

## Exoteric & Esoteric Methodological Reflections on Vol. 7 of the Rudolf Steiner Critical edition

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Rudolf Steiner. *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*. Edited, introduced and commented by Christian Clement. Vol. 7 of *Rudolf Steiner: Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Christian Clement. Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, 2015. cxxx + 498 pp. ISBN 978-3-7274-5807-1.

### 1. Introduction: SKA Volume 7

Volume 7 of the Critical Edition of Rudolf Steiner's Writings, *Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe* (SKA), contains Steiner's two main texts on the spiritual path of knowledge, both of which originally appeared in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* in the years 1904–1908. The first of Steiner's texts is entitled *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* (How does one Attain Knowledge of the Higher Worlds?),<sup>1</sup> and the second *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (The Stages of

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner's text *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* originally appeared in installments in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* (edited by R. Steiner) from June 1904–September 1905, in issues 13–28. It was first reprinted in a special edition of the journal in 1907/08, and then published in book form in 1909, with further main editions in 1910, 1914, 1918, 1919, 1920, and the final "Ausgabe letzter Hand" edition of 1922. (For details of the history of the editions, cf. C. Clement's introduction, SKA 7, pp. civ–cxxiv). The book is volume 10 in the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (GA). In English, the text is available in various translations, including: *Knowledge*

Higher Knowledge), which was conceived as a continuation or “intermediate reflection” on the former text.<sup>2</sup>

Chronologically, volume 7 is actually the second volume overall to appear in the Critical Edition, and again it is competently introduced and commented by Christian Clement, and published in a fine and attractive edition by the German academic publisher Frommann-Holzboog. Volume 7 begins with a foreword (vii–xvi) by the late Gerhard Wehr, who argues that Steiner’s aim in these writings was to furnish a Western path of knowledge that led to spiritual independence on the part of the student. Wehr sees parallels between Steiner’s views and those of Jacob Böhme and J.W. von Goethe, as well as an inherent connection with the concept of devotion in the Christian mystics of the middle ages. Next follows Clement’s consistently illuminating 120-page introduction (xix–cxxx) in which he carefully outlines the general character of the theosophical-anthroposophical path of knowledge, and the historical context, genesis, content and reception of the two texts in question.

As mentioned above, the heart of the volume is Steiner’s two works *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten* (3–163), and *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* (165–209), presented for the first time in a scholarly critical edition, that is to say, where all the textual variations, additions, omissions and modifications have been noted. The schooling outlined by Steiner in these writings is that of the knowledge and spiritual awakening of the higher self, or the “birth” of the “higher human being.” (32) The practical means for reaching this goal primarily consists in *meditation*, in a strengthening of one’s cognitive abilities and moral qualities. In Steiner’s sense, there is nothing obscure or nebulous about meditative activity, much less is it related to any kind of spiritualism or mediumistic lowering of consciousness, rather it is based on fully wide-awake and conscious thinking: “One has to construct one’s thoughts in a clear, lucid and definite manner.” (34) The student commences the spiritual path by first cultivating a specific and basic mood of soul – that of a genuine “devotion

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*of the Higher Worlds: How is it Achieved?* trans. D.S. Osmond and C. Davy (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1976). All translations from the German in the current article are my own.

<sup>2</sup> The text *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* was published by Steiner in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis* in five installments in issues 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, from October 1905–1908, and originally termed as an “Zwischenbetrachtung zu dem Artikel ‘Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse höherer Welten?’” (SKA 7, 167). The first book edition appeared posthumously in 1931, edited by Marie Steiner (cf. C. Clement’s introduction to SKA 7, cxxiv–cxxv, for further details). It is volume 12 in the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* (GA). Among others, the text is available in English under the title: *The Stages of Higher Knowledge*, trans. Lisa D. Monges and Floyd McKnight (Spring Valley/New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1974).

to *truth and knowledge*.” (21) In contrast to certain theosophical conventions of the time, in which knowledge was based on the reverence for and dogmatic authority of a spiritual leader,<sup>3</sup> Steiner stresses the inviolable principles of the freedom and autonomy of the student on the path of knowledge: “It must be emphasized that with regard to higher cognition it is *not* a matter of reverence for people, but of reverence for *truth and knowledge*.”<sup>4</sup> The activity of meditation and a dedication to the ideals of truth and knowledge should be accompanied by a number of preparatory exercises, including: learning to distinguish “the essential from the inessential” in all things (28), an exact and accurate observation of the world of nature (38–44), a heightening of one’s own ethical behavior (54), and the cultivation of personal characteristics such as patience, humbleness, modesty, respect, empathy, understanding, fearlessness and gratefulness (70–86). It is crucial for the student not to waver from the highest principles of “truthfulness, sincerity and honesty,” (92) to retain healthy, “logical and rational thinking” (93) at all times, and to unfold a confidence in and love of one’s fellow human beings: “And this love of humanity has to gradually extend to a love of all beings, indeed, to a love of all existence.” (84) The third stage after those of preparation (*Vorbereitung*) and enlightenment (*Erleuchtung*) is that of initiation (*Einweihung/Initiation*), in which the “true names” of things become revealed that are the “keys” to higher knowledge (59). According to Steiner, this stage is characterized by the greatest possible cognitive discernment in one’s judgments: one possesses an ever sounder and healthier capacity to distinguish between mere personal illusion, fantasy, preconceptions and prejudices, and true reality (65–68).

The second text, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, presents one of Steiner’s most detailed expositions on the relationship between ordinary sense cognition and his further tripartite classification of knowledge into “imagination,” “inspiration” and “intuition.” Steiner calls his presentation here the “epistemology of esoteric science.”<sup>5</sup> The general four elements of knowledge corresponding to Steiner’s fourfold classification are i) the object (*Gegenstand*); ii) the representation (*Vorstellung*), also called the image or picture (*Bild*); iii) the concept (*Begriff*); and iv) the I (*Ich*). Each of these four elements may form the starting point of a new mode of cognition, and this is to be conceived in a hierarchical sense, passing from the ‘lower’ cognitive mode of

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Clement’s analysis of these important points, among others, in SKA 7, CV, 215, 224.

<sup>4</sup> “Betont muß werden, daß es sich beim höheren Wissen *nicht* um Verehrung von Menschen, sondern um eine solche gegenüber *Wahrheit und Erkenntnis* handelt.” (SKA 7, 23).

<sup>5</sup> “*Erkenntnislehre der Geheimmwissenschaft*” (SKA 7, 167).

outer sense impressions and material objects, through to pictorial and then conceptual knowledge, and finally to the ‘highest’ form of I-based knowledge (167–73). As Steiner says of the latter: “The perception of one’s own ‘I’ is the model for all intuitive knowledge.”<sup>6</sup>

Stimulating too is Clement’s 140-page commentary directly following the two texts (213–353). His remarks here make a substantial contribution to the research by not only locating many of Steiner’s references, but also correctly pointing out various related historical, religious, artistic, philosophical and mythological conceptions. The volume is supplemented by a selection of documents pertaining to the ritual aspects of Steiner’s esoteric school (355–441), a bibliography (443–64), and an index of topics (465–97).

As is natural for any work of nearly 630 pages, SKA 7 contains a small number of minor factual errors and lacunae, and it is possible to disagree with certain of the editor’s decisions and interpretations. For instance, the unattributed poem “Wenn die Rose selbst sich schmückt...” cited by Steiner, is by the poet Friedrich Rückert and not Angelus Silesius (110, 297). Steiner’s sharp distinctions between illusion, image consciousness, artistic productions, and spiritual reality could have been more forcefully insisted upon at times by the editor (e.g. 322); and I disagree with Clement’s contention that Steiner’s conception of the “Meister” (Masters) was taken over from theosophical literature (222–23). Among others, the idea is found in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, just as Steiner personally spoke of Goethe as one of the “greatest German Masters” already in a letter of 1889,<sup>7</sup> as well as publicly stating in 1900: “[I]f I have had a Hermes [on the journey to Hades], it was not Nietzsche, but Goethe.”<sup>8</sup> In the chapter on “Control of Thoughts and Feelings,” when Steiner speaks of the “purification” (*Lauterkeit*) of one’s moral character (57) and intimates a relation to the virtues of “courage and fearlessness” (62, 255), it might have been worth pointing to the related conception of *katharsis* in the 1904 essay “Aristoteles über das Mysteriendrama” in the journal *Lucifer-Gnosis*. In this regard, instead of/or in addition to the ritual documents in the appendix, perhaps other published texts from *Lucifer-Gnosis* could have been included that directly relate to Steiner’s path of schooling, such as his essays “Einweihung und Mysterien,”

<sup>6</sup> “Die Wahrnehmung des eigenen ‘Ich’ ist das Vorbild für alle intuitive Erkenntnis.” (SKA 7, 172).

<sup>7</sup> Letter of R. Steiner to R. Specht, Weimar, 9 August 1889, *Briefe I: 1881–1890* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1985), 204.

<sup>8</sup> R. Steiner, “Goethe-Studien. Moral und Christentum” (1900), in *Methodische Grundlagen der Anthroposophie, 1884–1901* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1989), 208.

“Okkulte Geschichtsforschung” and “Von der Aura des Menschen.” Other relevant inclusions from around the same years might have been Steiner’s reviews of books by Mabel Collins, Annie Besant and Edouard Schuré, which could have perhaps better underscored the parallels and divergences between Steiner’s path and the theosophical literature of the time. A person index to complement the subject index would also have been helpful.

Notwithstanding these points, one has to admit that the editor has for the most part subjected these texts to a nuanced, balanced and comprehensive textual analysis that has been hitherto lacking in academic studies of Steiner. The considerable contribution that this volume makes to current Steiner scholarship may be further illustrated by means of a number of specific examples.

## 2. Metamorphosis as Meditation

Volume 7 of the Critical Edition is a further confirmation of the importance of first examining Steiner’s Goethean natural-scientific work in order to better comprehend his later published writings on spiritual topics. To take a concrete case: in 1790 the poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published a scientific essay on the metamorphosis of plants. Here Goethe set forth the organic unity of the plant: despite the differences between the separate “external” parts such as the stem and the petal, they were united into a living whole by means of certain laws and modifications. He called this principal law the “metamorphosis” of the plant. According to Goethe, a correct understanding of this law allows one to grasp the “secret relationship (*gebeime Verwandtschaft*) among the various external parts of the plant, such as the leaves, calyx, corolla, and stamens, in which they successively develop out of one another as it were.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the goal of the researcher is to scientifically study and explain this hidden interaction: how an invisible law is related to the revealed external or sensible parts. Goethe furthermore expressed this law and the aims of the researcher in poetic form, in a poem also entitled “The Metamorphosis of Plants.” One should strive to grasp this “secret law” (*geheimen Gesetz*) or “sacred riddle” (*heiliges Rätsel*), and once this is done, one will find oneself in a “higher world” (*böhere Welt*), that is to say, in a world completely different from the outer or lower sense world.<sup>10</sup> Despite Goethe’s treatise and poem

<sup>9</sup> J.W. Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Gotha: Ettingersche Buchhandlung, 1790), 2.

<sup>10</sup> J.W. Goethe, “Schicksal der Druckschrift”, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed.

being couched in the mystery language of sacred riddles and higher worlds, the cognitive path in this domain is still a wholly scientific one. There is nothing mystical or unclear about it. In fact, this path of cognition is not unlike that of the mathematician:

We have to learn from mathematicians, and even there, where we require no calculation, we should proceed as though we were accountable to the most stringent geometer. For on account of its deliberation and purity the mathematical method immediately exposes every jump in an assertion.<sup>11</sup>

Turning to Steiner, one sees that his earliest scientific writings of 1884 concern precisely this Goethean conception of how to understand the “living concept” and higher laws of plant metamorphosis, the organic transformation of the seed into a plant, and then into a new seed, expressed in the visible-sensible process of plant expansion and contraction.<sup>12</sup> In his Introduction to SKA 7, Clement insightfully recalls how the meditative image of the metamorphosis of seed and plant is also a key example in Steiner’s 1894 chief philosophical work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (The Philosophy of Freedom).<sup>13</sup> Steiner’s main point in this philosophical text is that human beings are also given the possibility of undergoing a metamorphosis. However, in the human being this has to occur in freedom and out of their own forces of perception and cognition: “In the object of perception, man is given the possibility of transforming himself, just as there lies in the plant seed the possibility of becoming a whole plant.”<sup>14</sup> In a subsequent passage of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* Steiner immanently links these ideas of human freedom, metamorphosis and monistic knowledge with the striking image of a rose seed and plant: “Everyone of us is called upon to become a *free spirit*, just as every rose seed is called upon to become a rose. In the domain of genuine ethical acting, monism is therefore a *philosophy of freedom*.”<sup>15</sup>

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R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1884), 97–99.

<sup>11</sup> J.W. Goethe, “Das Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt” (1793), in *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1887), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Steiner, Einleitung, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1884), xvii–xxxiv.

<sup>13</sup> SKA 7, XLIV.

<sup>14</sup> “Es ist in dem Wahrnehmungsobjekt Mensch die Möglichkeit gegeben, sich umzubilden, wie im Pflanzenkeim die Möglichkeit liegt, zur ganzen Pflanze zu werden.” R. Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1894), 158.

<sup>15</sup> “Jeder von uns ist berufen zum *freien Geiste*, wie jeder Rosenkeim berufen ist, Rose zu

What was scientifically and philosophically presented by Steiner in 1884 and 1894 respectively as the organic process of metamorphosis in the plant and human being, reappears in 1904 in *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* as one of the central meditations on the theosophical-anthroposophical path of knowledge: “You place a small plant seed before yourself. [...] Picture to yourself: what is invisible [in the seed] will later become transformed into the visible plant, which I have before me in form and color. One dwells on the thought: *the invisible will become visible*.” (50) According to Steiner, actively and consciously meditating on ideas such as these, in conjunction with the other practical exercises, ultimately leads to the birth and knowledge of the higher self: “Thus, meditation is the way that also leads the human being to the knowledge and intuition of the eternal, indestructible core of his being.” (35) This path and experience was not new to Steiner in 1904; he was convinced he had already discovered the faculty in himself for intuiting his own eternal being decades earlier in January 1881 while a 19 year-old science student at the Technical College of Vienna.<sup>16</sup> And like Goethe, on account of its rigor and transparency Steiner too considers mathematical thinking as one of the best cognitive models for the student on the spiritual path: “Mathematics is therefore the most easily acquired preparatory training for the occultist who seeks to rise to bright and radiant clarity in the higher worlds, and not to a dim sentient form of ecstasy or dreamy premonitions.”<sup>17</sup> Steiner links the different fields of the Goethean theory of metamorphosis, mathematics and anthroposophical meditation, because for him all three lead to a similar goal: they assist the student in developing sense-free or “pure thinking” (*reines Denken*), i.e. the ability to pass from sensible perceptions and intuitions to supersensible ones.<sup>18</sup>

Hence, one can only agree with Clement in his commentary when he likewise points out the necessity of understanding this later seed and plant meditation in the light of Goethe’s morphological conceptions, and where the idea of “intuitive judgment” (*anschauende Urteilskraft*) may be viewed as

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werden. Der Monismus ist also im Gebiete des wahrhaft sittlichen Handelns *Freiheitsphilosophie*.” R. Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1894), 168.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. R. Steiner to Josef Köck, 13 January 1881, *Briefe I* (GA 38, 13).

<sup>17</sup> R. Steiner, “Mathematics and Occultism” (Mathematik und Okkultismus), a 1904 text reprinted in: *Philosophie und Anthroposophie 1904–1923* (Dornach/Switzerland, 1984), 7–18. Clement has also included some of the ritual texts in SKA 7, in which mathematics – the example of an ideal circle for instance – is also presented as a solid preparatory path of knowledge (cf. SKA 7, 387–88).

<sup>18</sup> On “reines Denken” (pure thinking), or a new higher kind of thinking, cf. Clement’s commentary, 220–21, 335–36.

the “immediate model of Steiner’s concept of imagination, as the first supersensible stage of knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> As Clement puts it: “Thus, already here [in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*] we find clearly expressed the basic conception of anthroposophical meditation, the idea of a methodically executed metamorphosis of the ordinary human faculties of perception and thought.”<sup>20</sup> There are naturally considerable differences in the formats, content, and arguments of Steiner’s early and later writings, yet one of the aims of historical-critical Steiner research should be to objectively explore precisely these divergences and correspondences between works like *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* and the texts in SKA 7.

### 3. Goethean Esotericism

As we saw, according to Goethe, in the sphere of science the scientist should aim to understand how a “geheimen” (secret), i.e. *invisible* but open principle of nature such as the law of metamorphosis is expressed in the *visible* world of nature. Here we have a twofold process: the outer, sensible parts of nature, and the initially hidden higher law that only appears to the scientist once they have brought the outer parts together into an organic whole. The law of plant metamorphosis can be clearly “seen” as it were, and therefore may be termed an *open secret* (*offenbares Geheimnis*) of nature. Goethe’s conception is a form of active and open scientific esotericism because these laws are ultimately visible for anyone who makes the intellectual effort, who is able to scientifically harmonize the sensible and spiritual aspects of nature. Here the abstracted part is the exoteric element, whereas the living whole is esoteric, and dangers and errors arise when one confuses the two.<sup>21</sup>

Commentating on Goethe’s scientific writings in 1897, Steiner linked onto and expanded this Goethean thought.<sup>22</sup> Steiner likewise classifies a consider-

<sup>19</sup> SKA 7, 248. In a similar vein, see Clement’s introduction, lxvii. Cf. Clement’s further reflections on this point in his commentary, 248–52.

<sup>20</sup> SKA 7, xlv–xlvi.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J.W. von Goethe, *Sprüche in Prosa*. “Man tut nicht wohl, sich allzu lange im Abstrakten aufzuhalten. Das Esoterische schadet nur, indem es exoterisch zu werden trachtet. Leben wird am besten durch’s Lebendige belehrt.” (It is not good for a person to dwell too long in abstractions. The esoteric is only harmful to the extent it seeks to become exoteric. Life is best instructed by means of the living) in: R. Steiner, ed., *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 377.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of Steiner’s comments on esotericism prior to 1900, see Robin Schmidt,

ation of the single, abstracted parts as exoteric, while the view of the whole as an organic totality, which is won from the phenomena themselves, is to be considered as an esoteric concept: “A concept is esoteric when it is viewed in relation with the phenomena, and from out of which it is obtained. [A concept is] exoteric when it is viewed as an abstraction, isolated in itself.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, confining one’s vision to the single parts is merely an exoteric form of cognition, compared with knowledge of the esoteric whole:

Truths that belong to an entire system of views, can for the most part only be correctly understood and valued in this connection. One then calls their deeper sense, which they cannot have in isolation, the esoteric sense. The latter will only be familiar to someone who knows the entire corresponding circle of conceptions, to which the single elements belong. Truths that are immediately understandable in themselves apart from all their connections, are termed exoteric truths. The superficial manner of tearing esoteric truths out of their connections and immediately treating them in an exoteric manner can lead to the gravest errors.<sup>24</sup>

This public 1897 discussion of Goethe’s conception of esotericism was not a recent interest for Steiner; seven years earlier Steiner had already privately communicated to the renowned Vienna theosophist Friedrich Eckstein his conviction that “Goethe was an esotericist in the best sense of the word,”<sup>25</sup> discussing in relative detail with him the “open mysteries” and “esoteric” secrets of Goethe’s poetry.

It could also be argued that Steiner’s pre-1900 Goethean-inspired conception of active and open esotericism is a key principle in the post-1900 text *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?*. In the preface to the 1910 book edition Steiner says that the text requires *active and comprehensive* readers, clearly stressing that its most essential truths are not to be found in a single part or

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*Rudolf Steiner und die Anfänge der Theosophie* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2010), especially chapter V, 107–22.

<sup>23</sup> Original German: “Esoterisch ist ein Begriff, wenn er im Zusammenhange mit den Erscheinungen betrachtet wird, aus denen er gewonnen ist. Exoterisch, wenn er als Abstraktion abgesondert für sich betrachtet wird.” In: *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 5, ed. R. Steiner (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 377, footnote.

<sup>24</sup> Steiner’s remarks are a commentary on the section “Lust am Geheimnis” in the chapter “Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre” of Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colour) in: R. Steiner, ed., *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1897), 127, footnote.

<sup>25</sup> “Goethe ein Esoteriker in des Wortes bester Bedeutung war”; letter of R. Steiner to F. Eckstein, Weimar, November 1890, *Briefe II* (GA 39: 54).

passage, but in a close and wide-ranging understanding of the whole: “An intimate and living familiarity with the book is necessary; the presupposition is to be made that *one* thing is not solely to be grasped merely through what is said about this thing as such, but also by what is said about something else. One will then obtain the conception that the essence is *not* to be found *in one truth*, but in the harmonization of them all” (16).

In terms of esoteric traditions, *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis* lists three main methods of spiritual schooling, the Eastern, the Christian and the Rosicrucian, and characterizes them with regard to the level of the student’s dependence on the teacher. For Steiner, the Eastern is the most dependent, the Christian is in the middle, and there is absolute independence and freedom between the student and teacher in a true Rosicrucian schooling (190). With regard to his own scientific methodology and cultural and artistic presentations, and to the extent he did not make appeals to authority, even to the authority of the name of this tradition, Steiner saw his own path as following the Western Rosicrucian one.<sup>26</sup> More detailed academic studies are required to determine whether Steiner was here linking onto the oldest historical Rosicrucian documents, or certain later conceptions found in Goethe (for example in his Rosicrucian poem *Die Geheimnisse*), or more contemporary principles and works connected with the Theosophical Society. She may be wrong in her assessment, but it is still interesting to note that at the same time as Steiner was making these distinctions in *Die Stufen der höheren Erkenntnis*, Annie Besant saw the essential divergences between her path and Steiner’s in precisely these Rosicrucian terms, as she explained in a 1907 letter to Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden:

Dr. Steiner’s occult training is very different from ours. He does not know the eastern way, so cannot, of course, teach it. He teaches the Christian and Rosicrucian way, and this is very helpful to some, but is different from ours. He has his own School, on his own responsibility. I regard him as a very fine teacher on his own lines, and a man of real knowledge. He and I work in thorough friendship and harmony, but along different lines.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In the 1910 work *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* Steiner explains that he did not call the contents of the book ‘Rosicrucian’, even though it contains a rose-cross meditation, because it would be appealing to the authority of an ancient name. He wished to appeal only to the truth of the presentation itself. Cf. R. Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1989), 22–23, 359.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Annie Besant to Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, 7 June 1907; cited in Steward C. Easton, *Rudolf Steiner: Herald of a New Epoch* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1980), 169.

#### 4. Ideological or Immanent?

Many of the misunderstandings and disputes associated with this *Kritische Ausgabe* concern Clement's editorial work in trying to accurately determine the most essential and influential textual sources in Steiner's writings. This is exactly the right approach for a critical edition. In my opinion the reason why Clement has had such success in ascertaining Steiner's philosophical and literary sources is due to his essentially immanent reading of the texts. In a correct application of the immanent textual method one does not approach an author's works with preconceptions and ready-made theories as to their cultural significance and spiritual traditions, but *firstly* one tries to allow the writings themselves to guide this determination and to critically understand them on their own merits. *Subsequently* one of course moves outside of the texts and then compares them with other historical writings, documents and figures. This valid and important scholarly method seems to have been misunderstood by a number of Clement's critics.

Clement's precise work so far on the SKA reveals that a sizable portion of the content of Steiner's post-1900 texts is closely interlinked with the philosophical, cultural and religious traditions of Goethe and the German idealists. This fact has now had radical consequences for contemporary Steiner research. Here his findings partly agree with those of Hartmut Traub in his 2011 monograph *Philosophie und Anthroposophie* (xxxix) and a number of other researchers, yet often appear to be in conflict with the conclusions of scholars like Helmut Zander (xxx, 252, 320, etc.). Naturally, after 1900 Steiner's writings continue to discuss the conceptions of other late 19th century figures, such as Ernst Haeckel or the philosophers Nietzsche and Friedrich Theodor Vischer. And this is not to forget that the first audiences of Steiner texts were predominantly theosophically-schooled readers, hence there are references to some of the standard theosophical works of the period. What is notable about Clement's findings is that whereas many of Steiner's lectures from around 1902–1908 are replete with conventional theosophical ideas, structures and terminology, Steiner's written published works are much less so. And if Steiner engages with the theosophical literature in his published writings, he frequently transforms or enlarges upon it, so that the reader has to actively penetrate through the outer linguistic layers and composition to the inner concepts, otherwise the reader runs the risk of misunderstanding them, of taking the letter or image to be the spirit.

At this point it is worth concluding with a brief examination of a highly

disputed example of this in the research literature: Steiner's narrative presentation of the two "Guardians of the Threshold" in *Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten?* In my view Clement correctly argues that the *principal* textual sources for Steiner's two guardians is not the novel *Zanoni* by Bulwer-Lytton, as a number of commentators seem to think.<sup>28</sup> Nor are the two guardians any sort of new invention on Steiner's part. What then are the most *essential* textual sources for Steiner's concepts of the two guardians? The encounter with the initially demonic figure of the "Lesser Guardian" is derived from the death-experience and journey to Hades that is portrayed in ancient Greek and Roman writings, such as the hound Cerberus guarding Hades, or Odysseus's descent to the underworld in book XI of Homer's *Odyssey*, or Proserpina or Isis in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, or the Zoroastrian tradition in Menippus (142–49, 256–58, 319ff.). According to Steiner, after successfully traversing the death experience and encounter with the Lesser Guardian, the candidate comes to know their own "double-nature": the shadow sides of their life and destiny – and ultimately their higher and eternal self (153). The encounter with the figure of the "Greater Guardian" is essentially derived from the Bible, especially the Christian gospels and the death experience of Christ in the "Mystery of Golgotha" (148, 150–57, 233, 258, 319–31). Steiner's text specifically refers to the "cherub with the flaming sword at the gates of paradise" (*Genesis* 3:24) on the one hand (155), and points to the figure of Christ by evoking the image of the parable of the ten virgins and their lamps on the other (148) that is found in the *Gospel of Matthew* (25:1–13). With regard to the gospels, I would be even more specific than Clement, and argue that Steiner's Greater Guardian (150–57) is predominantly based on the depiction of Christ as the Good Shepherd in Chapter 10 of the *Gospel of John*. The Good Shepherd is at once the gatekeeper and door itself, a guardian who is to pass through his own death experience by laying down his life for others, and, significantly, is initially also thought to be "demonic" (John 10:1–21). In line with the Christian teachings, one can only enter the heavenly worlds and receive eternal life by crossing over the threshold attended by this gatekeeper, by passing through this door and this door alone (John 10:1–3, 7–9). In this

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Olav Hammer, who concludes that Steiner appropriated this 1842 literary fiction in order to stimulate a new belief system in the reader: *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 157–58; and Per Faxneld, "Secret Lineages and de Facto Satanists: Anton LaVey's Use of Esoteric Tradition," in *Contemporary Esotericism*, eds. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (London/New York: Routledge, 2014), 89.

sense, the final two chapters of Steiner's 1904/05 text reveal a direct parallel with his conception of esoteric Christianity, particularly its Johannine form, in his 1902 *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. Just as the ancient mystery traditions for Steiner lead to and have their culmination in the new and fully open Christian mysteries, so the death experience of the candidate with the Lesser Guardian, echoing the ancient literary depictions of the journey to Hades, leads to and culminates in a new understanding and experience of Christ as the guardian to the higher spiritual worlds. Steiner's textual sources for these two guardians are not "covered up", but are directly cited in other sections of the 1904/05 text itself – when, for example, Steiner specifically recommends *The Gospel of John* and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* as inspired models of spiritual literature (77) – as well as in his earlier 1902 *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. In line with the principle of open and active esotericism, it is a matter of the reader bringing all these conceptions together.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, Bulwer-Lytton's "dweller" figure from his 1842 novel *Zanoni* is also definitely cited by Steiner (145); that is not the problem. Indeed, Clement here analyzes and compares the dweller figure in *Zanoni* and Steiner's two guardians at length, acknowledging the role played by the former, but rightfully drawing the conclusion that this figure is simply too insufficient, unsubstantial and different to be Steiner's sole and principal textual source (319–24). For Steiner, although it relates to an inner experience, Bulwer-Lytton's dweller is essentially a *degenerate* outer sense image generated out of material smoke (145). Hence, anyone giving chronological priority to this modern novelistic image, over the original ancient tradition of the journey to Hades, would not only be subjecting Steiner's text to an anachronistic reading, but furthermore confusing an external artistic depiction with what is intended to be a profound and realistic inner experience.

The unusual presentation of Steiner is one of the most original aspects of his contribution to the problem of possible modern experiences of Hades and Christ: Steiner's description is not a slavish copy of the ancient reports of the descent to the underworld, or of the Good Shepherd in the *Gospel of John*,

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<sup>29</sup> Of course, many of the different interpretative findings concerning the two guardians of the threshold rest on how a scholar answers the question: what are the *primary* textual sources for Steiner, and what are the *secondary* ones? Adherents of the Bulwer-Lytton interpretation often render subordinate or reject outright the ancient literary and religious references in Steiner's text, as well as ignoring his earlier writings and conception of esotericism, inverting the chronological and experiential order of the guardians and minimizing the many significant differences between the two figures. Starting from these wholly different premises and textual sources they not unexpectedly arrive at a wholly different conclusion to mine.

rather he artistically transforms and builds on them to present his views in a new narrative form. As Clement notes, this narrative form of presentation is similar to Steiner's 1912 third mystery drama, which is also entitled *The Guardian of the Threshold* (lxviii). In both presentations the reader or spectator must not remain at the mere artistic images, but must seek to grasp the underlying spiritual reality.

Clement's assessment that many of the references in Steiner's works come from Western cultural and esoteric traditions has not been well received in certain quarters, especially by scholars who have argued for Eastern theosophical sources. If the general direction of Clement's research findings is correct, then a number of influential contemporary interpretations are indeed either erroneous or in need of reevaluation. Instead of trying to critically refute him, however, some critics have attacked Clement's personal background, academic qualifications and institution, and (implicitly or explicitly) accused him of ideological motivations. I think that is both unfair and inaccurate. It seems that these critics are more often than not confusing Clement's immanent textual approach – which, as mentioned, is a perfectly justified and legitimate scholarly method – with someone who places their own personal beliefs into the texts. Naturally, every scholar must be continually on guard against the latter, whether they are a fervent Kantian, Republican, theosophist, or Protestant theologian. A true scientific researcher should of course never allow his or her personal beliefs or political convictions to distort their interpretations.

If a scholar projects continuity or unity onto a text when there is none, this too should be rejected as unscientific. However, the inverse principle also holds: if a researcher is able to competently demonstrate that specific concepts, methods, structures or arguments are carried over by an author from his earlier to his later writings, this should not be dogmatically rejected as an impossibility, or superficially dismissed as an 'ideological' reading. Or to put it another way: all theses concerning rupture in Steiner's work also have to be critically demonstrated by means of the texts themselves, and not naively assumed beforehand as something self-evident. It is obvious that Steiner's writings after the turn of the century are vastly different from his earlier ones in many respects. But – to borrow a familiar image from Goethe – the question for a validly employed immanent and non-retrospective reading is whether the philosophical, scientific and esoteric seeds in Steiner's early works are organically present in, or even give rise to, some of the flourishing plants of his later period.

Clement's insightful and generally convincing results seem to speak for the

soundness of his approach. But every academic can make errors, and a critical researcher should not simply accept the opinions espoused in the secondary literature or by book reviewers. I therefore encourage interested scholars to carefully examine both Clement's commentaries and the original passages of Steiner in order to arrive at their own independent judgment of these issues. Or, better still, to critically overturn Clement's findings if they are able.

To conclude: volume 7 of the SKA furnishes another positive, radical and thought-provoking chapter in critical Steiner research. Any scholar genuinely interested in close textual and historical-critical readings will be thankful to the editor and publisher for making these writings available in such a transparent, accessible and engaging edition.

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