

## Introduction to Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein's Persephone play

The *Persephoneia* play, published for the first time in these pages, comes from the literary estate of Ita Wegman (1876-1943). It was originally written around Easter 1930 for the international youth camp to be held in August that year at Stakenberg in Holland. Two versions are in existence: 1) a handwritten version in Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein's handwriting, and 2) a typescript. Remarkably, Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein took turns in the handwritten version; two thirds were written by Ita Wegman, with 5 passages in Stein's handwriting in between, on two occasions changing in mid-sentence.

I found these undated manuscripts in Arlesheim in 1981 when I was planning the biography and sorting through Ita Wegman's papers. The typewritten text carries a note by Dr Hilma Walter: 'summarized by Dr Wegman', which suggested that it was a revision or summary of an existing text. I was unable to find out anything about this, however; Dr Walter was no longer alive and Madeleine van Deventer had never heard of the play. To date, there has been nothing to indicate that Wegman (and Stein) based themselves on an existing text. On the other hand the history suggests that this is an original work by Ita Wegman, and that Walter Stein worked on it as well. The play is also remarkable in so far as there are no other known literary efforts by Ita Wegman.<sup>1</sup>

Later a systematic search of Ita Wegman's correspondence brought to light a letter Dr Willem Zeylmans van Emmichoven (1893-1961) had written to Ita Wegman (dated May 1930), in which he discusses the play in some detail. This establishes the date of the original and the connection with Kamp de Stakenberg.

The first question that comes to mind is why the physician Ita Wegman had the idea of writing a mystery play on the Greek goddess Persephone, deviating considerably from the traditional myth. We know from her essays in *Natura* that she worked intensely on the theme for many years.<sup>2</sup> She knew Edouard Schuré's Eleusis play as arranged by Rudolf Steiner and had attended Steiner's lecture course on *Wonders of the World*.<sup>3</sup> Yet she did not take up the Eleusis tradition, according to which Persephone is one of the main figures, but that of Ephesos in Asia Minor. This is connected with investigations made by Rudolf Steiner who in the last years of his life established the location of Persephone initiations in ancient Ephesos, which goes against accepted views in the study of antiquities and mythology. A particularly impressive description of these was given in a lecture on 14 August 1924.<sup>4</sup>

Steiner also discussed the Persephone theme with Ita Wegman. In a note made in 1924 (or early in 1925) she mentioned that Rudolf Steiner intended 'to tell the Persephone myth in a new way', following this with the words 'Something I should do?' in her note. As I have shown in the 7th chapter of my Wegman Documentation,<sup>5</sup> we might well assume that Steiner intended to go more deeply into the subject with her. Following this trail, e.g. in the lecture Steiner gave on 21 August 1924,<sup>6</sup> we also find a connection with anthroposophical medicine. We can understand therefore why she wrote the play in 1930 and why poetic inspiration took this particular form.

We do not know who had the idea of performing a (this) mystery play at the Stakenberg Youth Camp. I can imagine that it was her idea. She would occasionally work intensively together with Walter Johannes Stein, one outcome of which was the book *Aus Michaels Wirken* published in 1929. It was known from Wegman's essays in *Natura* and above all also from Rudolf Steiner's lectures on the subject that Ita Wegman had a special connection with the mysteries of ancient Ephesos and the Persephone initiations that took place there. The search for a new understanding of Persephone *Natura* was intensively pursued by physicians working with Ita Wegman and specifically included in the programme for the Stakenberg Camp by its initiators. This is known from letters W. J. Stein wrote to his wife, Nora Stein-von Baditz. The letters show that for the group preparing for Stakenberg Camp Ephesian initiation was part of the esoteric background. The group also included Stein. Wegman no doubt talked with him about a 'new Persephone', obviously also with regard to the Camp and, as we can see, the draft of this play. The inspiration to write a play together may actually have been the upshot of conversations with Stein, for it demanded a quite special level of collaboration. Stein's final lecture in the evening of 9 August 1930 at Stakenberg Camp had the title 'Persephoneia—the destiny of the human soul.'

As it was, the play was not performed at Stakenberg Camp, with Schuré's *Drama of Eleusis* shown instead.

The programme does not say anything about a play being performed, but in an issue of the Dutch Camp paper of June 1930, distributed in the different countries—also in German and English—in preparation for the Camp, we read that a play was also planned. We may assume, therefore, that in the spring the organizers were thinking of rehearsing a play with a lay group during the preparatory period and then in the Camp and performing it on the last day. This would explain why Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein wrote the play, which must have been written in a relatively short time, at the end of April 1930.

Ita Wegman sent it to Willem Zeylmans in The Hague (no accompanying letter has been found) and he replied on 9 May. He agreed that it was important to perform a Persephone play at the Camp, and said he had therefore examined the text carefully. Sadly he had to say that the play lacked all dramatic vigour—the main figures were merely exchanging thoughts that held a wealth of meaning. 'Artistically and dramatically I do not think we can do it. In its present form it is an amateur effort.' Parts of it would be important to present, but in a mystery play those very parts would 'explode'. He also felt that the language was '*verre van fraai*' (totally lacking in beauty). The Golgotha event as the great, unique counter image to the annually recurring Persephone Mystery did not come through strongly enough; what was more, Mercury was too 'flat'.

Following rejection of the play by Willem Zeylmans van Emmichoven, who carried the main responsibility for the Camp, it was agreed in Holland to perform Edouard Schuré's *Sacred Drama of Eleusis*. Wegman mentioned some young people who she felt might play the main roles. On the final evenings of the conference some enthusiastic young people performed the great play in the main tent before thousands of people, expertly directed by Max Gumbel-

Seiling. But because Ita Wegman had kept the draft versions of her play (rather than throw them away, which often happened) we are able to see how she must have wrestled with the theme in 1930, intending to present it to the young people.

In conclusion some remarks concerning the manuscript. I assume there has been a first draft which has not been preserved. The handwritten version in which Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein took turns shows such fluency and so few corrections that this would be an obvious assumption. That draft cannot have included the whole text, however. To enable readers to see which parts were written down by Stein and which by Wegman, the Wegman parts of the text are marked with one asterisk (\*) and the Stein parts with two (\*\*).

Sadly we are unable to reconstruct the genesis of the work. The impulse and first drafts may well have come from Ita Wegman. Yet the strange manuscript written by two people shows clearly that Stein had creative input. In the passage where Stein's handwriting appears for the first time, Wegman had merely given a kind of résumé; this was developed by Stein, first in prose and then in verse ('Daughter of mine, darling of my spirit ...'). She quite obviously needed and accepted his assistance, but then took over again, for the dramatic dialogue with Pluto and the 'table of life' (a wedding feast of Brueghelian provenance) are in her hand. I is not clear why Stein then took up his pen again, writing down the dialogue with Mercury—the handwritten passage shows practically no corrections, indicating that he was copying from a draft—it is impossible to say if this was originally by Wegman and/or how far Stein had a hand in it.

The scene with the old monk was written by Wegman again—in pencil, with only minor corrections; her handwriting stops in the middle of a sentence (looks as if she'd run out of rhymes—or is it that she was called away from her copying or writing?). Stein wrote a few lines, then Wegman took over again, only to hand over to Stein again—once more in mid-sentence. He wrote two paragraphs and then Wegman brought the play to its conclusion.

There is, however, also the typescript, clearly representing a later stage. Comparison of the handwritten and typewritten versions shows a great many changes in the text. It seems that once they had written it down together, the play was thoroughly checked and corrected by both Dr Wegman and W. J. Stein. The intermediate version has not been preserved, and the typescript we have shows no further corrections apart from some pencil notes by Stein where he suggests some changes in the scene where Persephone rejects Pluto's Cup of Forgetfulness.

We can therefore only make a number of assumptions concerning the genesis of the play. Most of it was probably by Ita Wegman. Why Walter Johannes Stein had a hand in it will have to remain an open question. I assume Wegman asked his help; Stein was fifteen years younger and a stimulating discussion partner who was also able to help her. Ita Wegman radiated spiritual power and strength for Stein, but she also needed his inventive, positively choleric powers of form, at least in this case.

Now, sixty-five years after it was written, the play is published with some provisos, as a number of questions still remain open not only relating to the

content but also in a historical respect. As far as we know it has not so far been performed; the content is stimulating, posing questions, and was never put forward elsewhere by Wegman herself. We have to approach this play with love, sensitivity and a positive will to understand if we are to give it its due. Thoroughly prepared for a stage performance it can carry a lot of conviction for many people. And the fact that this play was written by two individuals may strike us highly appropriate if we consider Rudolf Steiner's statements that Persephone research in particular was done by two individuals working together—in ancient Ephesos and in the present time—using a method which he calls the 'Saturn way'.<sup>4, 6</sup> It is astonishing and also something to enthuse us that two people—Wegman and Stein—together looked for new understanding of the ancient Persephone myth.

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- 1 In volume 2 of my Ita Wegman Documentation (German edition currently out of print) I described the genesis and reprinted parts of the play (p. 161-7). A second edition of volume 2 is in preparation and will be available through Verlag Freies Geistesleben, Stuttgart.
- 2 Essays No. 1, 15, 17 and 21 in the anthology *Im Anbruch des Wirkens für eine Erweiterung der Heilkunst ....* In the book *An die Freunde* the essays dated 25 May, 23 August and 25 October 1925.
- 3 Steiner R. *Wonders of the World* (GA 129). Trs. D. Lenn and O. Barfield. London: Rudolf Steiner Press 1988.
- 4 Steiner R. *True and False Paths in Spiritual Investigation* (GA 243). Lecture of 14 August 1924. Tr. A. Parker. London: Rudolf Steiner Press 1986.
- 5 Ita Wegman Documentation volume 2 (see ref. 1). Chapter 7.
- 6 Steiner R. *True and False Paths in Spiritual Investigation* (GA 243). Lecture of 21 August 1924.

## Persephoneia

Ita Wegman and Walter Johannes Stein

[cc, am]

*\*Greek landscape, rocks, a meadow in front of these. Persephoneia sits deep in thought, as her eyes take in the great beauty of the landscape.*

**Persephoneia:** My heart delights in the rich array of forms spread out before me, beholding the world's abundance with wonder and awe. The light of the stars shines in the heavens, and from deep down in the earth the wondrous worlds of plant nature reach out to seek the universe above. Every dew drop in the cup of a flower holds the marvellous form of the whole universe. Every seed sends forth a world of many forms, rising up in leaf and stem. From North, South, East and West, borne on the wings of the winds, power comes that creates form, building up the plants. And deep down in the earth we find the crystal, its pure nature reflecting the marvels

built and created in the depths by the powers of the planets and great circle of stars. I see the powers that stream down from the circle of stars swirl upwards in the plants, taking the fluid stream to every part. And I see animals walk among the plants, some large, some small, in many different forms; in earth, water and air I see the work of the world's creator, and the heart perceives that in the fire, too, that burns on the altar, the universe has created living forms, gloriously darting tongues. Thus I see the vast variety of forms spread through the universe, and life flowing through all of it, life that pulses through and unites the world. This life is in me, too, and my soul lives in the waves that support all existence throughout the universe and every part of it. Life poses riddles and all of me wants to do the same: Who are you, o wondrous power, able to build the glory of all these marvels? I call on you to appear to me in this sacred temple grove, so that my soul may find the way to your divine heights.

*Mercury appears from behind a rock. Curly-haired, he has dark, kind eyes. He wears a winged helmet and the garb of a Greek youth. His sandals are winged, he walks as though on winged feet, and every word he speaks is full of inner life. His speech is iambic, which gives it something of a lift. He holds a golden staff that increases in diameter towards the upper end, terminating in a torch. Two serpents with a metallic sheen entwine around the staff, their heads at the same level as the torch, so that it looks as if the flames of the torch come from their mouths. Approaching Persephoneia he speaks:*

To yonder distant stars  
your eye shall go;  
perceive the spirit  
coming into being.  
Do not look back again.  
And you will feel  
how from the wide expanse  
the life of shooting, sprouting forms  
glides down to earth,  
with joy embracing matter.  
The spirit coming from above  
has to imbue the world of earth,  
for then the depths are raised up high  
and able to resound.

And so the wedding can take place  
tween host of stars out yonder  
and power of matter here on earth  
through all the ages of creation.

Behold, Persephoneia, how Sun and Moon work together in the universe. This is not the first time you see them; before you descended into birth, you were united with them in the depths of your being, for as a Sun being you lay sleeping before love brought you down into birth, and the Moon dreamt your form. Do not believe that human beings are descended merely from their fathers and mothers; they also come from Sun and Moon, the Sun their father and the Moon their mother; that is how it is before the soul descends into an earthly body. And see, Persephoneia, everything below is as it is above; the earthly world is a reflection of the divine world before birth. Below on earth: father and mother; above in the heavens: Sun and

Moon. Perceive Mercury's mission in this world in the two serpents twined about a single staff. For there can be no growth and development in the universe unless Mercury brings together and marries what comes from Sun and Moon. I am the mediator between above and below; taking delight in marrying and creating a balance. There is no realm I do not penetrate. Perceive Mercury's breath of fire. Henceforth you'll be within the circles he creates (*lowering the torch he creates forms on the ground all around Persephoneia*).

**Persephoneia:** O Mercury, the forms your fiery torch creates make me know the depth of earth; my limbs grow heavy, as if to draw me down to Pluto's realm, but your living word makes bright light stream up from my heart, and images appear before the inner eye. (*It has grown dark and the moon is rising.*)

Mighty forms arise before my fearful soul; I see animal bodies making their way through the slime, dragon-like monsters. A single eye shines on their foreheads. They find their way by pushing forward on limbs that are half foot, half flipper. Above them I see bird-like dragons fluttering and flying in dense air. Fiery breath comes from their mouths. Their wings are bat-like, glowing with colour, and I see the stars reflected in those wings as they move them. Thunder rumbles, lighting flashes and fire rises from depths of earth. Sulphurous odours fill the atmosphere. Oh, these fearsome creatures are horrible indeed.

**Mercury:** Your inner eye beholds the creatures of world in its beginning. Look up into the world that lies out yonder. There you see the movements of the stars, powers of Moon and planets create the myriad forms of wondrous worlds.

**Persephoneia:** Your word of guidance conjures up before the inner eye the most wondrous garden with the most magnificent trees. Yet none are rooted in the soil. From the periphery, from the movement of the stars, a light-filled world of plants, a wondrous shining web, is coming in with might and main.

What is it that I see?

**Mercury:** The mysteries of evolution present themselves to you. Born from water, your form given to the world's water by the stars, you perceive the plants that will only later on be rooted in dense earth. This is the garden whence the human soul descended to earth. You, too, Persephoneia, once lived up there before descending to the depths.

**Persephoneia:** The mystery of the plants' roots is now revealed to me. The power that creates the gnarled root, taking the fluid stream upwards in the clenched, branching rootsul feel it as a burden as gravity is overcome in my limbs. There I behold whole hosts of earth spirits, their bodies woven of thoughts, sparkling intelligence. They are building up the earth's structures, shaping stone and hardening what is still soft. Their bodies shine in the moonlight.

*In the meantime the earth spirits have actually appeared on stage, carrying all kinds of metals. Mercury extinguishes his torch by pushing it in the soil; the stage is now lit only by the earth spirits' small lamps.) Persephoneia has got up. Walking from one group of dwarfs to the other she looks at the metals they are carrying.*

**Persephoneia:** Let me behold what you carry and speak to me of the depths whence you come, and the roads you have travelled.

### Chorus of dwarfs:

Long have we waited for you,  
o queen whom we chose to reign in our realms.  
The treasures we bring are yours to behold,  
receive them with grace.  
Marvel at this form,  
behold bright lustre here,  
look at these delicate rays,  
and these fine needles. These are but samples;  
much more lies hidden in the underworld,  
shining in the depths.  
Gold sheds a radiant light  
creating many images  
within your soul.  
In silver's radiance  
you can perceive the wonders of times past.  
And all the metals tell you  
what we below condense  
in fixed, frozen form.  
We guard it deep down for ages to come,  
safely keeping below  
what comes from far widths of space.  
Long ago we took hold  
of planet powers that were pure light,  
making them into water  
and letting them freeze  
in hard, fixed metals.  
Not a single star exists in the heavens  
the image of which, radiant and bright,  
has not left its imprint here below.  
Perceive in lead  
the grey light of Saturn,  
and in brittle tin,  
collapsing with a cry,  
the light of Jupiter wisdom.  
In grey iron mines  
Mars shows its might.  
Feel how in gold  
the essence of sunlight lies,  
and in copper you find the warmth  
of Venus's spirit of love.

*A dwarf steps forward, letting mercury spill from his hand.*

See how mercury scatters into myriad forms;  
perceive the god's all-encompassing power divided,  
creating many small droplets.  
Your I is one such droplet,  
in the Moon's silvery ocean;  
there you find yourself mirrored.

**\*\*Demeter appears, wearing a long, flowing robe, faded flowers in her hair and fruiting plants in her belt. In her left hand she carries a bunch of poppies that have gone to seed. Serious and dignified in demeanour, she speaks to**

*Persephone, lightly touching her shoulder with her right hand, warning her:*

Daughter of mine, darling of my spirit  
chosen to show humankind the world of the will,  
be watchful, remembering that the depths of earth  
harbour not only the radiance  
that comes from gods in the heavens,  
nor do they merely hold in their dark womb  
metals that brightly shine, glittering and ringing,  
but also the host of evils hidden below,  
banished beneath the earth.  
Do not turn your mind solely to earth.  
Look up also to the stars  
that eternally shine in the heavens above.  
Born of the divine world of heaven,  
you are godlike here in the upper world.  
Embroider the fabric of your life,  
weave into the wondrous beauty of this veil (*holding it up*)  
the divine forms of the upper heavens  
and nevermore explore the dreadful secrets of the abyss!  
Promise me this, dear daughter!  
Lest the sinister depths send up  
their tongues of flame,  
reaching up and taking hold of you,  
for then you'd be  
the most unfortunate of divine creatures.

**Persephoneia:**

Dear mother, once I felt  
so close to you in reverence and love.  
How strange you seem today.  
Longing for knowledge  
burns in my soul.  
Flames from beneath the ground  
dart in my heart.  
My inmost being longs  
to know this earth!

**Demeter (*laying her hand on Persephoneia's head in blessing*):**

Divine protection  
shall go with you.  
Maternal warmth  
protect you.  
Light of stars  
radiate around you.  
In all ways  
in all places  
at all times.

*She goes off.*

**\*Persephoneia (*reflectively*)**

Wise mother, in harmony with earth's true nature,  
your power opens up earth's depths so that the stars  
may be reflected in the magic of its flowers,  
bringing to the surface  
the power of earth's depths and its mysteries,  
and that fruits may ripen.



Yet how do I find out what lies far deeper down  
as the true nature of the metals within the depths?  
Where are the worlds from which the answer comes?

**Pluto's voice from the depths:**

Your mother, Persephoneia, gives you food of life,  
Demeter offers bread made from her grain.  
But in that bread the answer does not lie.  
To unite more deeply with the earthly world  
your thirst for knowledge and hunger for insight  
must not be stilled with the divine ambrosia and nectar.  
Instead you have to learn of mysteries more deeply hidden.  
Those who eat and drink nectar and ambrosia  
walk among the stars.  
Those who eat bread and wine  
walk on the surface of the earth.  
To go down deeper  
you must know how the earth's body  
is built from powers that give form to metals.

**Persephoneia:**

What must I do to enter the realm of life  
where the mysteries of earth's deep are revealed?

**Pluto:**

You must become my espoused wife,  
uniting your light-filled star nature  
with my power of selfhood.

**Persephoneia:**

Dread and pain enters my heart.  
How can I be yours, who is unknown to me,  
whose voice has such a muffled sound?  
I asked for your light-filled wisdom,  
and shy away from your dark power.

*Persephoneia wants to flee but stops, nevertheless, as if held back by some unseen power. Pluto emerges from a rock cleft and takes her hand, offering her a cup filled with liquid that has a golden shimmer. She wants to free herself but cannot turn away her eyes from the liquid. Her face shows that she is attracted against her will.*

**Pluto:**

Insight such as you seek  
does not come to the impotent thinking  
in images that dissipate beyond earth's realm.  
Take courage, drink the potion,  
and it will stream through you like fire.

**Persephoneia drinks. Sensing the changes in her body she speaks:**

The world of images streams mightily in my thoughts  
filling my whole body with great vigour.  
My sentient, feeling soul condenses  
into a powerful 'I am'.

*Pluto draws her down into the rock cleft.*

**Demeter appears, her hair unbraided, woefully calling:**  
Persephoneia!

*Joyful, powerful, Titan song arises from the depths:*

*(music)*

We forge  
deep down  
form-bodies of matter  
into which the soul enters.  
We firm and harden,  
we shape  
and strengthen  
life forms  
that struggle to arise—  
mere images at first,  
lacking definition.

### New scene

*Persephoneia, accompanied by Pluto, enters a pleasure garden where a table stands laden with choice dishes. Pluto: This is the table of life's pleasures. All the joys and glories life can offer may be found here, but you must forget the world of the gods if you want to enjoy these pleasures to the full.*

For if you were to keep the spirit's power of vision  
a drop of bitter wormwood would there be  
in every cup of pleasure.

No longer shall you see as inner vision  
the pain and trouble, demon-wrought distortions  
that hide beneath life's superficial pleasures.

*Persephoneia looks at the table of life; standing still and erect she speaks:*

Desire for knowledge has brought me here, not greed.

I choose to go through life knowing and in full awareness,  
not in a dream, taken out of myself.

Show me life such as it truly is,  
and not the outer semblance which deceives.

*Pluto, calling to offstage:*

Let life's wedding march begin! (*music*)

*From the other side, a bridal couple appears in festive garb and wearing wreaths. They are followed by the wedding guests. All sit down to the festive board. Pluto has taken a step backwards. Persephoneia looks on with thoughtful interest. Behind the bridal pair a beautiful angelic form arises, protectively embracing bride and groom. From the other side, a dragon-like figure approaches, crouching down at the bridegroom's feet. The faces, dress and gestures of the guests show their passions, e.g. greed, intemperance, violent temper, envy; among them are beautiful maidens who either carry snakes hidden beneath flowers, or have toads following them wherever they go.*

*The greedy individual begins to eat greedily before the others start their meal.*

*The envious person is long and thin, dressed all in yellow, with green spots on his garment. Looking enviously at the groom he walks around the table, arguing to himself:*

'Why did good fortune come to him and not to me?'

*The person with a violent temper is dressed in red, with yellow headgear, and vents his anger on one of the servants. The intemperate individual, whose*

face shows his addiction, has got hold of a small wine barrel, embracing it together with a large green frog the eyes of which are just like those of the drunkard. A pair of lovers appears, fondling each other. A cat-like demon appears who rises from his crouching position as if called upon by the lovers' words.

*Lover to his lass:*

Darling angel, do you love me?

*(The black cat arches its back and hisses at the word 'angel!')*

*She replies:*

I am yours in all eternity.

*Eros appears behind her. He breaks his bow and arrow over his knee and weeps.*

**Persephoneia**, *having taken a few steps forward, says:*

Behind the lying facade, I see the true nature of human beings. Woe indeed, if such is humanity.

*A childish old man, giggling to himself, looks at everything lasciviously. Around him are animal figures with broken or paralysed limbs. Pluto appears. Offering Persephoneia a black potion, he says: Divine vision still shows you life's full truth, and you cannot find happiness, because bitterness enters into all pleasure. The cup of forgetting will give you the outward glory of life and keep all pain away, as often as you drink it. Persephoneia, showing distaste, pushes him aside. As she speaks, the demons take flight from the garden, with the people following them, each at his own pace.*

**Persephoneia:**

Why should I be tempted  
by mere gloss of life devoid of truth.  
Transports of pleasure, mere illusion of love  
do not deceive me.

My heart full of compassion,  
I long to help these poor souls;  
to let them share in heaven's power of vision,  
which brings the pain that comes with truth,  
but also power of healing.

Thus, Pluto, I reject your gift.

*Pluto leaves the stage. Persephoneia, alone, deep in thought:*

What was it that I saw?

Did not life's great adversaries pass before me,  
letting the worm enter into the most beautiful flowers,  
pitilessly giving birth to destruction only and to death.  
How can I bring my world of heaven  
down to this vale of sorrow?

Ah, I recall that one of heaven's spirits  
does understand and has the will to help.

That is Mercury. I've often seen him, serpent staff raised high, hasten down the roads that lead from the heights to the depths and from the depths up high. I'll turn to him and ask him to bring healing before the worm, the demon and corruption take hold of the marrow and life of these poor people, the only fruits they gain from sin, disease and death.

Mercury, appear to me!

Mercury, take pity,  
save this world,  
and take it up  
into our light-filled heights.

**Mercury:**

Who calls so loudly  
from the deep abyss  
that the call is heard  
even in the fields of Elysium?

**\*\* Approaches Persephoneia, looking on her with compassion.**

Are you a god?  
A hero's child?  
A human being?

**Persephoneia:**

I am a human being,  
but also daughter of a god.  
Desire for knowledge  
made me take the road  
that led down here.  
But I shall not  
return alone.  
My human brothers  
whom the demon took  
shall return with me  
to the light-filled world above.  
And so I ask your help,  
courageous torch bearer,  
and your healing powers  
to achieve this aim.

**Mercury:**

Why do you think  
that I can help?

**Persephoneia:**

I saw you hasten  
through the heavens,  
saw you gather  
and unite in your cup  
what flowed from two sides,  
from Sun and Moon.  
There I recognized  
the two roads that powerfully  
take human souls  
both upwards and downwards.  
I saw souls hasten  
from heaven to earth  
on Moon's silver paths,  
and also depart  
when through conception's narrow gate  
they went down to the earth.  
Governing births  
the Moon orbits in the heavens.  
Whereas the upward road

is governed by the Sun.  
I saw it draw upwards  
the water, veils of mist,  
to scatter through the universe.  
It seemed to me  
stairway to heaven for the dead,  
its golden rays creating rivers of fire.

- - -  
I saw these two forces  
of Sun and Moon  
in the serpents entwined  
round your staff,  
along which the axis of the world  
stretches far, far away.  
And your golden cup  
appear'd to hold a mixture  
that shows the way  
out of birth and death  
overcoming both,  
a road that goes up and goes down,  
and always further.

**Mercury:**

Let me show you  
the two sublime roads.  
The one you know already,  
and now you must find the strength  
to carry upwards  
the heavy sorrows of the earth  
that long so powerfully  
to reach the Sun's great shining light.  
Let your longing stream  
to the Sun Prince and his great light.

**Persephoneia:**

Thank you for giving guidance,  
o shower of the way,  
but heavily laden  
with the sorrows of earth  
I know no longer  
how to use the wings  
that lightly bear a soul to heaven.

**Mercury:**

The weight of matter  
has taken you down to earth,  
and your self had to be enmeshed  
in all its sorrows.  
But lo, another power  
also dwells in matter.  
Harken what sounds  
there are in matter.  
Perceive within it  
the sounds that tell  
of its heavenly home

—now grown mute—  
imprinted on the law  
of numbers and in gravity.  
There's not a speck of dust  
but in it does resound  
tremendous music  
of the spheres of heaven.  
Look with reverence  
for anything which, though mute,  
does yet proclaim an origin in heaven,  
and the weight will be taken from you.  
Nay more, the spirit of matter  
shall carry you upwards  
if you can hear what sounds within,  
if you discover what sings within.

**Persephoneia:**

Creation's life still dwells  
in nature of matter?

**Mercury:**

That is true,  
and there is a place  
where this life is released  
from sleep of death.  
This is the human heart.  
In it, death is transformed,  
and nature of matter  
given wings of spirit.  
It had to fall,  
be lost to the god,  
but you can raise it,  
give it back to him,  
in the incense of inner activity.

**Persephoneia:**

To bring redemption  
to humanity  
and raise it up,  
I thus must learn  
to find the spirit  
as it lives in matter?

**Mercury:**

Find it, and yours shall be  
the name that's rightfully yours;  
bear it in honour  
for a long, long time,  
and then one day  
humans will also know  
to bring together spirit and nature  
in a single word.

Your name from now on shall be *Natura*.

**Persephoneia: (*rejoicing*):**

*Natura*—Persephoneia! O Mercury! Within my heart  
the Sun is rising,

and the heavy burden of the earth  
within my body  
is now becoming Sun.

*Mercury exits. Persephoneia Natura sits on a rock. An old man with a long white beard who is wearing a brown habit enters and stands facing Persephoneia. Surprised, the medieval monk looks at the Greek woman. Persephoneia is supporting her head in her hands, shielding her eyes, and does not see him.*

**Old man:**

Who are you, lonely soul?  
It seems to me  
you are not human,  
nor a woodland spirit.  
Your garments are such as I think  
are worn in land of souls.  
For here we wear much rougher garb.  
People hereabouts  
are more practical and down-to-earth.

**Persephoneia (looking up):**

Thank you for your words, o venerable one.  
But I do not know the answer to your question.  
I do not know myself  
if realm of soul or human world  
is now my home.  
I feel drawn mightily  
to human beings,  
wanting to help the heavy-laden,  
by giving them powers of heaven,  
letting sparks of joy from glittering stars  
enter into darkness of hearts.  
Yet as I approach the human world  
the knowledge threatens to leave me  
from which alone I can give help.  
I therefore stand at the gate of earth existence  
and know not what to do.  
But you are old, and have seen much, no doubt,  
so that perhaps you know what you are asking  
more than I do.  
Speak then—who am I  
whose longing is to share  
earth destiny with human beings  
and yet who cannot forgo  
the wisdom of the gods.

**Old man:**

Take courage, let yourself  
be fully human;  
enter wholly into the weight that is the body's  
and take the lot of earth to be your cross.  
Divine wisdom shall not be lost to you.  
Its true, it will no longer  
shine as Sun-gold of wisdom

on your fair brow;  
into love it shall be transformed,  
love that in the doing of your hands  
becomes a part of earth's true nature.

**Persephoneia Natura:**

Yes, good old man, that is a road which I can take.  
You do not ask me to abandon the wisdom of the heavens.  
And change alone is all you ask of me.  
So shall it be. I take your counsel.  
What must I do that I be fully human?

**Old man, taking her by the hand:**

Listen to hear  
the words my lips now speak  
shall fill the whole of you:  
'World-embracing, true essence  
wants to dwell now in the woman  
you shall be from this time on.  
Power of stars now seeks to enter into your limbs.  
Glitter of stars shall shine  
from the light of your eyes,  
and planets shall orbit  
in the breeze that fans you,  
in the blood that runs within you.  
Power of Sun in your heart  
shall shine in every action  
performed for the world.  
Continue on your way  
on and on  
through fullness of life  
till death shall come.  
And feel in your soul  
that the stars are with you  
their light lives around you,  
loving you in all you do.'

*Taking her by the hand he walks through the woods with her to his cave.*

*Dionysos enters with fauns and satyrs. Flutes and wind instruments.*

*Dionysos in human form, as a youth. Fauns and satyrs are shaggy and bearded. Dionysos, gathering them around him:*

Since earth began you have been companions to human beings.  
That has come to an end. For human beings are now alienated  
from powers of nature, and it behoves me  
to let you go where you belong.  
Marry the nymphs, then,  
dwell in trees and woodlands  
for you can no more be part  
of a world that is all human work.  
I, however, in this new world and new age  
must wholly leave behind divine nature.  
Henceforth I am no longer Dionysos,  
I am henceforth a human, just as others are.



**Chorus of satyrs and fauns:**

To marry with the trees  
is good for us.  
But to live without you,  
never more aspiring to you,  
takes away all courage.  
If we are no longer allowed  
to return to you again and again,  
our song and the playing of flutes  
must cease forever.  
Yet if we are no longer heard  
woodland will no longer green,  
and our trees must die,  
perish every one.

**Dionysos:**

Truly you are right,  
and concern darkens heart and mind,  
thinking of your fate.  
But if I can no longer help you,  
wait for the fate  
that higher destiny shall now prepare for you.  
Fare well!

*Satyrs and fauns vanish among the trees.*

*Persephoneia steps out of the cave. She is young and beautiful, but her beauty has a sombre, austere touch. Her dress is white, with a golden belt.*

*Wide-eyed with wonder, she walks towards the young man. He is wearing Greek garments, with sunlight all around him. He, too, is surprised at the beauty and very presence of Persephoneia.*

**Dionysos:**

I travelled far through many lands and oceans,  
and I have seen the whole round of the earth.  
Many were the people I have seen,  
many were their colours and their voices,  
and there is nothing in the human world  
I did not see.  
But never has my eye beheld  
such radiant beauty.  
And I take heart to ask:  
Are you a human being or divine?

**Persephoneia:**

My road has been a long one, too.  
It took me through the ages.  
Whatever humankind lived through,  
I knew in sympathy.  
Divine in origin, that's true,  
but love has made me human,  
love for all that lies  
around me in this world.

*Clasping hands they say together:*

Let us enter into union divine  
and yet be human beings.

Thus only does become deed  
what the gods determined,  
what in eternal council

**\*\*divine love decreed.**

For in this union  
of divine and human powers  
space and time are wedded,  
and sleeping power awakens.

**Persephoneia:**

See, wisdom did go  
down to the depths in me,  
but rising from its earthly grave  
it has become love.

**Dionysos:**

For me, nature no longer holds  
the human qualities it did.  
Who will restore to me,  
and make whole again  
what has been lost?

**Persephoneia:**

**\*Even before I fully descended to earthly world, I beheld untold suffering among human beings. I then resolved to descend from sphere of soul and, hastening to unite myself more and more strongly with human life through all the ages, so as to bring healing to suffering humanity.**

**Dionysos:** My road was different. I perceived that greatest human value lies in each individual human being, for the 'I am' in man is divine. I sought to nurture this spiritual element in man. In doing so I realized that the forces and entities that create community among humans belong to nature, and I had to return them, my followers, to nature. Who will wrest them away from nature again, and how shall communities arise in future?

**Persephoneia:** Out of the love that can arise in every human I. You see, for long I sought to find **\*\*the powers of healing.** Now I know where to find them. Never before did flowers and trees sing out so clearly for me what their true nature is, how they relate to human beings. I know now that the element which has severed itself from human beings has slipped into nature. The physician heals a human being, at the same time redeeming what lies spellbound in nature, by bringing human being and nature together again in marriage.

**Dionysos:** Indeed, that is so, but it can only happen if the approach to nature leaves room for the human self. A social life must now develop in which natural forces are redeemed out of individual powers of love, and not because this life no longer builds its social body from the forces connected with tribal and blood relationships.

**\*Let us enter, then, into the union through which human beings and the divine world can reach their goal.**

You, Persephoneia Natura, shall give nature's forces to human beings, like a true physician who heals people and redeems nature as he gives his medicines. I for my part must create social communities based on the powers of self-aware individuality. I promise you that in the present world age, nothing that belongs to nature shall enter into social community but only such things as come from a fully aware human soul.

Dionysos takes Persephoneia by the hand and steps forward with her.

*Nature spirits emerge from behind trees and rocks, no longer satyrs and fauns, nor large titans, but gnomes, undines, sylphs and salamanders. They dance a round dance as they sing:*

Redemption's come to this our world  
with this union between human spirit  
and his bride, the human soul.  
Wedded to each other,  
they found each other  
and united  
in the human body newly healed.  
Now our limbs may once again  
unfettered be and, released from darkness,  
serve humanity,  
always prepared  
to serve them well.  
In human nature we have found  
what nowhere else is to be gained  
through all this earth.  
Sun's warmth of love  
that alone can transform us,  
we found it  
gained it,  
and are forever friends of man  
for love's nature is such  
that fullness of nature  
awakens in the I.  
Egoity was lacking from our lives,  
now it will be given to us.

*Mercury enters, bearing his staff:*

You beheld in images  
your own becoming,  
your soul's destiny,  
and the spirit's goal.  
Let, then, the voice be heard  
within your hearts;  
let the guide speak.  
Through deaths and lives  
he is guiding souls  
in wisdom and love.  
You know him well.  
For it is not the first time  
that you behold this.  
In times long past  
it sang to your hearts.  
Perceive yourselves  
in the eternal stream  
of time and history.  
Through many graves  
did the road take you.  
They were the cradles  
of new lives.  
Divine worlds

did fade from mind.  
'The gods are dead'  
your lips did say.  
But death of gods  
marks but a change.  
The wisdom of the beginning  
arises now anew as love within your hearts.  
Sublime wisdom and will born of love  
stream together  
to be the staff of Mercury  
here in my hand.  
It is the healer  
who changes all:  
old into new,  
thought into deed.  
Raising the depths  
it sacrifices the heights,  
giving them to the depths.  
It is for you now to become  
in every life  
true followers  
of the divine and noble art of healing  
that heals your souls  
and not alone your bodies.  
Heaven and earth are one in man  
when Persephoneia  
transforms the will  
into an ardent deed  
within your souls.

*The end.*

**Addendum to H. Kiene's essay on  
Platonists, Aristotelians and anthroposophy**  
Comments

[am]

Without going into the actual subject matter of Dr Kiene's essay, I'd like to comment on an important aspect of Raphael's *School of Athens*. In a lecture given on 1 November 1916 Rudolf Steiner said:

And now there is the painting which, as you know, is called *The School of Athens* because the two central figures are believed to be Plato and Aristotle. There is absolutely no intention here—I have spoken of this painting before—to insist on other views presented on the subject; but those two central figures certainly are not Plato and Aristotle.

On 5 October 1916 he said:

The painting often—though only from a later date—called *The School of Athens* has been overpainted in a variety of ways as time went on. Thus the word *ETICA* has been painted on to the book held by the man who stands in the centre, and *TIMEO* on that held by the other. These are later additions. The painting has been ruined in