theodora’s death.

There are undoubtedly a number of similarities between Theodora, Blavatsky and von Schewitsch, but one should also take into account the significant differences between them. These include the fact that the description of Theodora’s life in the first drama is clearly at odds with the biographies of both these women, and that Blavatsky’s presentations on theosophy essentially concern *the past* and much less the future – her writings are a revival of the wisdom of earlier epochs. Finally, according to Steiner, Blavatsky was originally inspired by Western occultists but her thought became progressively “anti-Christian”, in the sense that she and many people like her in the Theosophical movement did not ascribe a more central role to the Christ being or to esoteric Christianity.³⁴ This is obviously a crucial divergence from the personality of Theodora, whom Steiner depicts as someone having a prophetic vision of the future Christ experience and as an important representative of Rosicrucian Christianity.

Lunar Consciousness

In a lecture from September 1915 Steiner gave his most detailed account of Theodora’s mode of knowledge. He described her consciousness as “medial” and as a type of “lunar knowledge” (*Mondenerkenntnis*), because it belonged to an earlier stage of world evolution known as the “moon”. Steiner associated this type of cognition with somnambulists and mediumistic practices, and again stressed that though interesting truths may sometimes emerge, even concerning the period of the Mystery of Golgotha, many of the results are entirely illusory and riddled with error, because the medium’s semi-conscious or dampened faculty of perception is not progressive but a backward or atavistic state: “The person may arrive at visionary clairvoyance, and have a dampened intelligence [...] But this is not a

³¹ R. Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang* (GA 28), pp. 424-425.

³² R. Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, (GA 28), pp. 462-463.

³³ See Helene von Schewitsch, *Wie ich mein Selbst fand. Äußere und innere Erlebnisse einer Okkultistin* (Berlin: C.A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1901), pp. 4-8.

³⁴ Cf. R. Steiner, “Documents du Barr” in: *Selbstzeugnisse* (Dornach: 2007), pp. 98-101. Also see the subtitle of A. Besant’s book: *Esoteric Christianity, Or the Lesser Mysteries*.

further development, rather it is a regressive development of the human being.”³⁵ According to Steiner, a specific trait of people possessing atavistic knowledge is an absence of theoretical reason or ordinary logic in their normal waking life: “if one asks such a person to work in a rational and scientific manner, or even just to grasp the rational course of normal everyday events, they cannot do it, they are unable to”.³⁶ This is due to the simple fact that they are not present enough in earthly existence. They only exhibit a form of intelligence in their atavistic lunar state: “But I have never perceived an intelligent form of logic in such people when they have to explain something about the things of the physical world; then they do not possess this intelligence. They have not sufficiently become earthly people. However, when they are allowed to fall back into their lunar intelligence, then the intelligence emerges. Yet it is not *their* intelligence [...]”.³⁷

Steiner’s drama character of Theodora is a representative of this regressive visionary state. She is a character who exhibits the old lunar dream-state of consciousness that is at a lower level than our modern earthly rational consciousness. Steiner explains: “I have attempted to portray different types of people in the mystery dramas, and to also depict a figure who regresses back into a lunar state, i.e. who lacks intelligence in the physical world and yet may still reveal correct things, and who therefore stands below the level of normal earthly people: that is the figure of Theodora.”³⁸ As we saw, this is one aspect of the Steiner’s interpretation of the Hawk figure from Goethe’s *Fairy Tale* – insofar as the Hawk exhibits elements that are associated with the final rays of a closing world epoch. However, this past ability of “naïve seership”, as Steiner additionally terms it, is highly illusory and inappropriate for our time. It must pass away and be overcome before the new world epoch and new faculties can fully dawn and develop. This is the reason why Theodora has to die in the third drama and only appears in a soul state in the fourth: “Naïve seership is the same as lunar seership, evidently. It is a naïve kind of seership and the character is depicted in this manner. And this is also why Theodora herself cannot appear in the last mystery drama, but only her soul, because she cannot participate in certain things.”³⁹

One of the best ways to overcome this erroneous and atavistic form of consciousness is to train one’s faculties of logical and scientific judgment, to exercise rigorous rational thought. Why is the logical and rational thinking that forms the foundation of the Rosicrucian path of knowledge at a higher level than visionary dream consciousness? Because in the latter visions and truths are only *passively given* without much work on the part of the individual. One is not fully aware of their origin or interconnections, and is therefore continually exposed to error; whereas in logical and scientific thought, one *actively and freely* carries out conceptual judgments, and one can consciously survey their emergence and see their truth for oneself. Unfortunately, the person possessing atavistic seership does not usually want to forfeit their visionary ability, and is deluded into thinking that it stands at a higher level than scientific and rational thought: “Compared to lunar imagining (*Mondenimaginationen*), an earthly person who can combine facts and form concepts with their rational judgment based on life experiences, this person stands at a much higher level than both the lunar person and anyone who still longs for this lunar human existence, which does not consist of insights that have been worked through in thought.”⁴⁰

³⁵ R. Steiner, *Der Wert des Denkens für eine den Menschen befriedigende Erkenntnis* (GA 164), p. 59.

³⁶ Ibid. (GA 164), p. 59.

³⁷ Ibid. (GA 164), p. 55.

³⁸ Ibid. (GA 164), p. 60.

³⁹ Ibid. (GA 164), p. 60.

⁴⁰ Ibid. (GA 164), p. 54.

A Crisis in Dornach

In this same September 1915 lecture on the nature of Theodora's lunar consciousness Steiner made an aside in which he drew a direct comparison with events that were happening at that time in Dornach, Switzerland:

Precisely these mystery dramas should be taken in an extremely exact sense. Perhaps it might dawn on some of you in the future that most of the events that have recently occurred can already be read in some kind of form in these mysteries. If one had only read these things as they ought to have been read then it would not have been necessary to put up with all these confusing things.⁴¹

What are the confusing events in Dornach to which Steiner is referring, and why does he mention them in the context of Theodora's atavistic mode of lunar consciousness? Steiner is speaking about the crisis otherwise known as the Sprengel-Goesch affair.⁴² It involved a scientific mind, Dr. Heinrich Goesch (1880-1930), and a woman with visionary experiences called Alice Sprengel (1871-1949). What is most interesting here with regard to our search is that Sprengel was the actress who had first played Theodora in the mystery dramas in Munich from 1910-1913.⁴³ In 1911 she had also been nominated the "Keeper of the Seal" (*Siegelkonservator*) of the so-called "Gesellschaft für Theosophische Art und Kunst" (Society for Theosophical Method and Art), the same small Rosicrucian group to which Carl Unger belonged. To begin with, Rudolf Steiner had apparently tried to help out and develop the self-confidence of Sprengel, and gave her acting roles and other work. However, according to the testimony of numerous people, Sprengel developed a personality disturbance, accompanied by illusionary visionary experiences. Because of originally playing Theodora and her nomination to the small Rosicrucian group, Sprengel seemed to believe she possessed a lofty individuality with important historical incarnations behind her, including those of King David and the Virgin Mary. Sprengel furthermore thought she was the inspiring muse behind Steiner's spiritual science, and it appears that her unstable behaviour played a decisive role in the dissolution of the Society for Theosophical Method and Art.⁴⁴

In addition, like with Strader's marriage to Theodora in the mystery dramas, Sprengel believed that Steiner had indicated that the two of them would marry in the future. When Steiner married Marie von Sivers at Christmas 1914, it occasioned a personal crisis in Sprengel, in which she wrote letters to Steiner accusing him of not keeping his promises. Dr. Heinrich Goesch and his wife Gertrud likewise wrote to Steiner on Sprengel's behalf, claiming that Steiner was not leaving the members free and his conduct was verging on black magic.⁴⁵ Steiner directly appealed to the members during this crisis, asking them if they agreed with the Goeschs' claims and assessment. The members rejected the charges against Steiner, and both Sprengel and the Goeschs were subsequently excluded from the society.

By linking the discussion of Theodora's mode of consciousness with the Sprengel-Goesch crisis of 1915 Steiner seems to be implying that Alice Sprengel's delusions should be seen in the light of this atavistic form of lunar consciousness. This leads us to the question: could this mean that Sprengel herself, the very actress who originally played Theodora, is the main historical model for this character? The answer to this question seems to be *no*. In spite of Sprengel's regressive mode of knowledge and involvement in a Rosicrucian-inspired

⁴¹ Ibid., lecture 19 September 1915 (GA 164), p. 60.

⁴² This crisis is detailed in R. Steiner, *Probleme des Zusammenlebens* (GA 253).

⁴³ See Wilfried Hammacher's exposition of Sprengel and Theodora in: *Die Uraufführung der Mysteriendramen von und durch Rudolf Steiner in München 1910 bis 1913* (Dornach, 2010), pp. 280-282.

⁴⁴ An overview of Sprengel's biography and contemporary testimonies are given in: GA 253, pp. 125-136.

⁴⁵ See the long letter of the Goeschs to Steiner, 19 August 1915, in: GA 253, pp. 137-146.

group, Steiner explicitly says in a public lecture of 1917 that the drama characters are not based on the actors who played them, but on people in the wider domains of present-day society and cultural life who demonstrate the necessity and justification of spiritual science. We quoted part of the following passage in the accompanying essay on Strader; however, because of its importance we will quote it length again here. For Steiner's remarks furthermore seem to be directly referring to the Sprengel-Goesch crisis of 1915:

Whereas the personalities in these dramas – I would like to say – in these ‘dramas of knowledge’ (*Erkenntnisdramen*), are presented and drawn from real life, from all walks of life, particularly the sphere of life that is to demonstrate the necessity and justification of spiritual science in the other domains of our present existence, there were a number of curious people who believed that I had written these roles for the actors who played them, while my aim of course could not have been further from this.⁴⁶

To summarize the state of research so far: like a number of other women, Alice Sprengel might indeed have furnished certain personal traits for Theodora. However, as the actress who played this character it does not appear that she is the main historical individuality on whom Theodora is based. We will therefore continue our search.

A “Luminous Halo” (*Lichtschein*)

“Consider the What, consider more the How” (Goethe, *Faust II*). In 1908 in Hamburg, in his lectures on the Gospel of John, Rudolf Steiner spoke about the return of Christ in a non-physical form, and how the power of this gospel is a help for this new future perception: “He [Christ] is there and will come again, although not in a form of flesh, but in such a form that the people who have sufficiently developed themselves through the power of the Gospel of John will see him, will really be able to perceive him”.⁴⁷ It is one of the missions of the movement that Steiner represented to help “that part of humanity which wishes to prepare itself, to prepare itself on earth for the return of Christ.”⁴⁸ In Kassel in June 1909, in another major lecture cycle devoted to the Gospel of John, Steiner explained that it was the genuine Rosicrucians who had prepared people throughout history to understand esoteric Christianity. The Gospel of John served as their central meditative text, and for this reason one could also call them “Johannine Christians” (*Johannes-Christen*).⁴⁹ In the same lecture cycle Steiner talked of the appearance of the resurrected Christ to Saint Paul and to the first disciples, explaining that they had used their “spiritual eye” to see the etheric body of Christ in the aura of the earth: “As one untimely born, the spiritual eye of Paul was opened; he saw into the aura of the earth, and saw that Christ was in it. [...] Thus, when Christ was seen after his death, it was the etheric body of Christ.”⁵⁰

The following year in 1910, in lectures throughout Europe, Steiner brought together into a unity what he had taught in 1908 and 1909 in the two lecture cycles on the Gospel of John: that in line with the ongoing development of humanity the future form of the reappearance of Christ would not take place again in a physical form, but in a higher, spiritual or *etheric* form: “Human beings will become capable of seeing etheric bodies, and among

⁴⁶ R. Steiner, *Freiheit – Unsterblichkeit – Soziales Leben* (GA 72), pp. 34-35.

⁴⁷ R. Steiner, *Das Johannes-Evangelium* (GA 103), p. 213.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ R. Steiner, *Das Johannes-Evangelium im Verhältnis zu den drei anderen Evangelien* (GA 112), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid. (GA 112), pp. 270-271.

these etheric bodies they will be able to see the etheric body of Christ. [...] This is the greatest secret of our epoch: the secret of the return of Christ, and this is the true form of his return.”⁵¹

What is the etheric body? It is the second member of the human being, and like a living architectural structure, it above all furnishes life and form to the physical body. *How* does Steiner speak about it? Steiner was highly exact but flexible in the employment of his terminology, and gave for instance other names to the etheric body, such as the “life body” and the “body of formative forces”. He did this in order to emphasize better its different attributes, and which cannot be captured using a single term or designation.⁵² In his 1908 lectures on the *Apocalypse of John* Steiner also describes the etheric body as a “*Lichtschein*”, as a luminous halo or aura of light that is slightly larger than the physical body: “This physical body is permeated during the day by the so-called etheric body, which protrudes out of it, to begin with very slightly round the head, like a bright luminous halo [*Lichtschein*], but which entirely permeates the head.”⁵³

In line with the Rosicrucian teachings on the harmony of the major world religions, Steiner brought his teaching of the return of Christ into connection with a number of religious streams. Firstly, Steiner considered his teachings to be in harmony with the Christian scriptures. Here he could point to Acts (1: 10-11) or to the Apocalypse of John (1:7), where the return of Christ is prophesized as a return from the heavens (“in the clouds”), or to the Damascus experience of Paul (Acts 9: 3), where Christ is experienced as a “light from heaven”. Secondly, like in the legend of Barlaam and Josaphat, where the Bodhisattva has become a Christian teacher, the most important teacher in the twentieth century of the return of Christ in the etheric world is the individuality who will become the Maitreya Buddha in around 3,000 years time. Indeed, according to Steiner, this individuality is the greatest teacher of Christianity in general: “He will be the greatest proclaimer of the Christ impulse and will make it possible for many people to have a Damascus experience.”⁵⁴ Finally, in lectures to the members in Cologne on the Bhagavad Gita and the Epistles of Paul in 1912/13, which led to the founding of the new Anthroposophical Society, Steiner explained the deeper nature of the new etheric appearance of Christ in relation to Hinduism. The “light from heaven” of Paul, or the etheric body in which Christ will clothe himself, he again called a “luminous halo” (*Lichtschein*). – The origin of this luminous halo is to be traced back to the Hindu deity Krishna, the divine protagonist of the Bhagavad Gita: “What was, so to speak, that luminous halo in which Christ appeared to Paul before Damascus? What was it? Where did it originate? [...] The luminous halo in which Christ clothes himself, is Krishna.”⁵⁵ This new event coincides with the end of one world epoch and the beginning of a new one – the end of the dark age of Kali Yuga in 1899. When did Kali Yuga begin, and what is its significance? Kali Yuga is an ancient Indian term signifying the “dark age”, and it started in 3101 B.C., with the death of Krishna. It lasted 5,000 years until 1899. Then began a new light age. – From the beginning of this new light age Christ will appear in the *Lichtschein*, the luminous halo of Krishna.

The Signature of the Rose Cross

Steiner gave written form to these teachings on the reappearance of Christ in the etheric world in the small book *The Spiritual Guidance of Man and Humanity*, which appeared directly parallel to the second mystery drama, *The Soul's Probation* (1911). He again compared this event to the Damascus experience of Saint Paul on the one hand, while

⁵¹ R. Steiner, *Das Ereignis der Christus-Erscheinung in der ätherischen Welt* (GA 118), p. 28.

⁵² Cf. R. Steiner, *Theosophie* (GA 9), p. 37.

⁵³ R. Steiner, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes* (GA 104), pp. 51-52.

⁵⁴ R. Steiner, “Der Christus-Impuls und seine großen Verkündiger”, Rome, 13 April 1910 (GA 118), p. 227.

⁵⁵ R. Steiner, *Die Bhagavad Gita und die Paulus Briefe* (GA 142), pp. 121, 122.

pointing to the cultural background of the 20th century teachers of this event on the other: “And just as in our time the same great teachers are present who had already guided humanity in the Egyptian-Chaldean civilization, so it will also be those same teachers in the twentieth century who lead humanity to a vision of Christ as Paul beheld him.”⁵⁶ The spiritual nature of these lofty twentieth century teachers can be best understood from the history and perspective of Rosicrucianism, for these teachers will teach in *a scientific manner*, “under the signature of the Rose Cross” (*unter der Signatur des Rosenkreuzes*).⁵⁷ In the essay on Strader we outlined the scientific pretensions and logical-rational methods of true Rosicrucianism, but what is the signature of the Rose Cross? Steiner explained how the conference booklet for the 1907 Munich Congress contained such a signature: “The programme booklet is decorated with the signature of the Rosicrucian school: E.D.N.J.C.M.P.S.S.R That is: *Ex deo nascimur, In Christo morimur, Per spiritum sanctum reviviscimus*. [From God we are born, in Christ we die, we are reborn through the holy spirit].”⁵⁸ In other words, the signature of the Rose Cross is the same as the motto that can be found in the seal of the first mystery drama of 1910, *The Portal of Initiation: A Rosicrucian Mystery*.

In scene one of this first Rosicrucian drama, in the midst of the other characters, Theodora falls into a dream-like state. An “image wrapped in a halo of light” (*Bild im Lichterschein*) appears and speaks to her about the future:

Theodora:
 I am compelled to speak –
 Before my spirit
 An image stands wrapped in a halo of light,
 From which words are sounding in my ears;
 I feel myself in future times,
 And people do I behold as yet unborn:
 They also see the image;
 They too can hear the words it speaks ...⁵⁹

After speaking words of comfort and hope, the halo of light then becomes transformed into a human figure, who asks Theodora to proclaim the new future form of the Christ being. What is the significance of Theodora’s prophetic revelation here in this scene? Rudolf Steiner describes it is an experience of the reappearance of Christ in the etheric world: “And before the conclusion of the 20th century, what will happen is that a small number of people will really be ‘Theodoras’, that is to say, their genuinely opened spiritual eyes will have the same experience as Saint Paul had before Damascus [...] It is a kind of return of Christ, but in an etheric raiment”.⁶⁰ Thus, the “luminous halo” (*Lichterschein*) of Krishna is artistically presented in the mystery dramas in slightly different terminology as a “halo of light” (*Lichterschein*).

Just as the Hawk unites in itself past and future cosmic eras, so Theodora too is situated at the meeting point of two epochs, and is able to look both into the past and into the future. And Steiner once again stresses the spiritual-realistic nature of his presentation of this figure: “Theodora, who on the physical plane sees into the future, and who is able to prophesy that momentous event before which we stand, the new appearance of the Christ-being – so on the spiritual plane she is capable of calling into mind the significance of the past. If it is to be presented in a realistic manner, then it has to be presented in the spiritual world as it really

⁵⁶ R. Steiner, *Die geistige Führung des Menschen und der Menschheit* (GA 15), pp. 68-69.

⁵⁷ Ibid. (GA 15), p. 69.

⁵⁸ R. Steiner, *Bilder okkulte Siegel und Säulen* (GA 284), p. 70.

⁵⁹ R. Steiner, *The Portal of Initiation*, translated by H. Collison et al. (Translation modified); cf. *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (GA 14), p. 28.

⁶⁰ R. Steiner, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (GA 123), p. 201.

occurs.”⁶¹ One might find this contradictory – the fact that Theodora has atavistic faculties belonging to the past but can correctly see into the future. The contradiction can be resolved if one recalls that even though atavistic mediums are often enveloped in illusion, they may sometimes have correct visions. However, the problem still remains of distinguishing true insights from false ones, of strengthening one’s ego or I awareness in line with the modern demands of the consciousness soul, and of overcoming all regressive atavistic tendencies.

The Year 1903

In order to understand Theodora as based on a real person, it is worth bearing in mind Steiner’s important historical indication that the seeds of the first mystery drama can be traced back 21 years earlier to 1889, as well as passing through seven year rhythms in the years 1896 and 1903, before maturing into full artistic form in 1910.⁶² In earlier articles on the historical personalities behind the drama characters of Professor Capesius and Frau Balde, as well as the accompanying essay on Dr. Strader, we examined from various perspectives this indication of Steiner for the year 1889.⁶³ For the remainder of this essay on Theodora we will now look more closely at the year 1903. What happened in this year that might have had a connection with the genesis and development of the first mystery drama?

The year 1903 was the founding year of the journal *Luzifer*; if one examines Steiner’s essays from this year one immediately sees a number of them directly connected to the central motifs of the mystery dramas. This is especially true for the long essay “Einweihung und Mysterien” (Initiation and Mysteries), which seeks to show how true mysticism and the natural sciences can be reconciled. Steiner’s essay discusses at length Edouard Schuré’s 1889 book, *Les Grands Initiés (The Great Initiates)*, and Annie Besant’s *Esoteric Christianity*, which had just been translated into German in early 1903 by Mathilde Scholl. In addition, in 1903 we see Steiner giving private instructions on Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*, of which *The Portal of Initiation* is of course a metamorphosis. One of the people who received private instruction from Steiner in 1903 was Mathilde Scholl. She relates: “On the 22 November 1903 Dr. Steiner came to Cologne for the first time. At that time there were no members in Cologne apart from me. [...] As far as I recall, it was also at that time that Dr. Steiner read and interpreted for me Goethe’s *Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and Beautiful Lily*. Up to then I had never heard of this fairy tale. However, from that point of time onwards it was to remain a living stimulus for my soul life.”⁶⁴ Mathilde Scholl did indeed continue to harbour an interest in Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*; and from her extant texts and lectures she could also be rightly considered as the first systematic interpreter of Steiner’s mystery dramas. On account of these facts, it might be worth looking at the biography and writings of Mathilde Scholl in connection with the characters in the mystery dramas. We will now do this with the figure of Theodora.⁶⁵ Whether Mathilde Scholl is the main historical personality for this character will not be decided here. Instead, this essay simply seeks to present the research material so as to allow readers to freely decide for themselves.

⁶¹ R. Steiner, *Die Geheimnisse der biblischen Schöpfungsgeschichte* (GA 122), pp. 22-23.

⁶² Cf. R. Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (GA 125), p. 124.

⁶³ See the essays, “Professor (Josef) Capesius and Rudolf Steiner”, in: *New View*, Christmas 2010, pp. 53-63 (German translation in *Die Drei* 02/2011, pp. 21-31 & 03/2011, pp. 33-43); and “Frau Balde and the Library”, *New View*, Christmas 2011, pp. 58-70 (German translation in *Die Drei* 04/2012, pp. 43-55 & 05/2012, pp. 37-51).

⁶⁴ M. Scholl, “Erinnerungen an Dr. Rudolf Steiner”, in: Ekkehard Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl und die Geburt der Anthroposophische Gesellschaft 1912/13* (Dornach, 1991) p. 390; cf. p. 574 (Henceforth: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*).

⁶⁵ Here my research differs from Andreas Neider, who has recently brought Maria Strauch-Spettini into connection with the figure of Theodora. See: A. Neider, *Christus-Impuls und Rosenkreuzertum. Rudolf Steiners Weg zum Fünften Evangelium* (Stuttgart, 2011), pp. 18-34.

Mathilde Scholl was born on 9 February 1868 in Mettmann near Düsseldorf. Her biographer Ekkehard Meffert describes an important motif in her early life: the extinction of family blood ties. Meffert explains: “Originally Mathilde grew up in a large family, however, she became orphaned at the very young age of eight due to the death of both her parents (in 1875 and 1876); at thirteen she lost a part of her circle of siblings. At the age of 17-18 a further four members of her extended family circle passed away, so that Mathilde was now without a sheltering and protective family.”⁶⁶ Albert Steffen has delineated another aspect of her personality – that Mathilde Scholl hardly talked about her private life. She was “a personality who only spoke about herself in extremely rare instances, and with whom one could spend years and even decades without her recounting something about her destiny.”⁶⁷

Mathilde Scholl first heard about the work of Rudolf Steiner at the end of 1901, and met him and Marie Steiner for the first time in Berlin in October 1902, at the founding of the German Section of the Theosophical Society. Marie Steiner pointed out that Mathilde Scholl was one of the few people who had a feeling for the significance of this point in time, and how over the years she gradually attained more and more clarity in her inner experiences: “After Annie Besant and Dr. Steiner, Miss Scholl was clearly the most striking figure among all those present. [...] With Miss Scholl one had the impression: here is someone who knows the hour, and who will stand firm. It was like a symptom of something working in the depths of her soul and which was to gradually awaken and develop into clarity.”⁶⁸ This meeting with Mathilde Scholl was one of destiny for Marie Steiner: “[...] with Mathilde Scholl one felt at home in one’s soul, as though part of an earlier and familiar karmic community, and which had just been linked onto anew.”⁶⁹ The feeling was reciprocal for Mathilde Scholl: “Despite seeing then Dr. Steiner and Marie von Sivers for the first time, they did not feel unknown to me. And my trust in them grew the more time we passed together in those days.”⁷⁰ At the next General Meeting of October 1903 Mathilde Scholl was elected to the executive board of the German Section of the Theosophical Society,⁷¹ where she would be joined five years later by Carl Unger. What was one of the roles of Carl Unger in the Theosophical Society? – To help people overcome their subjective and mystical inclinations: “[...] it was my task in the Society to make sure that the considerable mystical idiosyncrasies did not gain the upper hand.”⁷²

Cologne remained the centre of Mathilde Scholl’s early theosophical work, and she led the Giordano-Bruno branch. From 1905-1914 she edited the important *Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder der deutschen Sektion der Theosophische Gesellschaft* (Communications for the Members of the German Section of the Theosophical Society). Despite her early admiration for Annie Besant, in her role as editor Mathilde Scholl became one of the central figures in the split from the Theosophical Society. In fact, it is mainly thanks to her initiative and presence of mind that the first Anthroposophical Association (Bund) was founded in Cologne in 1912/13, which then led to the founding of the Anthroposophical Society.⁷³ As we saw, it was also exactly at the turn of 1912/13 in Cologne, in his lectures on the Bhagavad Gita, that Steiner revealed the mystery of Christ appearing in the luminous halo (*Lichtschein*) of Krishna.

Like many others, in 1914 Mathilde Scholl moved to Dornach to support the work of Rudolf Steiner. For the rest of her life her intellectual, artistic and spiritual forces would be

⁶⁶ E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 53. This biographical sketch of M. Scholl is based on Meffert’s detailed study.

⁶⁷ Albert Steffen “Gedächtnisworte für Fräulein Mathilde Scholl”, in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 341.

⁶⁸ M. Steiner, “Grußworte zum siebzigsten Geburtstag (9. Februar 1938). Zum 70. Geburtstag von Mathilde Scholl” in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 330.

⁶⁹ M. Steiner, obituary, “Mathilde Scholl”, in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 335.

⁷⁰ M. Scholl, “Erinnerungen an Dr. Rudolf Steiner”, in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 383.

⁷¹ E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 387.

⁷² C. Unger, “Autobiographische Skizze”, in: *Schriften I*, p. 326.

⁷³ See Florian Roder, “In Memoriam Mathilde Scholl”, in: *Das Goetheanum*, 7 July 2012, pp. 4-5.

focused on two principal topics: helping others to understand the mystery dramas, and the event of the reappearance of Christ in the etheric world. Her writings on the dramas would be published posthumously in four volumes by Hugo Reimann under the title: *Rudolf Steiners Mysteriendramen. Betrachtungen auf Grund von Notizen aus Mathilde Scholls Nachlass*.⁷⁴ As a result of this work it appears that Mathilde Scholl was the first person to discover that Gideon Spicker was the main historical model for the drama character of Dr. Strader.⁷⁵ She wrote a number of Christological essays and texts, with her main composition dating from the year 1933. This work brings together Steiner's central teachings on the renewed Pauline experience of the 20th century and is called *Der Weg nach Damaskus* (The Road to Damascus).⁷⁶

Two Letters to Rudolf Steiner

Mathilde Scholl did not first encounter theosophy in 1901/02 through Rudolf Steiner's writings, but had already come into contact with this spiritual stream three years earlier in Rome. In 1899, the year signaling the end of Kali Yuga, she became a member of the Theosophical Society. She read the works of Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant, and the Bhagavad Gita was one of her main meditative texts.⁷⁷ At the close of the century in 1899/1900, while still in Italy, Mathilde Scholl had a profound spiritual experience. It left such a lasting impression on her that three years later in 1903, barely a few months after she had met Rudolf Steiner, Mathilde Scholl wrote two letters to him asking for his advice in understanding her earlier experience. Her letters on this subject to Steiner, in this year of destiny 1903, are dated 11th February and 7th May. They are not unknown or unpublished, but have been available for 30 years, appearing in 1984 in volume 264 of the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (Collected Works).

In her first letter of 11th February 1903 Mathilde Scholl asked Steiner the following question about the nature of a being she had encountered in a dream-like experience, which had the features of the Master 'M' – presumably a reference to the Eastern spiritual Master known as Morya. Her letter also mentions the 'swastika', which is an ancient Indian symbol referring to lotus blossoms or astral sense organs. Mathilde Scholl's specific question to Steiner was: "What kind, or to which hierarchy, might a being belong whose aura, starting from its centre outwards, is initially 1) bright blue – devotion, and then followed by 2) pink = love."⁷⁸ This configuration is likewise concentric, precisely in the illustrated aura – yet no other colours were visible except bright blue and pink. [In a dream experience.] Nevertheless, the physical body only appeared in outlines and transparent, *not* formed, and there appeared centres (like swastikas or like wheels) in the same, which spun quickly around and radiated light. The countenance had the features and the expression of the Master M. I would be very happy if you could and were allowed to tell me who this being is, or how I myself might find an explanation for it."⁷⁹

Rudolf Steiner answered this first letter on the 1st May 1903. From Mathilde Scholl's original description he was not sure if it concerned a higher spiritual being, or was merely the projection of the so-called causal body into the mind. The causal-body is an older theosophical term for the eternal extract or essence of the etheric and astral bodies that the individuality takes with it from incarnation to incarnation: "The aura you describe is not clear

⁷⁴ Published by the Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer Verlag (later Verlag am Goetheanum), 5th ed. 1977.

⁷⁵ Cf. E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 243-244, where he says that M. Scholl secured Spicker's Nachlass and corresponded with his relatives.

⁷⁶ Also first published posthumously, in 1991 by Meffert, in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 605-639.

⁷⁷ Cf. E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁸ Here Mathilde Scholl is referring to traditional theosophical theories about the colours of the aura.

⁷⁹ R. Steiner, *Zur Geschichte und aus den Inhalte der ersten Abteilung der Esoterischen Schule 1904 bis 1914* (GA 264), pp. 42-43.

enough for me to be able to say anything of significance about it. You do not say anything about rays streaming out from the being in question. In a *more advanced* human being rays are always present in the *causal body*. These rays are the expression of the active forces that a human being adds to its progressive karma. Thus, it appears that what you are describing is not the image of a causal body. However, I am not at all saying that in your case we are not dealing with a highly developed being. But then it could only concern the *projection* of the causal body into the mental substance. And in this case I do not understand the swastikas, which point in turn to an astral element. I therefore ask you to write for me an even more precise description of this experience. I would like us to attain clarity in this matter.”⁸⁰

Mathilde Scholl replied on 7th May 1903, giving a more detailed description, stating that she had experienced the being as an overwhelming “luminous apparition” (*Lichterscheinung*). The being did not appear to be corporal, though it seemed to have the human features of a Master. Her second letter again makes it clear that she herself was unable to determine the identity of this being, and she asks Steiner again for assistance: “[...] My most heartfelt thanks to you for answering my question. The dream-image (*Traumbild*) that I described to you certainly radiated light, and this light appeared to flow out from the swastikas, which were situated in the head and upper body. On the whole only the head and upper body were visible, and then only in outline. The being did not appear to be corporal, but seemed only to be a luminous apparition (*Lichterscheinung*). However, the impression was so profound that in the dream I believed I had thrown myself at the feet of this being and become unconscious. Upon waking everything vividly stood before my eyes, and for a long time afterward I felt an inner emotion. To begin with I did not look for an explanation. Later Leadbeater’s book helped me understand that it is possible to see a colour arrangement of this kind. However, I would gladly like to know *who* this being was, for even though it appeared to have the features of the Master M., this might be due as much to my individual mood as to reality.”⁸¹

As stated above, our essay leaves it to readers to decide for themselves to what extent Mathilde Scholl’s description in her 1903 letter of a “luminous apparition” (*Lichterscheinung*) in a dream image should be brought into connection with the “halo of light” (*Lichtesschein*) of Theodora, or the reappearance of Christ in the “luminous halo” (*Lichtschein*) of Krishna. In any case, one should remember here Steiner’s method of employing exact but variable terminology, and that while the mystery dramas are “spiritual-realistic” presentations, they are still transformed poetic portrayals of real-life people and events. Rudolf Steiner’s own answer to Mathilde Scholl’s second letter is unknown. What is known, however, is that this new future experience of the etheric body of Christ is also bound up with a second important spiritual experience: the transformation of the faculty of conscience. One will commit a deed in the future and see a karmic dream-image (*Traumbild*) of what one has to do to compensate the deed: “Already around the years 1930 to 1950 there will be people who will say: I see there a bright band of light (*Lichtstreif*) round the human being. – There will be others who see something like a dream-image arising before them with a remarkable content. [...] The first] they will call the ‘etheric body of man’, and what appears as a dream-image before the person, they will call ‘karma’.”⁸² In the mystery dramas it is Theodora who especially bears an intimate relation to both these spiritual experiences: “It is a realistic portrayal that on the physical plane Theodora is the seeress of the future, whereas on the spiritual plane she is the awakener for conscience and the memory of the past.”⁸³

⁸⁰ R. Steiner to Mathilde Scholl, 1 May 1903, *ibid.* (GA 264), pp. 43-44.

⁸¹ Mathilde Scholl to Rudolf Steiner, 7th May 1903, *ibid.* (GA 264), p. 44.

⁸² R. Steiner, *Das Ereignis der Christus-Erscheinung in der ätherischen Welt* (GA 118), p. 162.

⁸³ R. Steiner (GA 122), p. 23.

The New Michaelic Age

In the year 1903 Mathilde Scholl also became one of Steiner's esoteric students, and asked him for guidance on the spiritual path: "For example, I would prefer to have genuine instructions for study – [...] For me it would be a help not to carry out my studies in an undirected manner."⁸⁴ She received from Steiner meditative texts and instructions. In fact, he provided her with a more scientific assistance that seemed suited to her particular needs, additionally giving her private instruction in mathematics, especially algebra: "He procured for me Lubsen's volume and worked with me through the book one on elementary algebra. He gave me directions in calculating the exercises, and wrote down calculations that I had to solve at home. He gave me these lessons in the periods between his lectures. [...] I developed such an enthusiasm for algebra that on my return to Cologne I took private lessons for a period in algebra, and even worked through by myself a part of Euler's *Algebra*."⁸⁵ Rudolf Steiner's regular mathematical instructions to her seem to be unique: "She is the only known person who received lessons of this kind."⁸⁶ She extended her mathematical studies to include number theory and the theory of dimensions, as is documented in her two early essays: "Zahl und Offenbarung" (Number and Revelation, 1906) and "Die Vierte Dimension" (The Fourth Dimension, 1908).⁸⁷ From Steiner's 1904 book *Theosophy* one can see how important such rigorous scientific thinking is on the spiritual path: "To be a 'seer' requires an absolute healthiness in one's soul life. Now, there is no better cultivation for this healthiness than genuine thinking. [...] And on account of its strict laws that are not directed at the everyday course of sense phenomena, mathematics is truly a good preparation for the seeker after knowledge."⁸⁸

In the third mystery drama, after the seeress Theodora marries the scientist Strader, she does not fall into trance-like states anymore, and begins to lose the visions of her earlier years. After seven years of marriage to Strader, Theodora dies. Henceforth she only appears as a soul-being in the fourth drama. As we saw, in Steiner's interpretation of this character, although people like Theodora are sometimes able to have correct visions, they ultimately possess atavistic faculties that have to die out and be sacrificed before the new faculties of humanity can properly develop. It is a renouncing and receiving, and if one is unwilling to do this, one is exposed to the gravest errors and illusions in one's spiritual research: "As I said, one gains and one loses something. With the former, with the gain, people are usually in agreement; but with the loss, they do not agree. And because of this, countless errors arise; a huge number of errors arises because of this."⁸⁹

The necessity of a marriage between true mysticism and science had already been underscored in Steiner's 1901 book *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age*. Here Steiner does not advocate a return to the mystics of the middle-ages, although modern science could still learn from thinkers like Nicolas Cusanus⁹⁰, but a harmonization of the mystical and scientific paths. Again, this marriage is not meant in any symbolic or allegorical sense, but in a real inner sense; and this would even hold for a Jacob Boehme of modern times: "With his manner of thinking such a [new Boehme] would not penetrate the biblical story of creation and the battle of the angels with the devil, but Lyell's geological knowledge and the facts of

⁸⁴ Mathilde Scholl to R. Steiner, 11 February 1903 (GA 264), p. 43.

⁸⁵ E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 138-139.

⁸⁶ E. Meffert, "Mathilde Scholl" in: *Anthroposophie im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Bodo von Plato (Dornach, 2003).

⁸⁷ Published in E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 520-533 & 534-554.

⁸⁸ R. Steiner, *Theosophie* (GA 9), pp. 175, 184.

⁸⁹ R. Steiner, *Der Wert des Denkens* (GA 164), p. 53.

⁹⁰ Cf. R. Steiner, *Die Mystik* (GA 7), p. 129.

Haeckel's *Natural History of Creation*. Whoever penetrates to the *spirit* of Jacob Boehme's writings has to come to this conviction."⁹¹

Indeed, in her Christological text, *Der Weg nach Damaskus*, Mathilde Scholl presents the new Christ event in line with Steiner's philosophical writings *Truth and Science* and *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and shows how fruitful it is to understand this event on the basis of Steiner's "Pauline" epistemology.⁹² Here we see the link between the end of Kali Yuga in 1899, and the beginning of a new epoch of Michael, the leading archangel or time spirit. The new age of Michael started in 1879 and is to last for about 350 years. One of the tasks of the age of Michael is to unite true mysticism of the heart and scientific thinking, as Rudolf Steiner writes in one of his final works, the *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*: "The age of Michael has dawned. Hearts are beginning to have thoughts; enthusiasm no longer proceeds from mere mystical obscurity, but from souls elevated by clarity of thought. Understanding this means taking Michael up into one's heart."⁹³

Conclusion – Theodora's Name

There is of course a great deal more to say about the character of Theodora and her marriage to Strader, about her past incarnations in the middle ages as Cecilia and in ancient Egypt as the "Keeper of the Seal", and her complex relationship to Johannes, but this will have to be done in a future publication. For now we will conclude by asking: if in accordance with the spiritual realism of Steiner's dramas the character of Theodora is to be viewed in the light of the destiny of women like the Seeress of Prevorst (Friederike Hauffe), Madame Helena Blavatsky, Helene von Schewitsch, Alice Sprengel and Mathilde Scholl, then what is the significance of her *name* – why is this character called "Theodora"? Just as the drama character of Felix was really based on a Felix, and Professor Capesius seems to have been a Professor Capesius, perhaps the real-life identity of this character too is none other than an open secret in the Goethean sense. For if one examines more closely the full name of the writer of *Der Weg nach Damaskus* one sees that it is: Mathilde *Theodora* Scholl.⁹⁴

In an obituary of Carl Unger entitled "The Spiritual Goldsmith", written in February 1929, Mathilde Scholl paid tribute to her colleague who had been murdered in Nuremberg the month before. She spoke of the value of Unger's last book *The Language of the Consciousness Soul*, which is a commentary on Steiner's *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*. For Mathilde Scholl it is precisely writings like Steiner's and Unger's on the consciousness soul that herald the dawn of a new spiritual epoch:

Carl Unger received with warmth of heart the star wisdom bestowed on us by Rudolf Steiner in his *Leading Thoughts*, and the words of this spiritual language moved his soul. [...] Thoughts that are imbued with feeling rise into cosmic heights. They soar on wings, like the Hawk in Goethe's *Fairy Tale*, which holds a mirror that reflects the rays of the sun back onto the sacred figures in the Temple. Thus, knowledge permeated by the Christ impulse streams forth once again from the soul, it has become an unclouded mirror due to the sacrificial force of love. It understands and speaks the *language of the consciousness soul*.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ibid., R. Steiner, *Die Mystik* (GA 7), p. 129.

⁹² See Mathilde Scholl, *Der Weg nach Damaskus*, in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, pp. 608-612.

⁹³ R. Steiner, *Anthroposophische Leitsätze*, 1924/25, (GA 26), p. 62

⁹⁴ According to her biographer, Mathilde Scholl's middle name of Theodora is a feminine version of her uncle's name of "Theodor". Cf. E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 27.

⁹⁵ "Geistige Goldschmiedekunst" in: E. Meffert, *Mathilde Scholl*, p. 665.

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