**The Conception of Transformation in Rudolf Steiner’s**

**Mystery-Plays and Aesthetic Works**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this work is to examine the elements of transformation, metamorphosis, and transmutation in Rudolf Steiner’s mystery-plays and aesthetic works. This is not a study in the history of German literature, but rather in comparative literature. This study strives to examine Steiner’s texts of the early modernist era, with emphasis on key theoretical topics, including their historical, philosophical, religious, and psychological aspects, and to understand the many reciprocal and complex relations between them. This work investigates the element of transformation and the role of the imagination in three main stages in the development of Steiner’s aesthetic conception by way of focusing on its three key influencers: Goethe, Schiller, and Novalis. Furthermore, this study explores how the term “transformation” is manifested in Steiner’s mystery-plays and the reciprocal affinities between theory and artistic praxis in his works. The introductory Chapter One discusses the terms transformation, metamorphosis, transmutation, imagination, and initiation, and gleans their meanings and mutual affinities as a foundation for discussion in the ensuing chapters. Chapter Two discusses the concepts of transformation in the aesthetics of Goethe, Schiller, and Novalis, which are essential for understanding Steiner’s conception of transformation. Goethe argued that the affinity between nature and man is, on the one hand, close and complementary, and polar, on the other—when art creates on a new plane what nature creates and destroys in abundance (Goethe, 1967: 79, 162). In other words, what is expressed externally in nature can arise in man in the form of internal conscious artistic action. Schiller, in contrast, saw in art a domain of play and freedom between man’s drive to fulfil his physical needs and his drive toward ideas and rational thought, as well as a deep transformative process, in which nature becomes art’s raw material whose initial form is destroyed for the purpose of creating a new one (Schiller, 1986: 45-86). Novalis emphasized the activity of the artistic imagination as directed from the internal toward the external, and saw in poetics the ability to perform, in his words, a “romanticization” of all life, in other words, transformation (Novalis, 1976: 123, 133, 226). Chapter Three explores Steiner’s attitude toward these views and investigates how he develops, in relation to them, the term “aesthetic transformation.” In time, this term changed as his major aesthetic writings developed from unilateral to bilateral transformation. From his early work *The Aesthetics of the Future* to the lecture he gave during the last years of his life, *The Psychology of the Arts*, his conception of aesthetic transformation developed from drawing primarily on Goethe and Schiller toward another source of inspiration: Novalis. Steiner viewed in Goethe’s and Schiller’s aesthetic conceptions, notwithstanding their essential differences, aesthetic representatives of the first movement, and Novalis’s conception as an essential aesthetic representative of the second movement. A detailed discussion on this progression will lead to a summarizing outline of the dynamics of Steiner’s aesthetics and its development toward what I will call “monism of bilateral transformation.” This conscious-aesthetic exposition constitutes the basis for my discussion on the dramatic plain in Chapters Four and Five. Steiner’s mystery-plays are rich in transformative processes: whether constituted in the different characters, their relationships and the developments that occur in these relationships, on the plot level, or in the transitions and shifts in consciousness—in its relation to time and space and its conscious separation from them, and following a conscious return from spiritual experiences to the corporeal time, space, and condition. Chapter Four deals with the uniqueness of the four mystery-plays in terms of their place in the historical evolution of mystery-plays from the point of view of genre, style, language, etc. In addition, it outlines the nature of the transformative motion characteristic of them. This movement will be described in detail and referred to as “the transformative loop-movement.” Chapter Five focuses on Steiner’s first play, *The Portal of Initiation*, and discusses the initiation of Johannes, the transformation, metamorphosis, and transmutation he experiences, and the mental-spiritual aspect of this change. For this purpose, the beginning and end points of this trajectory are compared, while several focal points on its course are addressed as well. Furthermore, the transformation, metamorphosis, and transmutation experienced by other characters is discussed, as well as relationship between the individual, relationships between figures and the community, the changing of time and space, bilateral movement and its reversals in the play, masculine and feminine qualities of the self-journey, and the theme of fate as it is presented in the play. Chapters Four and Five explore whether one can see in Steiner’s dramatic work an innovation in regard to the conception of “what” and “how” drama and performing arts can articulate, represent, and express—this in terms of the transformation of various states of consciousness on both sides of the threshold presented on the stage (earthly world, mental world, spiritual world, and the type of consciousness associated with them); in terms of earthly, mental, and spiritual figures, and the attitude toward death and re-birth in the characters’ life development, and in terms of the light that illuminates topics such as fate and initiation, which are revealed in new ways.