APPROACHING ESOTERICISM AND MYSTICISM
Cultural Inluences

APPROACHING ESOTERICISM AND MYSTICISM
Cultural Influences

Based on papers presented at the conference arranged
by the Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History
and the research project 'Seekers of the New: Esotericism and the Transformation
of Religiosity in the Modernising Finland', Turku/Åbo, Finland, on 5–7 June 2019

Edited by
MAARIT LESKELÄ-KÄRKI and TIINA MAHLAMÄKI

Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 29
Turku/Åbo 2020

Editorial secretary Maria Vasenkari
Linguistic editing Vidyasakhi Sarah Bannock

ISSN 0582-3226
ISBN 978-952-12-3974-8 (print), 978-952-12-3975-5 (online)

Abografi
Åbo 2020

Table of contents

New currents in the research on esotericism and mysticism

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.91845

EDITORIAL

The present volume of Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis is based on a symposium entitled 'Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences' and arranged by the Donner Institute together with the research project 'Seekers of the New: Esotericism and the Transformation of Religiosity in the Modernising Finland' at the University of Turku in June 2019.

The beautiful and hot summer days of early June were filled with enthusiastic discussions and debates on the concepts, contexts and contents within the study of esotericism and mysticism. The highlight of the conference was a trip to the Gallen-Kallela Museum in Espoo to see the exhibition 'Sielun silmä – Själens öga – Eye of the Soul' that presented the influence of esoteric and occult ideas on Finnish art, particularly at the end of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some art works also illuminated the present interest in esotericism in contemporary art.

Both the project and the conference bespeak the current widespread and rapidly intensified research field concerning the study of modern western esotericism. Over ten years ago, in 2008, the Donner Institute arranged the first symposium in Finland concentrating on Western esotericism. Back then, there were lively discussions on the concept of esotericism as well as the scope of, at that time, a new and developing discipline. Subsequently a lot has happened, and the study of esotericism has evolved into a large, established, and well-known domain. Now it is possible to focus on a specific area within the study of esotericism. This conference focused on historical approaches.

Following the 2008 conference the project 'Seekers of the New' began slowly to build up, first as a loose network of Finnish scholars interested in the study of esotericism from various research fields (history, literary studies, cultural history, art history, study of religion) in order to connect and

share mutual research interests. In 2017 the network, now forming into a more focused research group, received a three-year grant from the Kone Foundation, and since then ten researchers have worked together to study the influence of esoteric ideas and movements in Finnish cultural history from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s. The project consists of several doctoral students writing their dissertations and senior scholars working with various research projects. The project has so far produced edited journal volumes, articles and museum exhibitions, and the researchers have presented papers and organised panels at various seminars and conferences, as well as organised courses at the University of Turku, and open lectures and events for the general public in different places in Finland. Last, but not least, in April 2020 a book on modern esotericism and occultism in Finland, led by Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen, was published by the academic publisher Vastapaino. Throughout the years we have encountered a wide, enthusiastic public response which has led to several radio programmes, newspaper interviews and articles – and, during the exceptional spring of 2020, also to online events. Also, many students have shown their interest in the subject and are currently proceeding with their own studies in the context of the history of esotericism.

As the research concerning esotericism has extended over the past two decades into a very diverse field of study, from the study of religion into the fields of history, art, literature, music and popular culture studies, the approaches and theoretical perspectives have multiplied as well. The current enthusiasm in the research on esotericism resonates with the present culture, where popular literature, art and media have been active in presenting esoteric ideas, movements and individuals. This is visible in both, for example, fantasy literature and science fiction tv-series and movies, or in the interest in various forms of new-age spirituality. It is evident that there is a growing interest in esoteric, occult, and mystic themes not only within the multidisciplinary research field, but also among the general public.

At this conference, organised in June 2019, we wanted particularly to focus on cultural influences of esotericism and mysticism, and we encouraged participants to adopt a cultural-historical approach – an approach that accords also with the emphasis of the Donner Institute. The keynote lectures of the conference dealt with both the conceptual approaches in the research field as well as the history of esotericism, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This publication is based on the papers presented at the conference, and the articles approach the traditions of Western esotericism and mysticism from multidisciplinary perspectives of cultural history, the study of religion, art history, popular culture studies, and folkloristics. The aim of this volume is to analyse the diverse influences of esoteric ideas and practices and the various forms of mysticism in their cultural-historical surroundings. The articles focus on individuals, groups and networks, and benefit from various archival source materials, as well as published texts such as journals, novels, and different genres of popular culture.

The articles of this volume demonstrate the multidisciplinary essence and the vitality of the study of esotericism and mysticism. As one of the main foci of the 'Seekers of the New' research project is art in its different forms and shapes, the articles themselves also interpret the esoteric and mystic in many different art forms, as well as the influence of different esoteric thinkers – such as Emanuel Swedenborg, Aleister Crowley, G. I. Gurdjieff, and Rudolf Steiner – in historical and contemporary art and popular culture.

The content of this volume is divided into four sections. The first article, by Professor Olav Hammer from the University of Southern Denmark, concentrates on the main concepts of the conference theme – esotericism and mysticism – and how they are defined in different contexts. Hammer sees the concepts as being on the same continuum as that of religion.

The second section concentrates on individuals in the history of esotericism and mysticism. It begins with the article by the cultural historian, director of the research project 'Seekers of the New', Maarit Leskelä-Kärki. She reflects on the ethical challenges of studying individuals in esoteric research contexts as she analyses the archival material from the early 1900s of the Finnish poet and writer Aarni Kouta. Other articles in this section open up the relations between the Finnish artist Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa and Swedish writer August Strindberg, written by Pekka Pitkälä, and the life narrative of G. I. Gurdjieff from the perspective of the history of wars and violence, written by Hippo Taatila.

In the third section, the focus turns to the esoteric and narratives in various novels. Tiina Mahlamäki and Tomas Mansikka present the Finnish author Laura Lindstedt, William Gray analyses the Turkish author Elif Shafak, and Carles Magrinyà discusses Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The fourth and last section returns to the concepts within the study of esotericism and mysticism. The articles deal with the concepts of the vernacular (Kaarina Koski), magic (Tilman Hannemann), and the paranormal (Cristoffer

Tidelius), that are essential within this research context. There is a need to look back, define and re-define the concepts used in the study of the esoteric and mystic, both in earlier as well as in contemporary research.

In the future, we would like to emphasise new approaches within the study of esotericism, and encourage diverse and multidisciplinary studies of ethics, politics, aesthetics, gender, and corporeality within esoteric currents, texts, ideas, and individuals. Also the methodological approaches within the study of esotericism should be developed further, and nor should we leave aside the conceptualisations and implementations of digital humanism, big data studies, and network analysis. The field of esotericism still remains a ground for new insights and new findings, both from the perspective of history and in our contemporary surroundings.

Turku 10 June 2020
Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Tiina Mahlamäki

Mysticism and esotericism as contested taxonomical categories

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.85791

OLAV HAMMER

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Esotericism and mysticism are two notoriously elusive concepts. Both are based on referential corpora of works that are so internally diverse as to defy any simple characterization. A definition of mysticism needs to encompass a range of empirical cases that include medieval Christian visionaries, Sufis, and Hindu gurus such as Ramakrishna. Similarly, the term esotericism denotes the work of individuals as diverse as Paracelsus, Swedenborg, and Carl Gustav Jung. Unsurprisingly, in a recent encyclopedia article (Nelstrop 2016) mysticism has been characterized as a 'taxonomical black hole', while esotericism has been described by a leading scholar on that topic, Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2005, 2012), as a waste-basket category for a range of currents that have little else in common than having been rejected by mainstream theologians and by rationalists from the Enlightenment to our own time. This article argues that the terms are not only laden with significant definitional problems, but that applying them to any particular phenomenon has little, if any, theoretical added value. Instead, this article advocates a higher-level taxonomy that sees the elements of both sets as examples of a more general category: religious phenomena which are supported by charismatic authority.

Introduction: on the peculiarity of theoretical terms

The terminology of the study of religion is sometimes deeply mystifying. Consider these three cases:

1. A man sees the sun reflected in a pewter vessel and spends the rest of his days spelling out a cosmology that he believes he was given access to via this vision. This cosmology *inter alia* describes a world of angels that in many ways parallels our own. His numerous books have come to influence the religious world views of generations of readers.

2. Another man enlists the help of a ritual specialist who claims that through visions in a mirror he can contact angels and learn their

language. The concepts recorded in his writings influence nineteenth-century magical orders.

3. Yet another man has visions of various superhuman beings, including angels, and pieces together an elaborate myth purportedly delivered to him as a result of this encounter by such means as peering through a stone placed in his hat. The book that emerges from this activity has become the canonical scripture of a major religious tradition.

The three cases of individuals who constructed complex stories upon the basis of visionary states are classified in very different ways in academic literature. The first, Jacob Boehme, was born in 1575 near the town of Görlitz, in Upper Lusatia in what is today eastern Germany. A pious shoemaker who for many years lived an outwardly rather everyday kind of life, Boehme's inner world was apparently revolutionized one day in the year 1600. A reflection of light in a pewter vessel gave Boehme the impression of seeing into the very core of reality. Boehme walked out of his house, and as he looked around, nature itself seemed transformed and full of significance. After perhaps a quarter of an hour the feeling faded. Boehme's biographer Abraham von Franckenberg relates that over the span of his life Boehme had four such experiences, occasions of what he called *Zentralschau*, a view into the core of existence. Most importantly, this *Zentralschau* was recorded in a very substantial corpus of writings. Boehme is, on the basis of such biographical data, considered to be both a mystic and an esotericist.[1]

The second case is that of John Dee (1527–1609), a polymath of the early modern period who was interested in angels. In 1582, Dee met the spirit medium Edward Kelley, who assured him that he had the ability to contact angels. Dee maintained that the angels laboriously dictated several books to him through Kelley, some in a special angelic or Enochian language. If we are to accept the judgment of the standard literature, John Dee and his

1 Boehme is, for instance, the topic of a very sizeable entry in the standard encyclopedia for the study of esotericism, the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Weeks 2005). Bernard McGinn devotes considerable space to Boehme in his monumental historical survey of Christian mysticism (McGinn 2016: 169–96).

assistant Edward Kelley are part of the history of esotericism but not of mysticism.[2]

The third case is that of Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–44), who related that he experienced a series of visions, including one in 1820 during which he saw 'two personages' (officially identified by the LDS [or 'Mormon'] Church in 1880 as God the Father and Jesus Christ), and another in 1823 in which an angel directed him to the site of a buried book made of golden plates inscribed with a Judeo-Christian history of an ancient American civilization.[3] In 1830, Smith published the Book of Mormon, which he said was an English translation of these plates. Joseph Smith is considered to be neither a mystic nor an esotericist; in the 1200-page *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* he is mentioned in one single sentence (Lucas 2005: 300).

The fact that such diverse terms are applied to individuals whose religious careers seem in many ways to run parallel to each other points to a conceptual issue at the heart of the literature on mysticism and esotericism: what typology and what level of classification is it fruitful to adopt? The many excellent studies devoted specifically to Boehme, Dee, and Joseph Smith are the results of a low-level classification that primarily sees these individuals as separate foci of research, yet contextualizes them historically and socially. A mid-level classification attempts to gain theoretical insights by classifying each of these figures into categories such as 'esotericism' and 'mysticism', distinguishing these categories in sufficiently stringent terms so that it will make sense to see Boehme, for example, as an esotericist and mystic, but Joseph Smith as neither of those. A high-level classification acknowledges the lack of clear boundaries between such categories and instead focuses on more abstract labels such as 'religious innovator' or 'charismatic leader' as being the theoretically significant level of analysis. This article will argue that, contrary to the low and high levels of this classificatory spectrum, the

2 Dee, too, is covered in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (see Szőnyi 2005).

3 There are several partly conflicting versions of, in particular, the first of the two visions (see Taves and Harper 2016). For the present purposes, the details of these versions or their veracity is of no consequence. As will become clear later in this article, the fact that Joseph Smith claimed to have had these experiences and that the LDS Church has accepted two specific versions as canonical and foundational are the key points. Former LDS President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) stressed that the First Vision was the foundation upon which the Church rested (see Hinckley 2002).

mid-level categories of 'mysticism' and 'esotericism' have little, if any, theoretical justification. In other words, low-level studies of various writers, currents, and movements contribute in important ways to our understanding of the history and sociology of religions. High-level studies provide equally important contributions to our understanding of the mechanisms of religion in general. Mid-level terms, by contrast, add little except a pragmatic label that scholars can use in order to explain what empirical materials they work on.

My attempt to argue for this position will proceed in three steps. A first section reflects upon the concept of mysticism and its vicissitudes from the seminal work of William James to the present day. The section that follows similarly addresses the concept of esotericism. The discussion that ensues argues that the sets of phenomena subsumed under these two headings share fundamental characteristics, and that the distinction between the two has little conceptual value. At the heart of the practices, texts, and currents associated with each of the two terms lies a social formation that they not only share with each other, but have in common with other religious phenomena based on charisma and persuasion, including the role of prophet as exemplified in the person of Joseph Smith.

Mysticism

In William James's seminal work mysticism was defined in a way that is still commonly quoted. His choice of title for the lectures (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*) and his definition combine to construct 'mysticism' as a term denoting a specific, extraordinary class of experiences. As is well known, James characterizes them in terms of their ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity (James 1985: 380–2).

James was primarily interested in Christian mysticism. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (published in 1902) refers to surprisingly few concrete examples from the historical canon of mystics, but when it does, these examples are individuals from the history of the Christian tradition, ranging chronologically from pseudo-Dionysius to Eckhart, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Boehme.[4] Once one begins to adopt a comparative, cross-cultural perspective on mysticism, it is clear that, despite a shared

4 James 1985: 416 (Dionysius), 417 (Eckhart), 408–414 (Teresa), 407–8 (John of the Cross), 417–8 (Boehme).

label, there is an extreme variability across epochs and cultures. This is a fact noted, for example, in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2nd edn), where the entry 'Mysticism [further considerations]' states that the term applies to

> a broad spectrum of ideas, experiences, and practices across a diversity of cultures and traditions … The application of appropriate epithets yields terminology for specific categories of mysticism (theistic mysticism, nature mysticism, and eschatological mysticism) and for distinct cultural or doctrinal traditions (e.g. Hindu mysticism, bhakti mysticism, Jewish mysticism, merkavah mysticism). (Moore 2005: 6355)

After James, the study of mysticism has been pursued in a vast literature, some of the best-known authors to address the topic being Evelyn Underhill, William T. Stace, Rudolf Otto, and Bernard McGinn. The term 'mysticism' has in such modern classics been defined in a variety of ways, usefully summarized by Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh (2008, 2016), who notes that these definitions ultimately hinge on the core idea that, whether or not there are other dimensions than the experiential one, mysticism is ultimately founded on a certain type of experience. If mysticism is defined in terms of experience, one can legitimately ask: 'what kind of experience?' How do inner states correspond to the vast diversity of mysticisms? For several decades, this remained the key scholarly issue. Famously, a debate raged in the 1980s and beyond between Steven T. Katz and Robert K. C. Forman. Although there are interpretive issues regarding the details of the positions taken,[5] the fundamental issue of the controversy is too well known to require any extensive summary. Roughly, Katz proposed a contextual theory of mysticism, according to which mystical experience is inextricably bound up with the tradition within which it takes place.[6] Forman, by contrast, suggested that a particular kind of experience, that of a 'pure consciousness', an aware but contentless state of mind, is at the core of mysticism across traditions (Forman 1990). Versions of the latter approach continue to have their advocates. Jeffrey Kripal is a contemporary proponent of transcultural approaches to mysticism. In an interview, for instance, Kripal, stated that

5 See Hammersholt 2013 for a detailed discussion of the issues involved.

6 The classic formulation of this approach is found in the anthology Katz 1978. Numerous publications developing contextual analyses of mystical traditions followed, including Katz 1983, 1992.

> Cultural context shapes, mediates and expresses the phenomenological feel of these events. But it's not *producing* them. I think they're cross-cultural. They're not even historical – they're not located on a particular point in space-time. But when they interact with human beings, they are. (Evans 2014)

In the writings of the scholars mentioned above, mysticism continues to be primarily framed as a psychological phenomenon. The tendency to treat it as such is reproduced, for example, in recent survey articles. For instance, the entry for 'Mysticism' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Gellman 2019) is primarily concerned with the experiential aspect of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the numerous problems that have been raised about the concept of a religious experience (for which cf. Proudfoot 1985; Sharf 2000; McCutcheon 2012) of course also affect any study of mysticism that is primarily couched in experiential terms. Being intensely private, the mental events that constitute a putative inner experience are only available via the traces they leave in discourse, action, and material culture. Those traces are inevitably coloured by and at least in part (and perhaps entirely) a product of the conventions of language, the cultural preoccupations, and the social position of the person deemed to have had that experience.

Whereas the issues summarized above would seem to deconstruct the notion of studying mysticism as experience, for many universalists, mystical experience not only remains a focus of interest but comes across as in some sense also constituting a personal, spiritual experience. William James, who in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* generally presents himself as a detached psychologist, towards the end of his book makes a confession of a personal experience that left him with a feeling of 'metaphysical significance', adding obscurely 'Those who have ears to hear, let them hear' (James 1985: 388). Robert Forman's suggestion that there are contentless forms of awareness, that is to say, a state of being fully aware but not aware of any specific thought, sensation or object, is an empirical claim about certain states of the human mind. At the same time, his scholarly arguments are surely not detached from the fact that Forman has also been a spiritual seeker for most of his life, as documented in a popular autobiographical work (Forman 2011). Kripal's reflection on the cross-cultural nature of mystical experiences, quoted above, is in the interview linked to his own intense experience during a stay in India.

Feminist writers have been at the forefront of devoting attention to other aspects of mysticism than the experiential, and in particular its social role. Grace M. Jantzen (1995) notes that to the extent that mystics have claimed to have direct access to the divinity, mysticism has had the potential to undermine authority. Since authority throughout the history of Christianity has been in male hands, female mystics have inevitably been drawn into battles concerning who should be counted as a mystic, the issue of male dominance over women, and women's resistance to the dominant modes of power. The argument made here generalizes this observation. To summarize an argument that will be unpacked below: to be a mystic is to be the focus of a socially constructed attribution. 'Mysticism' is at its very core a question of charismatic authority and does not have theoretically significant attributes that distinguish it from other cases of attributed charisma.

If we want to study the range of phenomena routinely classified as examples of mysticism as a cross-culturally applicable religious category and not only as a psychological experience, we need to agree on some basic definition of what the term 'religion' can usefully stand for. It is well known that there have been very numerous attempts to define religion.[7] My contention is that this diversity notwithstanding, the phenomena we are willing to characterize as religious have at least a minimal social component. Two lines of argumentation can be pursued in order to support this claim.

Firstly, there is a rather common-sensical argument grounded in an observation of ordinary language use: It seems absurd to suggest that an idea or a practice that either nobody else is aware of, or that nobody else links to a superhuman dimension, still can be meaningfully designated as religious. If, for instance, somebody claims that they have spoken to, seen, and merged with God, but the social consequence is that they are shrugged off as deluded, diagnosed as ill, or get locked up in a mental institution, the term religion seems misplaced. This can be illustrated by means of the following real-life example.

Skeptical author and elite cyclist Michael Shermer recounts in a blog (Shermer 2005) how he had been riding his bicycle for 83 non-stop hours in one of the most gruelling long-distance races, the Race Across America. A car from his support team passed by and his helpers asked him to pull over. At that moment, the car appeared to be transmuted into an alien spacecraft

7 This observation is a commonplace in the study of religion. See, e.g. Bergunder (2014: 247–52) for a survey of past approaches to the issue of definition.

and the people inside it were transformed into aliens trying to abduct him. After just ninety minutes of sleep Shermer's hallucinations had subsided, and the alien craft and its strange crew had returned to their more familiar shapes. Shermer drew the conclusion that his vision of aliens was caused by the extreme challenges he had faced.

Consider this counterfactual thought experiment: what if Shermer had been convinced that his experience was real? What if the vivid conversion narrative by an ex-skeptic, now transformed into a true believer in the involvement of alien life forms in human affairs, had persuaded others? What if Shermer, in his new role as a contactee of intelligent extraterrestrials, had presented spiritual messages from the denizens of Sirius, the Pleiades, or from wherever they may have come? Would he, despite having had exactly the same experience, not have been transmuted from being a skeptic to having had a religious, even mystical experience?

Many people have exotic experiences; presumably far fewer draw any religious conclusions from these experiences. Even fewer go public and declare that their experiences have any validity for others, and fewer yet manage to convince others of the validity of these experiences. Only the last of these are usually called mystics.

Secondly, the contention that the social aspect is a fundamental part of religion does not depend merely on appeals to linguistic intuition, that is to say, what appears to be a common-sense use of the word, but is also one that resonates with some of the most widely cited scholarly understandings of what kind of entity the term 'religion' might usefully apply to. A classic definition is that presented by Ninian Smart: religions are multidimensional including, as one of six (1969: 15–25) or seven (1989: 12–21) dimensions, the social and institutional dimension. In other words, religions are characterized by being shared by a group. Bruce Lincoln has more recently (2003: ix) defined religions as being constituted of four elements. Besides discourse and practice, these are comprised of the social elements of community and institution.

Identifying the social dimension as being a fundamental component of any phenomenon that we might want to regard as religious leads to the conclusion that there is a basic mismatch between traditional approaches to mysticism and some of the most central and widely accepted understandings of what constitutes a religion. Experiences are eminently private and cannot in and of themselves have social effects and thus be constituent elements in the formation of religious currents. If somebody has an experience that

seemingly fulfils all of James's criteria, but they never tell anybody, they will have had an interesting few minutes in their life, but their inner state hardly qualifies as the source material for anything we might study as scholars of religion. Yet, common understandings of mysticism, from James to Katz and Forman and beyond, have everything to do with how it feels to be a mystic and very little with what the mystic and his or her followers do to transform the initial experience into the bedrock of a social movement.

Only when presented to others in, for example, a narrative or iconographic form, does something as private as an experience become publicly accessible and thus potentially a religious phenomenon. To go from being potentially a religious phenomenon to actually being one, a visible expression of the putative experience needs to be accepted by others. In other words, authority needs to be vested in those who have had the experience. Over time, a complex social formation can arise around such a person. Claims of superior knowledge are attributed to them. Hagiographic narratives are composed; stories about, for example, their spiritually gifted childhood, or the miracles they were able to perform. Pilgrimage sites arise where their tombs are located or their relics are housed. Iconography is crafted that represents the extraordinary person of the mystic and purportedly embodies his or her spiritual power. Other forms of material culture typically arise around them, such as ritual paraphernalia symbolically representing them and their charisma, buildings where their teachings are studied, and so forth. A group of adherents is formed where cosmologies are studied, and ritual practices are perpetuated that go back to the founding mystics and to their most important disciples.

In the history of religions examples of this path from putative experience to social formation abound. A prototypical class of examples that have all of these components is Sufism. Clearly, there are experiential elements of the encounter with the divine in Sufism. Annemarie Schimmel (1983: 133) writes in terms that recall the Jamesian paradigm of 'the experience of Divine Love, basically ineffable'. As noted by Nile Green (2012: 1–3, 9), Sufism is nevertheless also an eminently social phenomenon based on the hierarchy between masters (who are said to have had such experiences) and disciples who attempt to follow the examples and instructions of their masters. Sufi manuals present these charismatic figures as being worthy of their disciples' complete submission because they have progressed so much further on the path. Hagiographies present them as God's friends. Their tombs are visited, for example, in order to have significant dreams or collect

charisma-laden objects. Other forms of Sufi material culture include amulets and other protective objects that, thanks to the charisma of the Sufi master, protect their owners. The group of people who venerate the master and carry on his practices is in the Sufi case called the *tariqa*, or brotherhood.

In the transformation from claim to experience to social formation, several divergent narratives and social formations can be traced back to the same, original purported experiences, which can be radically decontextualized, and essentially get buried under an avalanche of later projections. The modern interest in the German mystic Hildegard of Bingen is a case in point. Hildegard was a medieval woman who died in 1179, and who obviously was a product of her time and cultural context. She was approved by the Catholic Church as the recipient of communications from the Holy Spirit, her messages having been vetted for orthodoxy first by Abbot Kuno of Disibodenberg and then Pope Eugenius III.[8] In current times she remains a significant figure of the Roman Catholic tradition, having finally been canonized in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI.[9] Yet she has also been seen as a precursor of various New Age interests, from herbal medicine to the construction of mandalas. Outside the Catholic context she has been the topic of numerous books that disembed her from her medieval religious setting, including titles such as Matthew Fox's *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times: Unleashing Her Power in the 21st Century* (2012) and Gottfried Hertzka's *Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine* (1987). The latter was published by Inner Traditions, a company that presents itself on its website as devoted to producing books on the subjects of 'spirituality, the occult, ancient mysteries, new science, holistic health, and natural medicine' (Inner Traditions n.d.).

Although Hildegard's life and message can be interpreted in very different terms, contemporary Roman Catholic and New Age milieus at least agree on one fundamental point; namely that she is an important spiritual figure. It is, of course, quite possible to find social formations around visionaries and mystics that disagree even on this basic premise. A recent example concerns the German author Judith von Halle (b. 1972). An architect by profession, von Halle describes in *Schwanenflügel* (2016), a self-styled 'spiritual autobiography', how she has had intense visionary experiences from a very early age. She encountered anthroposophy in 1997 and worked part-time for the German Anthroposophical Society until 2005. During Easter 2004

8 For Hildegard's biography, see Flanagan 1998.

9 For the apostolic letter of canonization, see Benedict XVI 2012.

the stigmata of Christ purportedly appeared on her. Since then, she claims only to be able to consume water, i.e., that she subsists without any solid nourishment. She has published some twenty books based on her recurrent visions of Jesus and his life. Judith von Halle's claims have turned out to be very controversial in anthroposophical circles. Sergei O. Prokofieff, the author of numerous works on anthroposophy and a prominent member of the Board of the Anthroposophical Society from 2001 to 2013, devoted an entire volume, *Time-Journeys: A Counter-Image to Anthroposophical Spiritual Research* (2013), to rejecting her claims. Outside conservative anthroposophical circles, however, von Halle has had a more favourable reception. An open letter signed by thirty-seven German anthroposophists defends her and castigates Prokofieff for his 'ruthless attack' ('Open letter' 2013). Furthermore, she continues to give lectures and to make her views known through her prolific writings. The narrative of her extraordinary experiences thus makes her an inspiring visionary to some and a deluded soul to others.

To summarize, mysticism functions as an umbrella term for a set of culturally specific social labels that adherents give to charismatic individuals partly, but only partly, on the basis of exotic states that they are said to have achieved and to which various traditions give labels such as *satori* (in the Zen tradition), *fana'* (in Sufism), or *Zentralschau* (among followers of Boehme). There are numerous strong indications that the role of the mystic and the labels indicating what they have achieved are not only social attributions, but that the experiential element supposedly underlying the social attribution can even be subordinate. Three examples from very different religious traditions can illustrate this.

The first concerns the role of meditative experience in Buddhism. Western books on Buddhism typically stress extraordinary states experienced in meditation as the sine qua non for advancing on a kind of Buddhist spiritual path. Robert Sharf (1995) suggests that this view fundamentally misrepresents classic Buddhist texts. Several Buddhist branches have key manuals that present stages on the Buddhist path. For the Theravada tradition, for instance, there is Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purity), while for Tientai, there is the *Móhē Zhǐguān* (The Great Calming and Contemplation) by Zhìyǐ. Sharf notes that such works are misconstrued as records of actual meditative practices and ensuing experiences, and that they are better characterized as doctrinal works that present 'scholastic constructs' (Sharf 1995: 237). The main argument for this position is that the stages on the 'mystical path' include the ability to perform physically impossible feats, including

walking through walls, flying through the air, becoming invisible, and ceasing to have any mental or bodily function while still remaining alive (p. 238).

The second has to do with the role of visionary experiences in medieval Catholicism. Although it was acknowledged that visions could arise spontaneously, medieval literature on visionary states abounds with discussions of how spiritual exercises can lead to visionary experiences. Barbara Newman (2005: 3–4) stresses that texts that reported on such experiences were crafted in accordance with various genre constraints and that these accounts could formulate visions in terms that conformed to set expectations, embellish them creatively, or simply invent visions where there might not have been any. Reading medieval visionary accounts as straightforward renditions of actual experiences would in this view be rash. Visions were assumed to have their origins in a supernatural dimension, which meant that their conformity to Biblical models of how visions 'should' arise and to doctrinal statements on the supernatural were issues of paramount importance. Despite the emphasis on spiritual exercises leading to the desired result, the scriptural models emulated by Christian writers presupposed that visions came spontaneously and in a flash; a characteristic of the genre that is reminiscent of James's assertion that mystical experience is characterized by being passively received by the mystic. Medieval would-be visionaries were left with, on the one hand, an extensive literature on how to potentially generate visionary experiences, and on the other, texts that sternly warned readers that visionaries could be deceived. To summarize, authority would be vested in the person who had visions if the often heavily redacted texts purportedly recounting their experiences were deemed acceptable within strictly defined theological boundaries.

The third example has to do with the role of visionary experiences in Sufism. How does one achieve legitimacy as a leader of a Sufi brotherhood? In most cases, leadership becomes legitimate if one can point back at a succession of previous leaders in an unbroken chain that typically goes back to Ali, the cousin of the prophet Muhammad, and if this chain of leaders and disciples is deemed authentic by significant stakeholders (see, e.g. Green 2012: 53–4). Adherence to orthopraxy, or 'etiquette and ceremony' (p. 3), is typically a prerequisite for legitimacy. Their purported charismatic powers, whether recorded in hagiographic narratives regarding their sainthood (pp. 92–103; Renard 2008) or in displays of ritual healing (Crapanzano 1973), elevate them to the rank of leaders. Narratives of dreams and visions certainly played a significant part in propelling a Sufi to a position of spiritual

leadership. The legitimacy of such a narrative was, however, judged by having recourse to a scriptural precedent, namely a famous hadith, according to which Satan cannot impersonate the Prophet in a dream, or in other words, the contents of such a dream are by definition authentic (Green 2012: 75–7).

In Weberian terms, the success of the Buddhist, Christian or Sufi 'mystic' derives not from their private, spiritual experiences, but from their ability to navigate the complex waters of authority. Charismatic authority in its pure form is for Weber 'an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed' (Weber 1948: 295). In many religious traditions this is a kind of authority that runs in parallel, sometimes is intertwined, and sometimes competes, with that of a literati class. Those who manage to get stakeholders to attribute a special status to them emerge as 'mystics', and this special status can, among many other items on a list of authority-producing qualities, be based on the support of those stakeholders for the claim that the mystic has had certain experiences.

Esotericism

Despite the supposed ineffability of the experience, written accounts of mysticism have had a major impact on the history of religions. These accounts intersect with the corpus of writings that is usually presented under the rubric of Western esotericism. As noted above, a small proportion of the individuals who figure in the referential canon of esotericism (say, as documented in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*) are also part of the canon of mysticism (on any common definition). Unfortunately, it is far from clear on what grounds certain individuals are included in both sets, since there are several divergent definitions of the category of esotericism. The key problem with the term 'esotericism' is that it arose as a name for a set of writers and their works that were chosen on pre-theoretical, heresiological grounds. As Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2012: 107–14) notes, a nucleus of that corpus was first described in 1690–1, when the Protestant theologian Ehregott Daniel Colberg (1659–98) published a polemical compilation of 'heresies' entitled *Platonisch-Hermetisches Christenthum*. Colberg was the first author who suggested that something unites a range of currents as diverse as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Hermeticism, and the followers of Jacob Boehme.

Over time, this list of 'religious others' expanded as new writers and texts were added to it. Attempts to define that corpus rather than merely

enumerate it only arose in hindsight. The decades around 1800 saw the emergence of a terminological innovation that was intended to cover the set of such subjects: the term 'esotericism' was born.[10] The definitional question remained: what defines the set? The quest for definitions started in earnest in the early 1990s, and not even the semblance of consensus has been reached; here just the three most significant attempts at defining the concept will be mentioned.

Arguably the most influential definition was formulated by Antoine Faivre. In various publications, Faivre has described esotericism as a 'form of thought' characterized by four universally shared characteristics, as well as two that occur frequently but not with the same ubiquity.[11] The first of the four intrinsic characteristics is *correspondences*: all parts of the cosmos are understood to be linked by symbolic or in other ways non-empirical connections. This is the rationale behind the astrological belief that movements of the celestial bodies and human affairs are linked. The second involves the concept of a *living nature*. The entire natural world, according to this view, is alive and imbued with a soul, or in more modern versions of this idea a life force or energy. Third, insight into this normally hidden state of affairs occurs via *imagination and mediation*. Images, rituals, and so forth can be used as such mediating elements. Fourth, it is stressed that the person who pursues an esoteric pathway will experience an inner *transmutation*. The alchemist, or the member of an initiatory esoteric order, is deemed to have ascended to a radically new spiritual level. The two extrinsic characteristics are the belief that there is a fundamental *concordance* between different religious traditions and esoteric currents and a particular mode of *transmission* through initiation for those who wish to access esoteric teachings. One major problem with Faivre's definition is that far from all texts and currents commonly included in the corpus of esotericism fit the bill. Mesmerism, for instance, lacks most of these characteristics (cf. von Stuckrad 1998: 226), as does Swedenborgianism and Traditionalism (Hanegraaff 2012: 354).

A very different way of approaching the concept of esotericism has been championed by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2005, 2012). He characterizes esotericism as a category of diverse elements that have been rejected

10 A summary of this terminological development can be found in Hanegraaff 2012: 334-8.

11 The definition was introduced in Faivre 1992: 13–21; an English version of this text is Faivre 1994: 3–19.

by mainstream theologians and by post-Enlightenment rationalists. A definition that hinges on the rejection by specific others raises some thorny philosophical issues. Firstly, many esoteric currents were not rejected at all at the time they were part of the cultural landscape; opposition to them only came later. A prime example is the situation of astrology in pre-modern times. In Denmark, for instance, astrology was widely accepted by academics and the general public alike (Fink-Jensen 2016). Secondly, other cultural currents have also been rejected by mainstream theologians and rationalists. European folk beliefs about such creatures as ghosts, trolls, and goblins have been rejected as superstitions, but that does not include them in the category of esotericism.

Yet another approach is that of Kocku von Stuckrad (2005), who describes Western esotericism as a set of currents built on a discourse of having access to higher, restricted knowledge. This conception of esotericism also has its challenges to deal with. Not all members of the set 'Western esotericism' have an obvious component of suggesting that some knowledge is a scarce resource: Spiritualism, for instance, seems to democratize knowledge of the afterlife. Furthermore, as von Stuckrad notes (p. 88), the claim to having access to restricted knowledge is found in religious and secular contexts that have nothing to do with esotericism. His own examples include Marxism and Hegelian philosophy, some aspects of contemporary science, and the cosmology of Hildegard of Bingen. Claims to higher knowledge are very common indeed and the list of cases can easily be expanded. The practitioner of Transcendental Meditation can advance through several initiatory levels that one gains access to by means of secret mantras. In a secular setting, psychological theories of the most diverse kind suggest that they offer insights into the human mind that are inaccessible to us as 'naïve' observers of our own behaviours and thought processes. Studying claims to higher knowledge can deliver insights into fundamental cultural practices but goes far beyond the confines of the corpus of esotericism as a historically constructed category.

There is a perhaps even more fundamental quandary concerning the concept of esotericism, apart from the difficulty in agreeing on a definition. As with the concept of mysticism, an issue with the term esotericism is the sheer diversity of currents, people, movements, and texts included in the set. The predicament arises because the category of 'esoteric' currents was constructed on pre-theoretical grounds and scholars only much later attempted to give that category a typological unity as a delimited subset within a larger

set such as 'religion' or 'culture'. A set of objects can be subdivided into subsets along innumerable criteria. Once a set of objects is large, there is an astronomical number of ways of dividing it into possible subsets. To state that the members of a subset have an *air de famille* (which basically means that it 'just feels right') is not very helpful. Attempts to convert such hunches into established scholarly categories by producing short-hand descriptions of them do not automatically make matters better. The fate of once fashionable terms such as fetishism, totemism, astral religion, and animatism should alert us to that. What differentiates fruitful typologies from those that are merely idiosyncratic?

The Swedish author August Strindberg satirized contemporary science in the ninth chapter of his *De lycksaliges ö* (published in *Svenska öden och äfventyr* in 1882). A collector with an unusual passion is granted a state subsidy to study and typologize buttons in accordance to a large number of parameters: their uses, materials, number of holes, and so forth. Ultimately, his colossal efforts at classification result in the founding of an entire new branch of science: buttonology (*knappologi*). Strindberg was known for his strident polemics, and his satire directed against – in his particular case – typologies in archaeology definitely overshot the mark. His point here is, however, a fundamental one in the philosophy of science: a basic condition for setting up a fruitful typology of objects is that the members of a given class need to share some interesting characteristics beyond the sheer fact of fulfilling the criteria set out in the definition. In short: it needs some kind of predictive value.

The predictive value of the esotericism label is far from obvious: it would be very challenging to find shared myths, cosmological doctrines, rituals, elements of material culture, or modes of organization in phenomena as diverse as, for example, the writings of Marsilio Ficino, the Swedenborgian corpus, Spiritualism, Theosophy, the ritual magic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and Satanism.[12] The effort in devising a typology that differentiates the wide variety of 'esoteric' currents from other sets of cultural phenomena meets yet greater challenges once the definitional corpus itself becomes enlarged even further. This is the case when one begins to question the moniker of 'Western' in 'Western esotericism' (cf. Asprem 2014; Roukema and Kilner-Johnson 2018). Well outside any geographical borders

12 This argument summarizes the more extensive discussion in Hammer 2004.

of 'the West' one finds phenomena that either structurally resemble currents in the traditionally delimited corpus, or are historically related to that corpus, or both. An apt example is the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion. It is only mentioned in passing in a parenthetical statement in a single sentence in the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Bergé 2005: 659), yet it has both structural parallels and historical connections with Spiritualism, one of the most important elements in the set designated as Western esotericism. Among its foundational texts are messages said to have been received via mediums from the spirit of the nineteenth-century French author Victor Hugo (Hoskins 2017). At the same time, Caodaism is a specific product of its Vietnamese context and has many features not shared by any European current. To summarize the problem: precisely what criteria should be used to decide whether to include specific currents, writers, and movements outside the West, and does such an inclusion add anything to our understanding of these global phenomena?

The individual phenomena studied by scholars who deal with 'esotericism', that is, currents, organizations, concepts, rituals, elements of material culture, and so forth are obviously real and very worthy of study; the question remains: what do we gain from placing them in a shared category – besides the added legitimacy conferred to studying topics that were at one point in time under-studied but are now quite fashionable?

Mysticism and esotericism

Let us turn to the question of what the two sets, the canonical corpora of mysticism and esotericism, have in common. There is some degree of overlap between the two sets: as noted above, an author such as Jacob Boehme figures prominently in the scholarly literature on both categories. Arthur Versluis argues that there is not only a partial overlap between mysticism and esotericism, but that the two are parts of a continuum of religious phenomena:

> esotericism has as its central characteristic gnosis, meaning experiential insight into the nature of the divine as manifested in the individual and in the cosmos … what is esoteric is inner, hidden from outsiders, non-public, and in this context, associated with secret or semi-secret spiritual teachings. Given this functional definition of esotericism, we can see that mysticism falls naturally within it. Indeed, one could well argue that mysticism represents the purest form of esotericism, in that

> mystical experience is inherently esoteric, that is, an inner dimension of religious experience clearly distinguished from ritual or institutional religious practice even if the mystic endorses and draws upon the latter. Mysticism is, then, in this definition a subset of esotericism; mysticism is by its very nature esoteric. (Versluis n.d.)

My contention here is that Versluis is right in that the two concepts designate phenomena that are essentially alike, but that they are alike for very different reasons than those he adduces. The fundamental characteristic that unites the two sets is the way in which claims to authority and the social formations that potentially ensue from these claims surround them. We have seen how a central aspect of 'mysticism' is the attribution of socially constructed labels, but the same goes for 'esotericism'. If somebody claims that they have achieved a fine-grained understanding of the deity, or of levels of reality, or have uncovered the true characteristics of correspondences, or of living nature, and that this higher understanding is furthermore a scarce resource that they happen to possess, this claim only goes on to be a datum for the study of religions if somebody else engages with it. Only when presented to others, for example, in narrative or iconographic form, does a private conviction of having privileged knowledge become publicly accessible and a religious phenomenon. A visible trace of a putative higher or restricted knowledge, if accepted by others, leads to authority vested in those who claim to have this knowledge. A social formation arises around the people who have such claims attributed to them, and this social formation comprises a number of characteristic elements. For instance, hagiographic narratives can surround them. Emanuel Swedenborg became famous for his purported clairvoyant experiences. A story had him see the great fire of Stockholm in 1759 as it was taking place, although Swedenborg at the time was in Gothenburg, roughly 450 kilometres away (Bergquist 2005: 269–71). Helena Blavatsky was well-known for a range of apparently supernatural phenomena produced by her, and for the extraordinary travels she claimed to have undertaken in her youth.[13]

Locations associated with such individuals or with the cosmology they created can become sacralized and turn into pilgrimage sites. Several contemporary movements have such 'special' places. Anthroposophy has its main

13 These elements of Blavatsky's life are treated with varying degrees of trust or suspicion in the biographies; for a brief, neutral summary, see Godwin 2013.

building: the architecturally striking Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. Semir Osmanagić, the spiritual entrepreneur behind the so-called Bosnian Pyramids, has created a site that attracts thousands of seekers to the Bosnian town of Visoko. Geographic locations as diverse as the Egypt of the pharaohs and the crop circles in the English countryside are visited by tour groups comprised of people in search of esoteric insights or help with any number of personal issues.

Iconography is crafted that represents these privileged individuals in highly stylized ways. The iconic representations of Aleister Crowley, Helena Blavatsky, and Rudolf Steiner are not merely neutral portraits of these people. Well-known photographs of Crowley wearing a triangular hat with an Egyptian symbol, of Blavatsky fixing her intense gaze at the camera, or Steiner sporting a sartorially extravagant neckcloth are carefully styled to emphasize their extraordinary status. Similarly, a vast range of very diverse material culture – dances, ritual paraphernalia, clothing, and so forth – is created. A group of adherents arises that studies the cosmologies and practices the rituals that go back to the founders and to their most significant successors and commentators. In early modern times these social formations were often networks of readers and practitioners. In the post-Enlightenment period, formally organized associations, including the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Theosophical Society, and many others became a common means of ensuring that the legacy of the founder would be disseminated. This summary of how 'esotericism' can be transmuted from a personal conviction of having understood, for example, the web of correspondences that binds together a living nature into a social formation closely resembles the pathway, described above, that potentially converts reports of a purported mystical experience into a social fact amenable to being studied by scholars of religion.

Conclusion

This article started out with examples of individuals whose structurally similar doctrines and practices are seen as examples of mysticism, esotericism, both of these categories, or neither, without any clear theoretical reason for assigning them to any of these categories. Furthermore, the kinds of religious phenomena generally subsumed under each of the labels of mysticism and esotericism are so diverse that no generally accepted definitions have been proposed and no predictive value seems to inhere in either term. The

suggestion made here is that the categories of 'esotericism' and 'mysticism', although they may be convenient descriptive monikers, have little if any theoretical traction. One way of studying the individuals who are generally classed as mystics or esotericists is to follow the pathway from the claims put forth by them to the social formations surrounding them. Potential 'mystics' and 'esotericists', like prophets and charismatic leaders, who start out with tales of an experience and accounts of having access to privileged knowledge, often stumble on the incomprehension or lack of acceptance by others, but in successful cases end up with a social institution that can endure over time.

Olav Hammer is Professor of the Study of Religions, University of Southern Denmark. His main research areas are alternative archaeology, New Age religiosity, and religions in the Theosophical tradition. Major publications include the *Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (ed. with Mikael Rothstein, 2012), and *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia* (ed. with Henrik Bogdan, 2016).

References

Asprem, Egil, 2014. 'Beyond the West: towards a new comparativism in the study of esotericism', *Correspondences*, 2(1), pp. 3–33

Benedict XVI, 2012. 'Apostolic letter proclaiming Saint Hildegard of Bingen, professed nun of the Order of Saint Benedict, a Doctor of the Universal Church', <http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_ben-xvi_apl_20121007_ildegarda-bingen.html> (accessed 10.3.2020)

Bergé, Christine, 2005. 'Kardec, Allen', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism,* eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff *et al.* (Leiden, Brill), pp. 658–9

Bergquist, Lars, 2005. *Swedenborg's Secret: A Biography* (London, The Swedenborg Society)

Bergunder, Michael, 2014. 'What is religion? The unexplained subject matter of religious studies', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26, pp. 246–86

Crapanzano, Vincent, 1973. *The Hamadscha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (Berkeley, University of California Press)

Evans, Jules, 2014. 'Jeff Kripal on the mystical humanities', *The History of Emotions Blog*, 20.2.2014, <https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2014/02/jeff-kripal-on-the-mystical-humanities/> (accessed 10.3.2020)

Faivre, Antoine, 1992. *L'ésotérisme* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France)

———1994. *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, SUNY Press)

Fink-Jensen, Morten, 2016. 'Astrology in the early modern period in Denmark', in *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer (Leiden, Brill), pp. 64–9

Flanagan, Sabina, 1998. *Hildegard of Bingen: A Visionary Life* (London, Routledge)
Forman, Robert K. C., 1990. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (Oxford University Press)
———2011. *Enlightenment Ain't What it's Cracked up to be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul* (Lanham, John Hunt Publishing)
Fox, Matthew, 2012. *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times. Unleashing Her Power in the 21st Century* (Vancouver, Namaste Publishing)
Gellman, Jerome, 2019. 'Mysticism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* summer 2019 edn, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/> (accessed 10.3.2020)
Godwin, Joscelyn, 2013. 'Blavatsky and the first generation of Theosophy', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (Leiden, Brill), pp. 15–24
Green, Nile, 2012. *Sufism: A Global History* (Malden, MA & Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell)
Halle, Judith von, 2016. *Schwanenflügel. Eine spirituelle Autobiographie* (Dornach, Edition Morel)
Hammer, Olav, 2004. 'Esotericism in new religious movements', in *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, ed. James R. Lewis (Oxford University Press), pp. 445–65
Hammersholt, Torben, 2013. 'Steven T. Katz's philosophy of mysticism revisited', *Journal of the American Academy of Religioni*, 81(2), pp. 467–90
Hanegraaff, Wouter J., 2005. 'Forbidden knowledge: anti-esoteric polemics and academic research', *Aries*, 5, pp. 225–54
———*2012. Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press)
Hinckley, Gordon B., 2002. 'The marvelous foundation of our faith', The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints [website], <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2002/10/the-marvelous-foundation-of-our-faith?lang=eng> (accessed 10.3.2020)
Hoskins, Janet Alison, 2017. 'Caodaism', World Religions and Spirituality [website], 10.8.2017, <https://wrldrels.org/2017/08/10/caodaism/> (accessed 10.3.2020)
Inner Traditions, n.d. Inner traditions & Bear Company [website], <https://www.innertraditions.com/> (accessed 10.3.2020)
James, William, 1985 (1902). *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth, Penguin)
Jantzen, Grace M., 1995. *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press)
Katz, Steven T., 1978. 'Language, epistemology, and mysticism', in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York, Oxford University Press), pp. 22–74
———1983. *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford University Press)

———1992. *Mysticism and Language* (Oxford University Press)
Lincoln, Bruce, 2003. *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (The University of Chicago Press)
Lucas, Phillip Charles, 2005. 'Davis, Andrew Jackson', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff *et al.* (Leiden, Brill), pp. 299–301
McCutcheon, Russell, 2012. 'Introduction', in *Religious Experience: A Reader*, eds. Craig Martin and Russell McCutcheon (Sheffield & Bristol, Equinox), pp. 1–16
McGinn, Bernard, 2016. *Mysticism in the Reformation (1500–1650)* (New York, Crossroad Publishing Company)
Moore, Peter, 2005. 'Mysticism [further considerations]', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd edn, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI, Macmillan Reference), pp. 6355–9
Nelstrop, Louise, 2016. 'Mysticism', in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, eds. Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden, Brill), pp. 496–504
Newman, Barbara, 2005. 'What did it mean to say "I saw"? The clash between theory and practice in medieval visionary culture', *Speculum*, 80(1), pp. 1–43
'Open letter', 2013. 'Open letter – or – the Judith von Halle phenomenon continued', transl. by Tom Mellett and Frank Thomas Smith, *Southern Cross Review*, 8.4.2013, <https://southerncrossreview.org/89/jvh-open.html> (accessed 10.3.2020)
Proudfoot, Wayne, 1985. *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, University of California Press)
Renard, John, 2008. *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley, University of California Press)
Roukema, Aren, and Allan Kilner-Johnson, 2018. 'Editorial: time to drop the "Western"', *Correspondences*, 6(2), pp. 109–15
Schimmel, Annemarie, 1983. 'Sufism and the Islamic tradition', in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions,* ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford University Press), pp. 131–47
Sharf, Robert, 1995. 'Buddhist modernism and the rhetoric of meditative experience', *Numen*, 42(3), pp. 228–83
———2000. 'The rhetoric of experience and the study of religion', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7(11–12), pp. 267–87
Shermer, Michael, 2005. 'Abducted!', Michael Shermer's website, February 2005, <http://www.michaelshermer.com/2005/02/abducted/> (accessed 10.3.2020)
Smart, Ninian, 1969. *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons)
———1989. *The World's Religions* (Cambridge University Press)
Stuckrad, Kocku von, 1998. 'Esoteric discourse and the European study of

religion', in *Western Esotericism,* ed. Tore Ahlbäck, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 20 (Turku/Åbo, The Donner Institute), pp. 217–36

———2005. 'Western esotericism: towards an integrative model of interpretation', *Religio*, 35, pp. 78–97

Szőnyi, György, 2005. 'Dee, John', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism,* eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff *et al.* (Leiden, Brill), pp. 301–9

Taves, Ann, and Steven C. Harper, 2016. 'Joseph Smith's first vision: new methods for the analysis of experience-related texts', *Mormon Studies Review*, 3(1), pp. 53–84

Versluis, Arthur, n.d. 'Mysticism and the study of esotericism, part 2', *Esoterica*, <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Mysticism.htm> (accessed 10.3.2020)

Weber, Max, 1948. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. with an Introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, Routledge)

Weeks, Andrew, 2005. 'Boehme, Jakob', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff *et al.* (Leiden, Brill), pp. 185–91

Zarrabi-Zadeh, Saeed, 2008. 'Defining mysticism: a survey of main definitions', *Transcendent Philosophy*, 9, pp. 77–92

———2016. *Practical Mysticism in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Meister Eckhart* (London, Routledge)

Ethical encounters in the archives

On studying individuals in esoteric contexts

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.85671

MAARIT LESKELÄ-KÄRKI

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

This article discusses archival sources and biographical history in the context of the history of modern esotericism. Presenting as a case study, and the archival material of, a Finnish writer, Aarni Kouta (1884–1924), the article asks what are the ethical challenges that arise when studying individuals and their intimate sources in the context of esotericism? The starting point is in the forgotten figures of esoteric history, and thus the article reflects how our understanding of history, and more precisely on the history of esotericism, changes when we look at those whose history has not been presented before. I will argue that we need to be much more sensitive to the differences of the past when making interpretations concerning individuals, and we have to be ethically aware of our position as interpreters. This means careful working with historical source materials, but also sensitivity to both the long traditions of esotericism and to the multiple contexts of particular historical moments.

We encounter people from the past through the sources they have left behind, either by chance or because of a conscious effort to preserve. Either way, the sources we have are always partial and limited. A researcher interested in an individual life is always dependent on the material she has. Thus, the availability of sources has a strong influence on how we encounter people of the past. For example, a thorough, detailed life-long diary offers many more opportunities to analyse individual experiences than a collection of sporadic and fragmentary material that might include only few letters, some manuscripts, or notes.

The historian Jill Lepore (2013) had a very limited number of sources available when she started writing the biography of Jane Franklin, the unknown sister of the eighteenth-century politician, diplomat, mathematician and one of the founding fathers of the United States, Benjamin Franklin. In the context of this article, it is worth remembering that Franklin himself was involved in the wider esoteric movement as he was a freemason,

Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences
Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 29 (2020), pp. 28–48

became a grand master in 1734, and as a printer published the first Masonic book in the Americas. In her research Lepore was not, however, interested in the life of Benjamin Franklin, but that of his sister, with whom he had a close relationship, although there are no remaining public documents to show that.

From a very scattered and fragmentary collection of source material, Lepore constructed a history of an eighteenth-century woman. Although exceptional, Jane Franklin's circumstances could be compared to the possibilities and conditions of many women of that particular historical era. Lepore's book reveals how what we can know of past lives is quite accidental. Throughout her book, she discusses how historians are bound by the randomness of history: 'History is what is written and can be found; what isn't saved is lost, sunken and rotten, eaten by earth' (Lepore 2013: 6). Historical research is fundamentally bound to the materials that can be found, and in this article I will particularly pay attention to the encounters between these materials and a researcher as well as to the ways we can ethically approach the individual life-stories of people from the past.

Lepore's biography displays some recent trends, or even turns, in the field of academic biographical research. Women's agency, the gender perspective more generally, the perspective of the marginal and forgotten in history, as well as so-called relational biographies concerning couples, family members, friends or colleagues have become more and more popular (on new biographical research in the field of historical research, see e.g. Caine 2010; Halldórsdottir *et al.* 2016; Possing 2017; Leskelä-Kärki 2017).[1] Although this article deals with a male protagonist, the Finnish writer and poet Aarni Kouta (1884–1924), the perspectives of the so-called 'new biography' come close, as the main character of my research is a forgotten, uncanonised writer, whose life ended prematurely and cannot be seen as typical for a biographical narrative that has concentrated more on the history of 'great' and 'important' people (see also Leskelä-Kärki 2016: 188, 206).

The changes in biographical writing have also influenced the methodological discussions in the field of biographical research. This article is connected to these scholarly discussions as it discusses the practices of

1 In my previous research I have pointed out the hybrid aspect of the genre of biography, which demands careful methodological and theoretical tools and consciousness. For these discussions, see e.g. Leskelä-Kärki 2017.

biographical research in a more specific context concerning the history of esotericism. This article draws on a similar kind of idea of the randomness in biographical research that Lepore above argues is a feature: as historians, we are bound to the fragmented material that is left from the past, and sometimes it is only coincidences that bring us together with the material. In this article, I will ask what happens when we encounter historical, archival material. Using the archival material of Aarni Kouta and his life narrative as an example, I will reflect upon how archival materials turn into research, and how a life lived turns into a biographical account.

My focus will be on the ethical challenges of studying individuals and their private sources in the context of esotericism. More generally, I will reflect ideas on biographical research related to individuals in esoteric contexts. I argue that we need to be much more sensitive to the differences in the past when doing interpretations concerning individuals, and we have to be ethically aware of our position as interpreters. This means careful working with historical source materials, but also sensitivity, both to the long traditions of esotericism and to the multiple contexts of particular historical moments.

The individual and the otherness of the past

As the research concerning esotericism has extended over the past decade into a very diverse field of study, from the study of religions into the fields of history, art, literature, music and popular culture studies, the approaches and theoretical perspectives have multiplied as well (see e.g. Harmainen and Leskelä-Kärki 2017; Bauduin *et al.* 2018; Ferguson and Radford 2018; Mahlamäki and Leskelä-Kärki 2018; Kokkinen 2019; Kokkinen and Mahlamäki 2020; Faxneld 2020). Also popular literature has been active in presenting esoteric ideas, movements and individuals, but often in a way that has labelled people connected with esotericism as eccentric, or even immoral, pathological, and marginal (for Finnish examples see e.g. Häkkinen and Iitti 2014). In our current research project, 'Seekers of the New' (see the project's website), our aim is to approach the cultural history of esotericism in Finland through the experiences of individuals, and seek for more solid, ethical ways of approaching esotericism in individual lives (Harmainen and Leskelä-Kärki 2017; Mahlamäki and Leskelä-Kärki 2018; Kokkinen and Mahlamäki 2020).

As many scholars have argued, esotericism is a challenging concept that escapes strict definitions (Kokkinen 2019: 46–52; Kokkinen and Mahlamäki 2020: 13–16). For me, as a cultural historian, the scholarly context of modern western esotericism offers a new kind of perspective on the past, where it is possible to focus on the ways esoteric ideas, currents and movements have influenced culture and society. 'Esotericism' or 'esoteric' was not a concept used by contemporaries at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, they talked about 'spirit matter', 'occult', 'secrecy', 'spirituality' etc. (see e.g. Owen 2004: 4–8, 19–24; Leskelä-Kärki 2006: 248–58; Harmainen 2014; Kokkinen 2019; Faxneld 2020).

In the context of this article, as in my research more generally, I approach the topic as a historian interested in the ways people of the past experienced the new esoteric movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I do not regard these movements or discussions concerning the occult and esoteric as something separate or marginal to society, but as a genuine part of the cultural and social discussions of the time. As Alexandra Owen in her groundbreaking historical study argues, occultism[2] was not a shadow of modernity, but an essential part of the new worldview (Owen 2004: 4–8).

So far, our project 'Seekers of the New' has already shown how extensive and important the esoteric movements, ideas and thoughts have been in Finnish cultural history, in art, literature, in politics and in everyday life (see e.g. Kokkinen 2019; Kokkinen and Mahlamäki 2020). As a scholarly concept esotericism opens up a new perspective onto the history that is already known; it reveals previously unknown corners and paths and imbues them with new meanings. Thus, a perspective of esotericism can change our perception of Finnish cultural history altogether.[3]

In the project, we are both seeking for the previously unknown people within the esoteric circles, as well as looking into the ways esotericism has

2 Owen published her work in 2004, and did not use the concept of 'esoteric' or 'esotericism'. The 'occult' and 'occultism' are general concepts that she uses to discuss 'the new spiritual movement' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly Britain, but also in a wider European sense. She was one of the first historians to focus deeply on this field, and for a cultural historian her interpretations are very valid and influential.

3 In this regard, it is bit difficult to compare the situation of Finland to some other European countries, since so much more research has already been done elsewhere over the past twenty years, although that of modern western esotericism is still rather in its early stages.

affected already famous historical figures that have been labelled 'great men' in the national history of Finland.[4] However, it is not interesting only to look at those historical characters whose influence has already been acknowledged; the forgotten, marginalized or silenced figures are also of great importance, particularly in the context of esotericism. The forgotten ones in history have often been women, and in the context of Finnish research on esotericism this has been the case until recent scholarly works have started to raise awareness of women active in various esoteric movements (see Leskelä-Kärki 2006; Mahlamäki 2017; see also Mahlamäki and Leskelä-Kärki 2018).[5]

However, the forgetting does not only concern women, since there are many forgotten men as well. Their historical influence opens up in a different way in an esoteric context, and they may have been forgotten also exactly because of their esoteric views and actions. In an esoteric context, forgetting is often at least twofold: the esoteric interests of a person might have

4 This means for example painters of the golden era of national artists such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Hugo Simberg, and Pekka Halonen, whom Nina Kokkinen has been studying (Kokkinen 2019). Kokkinen's work has raised a lot of interest as these artists have been for the first time represented in the context of esotericism. Also many nationally important literary figures such as Eino Leino and J. H. Erkko are being studied in this context (see e.g. Harmainen 2010 and 2014).

5 Internationally, feminist and gender studies have been interested in the field of esotericism, both in contemporary society and in history, and it has started to produce a vast amount of scholarly works (e.g. Owen 1989; Braude 1989; Dixon 2001; Heidle and Snoek 2008; Kraft 2013). From a gender perspective, the history of esoteric movements is interesting since one of the biggest and influential movements, the Theosophical Society, was established by a woman and was also led for several decades by women. Spiritualism was led not only by men but also by women like Emma Hardinge Britten, and women were active as mediums and as performers during the late nineteenth century (see more in Braude 1988; Owen 1989; Kaartinen and Leskelä-Kärki 2020). However, women's agency has not been acknowledged in the earlier Finnish writings concerning esoteric movements. Even the most recent popular fact book *Valonkantajat* neglects the influence of women. The list of characters has only a handful of women, and of those only four are women who have been active agents in some esoteric form of movement. *Valonkantajat* (Häkkinen and Iitti 2015) has been a pioneering book covering the previously unwritten history, and as such it discusses the common distortion in the perspective: once we start covering something new, the men are important, and it is only a secondary consideration whether women have also been active.

been marginalized or 'forgotten' in earlier studies and/or historical sources (see e.g. Kaartinen 2018), or their esotericism might have been a cause for neglecting the influence of a person in a broader cultural context.

Individuals can thus act as meaningful agents whose experiences and actions open up the previously undetected scene of esotericism in Finnish cultural history. Interpreting individuals in their social and cultural context allows us to both see what is different in particular historical spaces, and to recognize the familiar that travels across historical times and circumstances. Thus, an esoteric perspective might turn the previously known cultural history upside down, as it reveals hidden meanings, hidden actions and hidden figures.

A historian is always faced with otherness and strangeness. Discussing the perspective of cultural history, Professor of English Bruce Johnson refers to a citation from L. P. Hartley's 1953 novel *The Go-Between*: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there'. The latter sentence reminds us, as Johnson puts it:

> …that the past is indeed heard as distant echoes of both itself, and of those who have engaged with it as historians. The past can never directly represent itself to us, but, in the word of another writer seeking illumination, is perceived 'through a glass darkly'.

Johnson points out the crucial idea of the presence of history, and its ever-changing nature by continuing as follows:

> The past is present in two senses: that our history never leaves us, never relinquishes its hold over our sense of what is possible now and in the future, and it is present in the sense that the past is still in flux through acts of memory: it has not finished its doing. (Johnson 2011: 1–2)

To say this in other words; history is always present and changing in one particular historical moment.

These words seem especially fitting when discussing the history of esotericism, and the ways we could study those individuals who became interested in various esoteric currents. The questions that arise from the currently flourishing research tradition of modern western esotericism open up history in a new way – we recognize things we haven't recognized before, and we are able to connect them to a larger, transnational history of esoteric

currents, movements and ideas. All the research done at the present time changes our view on history, and also allows us to write new chapters, in this case, in the cultural history of Finland.

A forgotten man in the archives

Approximately two years ago our project 'Seekers of the New' received a call from a descendant of the Finnish poet Aarni Kouta. She had heard about our project on a radio programme (Häkkinen 2016). The outcome of this phone call was the receipt by us of several cardboard boxes full of Aarni Kouta's personal material. These included his published books and manuscripts, his writings, some collections of the theosophical journal *Tietäjä*, as well as the *Ruusu-Risti* journal, a few hundred letters, notes, writings of his, and, what is most interesting, tens and tens of photographs and glass negatives. At that time, Kouta was, for all of us in the project, unknown; no more than a distantly familiar name related to the early twentieth-century literary

The archival material of Aarni Kouta was donated to the research project 'Seekers of the New' in 2019. Archives of Aarni Kouta (AAK). Photo by Maarit Leskelä-Kärki.

poetic scene. However, as we became familiar with the material, it became evident that Aarni Kouta would become one of the important esoteric persons in our project and its future publications.

Kouta represents an interesting figure in the context of Finnish esotericism. Besides his (mainly forgotten) literary activities as a poet and translator, he was quite deeply involved with the theosophical movement and those close to the society, especially Pekka Ervast, the founder of Theosophical Society in Finland. Aarni Kouta's material opens up a new perspective on the tradition of Finnish esoteric literature, as well as on the influence of esotericism in the small literary circles of Finland in the early years of the 1900s. The position of Aarni Kouta is, in a way, twofold: a forgotten writer in the context of a forgotten esotericism in the cultural history of Finland. I argue that by studying his life story and the materials in his archive it is possible to add new dimensions to the connections between literature and esoteric currents in Finland during the early twentieth century; and also to reveal some reasons behind this cultural forgetting.

Arnold Elias Candolin was born near Hämeenlinna in September 1884, and was the son of a vicar. From early on he seems to have directed his passion towards writing and literature. Attending upper secondary school in Porvoo, a small town near Helsinki, in the early 1900s, he had already started reading Nietzsche and became one of those writers whose work and ambitions were connected to Nietzschean philosophy and ideals. In Esko Ervasti's study from 1960 he is one of the Nietzschean writers in Finnish literary history of the early 1900s together with, for example, Joel Lehtonen, Volter Kilpi, Eino Leino and L. Onerva, who were all also close friends of Kouta. Already at the age of 17, he started translating *Also sprach Zarathustra*. This was finished in 1907, and thus became the first translation of Nietzsche in Finland. Later he translated *The Antichrist* in 1909 and a collection of his poetry. Aarni Kouta was himself mostly a poet, and he published altogether eight poetry collections as well as some prose works. Aside from that he worked as a translator and was an active writer in newspapers and particularly esoteric journals.[6] In the following, I will look at Kouta's archival remains from three perspectives.

6 Facts and details of Kouta's life are collected from various sources, particularly from Ervasti 1960; Saurama, AKK; 'Aarni Kouta – runoilijakuva', AKK; Kortelainen 2006; Tarkka 2009.

Firstly, in the archival material Kouta is represented in a very specific way, since a great proportion of the material consists of photographs and photo albums mostly taken and collected by his second partner Elsa Roschier, who was an enthusiastic amateur photographer. The material consists of hundreds of photographs and albums, most of them taken by Elsa, but also by Aarni. Their family life can be followed from the albums, since she photographed their home, their family life, summer places and Helsinki city life in the early 1900s. The couple had two sons who were born around 1910. The photographs open up a rare and immensely valuable perspective into their life and also their networks, since there are many photos also of their friends; Finnish writers and artists of that time such as L. Onerva and Eino Leino, Juhani Aho, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Toivo and Alma Kuula and Wilho Sjöström. The photographs show in a very concrete and material way how people are connected to other people, and how lives are relational. Kouta's life opens up in the various relations that his archive reveals. Kouta's literary work and his networks open up a perspective on his surroundings, on those people he networked with. This way it is possible to find new interpretations and new facts on the meaning of esoteric movements, ideas and undercurrents. An individual opens up a larger perspective than on himself only.[7]

Secondly, the archives show how Kouta's esoteric activity is connected to both theosophy and the Rosicrucian movement which Pekka Ervast established in 1920. There are several copies of the *Tietäjä* and *Ruusu-Risti* journals as well as some letters from, for example, Pekka Ervasti. No extensive correspondences have been preserved, though. It is as yet somewhat unknown how exactly Kouta got to know Pekka Ervast, the founder of Theosophical Society in 1907, and later, the founder of the Rosicrucian Order (Ruusu-Risti) in Finland in 1920. But previous research has already acknowledged Eino Leino's deep interest in theosophy and his friendship with Pekka Ervast, so it seems obvious that Kouta was involved in the same circles in Helsinki.[8] Kouta's works are to be found at least in the numbers of the *Tietäjä* journal published by the Finnish Theosophical Society in the late 1910s and then in the early 1920s in the journal *Ruusu-Risti* published

7 On relationality in life writing, see Leskelä-Kärki 2016: 191–3. On relationality in group biography, see e.g. Hakosalo 2016 and Harmainen 2016.

8 On Ervasti's theosophy, see e.g. Harmainen 2010 and Harmainen 2020: 105–11.

Aarni Kouta by his desk, *c.* 1910. Photo by Elsa Roschier. Archives of Aarni Kouta (AAK).

by the Ruusu-Risti society.[9] The decision of Pekka Ervast to establish a new kind of movement and take some distance from theosophy can be seen as a way to connect the movement more deeply to the Finnish context and Western culture at a time when the international theosophical movement turned more and more towards Hinduism and Asian culture. The connections to Christian culture were more in the focus in Ruusu-Risti. The movement stands for the idea of rebirth and the law of karma. In Ervast's idea the movement of Ruusu-Risti is what Blavatskian theosophy was in its purest form (Laine and Kokkinen 2020). In its rules the Ruusu-Risti society declares that it is the temple of free thought, whose members seek the core of truth, the secret godly wisdom, that is hidden in all religions, mythologies, philosophical and scientific systems (the rules of Ruusu-Risti, AAK). Kouta was a contributor to *Ruusu-Risti* journal, but documentation on his other activities in the society is so far lacking.

9 Here I prefer to use the Finnish Ruusu-Risti, since the version Ervast established is niether related to the earlier international Rosicrucian movement, nor to The Salon de la Rose+Croix. Ervast's decision to establish a new society tells more about the inner contradictions in the Theosophical Society.

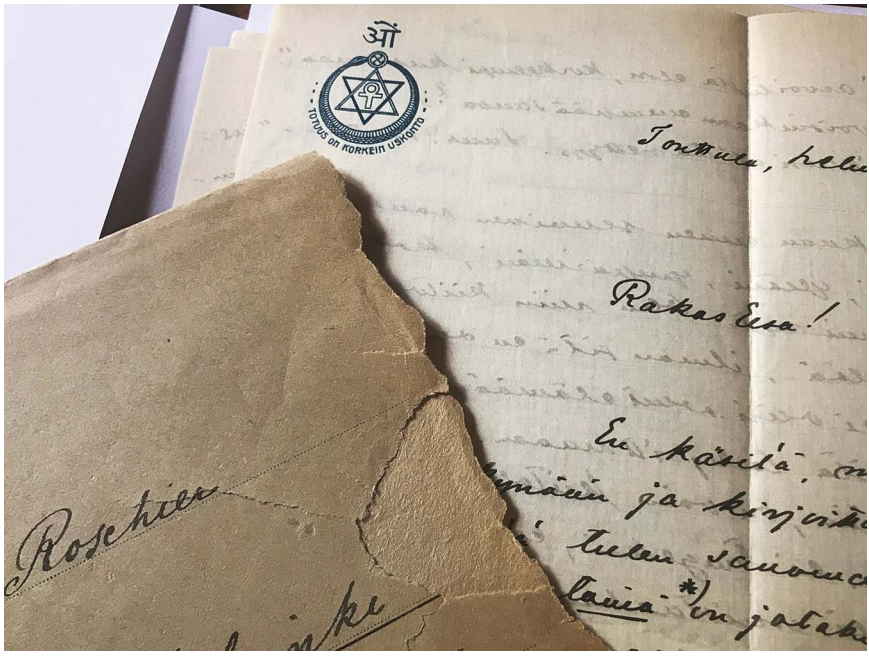
Thirdly, besides social networks and his activities in esoteric movements, the Kouta archives reveal more delicate and ethically difficult information. From various sources it can be deduced that Kouta suffered from mental unbalance, probably depression, and most of all he seems to have been a drug addict using morphine. Kouta was admitted to a mental asylum in Kivelä in 1917 suffering from anaemia, depression and anxiety – his brother had said that he had been using morphine and cocaine for many years. This fact is recorded in a book portraying the history of drug use in Finland, and Kouta is there by mention of his initials only (Ylikangas 2009). It can also be verified from a biographical account that Kouta's brother wrote after his death, and that is still available among Kouta's personal archives ('Aarni Kouta – Runoilijakuva', AAK).

In Kouta's case, his mental condition is quite significant, since he committed suicide in 1924. Just before his death he published a poetry collection called *Aurinkohäät* (Sun Wedding). In the manuscript there is a dedication to Elsa that says 'to Elsa, my only one, who has given me everything that has been and is worth living for' (Aurinkohäät, AAK). Kouta's archive also consists of tens of letters exchanged between the spouses, including the years they were no longer living together (approximately from 1914 onwards). Kouta's letters from his last years in the 1920s provide especially challenging material for a scholar. The letters are long and contemplate his feelings for Elsa and his longing for her. The most challenging document is his last letter to her. Kouta started to write a letter to Elsa at the point he had decided to take a mortal dose of veronal; later his brother mentions that it took three days for him to die ('Aarni Kouta – Runoilijakuva', AAK). The letter has a handwritten message on the cover saying that it should be given to Elsa after his death, and it is surrounded by a black line, that reveals it is a mourning letter of some kind. In this article, my focus is not on the content of this letter; rather, it stands for the ethical challenges of this particular biographical case. This letter, or Kouta's mental health, is not to be separated from an analysis of Kouta's esoteric life, since his personality, literary identity and worldview are deeply interwoven.

Kouta's fragmentary archive opens up the challenges of biographical research. It consists mainly of the material he himself has kept, and after his death it has probably been saved by his brother, possibly also by Elsa and later on by some of his children. Apart from these materials, we can find information about Kouta from various biographies concerning his close colleagues and friends. The biographies of Eino Leino, Joel Lehtonen and

L. Onerva (e.g. Tarkka 2009; Kortelainen 2006; Rajala 2018) tell incidental stories, for example, of his trip to Rome in 1908 together with Leino, Onerva and Lehtonen, or their co-operation on the journal *Sunnuntai* in the late 1910s. Yet we have to ask; how are we able to construct life narratives according to scattered sources that are often quite randomly saved? What can all this material reveal of Aarni Kouta as a poet, as an esoteric person, and of his position in the cultural history of Finnish literature and writing? Does all this give some answers as to how he came to be forgotten? And what does forgetting even mean? So in the end, the researcher stands alone with the material of Kouta, sees him and his wife Elsa in pictures, and wonders how to approach his life story.

Kouta's archives could be approached from several perspectives. He could be viewed against the context of literary history in Finland, and as one of the young, prominent writers of the early 1900s who were interested in philosophical and symbolist approaches particularly related to Nietzsche. There he is among the most distinguished and canonized writers such as Eino Leino and Volter Kilpi. Another perspective, that could be added to



Aarni Kouta's letter to his wife Elsa Roschier in 1919, written on the headed paper of the Finnish Theosophical Society. Archives of Aarni Kouta (AAK). Photo by Maarit Leskelä-Kärki.

the previous one, is a gender perspective. How could Kouta's somewhat unstable, addictive personality be analysed in the context of manhood and various gender discussions of the early 1900s? And, last but not least, how could Kouta's life story and archives help to open up the hidden history of esotericism and esoteric movements in Finnish cultural history?

From a biographical viewpoint the international history of modern esotericism has been written from the perspective of leaders, influential figures and prestigious esotericists. This is, of course, not a surprising fact, since biography has until recently been dedicated mostly to the 'grand' figures of history (statesmen, kings and queens, famous artists and writers, politicians etc.). However, over the past three decades the focus has changed, mostly due to an overall change in history writing. This change has mostly been affected by women's history, the history of everyday life, and marginal histories. This turn has had a huge influence also on biographical writing. Particularly from the early 2000s we can see a flow of biographical works related to forgotten persons or marginal figures, as well as various methodological means of approaching historical lives (about the more general change, see e.g. Caine 2009; Halldórsdottir *et al.* 2016; Possing 2017).

The field of biography in the modern history of esotericism covers such names as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Rudolf Steiner, G. I. Gurdjieff and Aleister Crowley, about whom already tens and tens of biographies and biographical accounts have been written. The biographical literature related to the history of esotericism can be seen as many sided; there are, for example, the popular, yet research-based biographies of well-known figures written, for example, by Gary Lachman[10]. The more scholarly biographical books tend to have a certain perspective or thematic angle when studying individuals (e.g. Pasi 2014) and then there's, obviously, the long tradition of writing traditional biographies on leading figures of esoteric movements. Research on esotericism covers also those biographical accounts where the writer has a reverent relationship to his or her subject – these are written mainly inside the esoteric movements. All these various biographical types can be seen in parallel with biographical writing in in general.

The field of biographical writing seems to hold quite a firm hand on traditional ways of recounting the life of important esoteric men and women. It

10 He has written biographies on, for example, Helena Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Emanuel Swedenborg, Carl Gustav Jung.

has not been interested in the 'ordinary' participants or marginal figures of the movement, or on a more relational perspective towards esoteric persons. The case of Aarni Kouta opens up a different kind of perspective, and the particular nature of his archive allows us also to ponder various ethical challenges. Some of them are particularly related to the study of the history of esoteric persons; however, many of these challenges are more general, and valid for all biographical research. In the following, I will raise some of these issues and discuss the ethics of this particular biographical case study.

Empathy as an ethical standpoint

In recounting Kouta's life according to his remaining material, it seems I have already constructed a certain narrative of his life. I have contextualized Kouta with the idea of the marginal and forgotten in the history of Finnish esotericism, brought up his close networks with more canonized writers, pointed out his connections with theosophy and Ruusu-Risti, as well as dwelt on the misery of his life. One has to ask, how will his life narrative be constructed in my future research? What kind of story of Finnish esotericism will it illuminate?

These considerations force one to encounter necessary ethical questions that we are faced with when dealing with individuals from the past and their autobiographical material. Writing a biography is a dialogical process in which the writer constantly mirrors his or her interpretations in relation to the other, the subject of the biography. As biographers, we thus become deeply involved with the past lives – we become interpreters, actors, close bystanders, who also come to be affected by the stories we read and by the interpretations we construct. In my previous research I have argued that we need to pay attention to these emotions, attachments and detachments, and in doing this, I have proposed empathy as a conceptual tool (Leskelä-Kärki 2006: 83–5; Leskelä-Kärki 2014; Halldórsdottir *et al.* 2016: 25).

As the word 'empathy' comes from the Greek words *em pathos* ('to feel inside'), that means an ability to put oneself into other person's position and to understand how the other feels. Empathy is thus not the same as compassion (*sym pathos*, 'to feel together'), since empathy means more the inner understanding of a person. Empathy could be seen as a statement; admitting the presence of a researcher and the reflexivity that a biographical research demands. Empathy could work as a concept to point out the meaning of the position of a researcher – thus it does not mean that a biographer would try

to experience something together with his or her protagonists, or identify with them. Rather, it means also taking a critical distance towards them, to ask questions from them, to be visibly present in the research, and to recognize one's position (Leskelä-Kärki 2006: 78–85, 636; Leskelä-Kärki 2014).

From this perspective, empathy can be regarded as an essential part of the research process, where every phase is important, from the very first moments spent in the archives, in the midst of the various, fragmentary materials dealt with, up until the process of writing, gathering information, and making interpretations. Empathy requires slowness; slow moments with your sources, days and weeks in the archives.[11] When working with material such as Aarni Kouta's archive, this slowness proved to be a point of departure for an ethical approach. For me, Kouta was an unknown figure whose poetry I had not read, whose life story I did not know, and whose impact on the cultural history of Finland was hidden. Thus, going through his archives, reading his letters, trying to make sense of his messy handwriting and confusing emotions, seeing his manuscripts, looking at him in the photographs, looking and reading the fragments of his life at a slow pace has been of utmost importance in order to start seeing him in a larger cultural context. Consequently, I have paid attention to those moments and fragments that I regard as valuable perspectives to his life – another scholar would see something different in these same archives.

This is what empathy is about: seeing and recognizing valuable moments during the research process. Empathy works through imagination. One cannot be empathetic without an ability to imagine. On the basis of various materials and historical facts we have to be able to imagine the person from the past, and his life. And in this we also need an ability to carefully contextualize the surroundings of such people. Consequently, we could conclude, that the key to understanding people from the past is in the historical context. Here context refers to the broad understanding we are able to attain from the historical and social context of an individual. In this we have to be sensitive to historical differences as well. With this kind of careful contextualisation, we could use empathy as a possible way to make individuals from the past understandable.

The empathetic approach allows us to see the past life story not as a final conclusion but as a process and interpretation, a possible narrative

11 On slowness in the archives, see e.g. Lejeune 2009: 132.

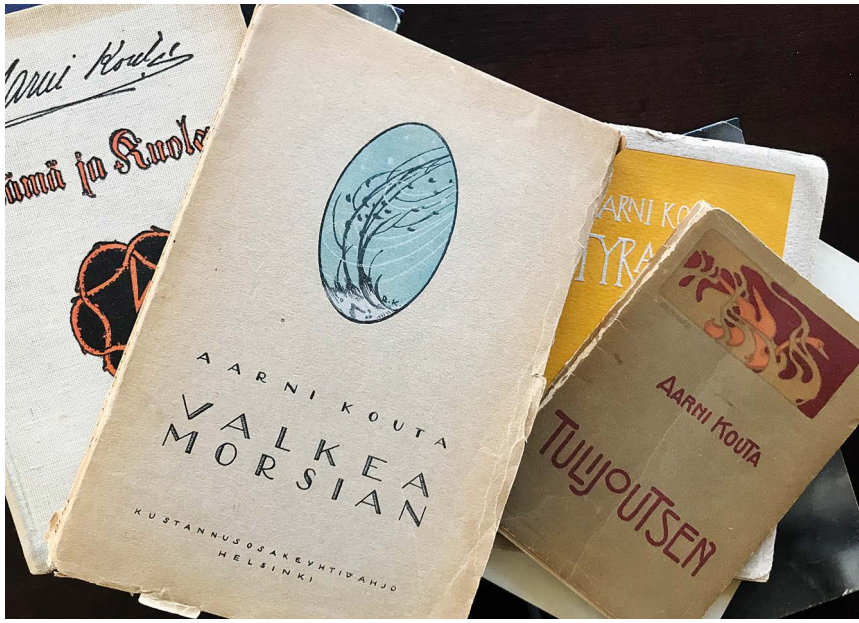
seen and written from one possible perspective, as a possibility, not as a concluding final narrative.[12] The cultural historian Jukka Sarjala (2014) has discussed the concept of 'an endless individual', who does not empty itself into one context, but is on the move constantly. For Sarjala, the question of the changing nature of an individual is fundamental. A human being is all the time on the move towards various directions, and he or she does not fit coherently into one particular context. Thus, we have to be able to imagine people from the past as endlessly changing, and be sensitive to the wide variety of contexts of particular historical moments.

In the context of the history of esotericism the idea of an endless individual could prove to be a valuable point. Since the whole concept of esotericism is quite obscure, the idea of endlessness seems appropriate particularly when we study people from the past in this context. Often esotericism offers only one possible context for an individual, since only some have clearly stated their esoteric context, for example by being a member of some movement. When discussing artists and writers it is more common that their connections to esoteric movements are quite unclear. Thus, the importance of esoteric contexts varies, and it seems, that, for example, in the case of Aarni Kouta, we would have to analyse his writings in great depth in order to thoroughly examine the meanings of the occult and the esoteric in his life. This demands also a close reading of his various connections to various literary contexts and relationships at different times of his life. The esoteric and the occult offers one possible, and in itself also an endless, context for his life.

Kouta represents a case where silence and forgetting play a major part. His case shows on a micro level how cultural memory is constructed. He was part of the most important and flourishing group of young artists and writers, published many poetry collections and also translated some of the most influential literature of his time. His life story seems to be that of a seeker; he attached himself to many other literary figures and seems to have been searching for the inner understanding of life and humanity.[13] Nonetheless, Kouta has been on the margins of Finnish literary history. Of course, his career was not a long one, and also his drug abuse and suicide must have affected his cultural position, but still there remains the question as to whether his esotericism has somehow influenced this marginal position. It

12 About the idea of possibility in cultural history, see e.g. Salmi 2010.

13 On seekership, see Kokkinen 2019: 52–66.



The body of Aarni Kouta's literary work consists primarily of eight collections of poems. Archives of Aarni Kouta (AAK). Photo by Maarit Leskelä-Kärki. s

seems that Kouta's material and his life story can offer diverse perspectives and possibilities in constructing interpretations, where the importance of esoteric ideas, currents and networks would be more visible and valued.

Aarni Kouta's life story, and the material he has left behind, leads a researcher to ponder how we constitute one person's life, and what we can, ultimately, know about past lives. How does biographical knowledge come into being, and how accidental is this knowledge, in the end? Asking these questions, we seem to be at the core of humanity and life: What is life? What is humanity? What is an individual's part in larger historical currents? These questions were also asked by theosophists, spiritualists, anthroposophists, rosicrucians, and others attracted to new esoteric ideas and movements of the early twentieth century. For a biographer, these questions must always be at the core of our research. In the case of Aarni Kouta the questions related to his life remain to be answered, but to conclude this article, it is important to hear his own voice; how he saw life and a human being's part in it. In an extract from his poem 'Katoavaisuuden kuoro' (A Choir of the Perishable) Kouta sees life as follows:

What is life?
A light golden ribbon of the Moon Goddess,
That joins together earth and heaven,
Bridge between night and the sun.
What is life?
The silver rain of the daylight,
That tenderly falls on the troubles of Man.[14]
(Kouta 1911: 34)

Maarit Leskelä-Kärki (PhD, Adjunct Professor) works as a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Cultural History at the University of Turku. She is also the vice-director of SELMA: Centre for the Study of Storytelling, Experientiality and Memory, and the Director of the research project 'Seekers of the New' (2018–20). Her main research interests include life-writing studies, the cultural history of writing, gender history and cultural history of modern western esotericism. She has written for example on epistolary and diary practices (e.g. edited anthology *Päiväkirjojen jäljillä. Historiantutkimus ja omasta elämästä kirjoittaminen*, Vastapaino 2020), biographical research (e.g. edited volume *Biography, Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives*, k&h-kustannus 2016; *Toisten elämät. Kirjoituksia elämäkerroista*, Avain 2017) and on women in spiritualism (in the anthology *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa*, Vastapaino 2020).

References

Archival sources

Archives of Aarni Kouta, The Archives of the School of History, Culture, and Arts Studies, University of Turku (AAK)
'Aarni Kouta – Runoilijakuva'
Kouta, Aarni: Aurinkohäät, manuscript
Saurama, Anna: Notes on the personal history and family history of Aarni Kouta, information sent as document to the author

Literature and other sources

Bauduin, Tessel M., and Henrik Johnsson (eds.), 2018. *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema* (London, Palgrave Macmillan)

14 'Mitä elämä on? / Kevyt Kuuttaren kultarihma, / mi liittää yhtehen maan ja taivaan, / välisilta yön sekä auringon. / Mitä elämä on? / Päivänpaistehen hopeavihma, / mi lankee lempeenä ihmisen vaivaan.' (Translation into English Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Kimi Kärki)

Braude, Anne, 1989. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America* (Boston, Beacon Press)

Caine, Barbara, 2010. *Biography and History* (Basingstoke, Palgrave and Macmillan)

Dixon, Joy, 2001. *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press)

Ervasti, Esko, 1960. *Suomalainen kirjallisuus ja Nietzsche,* vol. 1. *1900-luvun vaihde ja siihen välittömästi liittyvät ilmiöt* (Turku, Turun yliopisto)

Faxneld, Per, 2020. *Det ockulta sekelskiftet: esoteriska strömningar i Hilma af Klints tid* (Stockholm, Volante)

Ferguson, Christine, and A. Radford (eds.), 2018. *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Oxford, Routledge)

Häkkinen, Perttu, 2016. 'Esoterian vaikutus suomalaiseen kulttuuriin', Yle Areena, 3.5.2016, <https://areena.yle.fi/1-3419868>

Häkkinen, Perttu, and Vesa Iitti, 2015. *Valonkantajat. Välähdyksiä suomalaisesta salatieteestä* (Helsinki, Like)

Hakosalo, Heini, 2016. 'Coming together: early Finnish medical women and the multiple levels of historical biography', in *Biography, Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Erla Hulda Halldórsdottir, Tiina Kinnunen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Birgitte Possing (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 209–30

Halldórsdottir, Erla Hulda, Tiina Kinnunen, and Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, 2016. 'Doing biography', in *Biography, Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives,* eds. Erla Hulda Halldórsdottir, Tiina Kinnunen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Birgitte Possing (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 7–35

Harmainen, Antti, 2010. *Modernin mystikot. Teosofian ulottuvuudet Pekka Ervastin ja Eino Leinon maailmankuvissa 1902–1908*, MA diss. (Tampere, Tampereen yliopisto), <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uta-1-20710>

———2014. '"Kaikki voin kestää, voin elää, jos tiedän että hänet kerran vielä tapaan". Spiritualismi ja teosofia sivistyneistön surutyön välineinä 1880-luvun lopulla', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 4, pp. 382–92

———2016. 'Group biography as an approach to studying manhood and religion in late nineteenth-century Finland', in *Biography, Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives,* eds. Erla Hulda Halldórsdottir, Tiina Kinnunen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Birgitte Possing (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 101–20

———2020. 'Teosofia', in *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa*, eds. Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen (Tampere, Vastapaino), pp. 91–111

Harmainen, Antti, and Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, 2017. 'Moderni länsimainen esoteria historiallisena ilmiönä ja tutkimuksen kohteena', in *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 2, pp. 131–7

Heidle, Alexandre, and Jan Snoek, 2008. *Women's Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders* (Leiden & Boston, Brill)

Johnson, Bruce, 2011. 'Introduction', in *They Do Things Differently There: Essays on*

Cultural History, eds. Bruce Johnson and Harri Kiiskinen, cultural history – kulttuurihistoria 9 (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 1–18

Kaartinen, Marjo, 2018. 'Vera Hjelt and the calling of theosophical universal work, 1894–1904', *Approaching Religion*, 8(1), pp. 17–30, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.66735>

Kokkinen, Nina, 2019. *Totuudenetsijät. Vuosisadanvaihteen okkulttuuri ja moderni henkisyys Akseli Gallen-Kallelan, Pekka Halosen ja Hugo Simbergin taiteessa,* Turun yliopiston julkaisuja, Scripta Lingua Fennica Edita, 469 (Turku, Turun yliopisto), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-7607-2>

Kokkinen, Nina, and Tiina Mahlamäki, 2020. 'Näkökulmia esoteerisuuteen ja okkultismiin', in *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa*, eds. Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen (Tampere, Vastapaino), pp. 11–29

Kortelainen, Anna, 2006. *Naisen tie. L. Onervan kapina* (Helsinki, Otava)

Kouta, Aarni, 1911. *Jäiset temppelit. Runoja* (Helsinki, Yrjö Weilin)

Kraft, Siv Ellen, 2013. 'Theosophy, gender and the "new woman"', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current,* eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden and Boston, Brill), pp. 357–74

Laine, Johannes, and Nina Kokkinen, 2020. 'Ruusuristiläisyys ja Pekka Ervastin perintö', in *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa*, eds. Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen (Tampere, Vastapaino), pp. 113–31

Lejeune, Philippe, 2009. *On Diary*, eds. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, transl. Katherine Dunin (Honolulu, The University of Hawai'i Press)

Lepore, Jill, 2013. *Book of Ages. Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin* (New York, Knopf)

Leskelä-Kärki, Maarit, 2006. *Kirjoittaen maailmassa. Krohnin sisaret ja kirjallinen elämä* (Helsinki, SKS)

———2014. 'Suhteellista elämää. Relationaalisuus ja biografinen vuorovaikutus,' in *Historiallinen elämä. Biografia ja historiantutkimus*, eds. Heini Hakosalo, Seija Jalagin, Marianne Junila and Heidi Kurvinen (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 314–30

———2016. 'Remembering mother: biographical project on Minna Krohn (1841–1917)', in *Biography, Gender and History: Nordic Perspectives*, eds. Erla Hulda Halldórsdottir, Tiina Kinnunen, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Birgitte Possing (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 187–209

———2017. *Toisten elämät. Kirjoituksia elämäkerroista* (Helsinki, Avain)

Mahlamäki, Tiina, 2017. *Kaikki maallinen on vain vertauskuvaa. Kirjailija Kersti Bergrothin elämäkerta* (Helsinki, Partuuna)

Mahlamäki, Tiina, and Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, 2018. 'The history of modern Western esotericism: individuals, ideas, practices', in *Approaching Religion*, 8(1), pp. 1–4, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.70194>

Mahlamäki, Tiina, and Nina Kokkinen (eds.), 2020. *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa* (Tampere, Vastapaino)

Owen, Alex, 1989. *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (The University of Chicago Press)

———2004. *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (The University of Chicago Press)
Pasi, Marco, 2014. *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (London, Routledge)
Possing, Birgitte, 2017: *Understanding Biographies: On Biographies in History and Stories in Biography* (Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark)
Rajala, Panu, 2018. *Virvatuli. Eino Leinon elämä* (Helsinki, WSOY)
Salmi, Hannu, 2010. 'Kulttuurihistoria, mahdollinen ja runsauden periaate', in *Kulttuurihistoriallinen katse*, eds. Heli Rantala and Sakari Ollitervo, cultural history – kulttuurihistoria (Turku, k&h-kustannus), pp. 338–59
Sarjala, Jukka, 2014. 'Päättymätön yksilö. Henkilöhistorian muuntuva kohde', *Ennen & Nyt*, 6, <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/2014/06/paattymaton-yksilo-henkilohistorian-muuntuva-kohde-2/> (accessed 19.3.2020)
Seekers of the New, project website, <https://uudenetsijat.com/english/>
Tarkka, Pekka, 2009. *Joel Lehtonen. Vuodet 1881–1917* (Helsinki, Otava)
Ylikangas, Mikko, 2009. *Unileipää, kuolonvettä, spiidiä. Huumeet Suomessa 1800–1950* (Jyväskylä, Atena)

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a dispute concerning the common origins of the languages of mankind 1911–12

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.89215

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

PEKKA PITKÄLÄ

This article is about the notions of history and language of a Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (née Sigurd Asp, 1870–1946), and the Swedish writer August Strindberg (1849–1912), and their interaction. Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg knew each other from Paris, where both lived in the 1890s. In the 1910s they both published books and articles on their respective linguistic views. According to both of them, the languages of mankind had a common origin. Strindberg had a more traditional view, as according to him Hebrew was the original language of the world. For Wettenhovi-Aspa, the original language was Finnish. These ideas may seem eccentric, but I argue that they both reflect the intellectual currents of their own time and are connected with a long tradition as well.

Introduction

On 30 January 1912, the newspaper *Åbo Underrättelser* in Turku, Finland, published an article entitled 'Language strife between August Strindberg and S. Wetterhoff-Asp: a letter from Strindberg and an open one from Mr. W.-A.'.[1] To the readers of *Åbo Underrättelser* the term *language strife* in the headline probably at first brought to mind the prolonged political conflict concerning the status of the Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland. However, this was something very different: the famous Swedish author and the contemporarily well-known Finnish artist were debating on which was the seminal language of mankind, from which all other languages generated. The editors of *Åbo Underrättelser* presented the debate as a curiosity

1 'En språkstrid mellan August Strindberg och S. Wetterhoff-Asp. Ett brev från Strindberg och ett öppet dito från hr W.-A.' All translations are by the author, unless noted otherwise. *Åbo Underrättelser* is a Swedish-language newspaper in Turku, founded in 1824. Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa at that time resided in the Hotel Saima in Turku, where he stayed for long periods in the years 1910–12 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 195–8, 208–13).

interesting enough to be published, but made clear that they were not at all convinced of the adequacy of the views of the debaters (*Åbo Underrättelser* 1912).

The article was a response to Strindberg's writing in the Swedish newspaper *Afton-Tidningen* a week earlier, in which he made public a challenge he had made in a private letter to Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa.[2] He asked Wettenhovi-Aspa and his associates Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä to send him ten difficult Finnish words, which he promised to derive from Hebrew and Greek. This was in order to prove the seminal status of those languages in comparison to Finnish (SV 71: 192–4; Brev 7891, XX: 202–4).[3]

At this stage the discussion had been going on for a couple of months, both in private letters and in the pages of periodicals and newspapers. Besides Wettenhovi-Aspa,[4] Strindberg corresponded with Elias Lönnqvist

2 The letter, dated 23 December 1911, was actually addressed to Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, but in this article I will use his Finnicized and best known surname Wettenhovi-Aspa, which he started to use in 1910s. Originally his name was Georg Sigurd Asp, in which he added his maternal name Wetterhoff in the 1890s. In 1911–12 he experimented with Finnicized names and released some articles with the names S. W. Aspa-Haapets and Vedenhovilinnan Aspa-Haapets, just before starting to use the name Wettenhovi-Aspa. The name Wettenhovi-Aspa is not a translation, but rather based on similar appearance. For some reason, he didn't make it official until 1939.

3 Strindberg's works are cited from the standard edition *Nationalupplagan av August Strindbergs Samlade verk* (1981–2013), abbreviated here as SV, followed by volume and page number. Strindberg's letters are cited from *August Strindbergs brev* I–XXII (1948–2001), abbreviated here as Brev, followed by letter number, volume number and page number. Letters sent to Strindberg are cited from the Royal Library (Stockholm), Manuscript Department, The Nordic Museum's Strindberg Collection, with the signum SgNM, initials of the correspondent, and date, when appropriate.

4 Five of Strindberg's letters to Wettenhovi-Aspa have survived to be published in *August Strindbergs brev*, dated 2 and 18 December 1894, 21 and 23 November 1900, and 23 December 1911 (Brev 3014, X: 316; Brev 3036, X: 334; Brev 4410, XIII: 338; Brev 4414, XIII: 340; Brev 7891, XX: 202–3). It has been reported that in the beginning of the 1970s there still existed a bundle of letters from Strindberg in the villa of Wettenhovi-Aspa in Karjalohja, Finland, which then was a summer resort for Finnish artists (see Lintinen 1982). It is probable that those letters were not the published ones, according to the given provenance and details of the published letters in *August Strindbergs brev.* A significant part of Wettenhovi-Aspa's estate and archives were destroyed or went missing after his death. The surviving manuscript material was donated to Turku University

and Theodor Finnilä, who were inspired both by Strindberg's writings on languages, and Wettenhovi-Aspa's Strindberg-influenced newspaper articles published in the summer and autumn of 1911 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a–f). Theodor Finnilä (1868–1920), a lieutenant from Vaasa, Finland, did not publish any works of his own. His long letters to Strindberg reflect a dedication to comparative language studies (SgNM: TF). It has been suggested that he financed some of Wettenhovi-Aspa's publications. He also gave a lecture with Wettenhovi-Aspa in Turku, Finland in 1912 on an occasion which he had financed (Bok-Fyren[5] 1915: 4; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 208–9, 253–4). Elias Lönnqvist (1875–1949) was a station master at Kuurila railway station, Finland, who later published his views on 'Finnish as a key to all civilized languages' in two books (Lönnqvist 1931, 1945; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1962). Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä became acquainted with each other during the year 1911 (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911).

Strindberg's first studies in languages, published in his Blue Books in 1908 (*En blå bok*, *En ny blå bok*, SV 66–7), had already gained some attention in Finland. His original views on language history, and in particular the Finnish and Swedish languages, were presented and reviewed in Finnish newspapers, and also in then-popular political satire magazines. In the summer of 1911 Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa began a series of articles inspired by Strindberg's *Världs-Språkens Rötter* (The Roots of the World Languages),[6] published by *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Uusi Suometar*, major Finnish newspapers at that time. In the series of six articles, four in Swedish and two in Finnish, he introduced his own ideas to the public rather than Strindberg's. Wettenhovi-Aspa emphasized the role of Finnish as an ancient language which was older than any other language in the world, and had generated all other languages (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a–f).

Library, as Wettenhovi-Aspa had wished in his will, as late as in the 1980s. See Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 384–400. Wettenhovi-Aspa's, Finnilä's and Lönnqvist's letters to Strindberg are preserved by the Royal Library of Sweden (SgNM: SWA, TF, EL).

5 Bok-Fyren, Spex and Sepia were Rafael Lindqvist's (1867–1952) pseudonyms. He was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Fyren* from 1904 until 1922, known for his Svecoman and right-wing opinions. Wettenhovi-Aspa drew caricatures and magazine covers for *Fyren* regularly from 1898 until 1909, and sporadically also later (Pitkälä 2010: 12, 79, *passim*).

6 The English translations for the titles of Strindberg's language studies are by Freddie Rokem (2002).

In this article I will examine the debate between Strindberg and Wettenhovi-Aspa in 1911–12 within its contemporary and historical context. Although their ideas on languages seem to have been eccentric and marginal, they are part of a broader contemporary intellectual current, and connected with a long tradition as well. I argue that Strindberg had a decisive influence on his Finnish correspondents, especially Wettenhovi-Aspa, when they pursued their investigations concerning languages and history from the 1910s onwards.

A thorough analysis of the correspondence of Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist, however, requires more than one article. Their known mutual correspondence between December 1911 and April 1912 consists of over forty letters, from postcards to long etymological vocabularies and manuscript excerpts. They also sent books to each other and referred in their letters to a wide range of linguistic and historical literature. Their discussion was also extended to the public sphere, as Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg referred to the correspondence in their articles, and the debate was also commented on and reported in the newspapers.

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa hasn't been much investigated.[7] Art historians have neglected his works until recently, and his writings have not been taken seriously as historical sources. They have been seen as eccentric, or ridiculous and even shameful works, which deserve to be forgotten. Because there is very little information available in English about Wettenhovi-Aspa, and because he isn't a well-known person (even in Finland), and in order to understand the nature of his literary activities, it is necessary to provide a short biographical survey. It is also necessary to examine the roots of his ideas, in order to understand in which kind of context the investigated debate took place, as well as his acquaintance with Strindberg, which originated in Paris in the 1890s.

7 Halén and Tukkinen (1984) is still the only full biography of Wettenhovi-Aspa. I will use this biography as a reference, although it often doesn't mention its sources, as it does provide a view to the course of life of Wettenhovi-Aspa. It also contains some oral history, which is not otherwise available, because the interviewees are deceased. See also Pitkälä 2010.

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa: from an artist to a Fenno-Egyptologist

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, originally a painter, sculptor and caricaturist, but later also an inventor, writer and social activist, has mostly been remembered for his ideas about the past of the Finns. These ideas have been introduced to the public over the decades in many periodicals and newspapers as a quaint curiosity of the past. Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that most languages had their origins in Finnish. He was also the father of so-called 'Fenno-Egyptology'. In this theory he claimed that the ancient Egyptian language and culture were of Finnish origin. Wettenhovi-Aspa's activities during the years were so multifarious that it is unnecessary to detail all of them here. He was active in many fields, and apart from art he was an amateur in all of them. When he died in 1946, the Finnish newspapers commented on how remarkable and curious his life was in its entirety, and his personality was seen as perhaps more interesting than any single activity in his life (Halén and Tukkinen 1984; Pitkälä 2010: 1–18).

Wettenhovi-Aspa's notion of the Finnish language as the original language of the world was based on etymologies he conceived of himself. For example, in 1935 he explained some English and Irish place-names as follows:

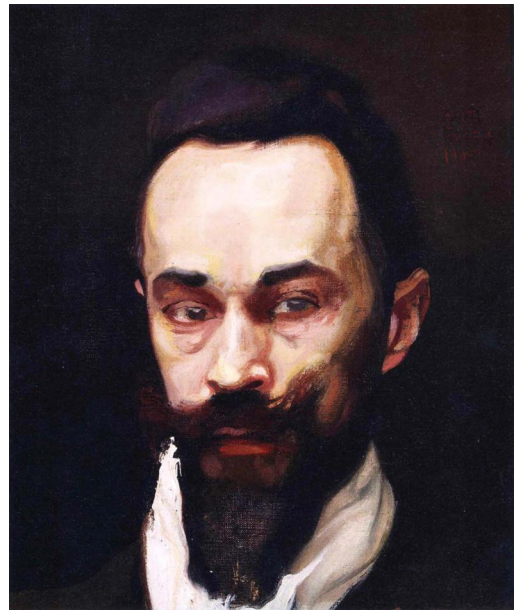
> Highfinnish: "TUONEN-KALLIO" = stone of death… became: "D'ONE'-GALL" = (ab ovo cemetary) now city in Ireland. …
>
> The particular Finnish DEVIL: "PERKELE" has seemingly once caused disturbance also in Britain, because in all cases: "Berkeley"-castle in Glouchestershire has been named after this Fenno-celtic devil.
>
> Highfinnish: PERKELE = the headmaster of devils
>
> English: BERKELE-Y Castle.
>
> Because the meaning of the Finnish word "Perkele" = "devil" in English: Berkeley = devil's (castle) was early forgotten, even a Bishop, George Berkeley, without the least suspicion bore the devlish name. And after all – why is it not possible for a finnish devil to be an English Bishop – since a forestgoblin – "Waldteufel" has been a waltz composer in Austria? (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935c: 24)[8]

8 This citation reproduces the orthography adopted in the original publication.

Wettenhovi-Aspa's etymologies and puns aren't always easy, or even possible, to translate but he published many writings also in other languages than Finnish, explaining the meanings of his etymologies (see e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a, 1935a, 1935c). The quotation above, for example, was originally published in English. For most contemporaries, many of these etymologies were either comic or just ridiculous, although he had some supporters as well. Wettenhovi-Aspa himself was Swedish-speaking, and it has been reported that according to the composer Jean Sibelius, who knew Wettenhovi-Aspa personally, his theories were mostly based on his poor skills in the Finnish language (Jalas 1981: 60–1; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 206, 290).

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa was born in Helsinki in 1870. His father was Georg Asp (1834–1901), Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the University of Helsinki. His mother, Mathilda Wetterhoff (1840–1920) was a teacher of gymnastics. As a somewhat troubled twelve-year-old he was sent to a boarding school in the little Danish town of Christiansfeld, Northern Schleswig, which then was a part of the state of Prussia. At the age of sixteen he moved to Copenhagen to study painting and sculpture, first in Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts) from 1886 to 1887, and then from 1891 to 1892 as a pupil of Kristian Zahrtmann and Peder Severin Krøyer at Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler (Free Art Schools). In 1891, he made his debut in Finland and left in 1892 for Paris, supported by a grant (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 20–33, 37, 65; Halén 2007: 464–5; Pitkälä 2010: 4–5). In the 1890s and at the beginning of the 1900s Wettenhovi-Aspa took part in various exhibitions in the Nordic countries, Germany and France (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 51–2, 89, *passim*; Pitkälä 2010: 5–12).

In Paris Wettenhovi-Aspa studied sculpture with the Finnish sculptor Ville Vallgren (1855–1940) as a personal teacher, took part in various *salons* and wrote some art criticism for the Swedish-language newspapers of Finland. Of the *salons* the most important was the Salon de la Rose+Croix, hosted by Joséphin Péladan, where Wettenhovi-Aspa and Vallgren were both invited to participate in the spring of 1893. He exhibited a relief depicting the maiden Aino from the *Kalevala*. Both Strindberg and Wettenhovi-Aspa admired Péladan who was a controversial art critic, writer and novelist (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927; Pitkälä 2010: 5–7; Johnsson 2015: 275–7). Strindberg acknowledged his admiration in his letters, in which he also called Péladan *maître* ('master') and *prophéte* ('prophet') (Brev S584 XXII: 172; Brev S607, XXII: 190–1). According to Strindberg, Péladan was the father of the



Portrait of the artist S. Wettenhovi-Aspa by Antti Favén (1882–1948), 1905, oil on canvas, 39 × 33,5 cm. Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.

whole symbolist movement. Péladan's ideas combined Catholicism, symbolism, mysticism and occultism. He admired the Orient and had adopted the title of Sâr Mérodack (King Mérodack or King Marduk) from the ancient Chaldeans. In his *salon* one was only allowed to present certain subjects in sculptures and paintings. The emphasis was on mythological, mystic, oriental and allegorical motifs, and, for example, still lives, landscapes, contemporary subjects and history painting were forbidden (Sarajas-Korte 1966: 10, 43–5, 84–7; Chaitow 2018). The Finnish painter Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905) wrote in a letter that Wettenhovi-Aspa was 'the leading lunatic' among the artists in Rose+Croix (Edelfelt 1893).[9] Edelfelt thought that Péladan's *salon* was decadent and that his Finnish fellow artists should avoid this new movement. Edelfelt, who was sixteen years older than Wettenhovi-Aspa, and already an established and esteemed artist, disapproved of Péladan and his *salon*, which he saw as a decadent combination of narcotics, Theosophy, spiritualism, sexual abnormality and Catholicism (Sarajas-Korte 1966: 88).[10]

In December 1894, a Finnish journalist and theatre critic Axel Berndtson (1858–1937) wrote an article in *Nya Pressen*, a Swedish-language newspaper in Finland. In his article 'Bref från Paris. – Strindberg. – "Fadern" á *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre*' (A letter from Paris. – Strindberg. – "The Father" – At the *Théâtre*

9 'På Rose & Croix har Sigurd Asp första rummet som galning …'. Albert Edelfelt to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt on Good Friday in [18]93 (Edelfelt 1893).

10 'Sar Péladanismen och allt detta morfinförsvagade, teosofiska, spiritistiska, sexuellt abnormal, katolicismen från Chat Noir – det tror jag ej på.' Albert Edelfelt to the painter Axel Gallén 19.9.1894, cited in Sarajas-Korte 1966: 88.

de l'Oeuvre) he interviewed Strindberg mainly about his play *The Father* (1887) and its final rehearsal in Paris. Berndtson was about to leave when Strindberg wanted to show him his paintings, mentioning Wettenhovi-Aspa, who back then still used his original name Sigurd Asp:

> Then I stood up to thank him for the natural and warm welcome, when he grabbed the lamp and uttered: 'No, first you have to see my paintings. Of course I'm not as revolutionary as your fellow countryman Sigurd Asp, because that boy is ahead of us all, but it can be interesting to see how a self-taught writer paints. I have recently sold ten pieces of work in Sweden.' (Berndtson 1894)[11]

In the cited paragraph, Strindberg emphasizes that he is uneducated as a painter, but that seems to be a positive quality rather than negative.[12] Strindberg also describes Wettenhovi-Aspa as a revolutionary painter, 'ahead of us all', which one could be tempted to interpret as irony. However, at the time Wettenhovi-Aspa was a young and maybe even promising artist, associated with Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix, and gaining attention in other exhibitions as well (Pitkälä 2010: 5–8). In December 1894 Strindberg told Wettenhovi-Aspa in a letter, that he had read his play manuscript, 'which is as slipshod and immature as your visual arts are mature' (Brev 3014, X: 316).

Wettenhovi-Aspa reported later that he had met Strindberg in August 1894 at Café de Versailles, where the Finnish sculptor Ville Vallgren had introduced them to each other (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 5–14). Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote several autobiographical articles and a book related to August Strindberg and the times in the 1890s when they socialized in Paris. In 1927, he released a memoir entitled *Jutelmia ja muistelmia 1890-luvun Parisista ja August Strindbergin Inferno-vuosista* (Stories and Reminiscences

11 'Därpå reste jag mig för att tacka för det okonstlade, förekommande sätt hvarpå han mottagit mig, då han grep tag i lampan och utbrast: Nej, först skall ni se på mina taflor. Jag är visserligen ej lika revolutionär som er landsman Sigurd Asp, ty den pojken är före oss alla, men det kan ju ha sitt intresse att se hur en literatör för en olärd pensel. Jag har nyligen sålt tio stycken i Sverige' (Berndtson 1894). The article was signed only with the initials A.B., but according to what Anna Kortelainen reports about Berndtson, it's most probable that the article is written by him (see Kortelainen 2001: 531, *passim*). I have found no personal connection between Berndtson and Wettenhovi-Aspa.

12 Strindberg's art was connected to his occult thought, see Lahelma 2018: 67–92.

of Paris in the 1890s and August Strindberg's Inferno Years).[13] It was later also translated into German under the title *August Strindberg intim* (1936).[14] The book was in fact Wettenhovi-Aspa's memoirs from his youth, although large parts of the book consist of informal recollections and stories about Strindberg intended for the general public (Pitkälä 2010: 28).

Wettenhovi-Aspa returned to Finland in 1895 with his French wife Marie Sophie 'Divina' Paillard (1861–1915). In Helsinki Wettenhovi-Aspa organized several 'free exhibitions' with other Finnish artists between 1896 and 1903. One of these exhibitions was also presented in other Nordic capitals during the years 1900–1 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 65–81, 85–95, 106–24, 140–1; Pitkälä 2010: 8–9). These exhibitions were protests against the art establishment and the academy. There was no jury to decide on what could be exhibited. It is obvious that the exhibitions were inspired by the Danish movement Den frie Udstilling (The Free Exhibition), which began in 1891, opposing the conservative Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Den frie Udstilling had its own pavilion in Copenhagen, designed by J. F. Willumsen and inspired by Egyptian and Greek temples. The movement and gallery

13 Wettenhovi-Aspa's extensive original manuscript 'August Strindbergs Pariser-inferno skildrat av en som var med' (August Strindberg's Parisian Inferno as Told by an Eyewitness) can be found at National Archives of Finland, Helsinki. Excerpts from the book were published in *Nya Dagligt Allehanda, Stockholms Dagblad, Julkvällen – Publicistklubbens jultidning* (Stockholm) and *Åbo Underrättelser* (Turku), between the years 1927–32, but the book was never released in Swedish (see Pitkälä 2010: I–XV for bibliographical details). In Strindberg studies only the published excerpts in Swedish, and the German translation from 1936 are usually cited, and they have been generally treated as somewhat unreliable sources. However, e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa's account of Strindberg's encounter with Alexandre Dumas' *fils* in December 1894 has been considered credible (see e.g. Meyer 1985: 312). In my investigations Wettenhovi-Aspa has in general proved to be a far more reliable source than for instance the biographers Harry Halén and Tauno Tukkinen have believed. It seems that Wettenhovi-Aspa's imaginative writings and sometimes grandiose style have made both his contemporaries and future generations exaggeratedly suspicious of what even he tells us about his own life. He may in his memoirs present Strindberg as a closer friend to him than he perhaps was, but their acquaintance and interaction are unquestionable.

14 According to Walter Berendsohn, a German-speaking Strindberg researcher, the translation is very poor and made by an uneducated person (Berendsohn 1946: 88). Both the Finnish and the German translations are made by somebody other than the author himself (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 58).

still exist. Wettenhovi-Aspa's 'Free Exhibition from Finland' (Den frie Udstilling fra Finland) was presented there in 1900–1. Already Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler and Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix had gone against the mainstream and academic art (Pitkälä 2010: 5–10; Scavenius 1991: 7–34, 53–9, 75–8). This is important, as Wettenhovi-Aspa was already an anti-academic as an artist, and this attitude followed him into his literary works. He also argued publicly with art critics throughout his early career, which didn't help him to achieve a lasting position on the Finnish art scene.

Besides art, Wettenhovi-Aspa was engaged in numerous other activities, beginning in the year 1900 with a compilation of poems entitled *Pro Patria*.[15] He also released a critical book about Russia and its emperor Nicholas II in France in 1905 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1905), and published political caricatures on the same subject in some prominent magazines, such as *Jugend* (Munich), *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Paris), and *Ravnen* (Copenhagen).[16] Because of this kind of suspicious political activity he lived in exile, mostly in France, during the years 1904–8 (Pitkälä 2010: 9–13; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 141–76).

Wettenhovi-Aspa recalled that he began to investigate languages seriously in 1910 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 10; 1927: 267; see also ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911; SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911). He reported that he had already compared Finnish and ancient Egyptian languages in Paris in the 1890s, when he examined the Egyptian collections of the Louvre for a painting representing Cleopatra. Then he had noted similarities between Finnish and Egyptian; the words *meri* ('the sea'), *puna* ('red') and *sini* ('blue') for example, and Kemet, the ancient name of Egypt, which was similar to the Finnish place name Kemi.[17] He recalled that he had then discussed languages and

15 *Pro Patria* included a poem dedicated to Strindberg, dated in Paris 1895, in which Wettenhovi-Aspa praised Strindberg's independence and courage and his critical attitude towards academics (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1900: 27).

16 I have found signed caricatures from e.g. *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Paris) no. 201, 1905; *Ravnen* (Copenhagen) 19/1906; *Jugend* (Munich) 42/1908. Wettenhovi-Aspa reported later that he had made many anonymous drawings during those years, in addition for e.g. *Lustige Blätter* (Berlin) and *Karbasen* (Stockholm) (Pitkälä 2010: 11).

17 The place name Kemi had already interested Olof Rudbeck the Elder in his *Atlantica* in the seventeenth century. He associated it with the Homeric Cimmerians, who had according to him given the name Kimmi (Kemi) to the town and river in northern Finland (Anttila 2015: 154). In Daniel Juslenius's *Aboa vetus et*

the similarities between Finnish and ancient Egyptian with Strindberg, who had tried to convince him of worthlessness of both the Finnish language and the interpretations of modern Egyptologists. Wettenhovi-Aspa reports that he had back then decided to study further the Egyptian language in the future (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 9–10; 1927: 261–5).

It is notable that in the contemporary art scene Egypt, and the Orient in general, were popular topics and sources of influence for artists, who at the same time were interested in Theosophy, Swedenborg and many kinds of esoteric movements. Finnish artists were discovering the *Kalevala* and conceived the Finnish national romantic movement in the arts. Thus both orientalist, religious and national features were present in the intellectual atmosphere of the time (see Kokkinen 2019; Lahelma 2020; Sarajas-Korte 1966). Wettenhovi-Aspa later combined these elements in his literary works, which were also very close to Theosophy in some aspects. Wettenhovi-Aspa wasn't a committed theosophist himself, but he emphasized the nature of the Finnish language and the *Kalevala* as the source of a secret wisdom, which had been preserved in the Finnish forests. He later also wrote articles for some Finnish theosophically-oriented magazines, *Sunnuntai* and *Ihminen* (Pitkälä 2010: 89–116).

Wettenhovi-Aspa's views on history and languages were influenced by Gothicist historians of the past, such as Olof Rudbeck (1630–1702) and Daniel Juslenius (1676–1752). They had also aspired to prove etymologically that Swedish, or in Juslenius's case, respectively Finnish, was the oldest surviving language in the world, or at least very close to the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek. The Swedes were presented as descendants of the ancient Goths. Swedish Gothicist historians from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries emphasized the great and glorious past of the nation, which had been forgotten (Urpilainen 1993: 11–12, 33–4; see also Juslenius 1700/2005). This was typical in seventeenth-century Europe, and similar investigations were published, for example, in the Netherlands and Italy, where scholars aspired to prove their languages to be closely related to the biblical languages, and their respective nations to be the descendants of Japheth, Noah's son (Olender 1994: 5–25). Wettenhovi-Aspa didn't always

nova (1700) the connection between Kemi and Cimmerians was to prove that both Finns and Swedes were descendants of the ancient Cimmerians, who had invented writing (Juslenius 1700/2005: 142).

refer to his historical predecessors, even when citing them, but mentions them in his early writings in an appreciative manner (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911e).

August Strindberg's language studies and their impact in Finland

August Strindberg had become interested in languages when he was working as an assistant in Kungliga biblioteket (The Royal Library), Stockholm, in the years 1875–80. Back then he had arranged the collections of Chinese and Japanese literature for various Swedish libraries. For instance, he arranged the Nordenskiöld Japanese Library, which has been considered a major project. He had also studied some Mongolian. However, he abandoned these kinds of linguistic activities to concentrate on writing fiction (Rohnström 1971: 290–2, 303; Bennich-Björkman 2007: 13–17, *passim*).

Strindberg's language studies at the beginning of the twentieth century were connected with his occult ideas and interest in the natural sciences which he had studied, especially in the 1890s. He had a conception of the common origin of all matter and a monistic view of the unity of both chemical elements and languages. In his opinion in chemistry the elements could be transformed into each other, and when it came to languages, they too were all related to each other, and of the same origin. These views were influenced by the monistic philosophy of Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) (SV 35: 25–44; Brev 7889, XX: 200; Regnell 2009: 36–7, 41–54; Pitkälä 2010: 31–4, 45–51; Johnsson 2015: 219–20, 225–6). According to Strindberg, it wasn't necessary to classify languages, as 'everything can be found everywhere' (SV 66: 841).[18] Freddie Rokem has described Strindberg's language studies as an alchemical dream, in which Hebrew transforms 'into the gold from which all languages stem' (Rokem 2002: 55).

In his later language studies Strindberg argued that all languages had their origins in Hebrew. In these studies he ignored the views of contemporary linguistics, phonetic laws and the existence of dialects. Strindberg ceased writing fiction and started investigating dictionaries and comparing languages. In his book *Bibliska egennamn med ordfränder i klassiska och levande språk* (Proper Names in the Bible with Related Words in Classical and Living Languages, 1910) he reported that he had even read a dictionary

18 'Jag kan således icke finna något berättigat i att isolera och indela språken, då allt återfinnes i alla.'

Portrait of August Strindberg by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, Paris 1894, pastel and pencil on paper, 49,5 × 34 cm. Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.

of Hebrew from cover to cover (SV 69: 14). By means of his self-made method he managed to find surprising similarities between very different languages (Balbierz 2005; Jonsson 1999: 1093–8).

Strindberg's studies on languages were based on auditory perception; on how words of different languages sounded. He was looking for similarities, but unlike Wettenhovi-Aspa, he did not usually build historical narratives around his etymologies. In Hebrew he saw the most perfect language, in which the words and the things they described corresponded. His approach was also musical. He described for example the Hebrew word *zippor,* 'a bird, as bird-like by nature', as one could almost hear a bird singing when seeing or hearing the word (SV 66: 13).

Jan Balbierz discusses Strindberg's language studies as an anti-rational and anti-positivistic alternative discipline. In the name of his scientific revolution Strindberg approaches ideas of man, language, nature and God preceding the Enlightenment. According to Balbierz Strindberg's ideas of language and his methods originated from the Middle Ages and baroque science. At the same time he participates in the modernist discussion by creating etymologies, playing with words and emphasizing their phonetic qualities at the expense of their meaning. Strindberg seeks to find the 'Hebrew' in all languages, which, according to Balbierz, approaches Ferdinand de Saussure's aspirations to describe *la langue*, the unchangeable and objective qualities of language (Balbierz 2005: 28–9, 46–8; Pitkälä 2010: 49).

The first hints of Strindberg's interest in languages were published in the second part of his four-part work of prose entitled *En blå bok* (The Blue Book, 1908–12). *En blå bok* was a sort of collage of short fragments of various kinds of text from fictional passages to chapters of more factual appearance, concerning, for example, the science, religion and mathematics of the ancient Assyrians.[19] The second part of the book, *En ny blå bok* (The New Blue Book, 1908) contained the chapter 'Finska Ungerska-Mandschuiska Japanska' (Finnish Hungarian-Manchu Japanese, SV 66: 837–45) in which Strindberg listed Finnish words and translated them into Swedish, arguing that Finnish words originated from all over the world and that Finnish was 'the real Esperanto'.[20] Strindberg also wrote a few pages about the Finnish

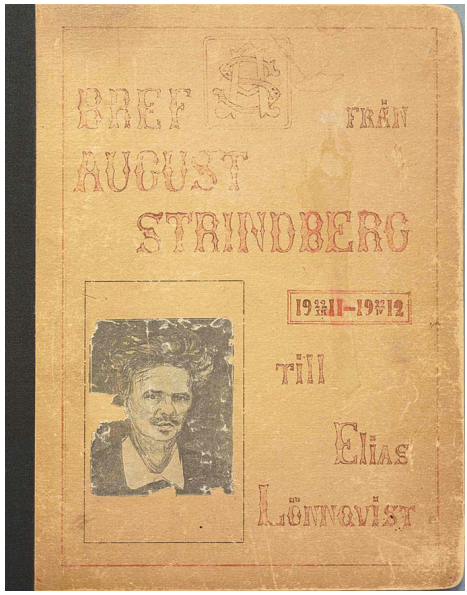
19 See the indices for *En blå bok*: SV 67: 1725–35.

20 'Däremot synes ordförrådet i finskan vara hämtat ur alla världens språk, vilket gör finskan till ett sannskyldigt esperanto' (SV 66: 837).

language in his first book entirely dedicated to language comparisons, *Bibliska egennamn*, which he released in 1910 (SV 69: 72–5).

Strindberg had adopted the basic idea of his language studies – Hebrew as the common origin of the languages of mankind – from Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) (Berendsohn 1946: 34; Lagercrantz 1979: 445–6; Meyer 1985: 546; Jonsson 1999: 1093–4; Rokem 2002: 45–6). In Swedenborg's thinking also two aspects of baroque literary ideas of a universal language were united: the search for the original language and an idea of a mathematical language of science. Swedenborg's writings articulated both a theory of the seminal status of Hebrew and a theory that the original language still existed in China. For Swedenborg the search for the original language was connected to a wider philosophical and teleological conception of the world (Siukonen 2000: 63–74). Swedenborg was influenced by the famous Gothicist historian in Sweden, Olof Rudbeck the Elder (1630–1702), whose magnum opus *Atlantica sive Manheim* (1679–1702) connected the history of the Swedish Empire to biblical history, explaining that Noah's son Japheth had come to Sweden after the Flood (Jonsson 1999: 1093–4; Siukonen 2000: 12; Anttila 2015: 143–51). Strindberg also studied Chinese as well as Hebrew in his writings concerning languages in 1910–12. He was interested in Swedenborg in particular in the 1890s while living in Paris. Later he dedicated the first part of *En blå bok* to Swedenborg (Lagercrantz 1979: 392–3; Siukonen 2000: 94).

Strindberg's views had already come to public attention in Finland by 1908. The Swedish-language humorous magazine *Fyren* cited his book on 11 July 1908 and advised him to buy a Finnish-Swedish-Russian dictionary to see the real origins of Finnish (Spex 1908). More commentaries and reviews followed. For example, the writer Kyösti Wilkuna presented Strindberg's book *Bibliska egennamn* to the readers of *Uusi Suometar* and wrote that it was a pity that Strindberg didn't know Finnish any better. According to Wilkuna, Strindberg could have proved Finnish to be a dialect of Greek with his method, as Wilkuna then humorously presented some similar words he had found from those languages (Wilkuna 1910). Rolf Nordenstreng reviewed *Modersmålets anor* (The Origins of the Mother Tongue) in a more serious style in the periodical *Finsk Tidskrift*. He mentioned also some of Strindberg's etymologies concerning the Finnish language, but was more interested in Strindberg's views on bringing some Icelandic vocabulary into Swedish, and in criticising Strindberg's methods (Nordenstreng 1910: 365–9).



Cover of Elias Lönnqvist's personal book binding containing letters from Strindberg, with Strindberg's initials replicated from the signet he used in his correspondence, and with Edvard Munch's famous Strindberg portrait, as a pasted up clipping. The newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* mentioned in an article in 1962 that the volume with Strindberg's letters then belonged to the Finnish publisher Bertel Appelberg (1890–1977) who had bought them from the bookseller Elis Tegengren in Helsinki (*Hufvudstadsbladet* 1962). The Royal Library of Sweden finally acquired the letters from an antiquarian bookseller in Oslo, Norway in 2005. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgKB 2005/63.

According to Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä had all begun their investigations influenced by his *En ny blå bok*, where Strindberg had provocatively argued that the Finnish language had nothing of its own (SV 71: 192). This may be the case at least with two of the three Finns, as Lönnqvist told Strindberg in a letter that he had commenced his language studies by acquiring Strindberg's *Världs-Språkens Rötter* after reading Wettenhovi-Aspa's article concerning the book in July, 1911 (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911).

Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that he had begun his language comparisons before Strindberg and that he had in fact introduced the idea of investigating the origins of language to his Swedish friend in Paris in the 1890s (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 261–72). There is however no evidence of any particular interest in languages by Wettenhovi-Aspa before the 1910s, and it is probable that he then started his language studies in interaction with Strindberg. Wettenhovi-Aspa recalled later that he became aware of Strindberg's language studies when Strindberg sent him his new book *Bibliska egennamn* in 1910. That could have been the first impulse for Wettenhovi-Aspa's own linguistic speculations (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 10; 1927: 267; 1936: 260).

The 'language strife' of Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg

In March 1911 Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote a long letter to the Swedish writer Verner von Heidenstam, seeking for support in publishing his studies in Sweden (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911). In his letter Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote that he had begun to seriously study 'languages of the Stone Age' about a year ago, and had found interesting connections between different languages and the Finnish language. He said that he had already produced a comparative vocabulary consisting of 10,000 words. Strindberg's language studies he mentions only in a passing remark, stating that 'Strindberg's hypothesis of Jews as primeval people' is wrong.[21] Wettenhovi-Aspa asked Heidenstam for help in finding someone from Sweden to edit his manuscripts and to find some journal in Stockholm to publish them.[22] According to Wettenhovi-Aspa Finnish newspapers or periodicals would reject his writings on the subject. However, he managed to actually publish six articles in prominent Finnish newspapers later in the same year, including virtually all the material he had sent to Heidenstam.

The letter is one of the earliest sources of Wettenhovi-Aspa's thinking concerning history and languages. It also proves that Wettenhovi-Aspa had independent aspirations to publish his studies before his newspaper articles concerning Strindberg's views, and the correspondence between Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä at the end of 1911 and the beginning of 1912. There is no further evidence of connections between Heidenstam and Wettenhovi-Aspa, and the letter did not lead to the intended publications in Sweden.

Wettenhovi-Aspa's investigations were already known in Helsinki in the spring of 1911. In April the humorous magazine *Fyren* told its readers

21 'Strindbergs hypothes om Judarna som urfolk är minst sagt löjlig, så mycket jag än håller af honom som fenomen. Lifvet började vid Equatorn och icke i Palestina' (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911).

22 Wettenhovi-Aspa writes to Heidenstam that he asks his help, because he doesn't know anyone in Sweden. Actually he had many Swedish friends and acquaintances, and even family, as his mother had moved to Stockholm with his two siblings in 1891 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: *passim*). The formalities and style Wettenhovi-Aspa used in his letter suggest that he had probably never met Heidenstam. One possible motive to approach Heidenstam might have been his status as Strindberg's antagonist in the contemporary public arena (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911).

that Wettenhovi-Aspa was writing a big dictionary called 'Finnish – every nation's mother tongue' (Culex 1911). In June he took orders in advance at an artists' gathering in a restaurant in Helsinki for a forthcoming book concerning the status of the Finnish language in world history (Pitkälä 2010: 59).

Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his investigations on languages for the first time in 1911 when *Hufvudstadsbladet*, the leading Swedish-language newspaper in Finland, had asked him to write a review of Strindberg's new book *Världs-Språkens Rötter* (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 11). He didn't write the usual newspaper review, but a series of six articles in which he introduced his own ideas to the public rather than Strindberg's. *Världs-Språkens Rötter* was the third of Strindberg's contributions to language studies, and in it he continued his comparative linguistics in vocabularies of languages such as Hebrew, Sanskrit and Chinese. In his articles Wettenhovi-Aspa opposed Strindberg's view that Hebrew was the original language. Wettenhovi-Aspa saw Hebrew merely as the remnants of the original biblical language, which had been destroyed in Babel. According to him, the Finnish language had survived Babel and subsequent 'Indo-Germanic transitions'[23], and thus it was the oldest surviving and most seminal language in the world (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a–f).

Inspired by contemporary archaeological excavations Wettenhovi-Aspa placed the original home of mankind in Java, which he saw as the lost paradise. There had lived the *Maa-laji* people (that is 'Earth-species' in Finnish, referring to the Malays) who once had to disperse all over the world because of overpopulation. Wettenhovi-Aspa called the original language *fenno-maa-lajiska* and believed that it had been very close to the modern Finnish language. Of this original language he found remains in Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit and especially Egyptian. According to him, the *Maa-laji* people had over the centuries wandered to Stone Age Europe through India and Egypt and finally settled in Finland. He also referred to *fingalliska* ('Fingallian') forefathers, who had lived in ancient Europe, referring to the character *Fingal* in Celtic mythology (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a).

In his articles Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his own contribution to the discussion about 'the roots of the languages of the world' evoked by the title of Strindberg's book. Strindberg's views provided a starting point for

23 '[I]ndogermaniska förskjutningar' (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a).

the articles and Wettenhovi-Aspa's own speculation, but he didn't refer to Strindberg more than a few times in his articles. Wettenhovi-Aspa used the vocabularies in Strindberg's book, as he admitted, for example, that he hadn't a Hebrew dictionary of his own. Thus he offered his own explanations for Strindberg's vocabulary examples, emphasizing the originality of the Finnish and Sámi languages (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a–f).

The comparisons with ancient Egyptian words were Wettenhovi-Aspa's own innovation, as Strindberg wasn't interested in Egyptian. Strindberg wrote to Elias Lönnqvist that it was useless to investigate Egyptian because it was in fact Hebrew, as all the other languages were (Brev 8043, XX: 299). *En ny blå bok* had contained a chapter about hieroglyphs, but Strindberg's views followed Athanasius Kircher's (1602–80) on this subject, considering hieroglyphs as esoteric and allegorical ideograms reflecting the Platonic world of ideas. Strindberg denied the modern interpretation of hieroglyphs in which they were understood as an alphabet and ideograms at the same

With his letter to Verner von Heidenstam Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (on the right) sent a photograph of himself, 'for identification', and the fellow artist Sergei Wlasoff (1859–1924), to whose address in Helsinki he asked for reply, and who was also in the letter described as a 'passionate supporter' of Wettenhovi-Aspa's theories. Wlasoff was serving as an artillery officer in Sveaborg until 1917. Verner von Heidenstams arkiv, Övralidsarkivet, Linköping City Library.

Theodor Finnilä sent his *carte de visite*, dated 'Helsingfors 1906' on the reverse, to August Strindberg with his letter of 15 December 1911. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

time. Strindberg thought that hieroglyphs were solely ideograms and that they were used in writing Greek (Troy 1999: 1092–3; Balbierz 2005: 27–8, 38–41). In contrast, Wettenhovi-Aspa built his investigations on the views and interpretations of modern Egyptology, which he accepted. On the other hand, he didn't appreciate the modern Egyptologists and Assyriologists very greatly, either, as he wrote to Strindberg about the 'Bible babble of the "scientific" humbug'[24] which was to be opposed by him and Strindberg (SgNM: SWA, 14.12.1911). Wettenhovi-Aspa referred to the current 'Bibel und Babel' debate, which had begun when Friedrich Delitzsch and other Assyriologists had started to emphasize the impact of Babylonian mythology and folklore on the Old Testament. According to Strindberg the Assyriologists, along with modern philologists, were thus heading towards paganism and perverted science (Balbierz 2005: 41).

Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist, Finnilä and Strindberg carried out a correspondence with each other in 1911–12, discussing Finnish, Hebrew and other languages, and etymology (SgNM: TF, EL, SWA, Brev 7862, 7876, 7878, 7879, 7888, 7889, 7891, 8020, 8023, 8043, 8054, XX: 181, 190–3, 198–204, 284–6, 298–9, 308–9). The discussion was often very detailed. Only two longer private letters between Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg have

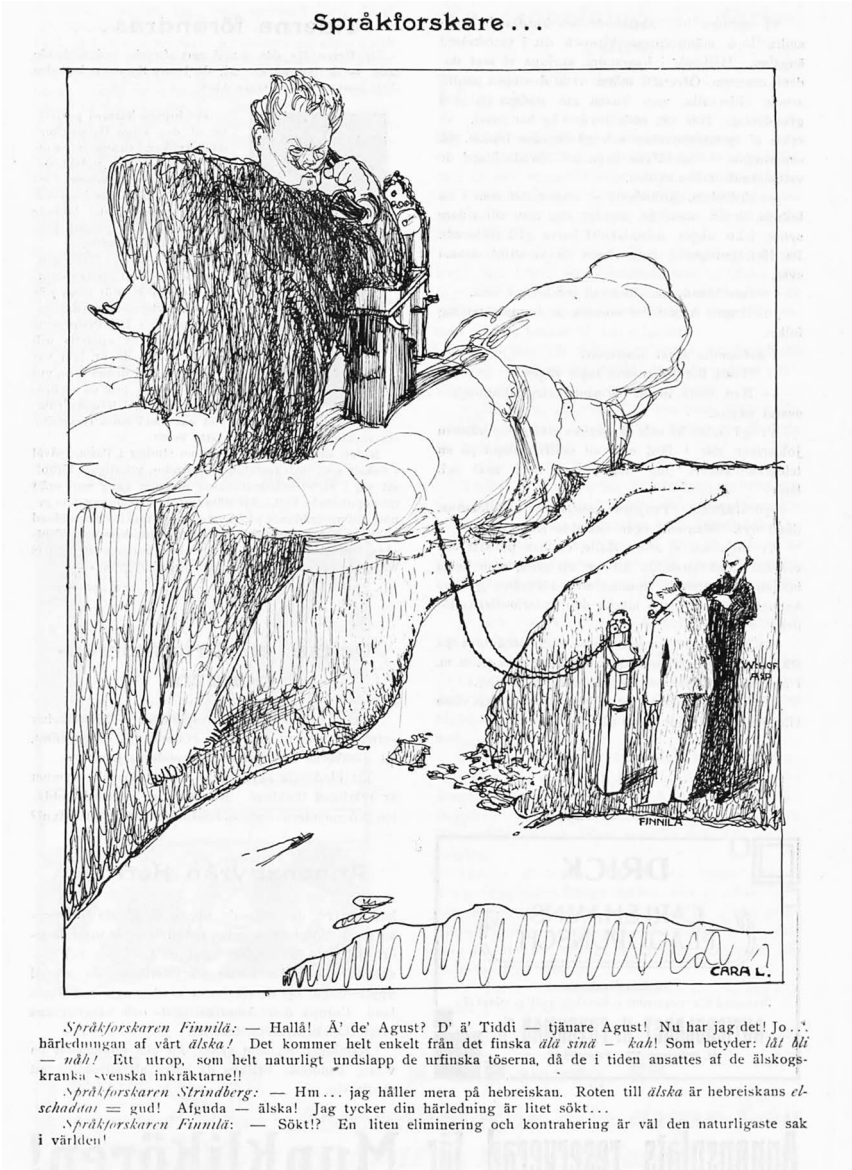
24 'Har Du lust att utslunga ett anathema öfver den "vetenskapliga" humbugens Bibel babbel, och lägga kronan på Ditt lifsverk – så är jag gärna med därom' (SgNM: SWA, 14.12.1911).

survived from this correspondence, and there perhaps never was much more. Wettenhovi-Aspa recalls that he finally withdrew from the friendly debate when he became aware of Strindberg's illness, and that Strindberg was corresponding and debating also with Finnilä and Lönnqvist (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 267–8). However, Wettenhovi-Aspa was present also in Lönnqvist's and Finnilä's letters. Lönnqvist reported to Strindberg about Wettenhovi-Aspa's writings in Finnish newspapers and mediated Wettenhovi-Aspa's views to Strindberg with Finnilä, although they had many ideas of their own, too.

Strindberg on the other hand told Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä to keep in touch with each other, as he didn't want to repeat his views and detailed etymological vocabularies to each of them individually (Brev 7889, XX: 200; Brev 7891, XX: 202). To some extent it is thus possible to read Strindberg's letters as if they were written to all three Finns together.

The motive for the correspondence was to draw Strindberg's attention to the Finnish language. Theodor Finnilä was the first of the Finns to approach Strindberg. He sent Strindberg a Finnish–Swedish dictionary with his first two letters and proposed to him a series of lectures in Finland, Russia and the Baltics.[25] At that time he was organising some lectures with Wettenhovi-Aspa in Finland, and they had also planned some kind of tour in the Nordic countries as well. Finnilä also offered Strindberg his assistance in the Finnish and Russian languages (SgNM: TF, 1.12.1911, 2.12.1911). Strindberg replied by sending his book *Kina och Japan* (China and Japan, SV 70) and a short letter as an answer to Finnilä's letters (Brev 7862, XX: 181). In the subsequent longer letters Strindberg also sent him sixteen pages of etymological comparisons concerning Finnish language, the *Kalevala*, Chinese and Assyrian (SLSA 432). Lönnqvist also received some etymological manuscripts from Strindberg (SgKB 2005/63). Strindberg wasn't at all convinced of the importance of Finnish. He explained that Finnish seems to be the key to all languages, as do all the other languages as well, because everything can be found everywhere. Strindberg stressed this monistic principle

25 Strindberg had several Finnish dictionaries and grammars in his library (Lindström 1977: 112, 116, 119, 121, 122, 138). In March 1912, he purchased the *Kalevala* in Karl Collán's Swedish translation (see commentaries in Brev 8023, XX: 286), probably inspired by his Finnish correspondence. To Finnilä (SLSA 432) and Lönnqvist (SgKB 2005/63) he sent etymological speculations discussing the proper names in the *Kalevala*.



´'Philologists', a caricature by Cara L., alias Carolus Lindberg (1889–1955), with philologists Strindberg and Finnilä explaining the Swedish verb älska ('love') with factitious Finnish and Hebrew etymologies. Wettenhovi-Aspa (W:hof Asp) is depicted as an *éminence grise* next to Finnilä. *Fyren* 51–2, 30.12.1911.

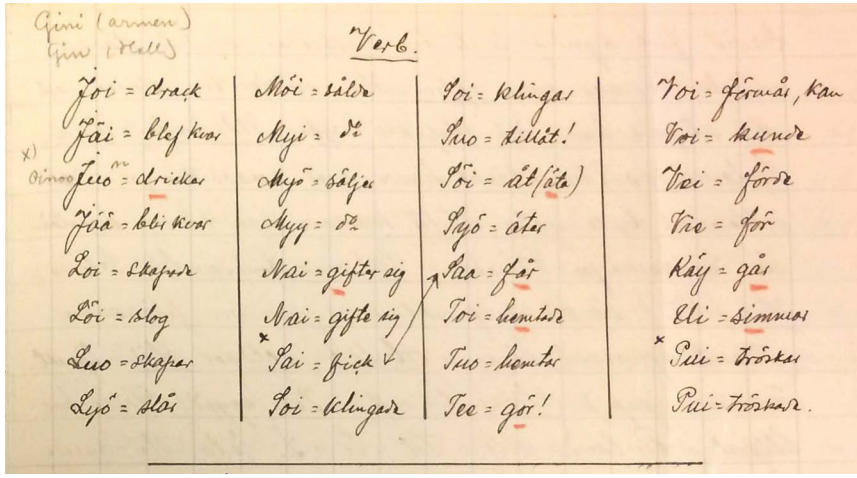
several times to his Finnish correspondents (Brev 7888, XX: 199; Brev 7889, XX: 200; Brev 8043, XX: 299).

Strindberg described the debate in his article for *Afton-Tidningen*, a Swedish newspaper, and described a dream he had had in a febrile delirium in which he leafed through a dictionary of all languages with Wettenhovi-Aspa.[26] According to Strindberg, the debate had been lively but friendly. In his article Strindberg published a challenge to the three Finns (SV 71: 192–4). The article was reproduced by the Finnish newspapers *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Dagens Tidning*, and also published in a Finnish translation by the newspaper *Suomi* (Strindberg 1912a–c). The humorous magazine *Fyren* also cited and commented on the article during the same week (Sepia 1912). *Fyren* had followed Strindberg's and the three Finns' debate from the beginning, and also mocked Wettenhovi-Aspa's articles in 1911 (Sepia 1911).

Strindberg asked Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist to send ten difficult Finnish words, which he promised to explain with etymologies of Greek and Hebrew. Wettenhovi-Aspa published Strindberg's letter and his answer in *Åbo Underrättelser* in January 1912. Strindberg's challenge and Wettenhovi-Aspa's answer[27] were noted also in other Finnish newspapers (see e.g. *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1912). However, Strindberg didn't reply to Wettenhovi-Aspa, at least not in public. Elias Lönnqvist sent Strindberg a long list of Finnish one-syllable words as a contribution to his challenge (SgNM: EL, 25.2.1912). Strindberg replied soon with six pages of etymological explanations, but he discussed only some of the words Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa had given in their replies. Strindberg connected for example the words *juo* / *joi* / *juon* (conjugations of the Finnish verb *juoda*, 'to

26 Possibly a reference to Catherine the Great's *Linguarum totius orbis vocabularia comparativa* (St. Petersburg 1787–9), a comparative dictionary of *c.* 200 languages, compiled by Peter Simon Pallas, which Strindberg recommended to Wettenhovi-Aspa and Finnilä in his letters. According to him it proved the common origins of all languages (Brev 7888, XX: 199; Brev 7891, XX: 202; see also SV 69: 9). In July 1911 Strindberg had asked his publisher Karl Börjesson for the book, but Börjesson hadn't managed to find it for him (Brev 7704, XX: 78). Wettenhovi-Aspa also mentioned the dictionary in his books, but it is possible that he actually never even saw it (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 13; Pitkälä 2010: 47–9; Balbierz 2005: 30–1).

27 Wettenhovi-Aspa answered with the words *kuu* ('moon'), *maa* ('earth'), *mies* ('man'), *tar* ('woman'), *pää* ('head'), *luu* ('bone'), *puu* ('tree'), *suu* ('mouth'), *laa* (*laaja*) ('wide', 'root for spreading'), and *ko* (*koko*) ('whole', 'root for gathering') (*Åbo Underrättelser* 1912).


Gini (armen)
Gin (Holl)

Verb.

Juoi = dricka	Möi = sälja	Soi = klinga	Voi = förmå, kan
Jää = bli kvar	Myi = dö	Suo = tillåt!	Voi = kunna
x) Juo = dricka	Myö = sälja	Söi = åt (äta)	Voi = förde
Jää = bli kvar	Myy = dö	Syö = äta	Vie = för
Loi = skapar	Nai = gifter sig	Saa = får	Käy = går
Löi = slog	Nai = gifte sig	Toi = hemtar	Eli = simmar
Luo = skapar	x Sai = fick	Tuo = hemtar	x Sui = tröskar
Lyö = slår	Soi = klingar	Tee = gör!	Pui = tröskar.

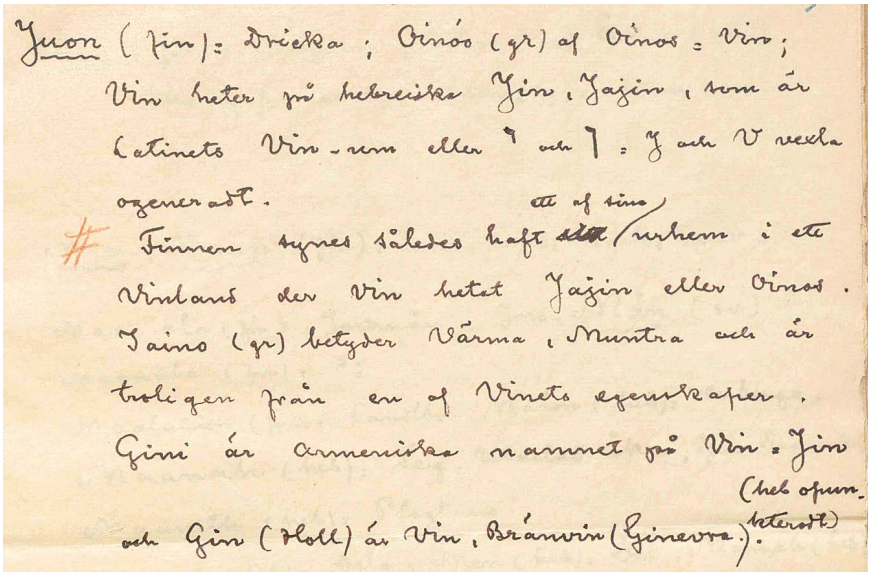
An excerpt from Elias Lönnqvist letter to Strindberg with Finnish verbs. Strindberg has made remarks with pencil and underlinings with red pencil. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgNM: EL, 25.2.1912.

drink': 'he drinks' / 'he drank' / 'I drink') with the Greek word *oinos* ('wine'), the Hebrew word *yayin* ('wine'), *vinum* in Latin and finally the words *gini* in Armenian and *gin* in Dutch and other modern languages. According to Strindberg some of the ancestors of the Finns thus had lived in a wine-producing area (SgKB 2005/63: February 1912).

The debate was short-lived, because Strindberg's illness was beginning to affect his ability to participate. Before his death on 14 May 1912, he continued to carry out some private correspondence on the topic. He wrote to Lönnqvist that he was too ill and tired to debate (Brev 8043, XX: 298), but continued to send him etymological speculations and references to literature. In March 1912 Strindberg asked his publisher Karl Börjesson to send a copy of his *Kinesiska språkets härkomst* (The Source of the Chinese Language) to each of 'his three adepts' who had 'invented the Finnish language'[28] (Strindberg 2016:[29] letter Sg126, 134). Lönnqvist thanked him for

28 'Herr Börjesson, Var snäll att sända ex till: Sigurd Wetterhof Asp: Hotel de Commerce, Helsingfors. Kapten Theodor Finnilä: Berggatan. Hfors. Herr Elias Lönnqvist. Kuurila Finnland. Mina tre adepter, som upptäckt Finska språket – en gång för alla! Eder AugSg.'

29 Strindberg 2016 contains 131 letters, supplementing *August Strindbergs brev* I–XXII.



Strindberg replied to Lönnqvist's letter from 25 February by presenting etymologies for some Finnish words, here explaining the connections with the Finnish word for drinking, and Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Armenian, and Dutch words for wine, among other words. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgKB 2005/63: February 1912.

the book on his and Wettenhovi-Aspa's behalf with a postcard (SgNM: EL, 27.3.1912). From Strindberg's point of view Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist seemed to be more his followers than his opponents.

When Lönnqvist asked for help in publishing his and Wettenhovi-Aspa's investigations, Strindberg answered that he couldn't help financially at the moment, but perhaps in the future. He didn't promise anything, though, and also mentioned that their theories needed to be discussed further and revised (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911; Brev 7889, XX: 200). Strindberg was interested in the views of his Finnish acquaintances, although he emphasized the seminal status of Hebrew instead of Finnish. It also seems that the correspondence with Finnilä, Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa enabled Strindberg to discuss languages with like-minded people, which perhaps wasn't otherwise possible. Strindberg had said in his letter to the publisher Karl Börjesson that the three Finns were his adepts. Maybe the shared view of the common origins of all languages was after all more important than the question of the seminal language.

After the debate

For Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, the activity in studying languages and history which began with the debate of 1911–12, continued for the rest of his life. In 1915 he released a book called *Finlands Gyllene Bok* (The Golden Book of Finland), which was translated into Finnish in the same year (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a–b). The book was actually a political pamphlet, which was written against a book called *Svenskt i Finland* (Swedishness/Swedish Culture in Finland). This book was a collection of articles produced by a Swedish-speaking students' Pan-Germanistic movement, which represented the Swedish-speaking minority as Germans, and as such superior to the Finns (*Svenskt i Finland* 1914; Klinge 1972: 53–4, 107–8).

As *Svenskt i Finland* emphasized the Swedish origin of Finnish civilization, Wettenhovi-Aspa – a Swedish-speaking Finn himself – turned the whole thing upside down, arguing that all languages had their origins in Finnish and also that the Swedish-speaking Finns should be grateful to the Finnophones for all valuable things in their culture. In fact the whole of western civilization was influenced by the Finns, who had created the ancient civilizations in Egypt and Crete. This kind of opinion can be seen as a bizarre and extremist manifestation of Fennomania, a Finnish nationalist movement, which started in the first half of the nineteenth century, demanding official recognition for the Finnish language and culture. Some Swedish-speaking Finns saw this as a threat, as Swedish had been the official language in the Grand Duchy of Finland, and their opposition was called the Svecomans. The book which Wettenhovi-Aspa opposed, *Svenskt i Finland*, represented one current in the Svecoman ideological tradition. The strife between Fennomans and Svecomans was politically more complicated, especially in relation to Russia, which favoured the Fennomans (Pitkälä 2010: 59–88). Besides language politics, there was also another aspect of Wettenhovi-Aspa's book, which emphasized the holy nature of the Finnish language and the wisdom of the *Kalevala*, which Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed to be the only peaceful epic of the world. The statement was made in 1915, during the First World War (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a, 1915b).

After 1915 Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his ideas about the Finnish language and history and the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, in several articles in Finnish newspapers and periodicals both in Swedish and in Finnish. In the 1930s Wettenhovi-Aspa published two books, which can be considered as his principal works concerning the Finnish language and the history

of the Finns. The first one was *Kalevala ja Egypti* (1935b).[30] It was a visually impressive book with many illustrations. The book contained comparisons between ancient Egyptian mythology and the *Kalevala*. Wettenhovi-Aspa also presents his etymological evidence here and there, but it is not as important here as in many of his other writings. Some of his mythological comparisons were later admired for their imaginative inventiveness, although his conclusions that the Finns had actually once lived in Egypt have not gained much acceptance. Wettenhovi-Aspa also attacked in his book established Fenno-Ugric linguistics and comparative folkloristics which were at the time eagerly investigating Germanic influences in Finnish language and folklore. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa these aspirations were both unjustified and unpatriotic (see e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935b: 69–74). The other book released that year by Wettenhovi-Aspa was intended for the international public and was entitled *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt. Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen* (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935a).

Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg were representatives of a larger cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This cultural movement was characterised by an interest in Oriental cultures and religions, which manifested both in arts and religious and intellectual movements such as Theosophy. It was also a counter-cultural movement against contemporary utilitarian rationalism and positivistic aspirations. At the same time, especially in small countries like Finland and Sweden, an interest in building nationality by investigating and inventing ancient national myth emerged. These interests were combined in particular in Wettenhovi-Aspa's texts. Strindberg wrote both about the Hebrew origins of modern languages and the history of Sweden, but he didn't combine these ideas into a nationalist narrative.

Both Wettenhovi-Aspa's and Strindberg's ideas on the origin of languages had been influenced by the same kind of intellectual context. They had both lived in Paris in the 1890s, where Swedenborg's ideas, theosophical ideas of the unity of divinities and mythological texts and the interests in Oriental and ancient Egyptian and Assyrian culture converged, and on the

30 *Kalevala ja Egypti. Suomen kultainen kirja* II. *Riemujuhlajulkaisu Kalevalan satavuotispäiväksi 28/II 1835–28/II 1935* (The Kalevala and Egypt. The golden book of Finland II. A jubilee publication for the centenary of The Kalevala 28.2.1835–28.2.1935).

other hand the culture of the Nordic countries was seen as pure and uncorrupted, and inspirational by both local artists and, for example, Swedish and Finnish artists as well.

Other important influences came from history. In the seventeenth century it was common in Europe to represent one's language as the original one, or as close to Hebrew, Greek and Latin as possible. In Sweden this historiographical movement was called Gothicism – the history of the Swedish Empire was to be derived from the Bible, and the Swedish were to be shown as a chosen people in order to legitimate the empire. In Finland and the Academy of Turku there were also Gothicist aspirations to etymologically prove that Finnish was very close to the biblical languages (Urpilainen 1993: 141–2).

August Strindberg's books on languages received mostly negative responses from critics in the newspapers and periodicals at the time they were released (Kretz and Ralph 2009: 267–70). However, in Finland they were noticed by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä, and others too (see Pitkälä 2010: 3). Strindberg's example was important for all of them, even if his Finnish adepts didn't follow exactly the same path. Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa pursued their investigations for decades, until the 1940s. In 1945 Lönnqvist persisted in starting his book citing Strindberg's language studies from 1910–11 (Lönnqvist 1945: 13–14). One of Wettenhovi-Aspa's last articles, in 1942, was about Strindberg. In it Wettenhovi-Aspa continued to admire Strindberg's originality and wrote that he was ahead of his time with many of his ideas concerning arts and sciences (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1942).

MA **Pekka Pitkälä**, Cultural History, University of Turku, is a historian writing his PhD dissertation on the notions of language and history of the Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (1870–1946). He is currently a member of the multidisciplinary research project 'Seekers of the New' that explores the cultural history of Finnish esotericism from the 1880s to the 1940s. The project is funded by the Kone Foundation.

References

Archive sources

KB = Kungliga biblioteket (Royal Library of Sweden), Stockholm
SgKB = August Strindberg: Letters to Elias Lönnqvist 1911–12 (2005/63), one volume in case, 5 letters, 14 manuscript pages, 3 loose envelopes

ÖA = Verner von Heidenstam's archive, Övralidsarkivet, Linköping City Library
Letter to Verner von Heidenstam, 1.3.1911 (microfilmed for Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm: KB, MfH 368:17), from Wettenhovi-Aspa, Sigurd Georg (1870–), sculptor, 1 letter, 1911 and appendix (photography)
SgNM = Strindberg collection, The Nordic Museum, Stockholm
EL = letter to August Strindberg from Wilhelm Elias Lönnqvist, Fi. railway station master, 9 letters, 1911–12 + 1 letter 7.3.1912
SWA = letter to August Strindberg from Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, artist, 1 letter, 1911
TF = letter to August Strindberg from Theodor Finnilä, Fi. officer, 19 letters, 1911–12 & 1 photo
SLSA = The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Archive
Letters to Theodor Finnilä from August Strindberg 1911 (SLSA 432), 5 letters, 16 manuscript pages, 2 newspaper clippings, 6 loose envelopes

Primary and contemporary sources

Åbo Underrättelser, 1912. 'En språkstrid mellan August Strindberg och S. Wetterhoff-Asp. Ett brev från Strindberg och ett öppet dito från hr W.–A.', *Åbo Underrättelser*, 30.1.1912
Berndtson, Axel [A. B.], 1894. 'Bref från Paris. – Strindberg. – „Fadern" á théâtre de l'oeuvre', *Nya Pressen*, 21.12.1894
Bok-Fyren [Rafael Lindqvist], 1915. 'Finlands gyllene bok', *Fyren*, 26–7, p. 4
Brev = Strindberg, August, 1948–2001. *August Strindbergs brev*, I–XXII (Stockholm, Bonniers)
Culex, 1911. 'Vägvisare till *Fyrens* Rundturer. "Från krog och till krog"', *Fyren*, 14–15, pp. 16–18
Edelfelt, Albert, 1867–1901. *Albert Edelfelts brev 1867–1901*, Database of Albert Edelfelt's letters to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt, Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland and Finnish National Gallery, <http://edelfelt.sls.fi/> (accessed 4.5.2020)
Hufvudstadsbladet 1912. 'En språkstrid mellan August Strindberg och Wetterhoff-Asp', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 2.2.1912
Juslenius, Daniel, 2005 (1700). *Aboa vetus et nova. Turku Old and New* (Helsinki, SKS)
Lönnqvist, Elias, 1931. *Suomenkieli kaikkien kulttuurikielten avaimena* (Huopalahti)
———1945. *Suomenkieli kaikkien kulttuurikielten avaimena,* II osa (Helsinki)
Nordenstreng, Rolf, 1910. 'Strindberg som språkforskare', *Finsk Tidskrift*, 5, pp. 365–9
Sepia [Rafael Lindqvist], 1911. 'Finlands störste skämtare', *Fyren*, 30, pp. 2–4

———1912. 'Modern språkforskning', *Fyren*, 4, p. 5
Spex [Rafael Lindqvist], 1908. 'Strindberg', *Fyren*, 27, p. 5
Strindberg, August, 1912a–b. Betraktelser på födelsedagen med anledning av sjukdomen', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 24.1.1912; *Dagens Tidning*, 24.1.1912
Strindberg, August, 1912c. 'Mietteitä syntymäpäivänä sairauden johdosta', *Suomi*, 4.2.1912
Strindberg, August, 2016. 'August Strindbergs Brev – en efterslåtter 2016', ed. Björn Meidal, in *Strindbergiana. Trettioförsta samlingen utgivna av Strindbergssällskapet,* eds. David Gedin and Cecilia Carlander (Stockholm, Atlantis), pp. 11–147
SV = Strindberg, August, 1981–2013. *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk* (Stockholm, Norstedts)
Svenskt i Finland. Ställning och strävanden (Helsingfors, Söderström & C:o Förlagsaktiebolag, 1914)
Wettenhovi-Aspa, Sigurd [Wetterhoff-Asp, Sigurd], 1900. *Pro Patria. Dikter af Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp. Första samlingen* (Helsingfors)
———[Wetterhoff-Asp, Sigurd], 1905. *La crise russe. Nicolas II Tel qu'il est* (Paris, Librairie Universelle)
———[Wetterhoff-Asp, Sigurd], 1911a–d. 'Till frågan om „Världsspråkens rötter". Filologiska ströftåg och meditationer af Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp' I–IV, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 9.7.1911 (1911a); 31.7. 1911 (1911b); 19.8.1911 (1911c); 7.10.1911 (1911d)
———[Vedenhovilinnan Aspa-Haapets], 1911e. 'Kysymykseen "Maailmankielien juurista." Filologisia partio-kulkuja ja aprikoitsemisia', *Uusi Suometar*, 5.11.1911
———[S. W. Aspa-Haapets], 1911f. 'Kysymykseen "Maailmankielien juurista." II.', *Uusi Suometar*, 10.12.1911
———1915a. *Finlands Gyllene Bok.* I. *Svar på "Svenskt i Finland"* (Helsingfors)
———[Vettenhovi-Aspa], 1915b. *Suomen kultainen kirja* I, transl. J. Raekallio (Helsinki)
———1927. *Jutelmia ja muistelmia 1890-luvun Parisista ja August Strindbergin Inferno-vuosista. Paljon mukana olleena Strindbergin ystävänä kertonut Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa* (Helsinki, Kirja)
———1935a. *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt. Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen,* eingeleitet von Philipp Paneth (Leipzig [Helsinki], Genius-Verlag)
———1935b. *Kalevala ja Egypti. Suomen kultainen kirja* II. *Riemujuhlajulkaisu Kalevalan satavuotispäiväksi 28/II 1835–28/II 1935* (Helsinki)
———1935c. 'The Highfinnish localitynames in Great-Britain as a last remembrance of the Fenno-Celtic times', *Forum*, 7, pp. 21–6
———1936. *August Strindberg intim. Aufzeichnungen eines Zeitgenossen* (Helsinki)
———[S. W-Aspa], 1942. 'Mångfrestaren Strindberg grep stundom till penna och pensel', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 10.5.1942

Wilkuna, Kyösti [K.W.], 1910. 'August Strindbergin vertailevia kielitutkimuksia. (Muutamia poimintoja hänen viimeisestä teoksestaan.)', *Uusi Suometar*, 1.5.1910

Literature

Anttila, Tero, 2015. *The Power of Antiquity. The Hyperborean Research Tradition in Early Modern Swedish Research on National Antiquity*, Acta Universitatis Ouluensis B Humaniora, 12, (University of Oulu)

Balbierz, Jan, 2005. 'Strindberg bland hieroglyfer', in *Strindbergiana. Tjugonde samlingen utgivna av Strindbergssällskapet,* ed. Birgitta Steene (Stockholm, Atlantis), pp. 27–50

Bennich-Björkman, Bo, 2007. *Strindberg och Nordenskiölds japanska bibliotek,* Acta Bibliothecæ Regiæ Stockholmiensis, 76 (Stockholm, Kungl. biblioteket)

Berendsohn, Walter A., 1946. *Strindbergsproblem. Essäer och studier*, transl. from the German manuscript by Knut Stubbendorff (Stockholm, Kooperativa förbundets bokförlag)

Chaitow, Sasha, 2018. 'Return from oblivion: Joséphin Péladan's literary esotericism', in *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema*, eds. Tessel M. Bauduin and Henrik Johnsson (London, Palgrave), pp. 113–36

Halén, Harry, 2007. 'Wettenhovi-Aspa, Sigurd (1870–1946), taidemaalari, kuvanveistäjä, kirjailija', in *Suomen kansallisbiografia*, vol. 10, Studia Biographica, 3:10 (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 464–5

Halén, Harry, and Tauno Tukkinen, 1984. *Elämän ja kuoleman kello. Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan elämä ja teot* (Helsinki, Otava)

Hufvudstadsbladet 1962. 'Strindbergs 'Broder' var Wetterhoff-Asp', *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 25.5.1962

Jalas, Jussi, 1981. *Elämäni teemat*, ed. Olavi Lehmuksela (Helsinki, Tammi)

Johnsson, Henrik, 2015. *Det oändliga sammanhanget. August Strindbergs ockulta vetenskap* (Stockholm, Malört)

Jonsson, Hans, 1999. 'Hebreiskan, urspråk och diverse språkjämförelser', in *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk 66*, Nationalupplaga, ed. Gunnar Ollén (Stockholms universitet, Norstedts), pp. 1093–8

Klinge, Matti, 1972. *Vihan veljistä valtiososialismiin. Yhteiskunnallisia ja kansallisia näkemyksiä 1910- ja 1920-luvuilta* (Porvoo, Werner Söderströmin Osakeyhtiö)

Kokkinen, Nina, 2019. *Totuudenetsijät. Vuosisadanvaihteen okkulttuuri ja moderni henkisyys Akseli Gallen-Kallelan, Pekka Halosen ja Hugo Simbergin taiteessa*, Turun yliopiston julkaisuja, Scripta Lingua Fennica Edita, 469 (University of Turku)

Kortelainen, Anna, 2001. *Niin kutsuttu sydämeni. Albert Edelfeltin kirjeet äidilleen 1873–1901*, ed. Anna Kortelainen, letters translated by Sirpa Kähkönen (Helsinki, Otava)

Kretz, Camilla, and Bo Ralph, 2009. 'Kommentarer', in *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk 69,* Nationalupplaga, eds. Camilla Kretz och Bo Ralph (Stockholms universitet, Norstedts), pp. 259–315

Lagercrantz, Olof, 1979. *August Strindberg* (Stockholm, Wahlström & Widstrand)

Lahelma, Marja, 2018. 'August Strindberg's art in modernist and occult context', in *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema*, eds. Tessel M. Bauduin and Henrik Johnsson (London, Palgrave), pp. 67–92

———2020. 'From nostalgia to where…? National romanticism, esotericism, and the 'golden age of Finnish art', in *European Revivals: From Dreams of a Nation to Places of Transnational Exchange*, FNG Research, 1 (Helsinki, Finnish National Gallery), pp. 177–206, <https://research.fng.fi/2020/01/20/european-revivals-from-dreams-of-a-nation-to-places-of-transnational-exchange/> (accessed 20.4.2020)

Lindström, Hans 1977. *Strindberg och böckerna*, I. *Biblioteken 1883, 1892 och 1912,* förteckningar och kommentarer av Hans Lindström, Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Litteratursällskapet, 36 (Stockholm)

Lintinen, Jaakko, 1982. 'Miten käy Aspan perinnön?', *Taide*, 2, p. 54

Meyer, Michael 1985. *Strindberg: A Biography* (London, Secker & Warburg)

Olender, Maurice, 1994. 'Europe, or how to escape Babel', *History & Theory,* 33(4), pp. 5–25

Pitkälä, Pekka, 2010. 'Pyramidit, pyhät raamit. Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan (1870–1946) näkemykset suomen kielestä ja suomalaisten historiasta', MA diss. (University of Turku), <https://www.utupub.fi/handle/10024/92657> (accessed 20.4.2020)

Regnell, Astrid, 2009. *Att se stjärnor på ljusa dagen. Förvandling och försoning i August Strindbergs* En blå bok (Lund, Ellerströms Förlag)

Rohnström, John, 1971. 'Strindbergs mongoliska studier. Ett nyfunnet Strindbergsmanuskrift', in *Bibliotek och historia. Festskrift till Uno Willers*, ed. Åke Lilliestam, Acta Bibliothecæ Regiæ Stockholmiensis, 12 (Stockholm, Kungl. biblioteket), pp. 290–305

Rokem, Freddie, 2002. 'Secret codes: Strindberg and the dead languages', in *August Strindberg and the Other: New Critical Approaches,* eds. Poul Houe, Sven Hakon Rossel and Göran Stockenström (Amsterdam, Rodopi), pp. 167–84

Sarajas-Korte, Salme, 1966. *Suomen varhaissymbolismi ja sen lähteet. Tutkielma Suomen maalaustaiteesta 1891–1895* (Helsinki, Otava)

Scavenius, Bente, 1991. *Den frie Udstilling i 100 år* (København, Den frie Udstilling i kommission hos Borgens Forlag)s

Siukonen, Jyrki, 2000. [Introduction], in *Swedenborg, Emanuel: Clavis Hieroglyphica. Hieroglyfinen avain ja muita filosofisia tekstejä,* ed. and transl. by Jyrki Siukonen (Helsinki, Gaudeamus), pp. 7–113

Troy, Lana, 1999. 'Hieroglyfer', in *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk 66*, Nationalupplaga, ed. Gunnar Ollén (Stockholms universitet, Norstedts), pp. 1092–3

Urpilainen, Erkki, 1993. *Algot Scarin ja göötti läisen historiankirjoituksen murene-minen Ruotsissa 1700-luvun alkupuolella*, Historiallisia Tutkimuksia, 171 (Helsinki, Suomen Historiallinen Seura)

A history of violence

The concrete and metaphorical wars in the life narrative of G. I. Gurdjieff

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.84863

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

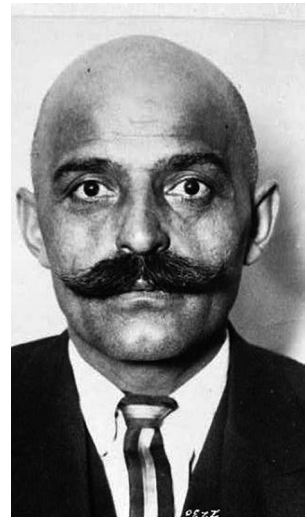
HIPPO TAATILA

Research into the life and work of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, a Greek-Armenian spiritual teacher and one of the foundational figures of modern mysticism, remains an emergent field within the academic study of religion/s. While esotericists such as H. P. Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner have been thoroughly studied, international academic study of Gurdjieff is still scarce. Gurdjieff lived his early adulthood amidst a severe power struggle between the major powers of the Russian, British and Ottoman empires. He survived the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Russian Civil War of 1918–22 and two World Wars. In his writings, he states how after the turn of the twentieth century, he understood it to be his mission in life to help mankind stop wars from happening, and during his years as a teacher, the question of war was omnipresent because of the events surrounding him and his pupils. Despite all this, there is no previous academic research on the topic of Gurdjieff and war. In this article, I examine the role of wars and armed conflicts in Gurdjieff's personal life narrative according to his own writings, present his narrative in a military-historical context and analyse his narrational tools and motives as a first step towards a comprehensive study of a much larger subject.

Introduction and definitions

George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866/77–1949), a Greek-Armenian spiritual teacher and esotericist, is often mentioned as one of the foundational figures of modern 'secularized' mysticism, yet he is far less studied than other foundational figures of the field such as H. P. Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner (Cusack and Sutcliffe 2015: 109).

Gurdjieff came from an ethnically Greek family who had to escape Ottoman Turkey because of the fear of persecution. He lived his childhood in a historically Turkish area which had been recently conquered by the Russians. During his early years, high geopolitical tensions prevailed between the British, Russian and Ottoman empires. He began his public teaching career in Russia during the days of World War I, continued to teach during the days of the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War,



G. I. Gurdjieff.
Wikimedia Commons.

and ending up in Paris, kept on teaching even through the World War II Nazi occupation of that city (Cusack 2011: 73–4).

My research objective in this article is to summarize what Gurdjieff says about wars and conflicts in the course of his life, according to his autobiographical texts, and present the military-historical context behind his writings. However, I use his texts as a narrative by analysing how and why they are presented, what is the underlying significance of his war stories and what does he want his followers to know about them. Therefore, even though the historical facts about the first decades of Gurdjieff's life are speculative, and his teaching is contested in terms of its sources as well as its proper scholarly classification (Cusack 2011: 72; Cusack and Sutcliffe 2015: 109), this is more or less a rule when approaching autobiographical writing. The 'truth' of the autobiographical storyteller is always a story of its own and in that sense, more fiction than fact (Kosonen 2016: 44) – or in the words of British sociologist Liz Stanley, the borders of fictional texts and autobiographical accounts are complex and shifting (Leskelä-Kärki 2008: 327).

Gurdjieff himself gives his readers instructions of interpretation by writing about his intention to give his autobiographical book, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963) a form as understandable as possible and accessible to all (Gurdjieff 2002: 6, 30). A major key to interpretation of the book is the speech of an 'intelligent, elderly Persian' in the introduction. The Persian rants about the woeful state of contemporary literature and refers to *A Thousand and One Nights* as a work of literature in the full sense of the word: 'fantasy corresponding to truth, even though composed of episodes which are quite improbable for the ordinary life of people' (p. 18). The nature of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* as a strategic method of teaching higher truths has been mentioned in several academic sources (see e.g. Cusack 2011: 78–83; Tamdgidi 2009: 13).

Despite the fantasy-filled content of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, the last chapter of the book, 'The Material Question', a reconstructed version of a talk Gurdjieff held in New York on his first trip to the United States in

1925–6, refers to actual historical moments in Gurdjieff's life that can be traced to other literary sources such as his escape from Russia from 1917 to 1919 as well as his days in Tiflis and Constantinople from 1919 to 1920. In 'The Material Question', the narrative of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* changes from tall tales to actual history, excluding the hyperbolical tale of Gurdjieff's travelling workshop. The second major autobiographical source of Gurdjieff's life narrative is his book *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* (1975). The book consists mostly of talks and practical exercises, but also includes a story of three nearly fatal stray bullet wounds received at the turn of the nineteenth century, as well as the written form of his decision to become a teacher.

The concept of war is a rarity as a research subject in the field of the study of western esotericism, but not completely unheard of. Study of the esoteric and occult dimension of Nazism remains a well-researched area (e.g. Goodrick-Clarke 1992, 2002; Staudenmaier 2013: 25–58; Strube 2015: 336–47) while the subject is occasionally present in other studies, such as in Susan Rowland's summary of C. G. Jung's esoteric theory of the reasons behind the World Wars in a comparative study of the works of Shakespeare and Lindsay Clarke (Rowland 2007). However, thorough academic research of the concept of war in the teachings of major western esoteric thinkers such as G. I. Gurdjieff, H. P. Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner is relatively untouched and provides remarkable amount of research material for those interested. This article, too, is merely the starting point of a longer, more thorough research project. The sheer multitude and length of the writings of Gurdjieff's followers concerning the subject warrants an article of its own; these writings cannot be examined sufficiently thoroughly in the context of this article alone.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines 'war' as a conflict among political groups involving hostilities of considerable duration and magnitude (Frankel 2017). In this article, I include the conflicts Gurdjieff himself labelled wars such as the Russian Civil War, World War I and the Greco-Turkish War, but also take into consideration the several pre- and post-war political tensions of the time of his life narrative such as The Great Game or the creeping expansion of the Russian Empire during the nineteenth century.

Early years: a migrant boy on the outskirts of the Russian Empire

Even when first mentioning his family background, Gurdjieff describes wars and persecutions: he is the son of an ethnically Greek father whose ancestors had to escape persecution by the Turks in Byzantium following the conquest of Constantinople (Gurdjieff 2002: 40). The family settled in the heart of Turkey, but then moved to the environs of present day Gümüşhane. Still later, 'not long before the last big Russo-Turkish war' (1877–8),[1] the repeated persecutions by the Turks forced the family to move to Georgia (p. 40). From Georgia, Gurdjieff's father moved to Armenia and the town of Alexandropol, formerly the Turkish town of Gumri.[2] George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was born there, the first of his parents' children (pp. 40–1).

By the time Gurdjieff was seven, his family consisted of his father, his mother, his grandmother and three children – himself, his brother and his sister. His father was the richest cattle owner of the district, employed several shepherds and held in his charge the cattle of poorer families in exchange for butter and cheese. Gurdjieff doesn't describe the daily life of his mother in his writings, but considering his father's wealth and position, his mother most likely stayed at home and ran the household (Gurdjieff 2002: 40–1). However, his father lost all his fortune in the aftermath of a cattle plague and since the maintenance of a family – 'which until then had been pampered by a life of wealth' – cost a good deal, he had to open a lumber yard and a carpenter's shop. This coincided with a period of reconstruction by the Russians of the nearby fortress town of Kars.[3] Because of newly arising opportunities, Gurdjieff's father took his workshop to Kars and eventually moved his whole family there. By that time, three more daughters had been born into the family (p. 41).

1 Gurdjieff is most likely referring to the latest conflict (1877–8) in a series of conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire fought in the Balkans, the Crimea, and the Caucasus for political domination of those territories, starting from 1806 (Wright 2007).

2 Known as Kumayri in antiquity, and later called Gyumri, the city was named Alexandrapol (commonly spelled Alexandropol) by the Russians in 1837, in honour of Czar Nicholas I's wife. Russians occupied the city in 1804 and a Russian army base was established in 1837, when Nicholas I visited the town (Adalian 2010: 352).

3 Kars was handed over to Russian troops in the Treaty of San Stefano in the aftermath of Russo-Turkish war of 1877–8 (La Boda 2013: 359).

The first striking attribute of Gurdjieff's stories about his childhood is the multi-ethnicity of his environs. Children of all colours and different races – Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Tartars, Yezidis, and so forth – were constantly playing with each other (Gurdjieff 2002: 65). The description of his childhood takes place in a pre-industrialized world: his father was a shepherd and a carpenter and widely known among the inhabitants of Transcaucasia and Asia Minor as a poet and a storyteller (pp. 32–4). He constantly refers to the presence of Russian soldiers in the environs of Kars and Alexandropol, which makes sense, since the area was located at the border of Russian and Ottoman empires.

Dean Borsh, the highest spiritual authority of the region, hand-picked Gurdjieff to be a pupil of Kars Military Cathedral, which Gurdjieff describes as a far better seat of learning than the Kars municipal school which he had previously attended. At the Military Cathedral, Gurdjieff was able to learn subjects such as geography, Russian language, scripture, anatomy, physiology and mathematics (Gurdjieff 2002: 50–1, 53). Studies at Kars Military Cathedral were also a gateway to a higher social standing, since the town elite consisted of Russian military men. Gurdjieff mentions a few of them by name, such as the army engineer Vseslavsky, artillery officer Kouzmin, artillery officer Artemin, captain Terentiev and company commander Gorbakoun (pp. 59, 63, 67).

Gurdjieff seems to have been fond of weapons as a child and youngster. As a six-year-old he took his father's rifle without permission and fell in love with shooting. After his father confiscated the rifle, he made a customized gun out of old cartridge shells and became his own 'gunsmith', selling toy firearms to his comrades. Later, he was accidentally shot in the leg during a duck hunt with his friends (Gurdjieff 2002: 63–4). Yet another incident in his youth involving lethal weapons happened when he sneaked into the artillery range with his friend, Piotr Karpenko, during artillery firing. Even though Karpenko was wounded and lost a lot of blood, both young men survived (pp. 201–7).

Gurdjieff doesn't seem to have been bothered about the omnipresence of the military – it was apprehensible in rural borderlands between two empires and nothing to be concerned about. He even seems to consider the Russian army to be an entity which brought a sense of civilization and stability to the region while his studies at Kars Military Cathedral opened him up to possibilities he would have never thought of. It's also worth mentioning that even though Gurdjieff's ancestors suffered from persecution by the Turks,

he writes about Turks in a neutral way, as if he understood the grand scheme of things: there was 'nothing personal' about the persecution; human beings tend to act that way.

Young adulthood: 'Seekers of Truth'

From Kars, Gurdjieff moved to Tiflis and worked there as a stoker for the local railway station. Soon after, the engineer Vasiliev, who came to town to survey the route of a proposed railway between Tiflis and Kars, offered him a job. Gurdjieff spent the next three months as an overseer and interpreter in the villages along the proposed railroad (Gurdjieff 2002: 86–7). Here, Gurdjieff positions himself in the middle of the major power politics of the turn of the twentieth century: the Russian Empire wanted its new territories to be linked to the old ones as soon as possible. The railway route from Tiflis to Kars through Alexandropol was initiated in the spring of 1894 and completed in December 1899. Historical sources mention Russian sectarians such as Doukhobors and Molokans living in the villages between Kars and Alexandropol and refers to them as the basis of support of the Russian administration in the newly acquired territory (Mirzoyam and Badem 2013: 19–21).

After the railroad episode, the chronological character of Gurdjieff's tales begins to disappear as he introduces his reader to various – factual or fictional – companions of his and describes many adventures and journeys. He refers several times to a group named 'Seekers of Truth', a club composed of Gurdjieff and his companions which sought for traces of ancient wisdom in places such as the Gobi Desert, Africa, the Himalayas, Asia, Mecca and Medina (Gurdjieff 2002: 164–5, 209–11, 227). He and his companions seem to be able to roam from one country to another rather freely, but despite the long distances, this cannot be claimed to be unrealistic: the nation states were still a new invention, and especially the more extensive borders must have been virtually impossible to monitor. Also, in a pre-unionized and mostly pre-industrialized world, the movement of the workforce was easier than it is today.

While Gurdjieff's tales are not in a chronological form, nor can their historical accuracy be confirmed, there are several sequences which can be placed in a military-historical context. In Alexandropol, Gurdjieff and his friend Sarkis Pogossian are keen on getting to the current-day Iraqi city of Mosul, where they have been told they will find traces of a mystical Sarmoung

Andranik Ozanian, one of the historical military figures mentioned in Gurdjieff's writings, 1918. Wikimedia Commons.

Brotherhood. This takes place during a great nationalist movement among the Armenians, at a time when the Armenians are being persecuted by all the other races: 'a violent political explosion was taking place, such as recurs from time to time in Armenia, with the usual train of consequences' (Gurdjieff 2002:92). Gurdjieff and Pogossian join the Armenian committee of Alexandropol on a special mission which they use as a cover for their departure for Mosul (Gurdjieff 2002: 90–5). These events have a historical background. In the nineteenth century, the well-educated and cosmopolitan Armenian elite in Istanbul and other Ottoman port cities became a source of suspicion among the Muslim majority and were considered a foreign element within the Ottoman Empire. Young Armenian activists formed various revolutionary parties, trying to ignite Armenian nationalistic fervour amongst their countrymen in Turkey. While the movements didn't gain wide support among Turkish Armenians, their actions evoked anti-Armenian feelings which erupted into mass violence several times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed in the so-called Hamidian massacres of 1894–6 (Suny 2019). A revolutionary character specifically mentioned by Gurdjieff is 'young Andronik, who later became a national hero' (Gurdjieff 2002: 92). This refers to Andranik Ozanian, an Armenian military commander and statesman, who joined the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in 1892 and defended the Armenian villages of Mush and Sasun from attacks by the Turks and Kurdish units during the Hamidian massacres (Walker 1990: 411).

The adventures of Gurdjieff in his young adulthood also take place in a highly militarized world. This can be deduced, for example, from the way he describes his companions; almost all of them were involved with the military in one way or another. Abram Yelov prepared to enter the Cadet

school (Gurdjieff 2002: 109–10), Ekim Bey studied at a military school in Germany (pp. 145–6) and Soloviev spent his first weeks in military service in the railway battalion in charge of the Trans-Caspian Railway, and was then sent to 'what was called the Kushka Line'[4] (pp. 145–6). Gurdjieff encounters the Russian military even in virtually deserted regions. This is also logical: the Russian Empire expanded rapidly into Asia throughout the entire nineteenth century ('Map of acquisitions of the Russian Empire, 1553–1894'). The Russian Empire needed its military to maintain order and stability in her newly-acquired frontier regions. A brilliant example of this is Gurdjieff's tale about travelling through Pamirs and finding out that the headquarters of the surveyors from the Turkestan Military Topographic Department is in one of the valleys near this peak (Gurdjieff 2002: 211).[5]

Since Gurdjieff claims to have roamed all over Asia, it is more than apposite to find that he came across British soldiers several times. He reminisces how he and Pogossian helped a bunch of British sailors in bar fight in the Turkish town of Smyrna and as a favour in return, they were accepted on board a British warship sailing to Alexandria, Egypt (Gurdjieff 2002: 102–6). British troops are also mentioned when another companion of his, Professor Skridlov, has to take an Afghan holy relic across the river Amu Darya, which is being watched over by the Afghan guards and by British soldiers, who 'for some reason or other, were there at that time in great numbers' (pp. 116–17). Here, Gurdjieff again locates himself at a remarkable historical turning point, since on 10 September 1895, The Great Game – a political and diplomatic, cold-war-like confrontation between the British and Russian Empires over Afghanistan and Central and Southern Asia – ended with the signing of Pamir Boundary Commission protocols, where

4 The Kushka line is also something with great military-historical value; a highly secret railroad branch built in 1897–8, which began from the city of Merv in present day Turkmenistan and terminated 313 kilometres later at Kushkinski Post, the southernmost point of the Russian Empire after its founding in the 1890s. Due to the Kushka line, Russian army could move troops from Caucasus to the Afghan border in eight days (Alikuzai 2013: 898).

5 'Turkestan' is referred to as the geographical entity of Russian Turkestan, which began to form in 1865, when Russian forces took over the city of Tashkent, the capital of present-day Uzebkistan (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2019b). The entity known as Turkestan Military District was created alongside other Russian military districts by count Dmitry Milyutin in 1862–4 as a part of a programme of Russian military reform (Bellamy 2001).

it was agreed that the Amu Darya would form the official border between Afghanistan, which was closely monitored by the British, and the Russian Empire (Rowe 2010: 64).

The military is present everywhere in Gurdjieff's early adulthood. Both the expansion of the Russian Empire and the tensions of The Great Game are detectible in his stories. In several cases, Gurdjieff pinpoints himself in the middle of most notable historical occurrences; while there might be glimpses of truth in many of his tales, one might think he uses well-known historical events and currents as a background so that his contemporary readers can more easily identify with his stories. Gurdjieff's description of the 'political explosion' in Armenia is especially interesting, since it is written in a very objective sense. He describes the Turks rather neutrally despite their deeds and even claims that political upheavals recur in Armenia 'from time to time', putting some blame on the minority, despite his maternal Armenian background.

The three gunshot wounds

The third and final book of Gurdjieff's 'All and Everything' trilogy, *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, consists of a prologue, an introduction, five talks and a final chapter, which all process Gurdjieff's idea of the inner world of man. The book was intended by Gurdjieff to be written in a much more polished form, but because of the passing of Gurdjieff in 1949, his followers published the preliminary draft he had written (Anastasieff 1999: 9).

While the book consists mostly of practical issues concerning the inner world of man, Gurdjieff also tells the story of 'the three gunshot wounds', the story behind his decision to settle down and teach in Russia. According to the story, Gurdjieff had a desire to investigate and understand the significance and purpose of the life of man; because of this 'sole aim' of his 'inner world', he explains he had the tendency to place himself wherever 'sharp, energetic events' such as civil wars and revolutions occur (Gurdjieff 1999: 26–7). The first stray bullet hit him in 1896 on the island of Crete a year before the Greco-Turkish War (p. 7), the second one in 1902 in the mountains of Tibet a year before the Anglo-Tibetan War (p. 9) and the third one in 1904 near Chiatura tunnel in Georgia during a battle between a branch of the Russian Cossack army and the local 'Gourian' troops (p. 9). Here, Gurdjieff places himself again at a military historical crossroads.

In 1896, the island of Crete was a part of the Ottoman Empire despite most of its population being Greek. While the Cretan Greeks longed for union with Greece, Ottoman Turkey decided not to give them the status of autonomy, resulting in deteriorating relations between Greeks and Turks. An outbreak of rebellion in 1896 appeared to give Greece an opportunity to annex the island, but they were met by Ottoman reinforcements, setting up the Greco-Turkish War of 1897. This is most likely the historical background of Gurdjieff's first gunshot wound (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2016). Gurdjieff doesn't present details of the incident.

The second stray bullet hit Gurdjieff in 1902 in the mountains of Tibet a year before the Anglo-Tibetan War. This chapter in history is yet another example of power play between British and Russian empires in Asia. The British Viceroy of India was obsessed with Russia's advance into Central Asia and feared an invasion. This was provoked even further when Tibet's spiritual leader the Dalai Lama declined to meet the British government of India and decided to concentrate on having good relations with Russians. When the rumours concerning a secret agreement about handing over Tibet to Russia began to circulate, the British prepared an expedition to take over Tibet, tried to provoke the Tibetans into a confrontation and in the end, pressed deep into Tibetan territories in early December 1903 (Allen 2015: 1–2, 28, 31). Once again, Gurdjieff decides not to give his reader any details about the incident.

The third stray bullet hit Gurdjieff in the end of 1904 in the Transcaucasian region, in the vicinity of the Chiatura tunnel. This time, Gurdjieff explains how the bullet was 'plunked' into him by a representative of either group of people; the Russian army, which consisted of chiefly Cossacks, or the so-called 'Gourians' (Gurdjieff 1999: 9). The term 'Gourians' refers to the peasant protest movement in the western Georgian region of Guria, which culminated in creating the self-governed Gurian Republic in 1902. During the Russian Revolution of 1905, the mining town of Chiatura was the only Bolshevik stronghold in mostly Menshevik Georgia, while the 'Chiatura Tunnel' most likely refers to the large mining complex near the town. The Gurian Republic collapsed in 1906 when the area was devastated by the Cossacks (Jones 2005: 131–2).

After struggling 'between life and death for two weeks' in a cave in the mountains near Chiatura tunnel (Gurdjieff 1999: 10–11), Gurdjieff reminisces about terrors he has witnessed, mentions previous conversations with revolutionaries in Italy, Switzerland and Transcaucasia, and finally tells the

reader what was his motivation in becoming a teacher: he must 'discover, at all costs, some manner or means for destroying in people the predilection for suggestibility which causes them to fall easily under the influence of mass hypnosis' (p. 27).

While the story of three gunshot wounds might be based on factual occasions in the life of Gurdjieff or his companions, it is interesting to see how he caught a bullet and was able to escape death three times. The number three is highly significant in several world religions; for example Christianity (the Holy Trinity, three temptations of Jesus), Buddhism (the three jewels), Judaism (three daily prayers) or Taoism (the three treasures), not forgetting the Triple Greatness of Hermes Trismegistus. The way Gurdjieff describes the aim which crystallized in him emanates a sense of holiness; through suffering, he found himself an 'apostle's mission' which eventually led him to become a teacher – in this context, the underlined use of the trinity or number three couldn't have been a mere incident. Also, as on previous occasions, Gurdjieff places himself in the middle of conflicts well known to his contemporaries in exotic geographical locations and stirs the pot even more by mentioning Switzerland and Italy, most likely to help his words resonate in the minds of people from all over the world.

The Material Question and 'Madame Russian Revolution'

In the last chapter of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, entitled 'The Material Question', Gurdjieff gradually changes the tone: while the first third of the chapter is vivid, extravagant and humorous, he begins writing down history, describing in great detail some events before, during and after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Here, Gurdjieff's life moves from the mode of an epic legendary past to written history, since the earliest follower's descriptions of Gurdjieff's life and teaching come from mid-1910s, when the philosopher and writer P. D. Ouspensky was introduced to him and wrote the earliest and most systematic version of his teaching, *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949). The last thirty-five years of Gurdjieff's life are well documented by his pupils and contemporaries (Cusack 2011: 74).

Gurdjieff tells how after gathering money for four or five years, he went to Moscow near the end of 1913 to 'begin to actualize in practice' what he had taken upon himself as 'a sacred task': to establish an institute in which a man would be 'continually reminded of the sense and aim of his existence by an unavoidable friction between his conscience and the automatic

manifestations of his nature' (Gurdjieff 2002: 270). The same period in Gurdjieff's life is described in *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, but is placed one year earlier: he claims to have arrived in Moscow in 1912, where he began to establish the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man (Gurdjieff 1999: 28). However, the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the beginning of the Russian Civil War in 1918 forced Gurdjieff to change his plans. He describes, how after two years of constant, intense work, his institute was nearing completion when war broke out. While Gurdjieff was able to adapt to the wartime conditions, 'very s-l-o-w-l-y and very u-n-o-b-t-r-u-s-i-v-e-l-y there emerged Madame Russian Revolution' (pp. 28–9). By this time, Gurdjieff had spent half the capital he had collected on the preparatory organization (Gurdjieff 2002: 271).

As hope of an early peace began to grow fainter, Gurdjieff was compelled to leave Moscow and settle in Essentuki at the base of Caucasus Mountains to wait until the conditions were stable enough for him to return. When Gurdjieff decided to establish his institute in Essentuki instead of waiting for return to Moscow, the district of Mineral Waters (*Mineralnye Vody*) became one of the centres of the Russian Civil War. The control of towns in the area passed from the Bolsheviks to the Cossacks and the White Army or other parties while about twenty of Gurdjieff's pupils lived in fear of being conscripted (Gurdjieff 2002: 271–2). In addition to this, Gurdjieff – who was already hosting eighty-five followers of his ideas, as well as relatives of his in Essentuki and another sixty in Piatigorsk – had to accommodate twenty-eight refugees from Alexandropol, which had been attacked by the Turks two months before (pp. 277–8).

To escape the situation, Gurdjieff framed a scientific expedition to the Caucasus Mountains. While he was factually interested in ancient Caucasian stone monuments called 'the dolmens', he also used the expedition as an excuse to escape. He emphasizes selecting conscription-age males for the expedition so that they would not have to join the rival armies and fight for them. Eventually, Gurdjieff split his expedition group into two parties which were supposed to meet at an agreed place (Gurdjieff 2002: 272–3). The party Gurdjieff was a part of intended to proceed to Mount Indur close to the Black Sea coastal town of Tuapse and begin searching for monuments in a south-easterly direction. However, the party was only able to travel to Maikop, 140 kilometres northeast from Tuapse, because a rebel army which

called themselves 'the Greens'[6] had destroyed the railway. Therefore, they had to proceed on foot and by cart towards an area known as the White River Pass[7]. On their journey, they had to cross the Bolshevik and White Army lines 'no fewer than five times' (pp. 272–4). After great difficulties, the party made it through devastated Cossack villages to Kumichki[8], the last inhabited place before the Caucasus Mountains, and proceeded to the coastal town of Sochi. From Sochi, they travelled by ordinary roads all the way to Tiflis in Georgia. At the time of their arrival in Tiflis, four years had passed from the beginning of the organization of the institute in Moscow (pp. 275–7).

Tiflis was somehow living according to its old ways, even during the war. Therefore, Gurdjieff was able to earn money through trade and established his institute there. However, once the Bolsheviks advanced into Georgia, the difficulties of daily living increased, and Gurdjieff decided to emigrate beyond Russia. He took thirty pupils with him and proceeded to Contantinople through Batum so that one day he could reach a European country where he could finally settle with his institute (Gurdjieff 2002: 279–81).

Despite being wealthy when settling in Moscow, Gurdjieff lost a huge majority of his wealth during wartime. He spent half of his money establishing the institute in Moscow and St. Petersburg and a notable portion of his wealth was lost during their escape from Maikop. Further still, when fleeing from Georgia, he had to pay extra duties and taxes (Gurdjieff 2002: 271, 279–81). Gurdjieff underlines his financial difficulties also in his first personally written but subsequently withdrawn book *The Herald of Coming Good* (1933), where he laments how 'unexpected and catastrophic events

6 'In a broad sense, the Green armies were spontaneous manifestations of peasant discontent rather than any specific ideology. … While these groups primarily opposed the Bolsheviks, they often did so without a plan or alternative form of government in mind; rather, they simply wanted to rid the countryside of Bolshevik influence by any means necessary' (Figes 1989: 319–20).

7 Geographically, this must mean the same Belaya River which flows through the city of Maikop. There are several Belaya Rivers in Russia (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2018).

8 Since there is no locality called Kumichki in Russian Caucasus, Gurdjieff most likely means the village of Khamyshki south of Maikop upon Belaya River (Google Maps 2019).

Pera in 1919–20 when Gurdjieff was active in the area. ouspenskytoday.org.

of the World War' destroyed his institute in Russia at the very height of its activities, including enormous material and other loss (p. 16).

In Constantinople, Gurdjieff rented large premises in Pera, the European quarter of the city. He arranged several public demonstrations,[9] lectures and open courses to raise interest on his teachings and to earn money. Alas, Gurdjieff and his pupils couldn't find peace in Turkey, either. After only a year in Constantinople, 'the wiseacring of Young Turks[10] began to have a

9 On this occasion, Gurdjieff tells the first time of organizing public demonstrations or 'movements' (Gurdjieff 2002: 282–3), sacred dances of great importance in Gurdjieff's system, which have been widely researched within Gurdjieff studies (see e.g. Petsche 2013).

10 The Young Turks were a coalition of reform groups that led to a revolutionary movement against the regime of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II, finally culminating in the establishment of constitutional government in 1908. However, the Young Turks were also extremely nationalistic and responsible for the Armenian Genocide, the execution or deportation of a million Armenians in 1915, only a few years before Gurdjieff's stay in Constantinople (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2015). In addition, Gurdjieff's time in Constantinople coincides with dissolution of the Ottoman Empire which triggered fierce national resistance led by Mustafa Kemal, the future president of new Republic of Turkey (Wright 2006).

particular smell', so Gurdjieff decided to get away with his people as quickly as possible and leave for Germany (Gurdjieff 2002: 281–4).

The end of the book moves on from wartime to describe the interwar period: how Gurdjieff establishes his institute south of Paris in Château du Prieuré, moves in there with fifty pupils on October 1922 and earns money by different means, such as running a restaurant in Montmartre and providing treatment for alcoholics and drug addicts, so that he can arrange a tour around Europe and North America to introduce the fundamental ideas of his institute to the public (Gurdjieff 2002: 284–8, 291). In 'The Material Question', Gurdjieff especially mentions sitting in a Childs restaurant in New York on 10 January (pp. 295–7, 302). According to Paul Beekman Taylor, Gurdjieff's first trip to America took place in the winter of 1925–6 (Taylor 2004: 103).

An important fact here is that Gurdjieff published only one autobiographical text during his lifetime: *The Herald of Coming Good* which he eventually withdrew from circulation and didn't include in his official *All and Everything* trilogy (Cusack 2011: 78; Cusack 2017: 2), Gurdjieff's personally-written life story ended with 'The Material Question', leaving the last 23 years of his life – including his time in Nazi-occupied World War II era Paris – for his followers to write down.[11]

Sidenotes: a fallen companion, a Russian refugee, a late father, an old mother and the role of pupils

In the chapters of *Meetings with Remarkable Men* preceding 'The Material Question', Gurdjieff on two occasions refers to things that happened during or after wartime. In the first occasion, he laments how Professor Skridlov, a member of Seekers of Truth, disappeared without a trace 'at the time of the great agitation of minds in Russia', referring to World War I, the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War (Gurdjieff 2002: 225). He also describes how after moving to Germany he saw a beggar dressed like a German soldier along Kurfürstendamm in Berlin and recognized the

11 A brilliant companion to the writings of Gurdjieff's followers and pupils is J. Walter Driscoll's (2004) article: 'Gurdjieff. The secondary literature: a selective bibliography'.

man as a former Russian officer who was evacuated with Wrangel's army[12] from Crimea to Europe (pp. 216–17).

The fate of Gurdjieff's father is also bound to the times of war. In the beginning of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Gurdjieff explains that his father died one year after 1916 at the time of the Turkish attack on Alexandropol (Gurdjieff 2002: 45).[13] While Gurdjieff doesn't write too much about his mother, at the end of 'The Material Question' he explains that his 'old mother in Alexandropol' came to live with him in Essentuki during Russian Civil War. A while later, a while before departing for the Caucasus Mountains, Gurdjieff entrusts her to his followers who remain in Essentuki. The circle closes years later, when Gurdjieff's mother moves with him at the institute at Château du Prieuré in France (pp. 293–5).

Pyotr Wrangel, a White Army commander in Russian Civil War who eventually had to retreat with his army to Crimea. Unknown author, about 1920. Wikimedia Commons.

On these occasions, Gurdjieff underlines the effects of war on many kinds of human destinies. The war ended the lives of many regardless of age, conviction or nationality and forced millions of people, such as his mother and her sister with her six children, to relocate from their homes. Meanwhile, the tale of the former Russian officer seems to remind the reader of the fact that in war, the courses of the lives of human beings can change dramatically in a

12 Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel was a White Army commander in the Russian Civil War who launched an offensive against the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine in June 1920 and who eventually had to retreat with his army to Crimea. General Wrangel's army was evacuated to Constantinople in November 1920 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2019a).

13 After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Russian troops withdrew from South Caucasus, creating a power vacuum. Encouraged by this, Ottoman forces regrouped and captured the city of Alexandropol on 11 May 1918 (Allen and Muratoff 2010: 457–69).

short period of time: respectable officers can become beggars on the streets in a toss of a coin.

Beginning from P. D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, Gurdjieff's deeds and teachings during wartime are well documented, from World War I to the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War. In addition to Ouspensky's aforementioned book, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (1964) by Thomas and Olga de Hartmann includes first-hand material of Gurdjieff's wartime teachings and a description of Gurdjieff's escape from Russia during the civil war. While Gurdjieff didn't include in his trilogy any details about his nearly three decades in France, several pupils of his wrote about these years from the founding of the institute to the years of Nazi occupation – some examples are *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (1964) by Fritz Peters, *Undiscovered Country* (1966) by Kathryn Hulme and *Idiots in Paris* (1949) by Elizabeth and John Bennett. At the same time, the chronology of Gurdjieff's life has been reconstructed in academic discourse in James Moore's *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (1991), James Webb's *The Harmonious Circle* (1980) and Paul Beekman Taylor's *G. I. Gurdjieff: A New Life* (2008). These first-hand writings and academic studies provide the material for additional analysis of Gurdjieff's wartime deeds and teachings.

Concluding remarks: the storyteller's burden

Despite all the realistic elements or factual history behind G. I. Gurdjieff's life story, it is, in a sense, a classic autobiography – the writer realizes he has been writing a truth in an experiential sense; a narrative and a myth. Instead of merely listing facts, he has created a myth around himself to underline the grand meaning of his mission (see Kosonen 2016). Gurdjieff primarily wanted to capture the minds of his two target audiences: the people seeking for truth as well as the wealthy individuals interested in financing his institute in Europe and North America. In this context, it is more than understandable that Gurdjieff uses well-known historical elements (Armenian revolutionary parties, Young Turks, Wrangel's Army), exotic places (the Kushka line, Tibet, the Chiatura tunnel) and colourful, occasionally almost archetypal characters (Professor Skridlov, Pogossian, Soloviev) to capture the interest of the reader or listener. In the course of his lifetime, he assured himself about the 'mission' he had embarked on; to awaken people from their sleep and help mankind stop wars and violence from happening (Gurdjieff 1999: 27).

Gurdjieff's tales about his childhood and youth are very believable. At the same time, whatever happened during his last 35 years or so – including the Russian Revolution, World War I and the Russian Civil War – can be mostly verified from the writings of his followers. His description of the conditions of the Caucasus during The Great Game seem believable, as well. At the same time, the approximately two decades between his young adulthood and his arrival in Russia seems to be purposely presented as a great, picaresque adventure. It seems believable he at least had heard tales about the adventures claimed to be his own and, as a storyteller, he knew how to weave different stories together by placing himself as the mythical central character; the wise narrator in a mad world who wants to awaken his students from slumber, make them aware of the 'terror of the situation' and point out to them that another kind of world is possible. All the tales of Gurdjieff – both tall tales and historical facts – seem to construct a 'textual web' which point in this same direction (see Leskelä-Kärki 2008).

The natural next step of charting the role of war in Gurdjieff's life and teachings is to go through the writings of his pupils about the times of World War I, the Russian Revolution, the Russian Civil War and the Nazi occupation of Paris. This will both complement the historical study of Gurdjieff's deeds during wartime and present the researcher with an opportunity to compare Gurdjieff's personal narrative with those of his pupils. After this ground work, it would be possible to research the overall role of war in Gurdjieff's philosophy and teachings such as: what is war, why and how do wars occur, can they be prevented, or what is the role of an individual during wartime? Eventually, Gurdjieff's teachings about war can be compared and reflected with teachings about war in the philosophies of other twentieth-century esoteric figures of the West such as Rudolf Steiner and C. G. Jung.

Hippo Taatila is a professional author from Helsinki, Finland and a postgraduate student at the Department of Study of Religion at the University of Turku. Taatila specializes in themes of war and end of the world in teachings of major figures in Western esotericism. He has translated G. I. Gurdjieff's autobiographical *Meetings with Remarkable Men* into Finnish.

List of references

Maps

Google Maps 2019. 'Khamyshki', Google Maps, <https://goo.gl./maps/RW1ZUQ4TDCNS6sNSA> (accessed 29.8.2019)

'Map of acquisitions of the Russian Empire, 1553–1894', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://cdn.britannica.com/50/3850-050-01023ADD/Russian-expansion-Asia.jpg> (accessed 26.8.2019)

Literature

Adalian, Rouben Paul, 2010. 'Gyumri / Gumri', in *Historical Dictionary of Armenia,* 2nd edn (Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth, Scarecrow Press), pp. 352–3

Alikuzai, Hamid Wahed, 2013. *A Concise History of Afghanistan in 25 Volumes*, vol. 14 (Bloomington IN, Trafford Publishing)

Allen, Charles, 2015. *Duel in the Snows: The True Story of the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa* (London, Hodder & Stoughton)

Allen, William E. D., and Paul Muratoff, 2010 (1953). *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1828–1921* (Cambridge University Press)

Anastasieff, Valentin, 1999 (1975). 'Prefatory note', in G. I. Gurdijeff, *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* (England, Arkana), pp. 8

Bellamy, Chris, 2001. 'Russian army', in *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (Oxford University Press), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.utu.fi/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606963.001.0001/acref-9780198606963-e-1101> (accessed 30.8.2019)

Bennett, Elizabeth, and J. G. Bennett, 2010 (1949). *Idiots in Paris: Diaries of Elizabeth Bennett* (Santa Fe NM, Bennett Books)

Cusack, Carole, 2011. 'An enlightened life in text and image: G.I. Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963) and Peter Brook's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979)', *Literature &Aesthetics*, 21(1), June, pp. 72–97

———2017. 'G.I. Gurdjieff, the arts and the production of culture', *Religion and the Arts,* 21, pp. 1–9

Cusack, Carole M., and Steven J. Sutcliffe, 2015. 'G.I. Gurdjieff and the study of religion/s', *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 6(2), pp. 109–15

Driscoll, J. Walter, 2004. 'Gurdjieff. The Secondary Literature: A Selective Bibliography', <www.Gurdjieff-Bibliography.com> (accessed 22.8.2019)

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015. 'Young Turks. Turkish Nationalistic Movement', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Young-Turks-Turkish-nationalist-movement> (accessed 29.8.2019)

———2016. 'Greco-Turkish wars', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <www.britannica.com/event/Greco-Turkish-wars> (accessed 29.8.2019)
———2018. 'Maikop', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Maikop> (accessed 26.8.2019)
———2019a. 'Pyotr Nikolayevich, Baron Wrangel', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pyotr-Nikolayevich-Baron-Wrangel> (accessed 29.8.2019)
———2019b. 'Tashkent', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tashkent> (accessed 27.8.2019)
Figes, Orlando, 1989. *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (New York, Oxford University Press)
Frankel, Joseph, 2017. 'War', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/war> (accessed 12.8.2019)
Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, 1992. *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York University Press)
———2002. *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York University Press)
Gurdjieff, G. I., 1933. *The Herald of Coming Good* (Paris)
———1999 (1975). *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* (England, Arkana)
———2002 (1963). *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London and New York, Compass)
Hulme, Kathryn, 1972. *Undiscovered Country: A Spiritual Adventure* (Boston, Atlantic-Little and Brown)
Jones, Stephen F., 2005. *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883–1917* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press)
Kosonen, Päivi, 2016. 'Moderni omaelämäkerrallisuus & itsen kertomisen muodot', *Niin & Näin*, 3, pp. 43–9, <https://netn.fi/sites/www.netn.fi/files/netn163-11.pdf> (accessed 29.1.2020)
La Boda, Sharon, 2013. 'Kars', in *International Dictionary of Historic Places*, vol. 3: *Southern Europe* (Chicago and London, Fitzroy Dearborn), pp. 357–60
Leskelä-Kärki, Maarit, 2008. 'Narrating life stories in between the fictional and the autobiographical', *Qualitative* Research, 8, pp. 325–32, <http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/8/3/325> (accessed 31.1.2020)
Mirzoyam, Sonya, and Candan Badem, 2013. *The Construction of the Tiflis–Aleksandropol–Kars Railway, 1895–1899* (Cape Town, Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation)
Moore, James, 1991. *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth. A Biography* (Shaftsbury, Dorset, Element)
Peters, Fritz, 1964. *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (Baltimore, Penguin Metaphysical Library)
Petsche, Johanna J. M., 2013. 'Gurdjieff and de Hartmann's music for movements', *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, 4(1), pp. 92–121

Rowe, William C., 2010. 'Chapter 4, The Wakhan Corridor: the endgame of The Great Game', in *Borderlines and Borderland: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-state*, eds. Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen (Plymouth, Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 53–68

Rowland, Susan, 2007. 'Writing about war: Jung, Much Ado About Nothing, and the Troy novels of Lindsay Clarke', *Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies*, 3(1), <https://jungianjournal.ca/index.php/jjss/article/view/74/67> (accessed 28.1.2020)

Staudenmaier, Peter, 2013. 'Nazi perceptions of esotericism: the occult as fascination and menace', in *The Threat and Allure of the Magical*, ed. Ashwin Manthripragada (Cambridge Scholars Publishing), pp. 25–58

Strube, Julian, 2015. 'Nazism and the occult', in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (Abingdon, Routledge), pp. 336–47

Suny, Ronald Grigor, 2019. 'Armenian genocide', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Armenian-Genocide> (accessed 28.8.2019)

Tamdgidi, Mohammad H., 2009. *Gurdjieff and Hypnosis: A Hermeneutic Study* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan)

Taylor, Paul Beekman, 2004. *Gurdjieff's America: Mediating the Miraculous* (Lighthouse Editions)

———2008: *G.I. Gurdjieff: A New Life* (Utrecht, Eureka Editions)

Walker, Christopher J., 1990. *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London, Croom Helm)

Webb, James, 1980. *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky and Their Followers* (London, Thames and Hudson)

Wright, Edmund, 2006. 'Turkey', in *A Dictionary of World History*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press), doi: <10.1093/acref/9780192807007.001.001>

———2007. 'Russo-Turkish wars', in *A Dictionary of World History*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press), doi: <10.1093/acref/9780192807007.001.001>

Interpretations of Emanuel Swedenborg's image of the afterlife in the novel *Oneiron* by Laura Lindstedt

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.85054

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

TIINA MAHLAMÄKI and TOMAS MANSIKKA

This article discusses the relationship between Western esotericism and literature. As an example of a secular author who uses and benefits from esoteric texts, ideas and thoughts as resources in creating a literary artwork, the article analyses Laura Lindstedt's novel *Oneiron. A Fantasy About the Seconds After Death* (2015). It contextualises the novel within the frames of Western esotericism and literature, focusing on Emanuel Swedenborg's impact on discourses of the afterlife in literature. Laura Lindstedt's postmodern novel indicates various ways that esoteric ideas, themes, and texts can work as resources for authors of fiction in twenty-first century Finland. Since the late eighteenth century Swedenborg's influence has been evident in literature and among artists, especially in providing resources for other-worldly imagery. *Oneiron* proves that the ideas of Swedenborg are still part of the memory of Western culture and literature.

> Listen up, ladies. Once there was a mystic who was sometimes called a philosopher … he described the afterlife in a way that *slightly* resembles where we are now. (Lindstedt 2015: 209–10).[1]

From *Oneiromantia* to *Oneiron*

In 1783 a book entitled *Oneiromantia, or the Art of Interpreting Dreams* (Swedish original: *Oneiromantien, eller konsten att tyda dröm[m]ar*) was published anonymously in Stockholm. It was written by two followers of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), the brothers August Nordenskjöld (also Nordenskiöld, 1754–92) and Carl Fredrik Nordenskjöld junior (1756–1828). They were born in Finland, which at the time constituted

1 All English translations of the novel are from Lindstedt 2018 (transl. Owen F. Witesman), but page numbers are from the original publication of 2015. We use the electronic version of the translated novel which lacks page numbers.

the eastern region of the kingdom of Sweden. As editors of Swedenborg's manuscripts, they were amongst the earliest of the Swedenborgians in the 1770s, having especially close ties to England and the growing numbers of followers of the Swedish visionary there. Within this emerging movement August Nordenskjöld, who also made a career as a court alchemist to King Gustavus III, travelled frequently to England and delivered an address at the first Swedenborgian conference, held in London in 1789 (Paley 1979; Schuchard 1992; Rein 1939; Smithson 1841; Siukonen 2000; Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2010).

Meanwhile, in Sweden and Finland the publication of works by Swedenborg had been placed under censorship by a royal decree. As a dream dictionary, *Oneiromantia* was the first work to challenge these restrictions by disseminating Swedenborgian ideas in a book on a popular subject of the time. As a 'pseudo-Swedenborgian' piece of writing, *Oneiromantia* brings together central topics of Swedenborg such as love and light, articles on various philosophical and theological subjects, and more specific entries such as 'snow', 'pig', or 'shoes', interpreted through the doctrine of correspondences – a central principle in Swedenborg's thinking and in Western esotericism at large. In Jane Williams-Hogan's words, *Oneiromantia* 'gives a good overview of the interests of occultists and theosophists of that period'. It also had the effect of encouraging Swedenborgians to publish Swedenborg's writings outside Sweden (Sjödén 1995: 66–7; Williams-Hogan 2016: 539; Blåfield 2008; *Oneiromantien* 1783, I–II).

Some 230 years later a Finnish author, Laura Lindstedt (b. 1976), has a dream, or a vision, in which she is given the key word and title for her forthcoming novel, *Oneiron* (*Oneiron. A Fantasy About the Seconds After Death,* 2015). Lindstedt's *Oneiron* takes place in a dream-like emptiness, a white space or void. Only whiteness exists, and into this emerge seven women[2], one by one, as voices in the emptiness: Shlomith, Polina, Wlibgis, Rosa, Imaculada, Nina, and Ulrike. As characters and personalities, representing various ethnicities and religious backgrounds, they do not question who they are, but rather what has happened to them, and where they have arrived. They only have the clothes they are wearing with them; no memories concerning

2 Compare the seven women with the seven brothers; as the voices of two authors mirroring their different historical settings, the nature of enchantment, and spirit-world.

their respective deaths. At first, they have difficulties in understanding each other, because of language barriers, but proceed later on to a state where they can communicate by connecting their minds. As to their appearances, they are not only visible, but tangible in the sense that they can touch each other, having thus retained their gendered and human forms. They are constantly present to each other, which means they cannot hide anywhere. They also become successively loosened from their material and vital embodiments; at some point they take notice that they have stopped breathing, no longer experiencing corporal sentiments, such as the ability to feel pain or pleasure, hunger or thirst. Finally, their minds desire to move forward and to give up; with the assistance of the word 'Oneiron' they confront the events that will lead to their deaths and departure from the emptiness. Each one encounters her own death and moves forward with the help of the others – where to is left open. What remains of them in the world are memories, presented in *Oneiron* in form of newspaper articles, obituaries, and necrologies published after their deaths.

While the two books *Oneiromantia* and *Oneiron* have little in common save for the word Oneiron, Lindstedt's novel can be discussed to good effect from at least four viewpoints. First by locating it within the larger field of Western esotericism and literature. Secondly by discussing it within a distinctly Swedenborgian literary reception and culture in Finland, in part related to the historical context of *Oneiromantia*. Thirdly by discussing the novel's other-worldly structure and features in relation to a Western esoteric and Swedenborgian afterlife in particular. Finally the article will point out that while the Swedenborgian afterlife plays a role in the novel, its primary characteristic may be defined – as reflecting the author's preferences – as a magical tribalism.

Western esotericism and literature

Western esotericism is in many respects a thoroughly literary phenomenon. While esotericism may utilize rational, theological or even scientific discourse, as in the case for instance of Swedenborg or Anthroposophy, esoteric ideas transmit alike through fiction and poetry. Like religious discourses, esotericism also uses grand narratives, myths, allegories and symbols which can more adequately be expressed within fiction and poetry. It is therefore no surprise that fiction – poetry, drama, novels – may not only contain, but actually also function as, reservoirs of esoteric knowledge (see e.g. Versluis

2004: 3–5). Of those literary works that hold the status of imparting esoteric philosophy, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels *Zanoni* (1842) and *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* (1871), amongst others, are often referred to. Bulwer-Lytton's works were endorsed in both Theosophy and Anthroposophy, as in schools of ritual magic, and have subsequently been discussed within much of twentieth-century Western esotericism (see e.g. Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2013: 454). Thus, as Christina Ferguson (2019: 100) contends, popular literature is not simply 'a passive reflection of enduring public opinion towards esotericism; it might also, as occultists and anti-occultists alike have recognized, be its active producer' (see also Versluis 2004: 135–6). While Bulwer-Lytton employed historical novels as a medium for imparting his ideas and philosophy, later occultists also resorted to popular fiction besides their non-fictional works including, for instance, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Emma Hardinge Britten, Arthur Edward Waite, Charles Leadbeater, Aleister Crowley, and Dion Fortune (see also Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2013; Faxneld and Fyhr 2010: 16–17; Bogdan 2020). Although works of popular fiction written by 'esoteric' authors may seldom become real bestsellers[3], they reach much wider audiences than works of non-fiction, as they utilise different genres, such as romance, ghost stories, fairy tales, science fiction, and detective novels (Ferguson 2019: 99). Finally, the genre of esoteric literature in which a division between esoteric and exoteric is maintained could be indicated, which is thus communicating a double message: what for common readers appears as mere fiction, for readers aware of the esoteric underpinnings the text conveys imageries of various occult trajectories. In these cases the message received depends on the reader's ability to understand the layers of metaphors and symbols employed (Bauduin and Johnsson 2018: 20; Kokkinen *et al.* 2020: 241–2). Researchers may here interpret either the intention of the author or the intention of the reader; for what purpose the novel is written and for what purpose it is read.[4]

As Christine Ferguson (2019: 100–1) points out, the early theosophists knew that fiction has to be both entertaining and imaginatively stimulating.

3 Examples of bestseller esoteric novels would be, for instance, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompey* (1834); in the twentieth century, for instance, *The Devil Rides Out* (1934), and other novels of Dennis Wheatley.

4 To this category could be added a wide range of works, such as *Liber Novus* or The *Red Book* (publ. 2009) of C. G. Jung, a writing on which Jung remarked: 'To the superficial observer, it will appear like madness' (see Corbett 2009).

This awareness however has not always been beneficial for literature: some writers of 'occult-themed fiction' she continues, and 'particularly those publicly associated with theosophical and ufological currents, have eagerly embraced the propagandistic potential of popular fiction, sometimes to the detriment of its aesthetic quality' (see also Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2013). Ferguson writes that there are three purposes for esoteric popular fiction: *proselytization*, *entertainment,* and *canon formation.* Some of them are manifest when 'occult thinkers identify certain critically acclaimed and/or enduringly popular works of literature' as more than mere pieces of art; characterising them as 'encoded vessels of esoteric wisdom: in doing so, they claim the attendant cultural capital of such texts for their mystical worldviews' (Ferguson 2019: 102). An example of this may be seen, for instance, in the publication and critical reception of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* in Finland. The main journal of the popular esoteric scene, *Ultra*, published no less than three reviews of the book, which were all in agreement that it revealed hidden truths (Ramstedt 2018; Ramstedt and Moberg 2020: 260–3). In cases like this, where popular fiction purports to unveil mysteries by decoding esoteric or religious symbols, riddles or clues, the act of reading may be seen as a form of spiritual practice in itself (see Ferguson 2019: 103; Versluis 2004: 13).

Another form of collaboration between literature and esotericism is in the reference to esoteric or occult texts within fictional narratives. These texts can be both 'authentic', as for instance in the references to actual historical works on magic in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), or 'fictional' as the *Necronomicon* in the novels of H. P. Lovecraft. In both cases, notwithstanding, they function as resources. By means of this interplay esoteric and occult persons, conceptions and ideas become familiar among consumers of popular culture. But while these 'dimensions of occultism' have, according to Ferguson, indeed been taken seriously within modernist studies,[5] this is not yet the case within literary studies, in which esotericism (or occulture) and popular fiction have until relatively recently been left outside serious academic study. Finally Ferguson asks what can be achieved from 'a new form of literary occultural studies which combines expertise in both the emergence of esoteric currents and in the development

5 '…under whose aegis they have hitherto almost exclusively been examined'. Christine Ferguson (2019: 96) argues here against Tessel M. Bauduin and Henrik Johnson (2018: 3).

of popular literary genres and markets.[6] Such a methodology promises to correct previous approaches to occult fiction which have either minimized its literary texture or miscast its complex relationship to historical expressions of esotericism' (Ferguson 2019: 97–8). To be able to interpret occult fiction or art properly, researchers thus need acquaintance with relevant and specific currents and ideas, and also discernment concerning representations and interpretations of historical themes (Kokkinen *et al.* 2020: 245).

The impact of Emanuel Swedenborg in art and literature

Emanuel Swedenborg's position within Western esotericism is unconventional but highly important.[7] As a versatile writer, the Swedish scientist and seer conveyed his thoughts through various literary genres, from scientific, philosophical and theological to mytho-poetical works.[8] Far from being a magician, occultist or anything of that sort, in his person combines Lutheran piety with currents of mystical theology and Platonism. While influencing both art and literature, movements such as utopian socialism, transcendentalism and spiritualism, his legacy to modernity may be seen primarily in the articulation of a modern afterlife. The modern perception of heaven and the spirit world, as commonly represented in modern-day popular culture, could be shown to owe many, if not all, of its elements to Swedenborg. For this reason any discussions of the afterlife, in literature, philosophy or theology, seem to become by necessity also apprehensions of him, thus acknowledging his legacy in art and culture (see e.g. Williams-Hogan 1998, 2005; Lachman 2009). His impact on classical authors such as August Strindberg, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Jorge Luis Borges, William Blake, Feodor Dostoevsky, Selma Lagerlöf, and Arthur Conan Doyle is widely recognized and much researched (e.g. Versluis 2004; McNeilly 2005; Williams-Hogan 2008; Faxneld and Fyhr 2010).

6 This point of Ferguson (2019: 97) has also been raised by Bauduin and Johnson (2018); see also Versluis 2004: 5; Kokkinen *et al.* 2020.

7 Of Swedenborg's life, career, and place within Western esotericism, see e.g. Williams-Hogan 1998, 2005; Smithson 1841; Lachman 2009, and all the textbooks concerning the domain of Western esotericism.

8 Swedenborg wrote a creation poem (*De Cultu et Amore Dei* 1745) which is regarded as a landmark work in Swedish literature. Swedenborg 1988.

In previous studies the authors of this article have published studies dealing with analyses of Swedenborgian themes in three Finnish authors. These studies included taking under some scrutiny Johan Ludvig Runeberg's *Letters from an Old Gardener* (1836–8), Aleksis Kivi's *Seven Brothers* (1870), and the literary oeuvre of Kersti Bergroth (1886–1975), who was a first-generation anthroposophist (Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2010, 2013; Mahlamäki 2010, 2014, 2017, 2018). The ways in which they drew inspiration from Swedenborg varies greatly. Whereas Runeberg was a poet representing nineteenth-century idealism and national romanticism (Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2010, 2013), Kivi used the literary devices of parody, travesty and irony in his novels and plays (Mahlamäki 2010; Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2013). Bergroth in turn could be seen as a writer of fiction with a double message; novels that can be seen to be imparting different messages for different readers (Mahlamäki 2014, 2017). While Bergroth's spiritual or esoteric path was anthroposophical rather than Swedenborgian, there is concord and mutual confirmation between the two ideologies, being parts, so to speak, of a larger esoteric family (Mahlamäki 2018). Of other Finnish writers of fiction that still await research regarding esotericism and literature, the names of Pekka Ervast, Helmi Krohn, Eino Krohn, and more recently A. W. Yrjänä and Heikki Kännö, could be mentioned (see Kokkinen *et al.* 2020).

Laura Lindstedt's *Oneiron* can be seen as a work of fiction that takes inspiration from certain currents of esotericism. Although *Oneiron* has been widely read – it sold over 40,000 copies in Finland and has been translated into several languages – it does not represent popular fiction strictly speaking, but a genre of the postmodern novel. We will interpret Lindstedt as a 'secular' author who uses, benefits from, and creates on the basis of esoteric texts and ideas as resources in producing a literary artwork. As with many other artists and authors taking inspiration from Swedenborg, Lindstedt also seizes on an interest in the liminal stages after death. In works of fiction it is not uncommon nowadays to find a list of references at the end, and Lindstedt lets us know what books she has read – amongst which are the Finnish translations of Swedenborg's *De Nova Hierosolyma et Ejus Doctrina Coelesti* (*Elämän oppi uutta Jerusalemia varten* 1934) and *Clavis Hieroglyphica* (2000), the last including a presentation of Swedenborg's life and influence in Finland by the visual artist and researcher Jyrki Siukonen.

As to *Oneiron*'s depiction of the afterlife, it is notable that the author has not consulted the most exhaustive work of Swedenborg as regards the afterlife, namely his *Heaven and Hell* (*De Caelo et Eius Mirabilibus*…), which

was translated into Finnish (*Taivas ja Helvetti*) in 1940. This is also evident in the novel as a whole, as Swedenborg's views are not developed in more depth or detail. Nevertheless, by adopting Swedenborg as one of the voices in *Oneiron*, the author has chosen a thinker who in fact has contributed in a positive and emancipatory way to our modernist view of gender equality – in both society and the afterlife. To this we will return later on in the article. Perhaps also unwittingly, Lindstedt reiterates a somewhat outdated 'negative influence thesis' (Thorpe 2011: 2) concerning Swedenborg. This legacy, ascribed to the influence of Immanuel Kant, questions a simultaneous coexistence of rationality and spirituality, maintaining a kind of 'two outcomes' thesis: the scientist-seer should be regarded either a truthful witness or mentally deranged. However, as stock in trade points of view, this, as well as the numerous anecdotes of his life and conduct, as scientist, theologian, and visionary, are part of the world memory of Swedenborg. In art and literature one of his most enduring influences can be detected in perceptions of the immediate afterlife.

Oneiron thus compares to works such as, for instance, Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (1944), Lars Norén's *Andante* (2019), and Roy Andersson's movie *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000), which by various means illuminate possible conditions after death. An analysis of these works, as also of *Oneiron*, would point to various resemblances to the first stages of the afterlife described in *Heaven and Hell*. These descriptions have been the most read and commented upon in literature, as they provide the protocol for the specific modalities and orders that govern the afterlife. Thus, in various degrees, they are found employed in non-fiction, fiction and science fiction alike. However, as regards Swedenborg's descriptions of the more subtle regions, such as heaven, writers – especially those of a secular stance – have usually been more wary. With these terrains we enter areas of Christian theology and mysticism concerned with, amongst other things, transcendental love and will. To more fully grasp the afterlife of Swedenborg some of these historical and theological conditions will be highlighted next.

Swedenborg's afterlife

As Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang (2001: 181–227) have shown, Swedenborg's heaven was the first modern afterlife. It is characterised by four aspects: first, only a thin curtain or veil separates the afterlife from earthly existence, and it starts immediately after death. Second, the afterlife

The statue of Emanuel Swedenborg in Stockholm. Photo by Tiina Mahlamäki.

is not seen as the opposite to earthly life, but a consequence and fulfilment of it. The third characteristic is that even though the afterlife and heaven are places of rest, the spirits inhabiting them are active and continue to develop spiritually. The fourth characteristic is that it emphasises human love, which manifests in various kinds of interhuman relationships. Within Western culture and esotericism this legacy manifests, as mentioned, in movements such as transcendentalism and spiritualism, as for instance in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and Henry James (1843–1916). More general characteristics include a universal order of correspondences, which in this article is illustrated by a logo- or phonocentricism that governs the spirit world. Lastly, and of particular interest to our subject, is the continuance of gender-specific identities in the afterlife.

Swedenborg's afterlife is profoundly anthropocentric, even to the degree that heaven has a human form (*maximus homo*). In the Swedenborgian universe people are primarily minds, guided by wills and affections, which are born, live and die, and finally resurrect in the afterlife. Humans do not reincarnate but are born only once, and after passing away settle in the afterlife, from which they eventually proceed to heaven or descend to hell. The immediate afterlife consists of three phases, of which the first closely resembles the earthly life. Here the spirits continue as they did in their previous lives,

orientating themselves by their peculiar interests, affections and objects of love. The second phase is marked by an increasing transparency, in which the inner inclinations of the spirits become manifest to the others, making it impossible to hide behind their appearances. The third is the final preparation of the spirits as to their destinations and respective regions in heaven or hell (see Swedenborg 2010).

Swedenborg speaks of love as corresponding to will, in the sense that when humans are attached to virtues or vices, ideals, objects, or mere amusements, their love is also their will. There is, however, a heavenly will or love that humans partake in. In the afterlife the deceased spirits eventually become aware of this order, which is the correlation of their wills with the good and the true. The spirits will proceed to the various heavenly regions to the extent their souls are adapted to this unconditioned will. Thus, in the end, only unconditioned will or love will qualify the souls for the heavenly communities, whereas spirits with evil or narcissistic forms of love will inhabit various regions in hell, where they continue to execute their desires. Swedenborg depicts these dwellings as cave-like, dark and gloomy, suffused with toxic odours; when occasionally a beam of light enters an underground region, it blinds and terrifies the inhabitants (see Swedenborg 2010).

The primary tool for communication in the afterlife is speech. This applies not only among the spirits or the deceased, but among angels as well. Like human language, angelic language also 'is differentiated into words', Swedenborg writes (2010: §235). Thus, different forms of speech are found on multiple planes in the spiritual universe. In heaven, he writes, all people have the same language:

> They all understand each other, no matter what community they come from, whether nearby or remote. This language is not learned but is innate; it flows from their very affection and thought. The sound of the language corresponds to their affection and the articulations of the sound—the words, that is—correspond to the mental constructs that arise from their affections. Since their language corresponds to these [inner events], it too is spiritual, for it is audible affection and vocal thinking. (Swedenborg 2010: §236)

From the viewpoint of the deceased in the spirit world, speech ascends from exterior to interior and becomes more perfect and universal in the regions of heaven. There, Swedenborg writes, the language 'is not a language

of words, but is a language of ideas of thought; and this language is the universal of all languages' (Swedenborg 2010: §1637, 5272; see also Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2010: 87; Mahlamäki 2018).

A gendered afterlife, with a Finnish prelude

When August Nordenskjöld attended the Swedenborgian conference in London 1789, he shared among the participants information of a hitherto unknown diary by Swedenborg. The diary contained, as did also the work *De Amore Conjugiali* (1768) not yet translated from Latin, some seemingly explosive thoughts on marital and reciprocal love. These Nordenskjöld had interpreted and, seemingly, also applied to his life, as his own marriage had been notoriously unhappy (his wife did not share his affection for Swedenborg).[9] Nordenskjöld had learned from Swedenborg that as gender identities continued in the afterlife, it would follow also that love and affection between human beings continued beyond the earthly life. In articulating this Swedenborgian view Nordenskjöld was ahead of his time, as he anticipated by half a century the views of Carl Jonas Love Almquist (1793–1866), the popular Swedenborgian novelist. Almquist heralded views of gender equality and non-marital relationships in bestseller novels such as *Det går an* (1839)[10], inspiring contemporaries such as Runeberg and Zachris Topelius (1818–98), and provoking more conservative minds such as Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–81), who wrote a critical reply in *Det går an. En tafla ur lifvet. Fortsättning* (1840). Almquist's views emerged largely from the modern, Swedenborgian perception of an afterlife in which gendered (heterosexual) relationships would not only continue, but also new partnerships and marriages would be instigated in the afterlife. Later in the century we find such views in, for instance, Aleksis Kivi's novels and plays.

In Swedenborg's platonic view humans long to find a partner, that is, a counterpart, in order to become whole (achieve conjunction). Those who

9 Nordenskjöld went so far as to suggest that in cases such as his, one would be allowed to take a mistress. Proposing that Swedenborgians should endorse concubinage, among conference attendants such as William Blake and his wife Catherine, passed from initial perplexity to subsequent silencing, and the episode was suppressed from all later histories of the Swedenborgian Society. Paley 1979.

10 Literally 'It will do'. Translated into English with the title *Sara Videbeck and the Chapel* (1919).

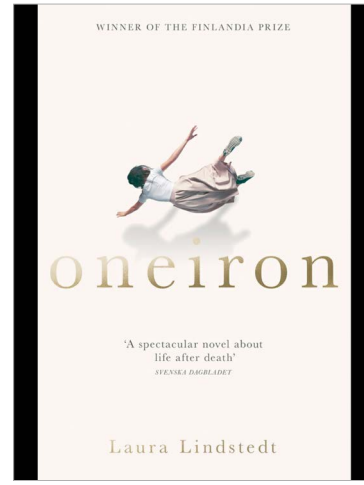
have already found their partners will continue their relationship in the afterlife. Those who have not will eventually find a new and suitable partner out there. Moreover, those who have lived in unhappy relationships will distance themselves from each other and find new soulmates. The afterlife is a place where marriages occur frequently. This idea that gender difference and marriage, including separations, continue beyond death was a new notion in a long history of theology and Christian philosophy which had viewed the deceased as genderless.[11] A modernist reading could readily interpret this Swedenborgian turn, not through the lens of fixed genders, but from its premises of interhuman relationships.

Afterlife rituals and magic

The afterlife of *Oneiron* is an existence of female identities. They gather in a ritualistic fashion around a wig – which has belonged to Wlibgis who had lost her hair due to cancer treatments – making it their campfire around which they tell stories about their lives and their last memories. They come to realise the campfire is not enough to protect them; they also need walls around them:

> But where will they get walls? What will be the construction materials? Each has her clothes but not much else. Nothing beyond the odd little thing that happened to come with them when they left; something forgotten in the bottom of a pocket. So they start with the easiest thing and empty their pockets. They all have pockets except for Wlibgis, who is wearing ugly, green hospital pajamas. … The clothes are to become the walls, the boundaries of the rooms, and boundaries are what they need now, because without boundaries a person becomes a panoply of pirouetting panic. Like a child who gets everything she wants. For whom no verbal edifice of opposition is erected. (Lindstedt 2015: 167)

11 '[T]he notion that married partners will meet again in the other world and will belong to each other as married partners is not a common Christian notion at all. Even today, what predominates is the actual understanding of the early church and of Augustine that in the resurrection we will be genderless, all essentially identical. Swedenborg was the first to venture to propose the doctrine that gender differences and marriage continued beyond death into the other world.' Horn 1997: 22–3.



After this ritualistic composing of a shelter or a home[12] by means of their clothes, the women appear all naked, unable to hide their bodies from the others' gaze. They witness various female bodies: a pregnant body, an anorectic body, an overweight body, a body dried up due to cancer, a body of a teenage girl, a scarred body. The bodies are the same as during their lifetime, with the exception that they do not feel pain anymore, which is a relief for most of them.

From the outset *Oneiron* would appear to share various common features with the Swedenborgian after-world. Fundamentally different however is the overall backdrop against which the other-worldly display is enacted. With no escape, they can experience privacy only by closing their eyes. In one passage Polina, by closing her eyes, retreats to a private imaginative state, and on opening them again confronts a reality where 'once again everything is harsh, shadowless, painfully white'. This spatial, or semi-spatial, feature makes the after-worldly existence both sinister and hostile, and something quite different from a traditional spiritual 'atmosphere': the bright light of meditational practice, the bardo of the Tibetans, the inner light of Christian mysticism. As the whiteness is maintained as an 'outer' principle in contrast to a private 'inner', the other-worldly fabric runs the risk of being a mere extension of mundane existence. Swedenborg, as Lucas Thorpe writes, 'believed that the spatiality and temporality of objects of experience were due to our mode of perception and not due to the nature of the objects themselves' (Thorpe 2011: 2).

In the Swedenborgian afterlife the surroundings adjust to one's state of mind; existence being as pleasant or unpleasant it is projected to be. There is no 'matter' outside the minds; a dark and destructive mind will engender dark

12 In his groundbreaking work *Crossing and Dwelling* (2006) Thomas Tweed defines religion as situating people in time and space, positioning them in the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos. He sees the importance of religion in marking boundaries and constraining terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic crossings – glimpses of this can be seen in the homemaking process of women in *Oneiron*.

and destructive surroundings, while a lovable or delightful mind engenders lovely and pleasing surroundings (Swedenborg 2010). Traditional, religious afterlife descriptions are conventionally allegorical and anagogical: 'whiteness' or 'light' are metaphors, for example, for clarity, goodness, pureness and progress, while darkness stands for opaqueness, evilness stagnation. While nakedness would imply in Swedenborg's second-phase afterlife that the inner thoughts and inclinations of the deceased have become manifest, for the characters in *Oneiron* this merely appears to mean that they expose, in some humiliating fashion, their naked bodies to each other.

Without variables such as night and day, sleep and wakefulness – even heartbeats – the only way for the women to measure or pass time is by means of conversation. Speech, or words, is what ultimately constitutes reality and, eventually, the only thing they have left:

> Now everything else is gone, everything except words. Conversation, no matter how clumsy it is, no matter how loaded with misunderstanding, maintains time, nurturing them, helping them remain people in some incomprehensible way. Talking, prattling, even arguing: it isn't a question of entertainment. Words offer them safe chains, something to keep them afloat, causes and effects, although not yesterdays or tomorrows, which have become meaningless expressions, but continuums, continuums all the same: that is what speech gives them. The evergreen groves of memory, from which they can draw both the feeling of the past and the expectation of the future. (Lindstedt 2015: 202)

The afterlife is not merely phonocentric, but also and at its base logocentric: the word 'Oneiron' has the power to push the women forward towards redemption. Logocentrisms of various kinds are deeply rooted in our Western culture; both in our Jewish-Christian roots as well as pre-Christian mythical cosmologies. As Jenni Råback (2018) notes, Lindstedt at times invokes 'Kalevalaesque otherworldliness' in her use of alliterations. Lindstedt guides the reader to an otherworldliness where words matter in unfathomable ways. The women instinctively form a tribal community, resembling a coven of witches that are at first sceptical, but as they realise the power of 'Oneiron' they adapt to a magical order of things: by chanting the word they proceed to the moments of their respective deaths.

Polina and Swedenborg

In the midpoint of *Oneiron* one of the women, the Russian bookkeeper Polina, gives a lecture on Swedenborg. She starts the lecture using her own language, Russian, but at this point the women suddenly realise that they understand each other by a more direct communication. The lecture itself is a rather pedantic and dull exhortation, outlining Swedenborg's life and career and dwelling mostly on anecdotal and external events. It also addresses heaven's modern stance:

> According to modern conceptions, Swedenborg is the first modern architect of heaven. He divided the afterlife into three parts, heaven, hell, and some sort of intermediate space, the spirit world, a place where the dead go first. There is no time in the spirit world of the dead. In the afterlife, changes in spiritual state correspond to differences in time. (Lindstedt 2015: 225–6)

Without further exploring the subject, Polina proceeds to describe the corporeality and sensibility of Swedenborg's heaven, and his understanding of love as conjunction, by citing Swedenborg from her memory. After the verbatim recitation, that imparts a rather magical aura to Swedenborg's texts, Polina finally addresses whether the white void is compatible with the afterlife of Swedenborg, posing the question:

> 'Well now, dear women. Based on this, can you say where we are now if we even believe a part of Swedenborg's teachings?' And then Polina states a question: 'what if we vote now? Can we explain our current state using Swedenborg's celestial doctrine? … Left hands up everyone who believes the hell hypothesis! Right, if you believe we're in heaven. And if you think Emanuel's visions are just the ravings of a deranged mind, don't raise your hands at all.' (Lindstedt 2015: 229–30)

But it was a mistake to give the women the third option:

> A sullen, unwelcoming expression appears on the women's faces, the resentful, wrinkled mug of a small child who's been cheated in such a way to injure her down to her very heartstrings. In hell, in heaven: all a sham. And not a single hand goes up. (Lindstedt 2015: 229–30)

Intriguingly, the women leave it open whether they exist in a Swedenborgian afterlife or not. In the end they are not even interested in the question – a response which seems to follow from Polina's restrained and detached presentation. As the white space does not resemble anything Swedenborg has described in his afterlife, the women are left unimpressed.

Polina had begun her lecture by announcing that Swedenborg's description only '*slightly* resembles where we are now' (Lindstedt 2015: 209–10, italics in original). Contrasted to the Swedenborgian afterlife, there is both relief and curse to the character of Polina. In her mundane life in Moscow she had died as an alcoholic, inebriated and plunged into a heap of snow. She was unmarried and had lived a mostly secluded life, devoting her evenings to, besides consuming liquor, reading books she loved and petting her cat. In the afterlife, however, she no longer cares for drinking, as the familiar requisites from home are lacking in her new environment. While this suggests an afterlife that blessedly eradicates addictions, which in the Swedenborgian afterlife have the nature of a purgatory for the souls, the curse would be that she finds herself in an emptiness, and in an ultimately unpleasant environment. In a Swedenborgian spirit world she would surround herself with the dear and familiar; the books she loves, her cat and her apartment, but would at the same time be desperately trying to satisfy a thirst that can't be fulfilled, as liquor there has only a representational, imaginative existence.

Polina, intriguingly, also becomes the only one who gets stuck in the white space. When in the last part of the novel the women, one by one and supported by the others, reach back to the time of their death and move forward, Polina misses her own death and has to return to the whiteness, and in this process forgets everything she has experienced with the other women. After Polina's return to the white void, a work announcement is displayed in the novel, in which is sought a new employer for her. Polina thus becomes both forgotten and doomed, replaced on earth and stuck in a discomforting limbo.

Concluding remarks

Laura Lindstedt is both an author and a scholar of literature.[13] She writes experimental literature, and *Oneiron* is filled with allusions, metaphors, intertextual references and different genres. Even though *Oneiron* became a praised and prized novel – it was awarded the Finlandia Prize, which is the most prestigious prize a novel can receive in Finland – its reception among readers at large (the common readers) was ambivalent. From one point of view it was considered incomprehensible, boring, confusing, and without a clear plot. From another it was praised as a rhizome of cultural and intertextual references. *Oneiron* also raised discussion or even a minor conflict on cultural appropriation. A blog entry by Ruskeat tytöt (Brown Girls) accused Lindstedt of cultural appropriation, by writing a novel dealing with women of different colour, religion, and ethnicity than herself (Hubara 2016).

For several modern and postmodern authors, esoteric, spiritual and religious texts are cultural resources. They are familiar stories, powerful narratives that can be used, re-used, circulated and re-interpreted. From a Western esotericism point of view *Oneiron* re-interprets themes both from the legacy of Swedenborg and from pre-Christian cosmology. As a 'secular' author Lindstedt uses ideas and thoughts from culture and occulture alike, as resources in creating literary art (see Partridge 2005). Ferguson (2019: 95) emphasises that there is much to learn about the cultural impact of Western esotericism by focusing on fictional novels rather than on non-fictional works on occult or esoteric themes – as they have a much larger audience. She writes: 'Although genre fiction might sometimes strike us as sensational ersatz, or even scurrilous in its approach to esotericism, it urgently requires our attention if we are to understand how occult ideas have been transmitted, commercialised, and given meaning by and for the public' (Ferguson 2019: 95–6).

Laura Lindstedt's *Oneiron. A Fantasy About the Seconds After Death* can be seen as an example of a popular novel transmitting, but at the same

13 Besides of her literary work Lindstedt is also a PhD student in literary research. She's studying the problem of communication in Natalie Sarraute's philosophy, which influences also her literary work. One can also read *Oneiron* from that perspective. Communication or difficulties and gaps of communication is an important theme in the novel, in which characters speak different languages and one of them has even lost her ability to speak due to cancer.

time, re-interpreting the ideas of the afterlife by Emanuel Swedenborg. Re-interpretation is made within the frames of the postmodern novel. The reader of *Oneiron* learns of Swedenborg but is not supposed to adapt his teachings. The themes *Oneiron* discusses concern more the problems of this world than the other world.

PhD, Adjunct Professor **Tiina Mahlamäki** is Lecturer in the Study of Religion at the University of Turku. She is an expert on studying fictional texts as well as biographical writing. Her main research interests are: religion and literature, gender and religion, Western esotericism, and creative writing. In her recent studies she has concentrated on Western esotericism, especially the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg and themes associated with Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical Society. Her biography of the author and anthroposophist Kersti Bergroth was published in 2017. She has edited, together with Nina Kokkinen, *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa* (Modern Esotericism and Occultism in Finland, Vastapaino 2020).

Tomas Mansikka, Phil.Lic., is an independent researcher in the history of religion and the history of ideas. He has published articles on Jacob Boehme and the Pietistic culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He has also written on Emanuel Swedenborg (together with Tiina Mahlamäki) and contributed to *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia* (Brill 2016), *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa* (Modern Esotericism and Occultism in Finland, Vastapaino 2020), and *Kuvittelu ja uskonto* (Imagination and Religion, SKS 2020).

Bibliography

Bauduin, Tessel M., and Henrik Johnsson, 2018. 'Introduction: conceptualizing occult modernism', in *The Occult in Modernist Art*, *Literature, and Cinema*, eds. Tessel M. Bauduin and Henrik Johnsson (New York, Palgrave), pp. 1–29

Blåfield, Matti, 2008. 'Nordenskiöld, August (1754–1792): Alkemist, chef för bergsbruket i Finland', in *Biografiskt lexicon för Finland* 1. *Svenska tiden*, <URN:NBN:fi:sls-5227-1416928957833>

Bogdan, Henrik, 2020. 'Introduction: Western esotericism and literature', *Lir journal,* 12, pp. 4–9, <http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/LIRJ/article/view/4878/3802> (accessed 7.6.2020)

Bulwer-Lytton, Edward, 1834. *The Last Days of Pompey* (London, Richard Bentley), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1565> (accessed 7.9.2019)

———1842. *Zanoni* (London, Saunders & Otley), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2664> (accessed 7.9.2019)

———1871. *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* (London, William Blackwood), <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1951> (accessed 7.9.2019)

Corbett, Sara, 2009. 'The Holy Grail of the unconscious', *The New York*

Times Magazine, 16.9.2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/magazine/20jung-t.html> (accessed 7.9.2019)

Faxneld, Per, and Mattias Fyhr (eds.), 2010. *Förborgade tecken. Esoterism i västerländsk litteratur* (Stockholm, Text & Kultur)

Ferguson, Christine, 2019. 'What does popular fiction have to do with the occult?' in *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Peter Forshaw and Marco Pasi (Amsterdam University Press), pp. 95–104

Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid, and Lisbeth Mikaelsson, 2013. 'Theosophy and popular fiction', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden, Brill) pp. 453–72

Horn, Friedemann, 1997. *Schelling and Swedenborg. Mysticism and German Idealism*, Swedenborg Studies, 6 (West Chester, PA, Swedenborg Foundation)

Hubara, Koko, 2016. 'O(t)heiron', in *Ruskeat tytöt* [blog], <https://www.lily.fi/blogit/ruskeat-tytot/otheiron/> (accessed 7.9.2019)

Jung, C. G., 2009. *The Red Book: Liber Novus*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani (Carpinteria, Philemon Foundation)

Kokkinen, Nina, Tiina Mahlamäki, and Maarit Leskelä-Kärki 2020. 'Esoteerisuus taiteessa ja kirjallisuudessa', in *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa*, eds. Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen (Tampere, Vastapaino), pp. 221–45

Lachman, Gary, 2009. *Emanuel Swedenborg: An Introduction to his Life and Ideas* (New York, Penguin)

Lindstedt, Laura, 2015. *Oneiron. Fantasia kuolemanjälkeisistä sekunneista* (Helsinki, Teos)

———2018. *Oneiron. A Fantasy About the Seconds After Death*, transl. Owen F. Witesman (London, Oneworld Publications)

Mahlamäki, Tiina, 2010. 'Seitsemän veljeksen salattu maa. Emanuel Swedenborgin ideoiden läsnäolo Aleksis Kiven *Seitsemän veljestä* -teoksessa', *Sananjalka*, 52, pp. 163–80

———2014. '"A touch of the spiritual world?" An anthroposophical core in the life and work of Kersti Bergroth (1886–1975)', in *Finnish Women Making Religion: Between Ancestors to Angels*, eds. Terhi Utriainen and Päivi Salmesvuori (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 103–21

———2017. *Kaikki maallinen on vain vertauskuvaa. Kirjailija Kersti Bergrothin elämäkerta* (Helsinki, Kulttuuriosuuskunta Partuuna)

———2018. 'A relation of Swedenborgianism and anthroposophy: the case of the Finnish author Kersti Bergroth and her novel *The Living and the Dead*', *Approaching Religion*, 8(1), pp. 69–78, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.66723>

Mahlamäki, Tiina, and Tomas Mansikka, 2010. 'Remarks on Swedenborgian elements in the literary production of Johan Ludvig Runeberg', *Temenos:*

Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion, 46(1), pp. 73–99, <https://journal.fi/temenos/article/view/6942> (accessed 7.9.2019)

———2013. '"His visions have captured my thoughts": Emanuel Swedenborg in the newspapers and national literature in 19th century Finland', in *Emanuel Swedenborg. Exploring a 'World Memory': Context, Content, Contribution*, ed. Karl Grandin (Stockholm, The Center for the History of Sciences, The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences), pp. 296–311

McDannell, Colleen, and Bernhard Lang, 2001 (1988). *Heaven: A History* (New Haven, Yale University Press)

McNeilly, Stephen (ed.), 2005. *Between Method and Madness: Essays on Swedenborg and Literature* (London, The Swedenborg Society)

Oneiromantien, eller Konsten at tyda drömar, förra delen (Stockholm, Stolpiska tryckeriet, 1783), <http://www.alvin-portal.org/alvin/view.jsf?pid=alvin-record%3A100979&dswid=3103> (accessed 7.9.2019)

Oneiromantien, eller Konsten at tyda drömar, andra delen (Stockholm, Stolpiska tryckeriet, 1783), <http://www.alvin-portal.org/alvin/view.jsf?pid=alvin-record%3A100980&dswid=6413> (accessed 7.9.2019)

Paley, Morton D., 1979. '"A new heaven is begun": William Blake and Swedenborgianism', *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly,* 13(2), pp. 64–90 <http://bq.blakearchive.org/13.2.paley> (accessed 30.3.2020)

Partridge, Christopher, 2005. *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1 (London, Bloomsbury)

Råback, Jenni, 2018. Jenni Råback reviews *Oneiron* by Laura Lindstedt. *Asymptote*, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/criticism/laura-lindstedt-oneiron/> (accessed 30.3.2020)

Ramstedt, Tommy, 2018. *Knowledge and Identity within the Finnish Fringe-Knowledge Scene* (Åbo Akademi), <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-765-916-1>

Ramstedt, Tommy, and Marcus Moberg, 2020. 'Esoteerisuus ja populaarikulttuuri', in *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa,* eds. Tiina Mahlamäki and Nina Kokkinen (Tampere, Vastapaino), pp. 247–67

Rein, Gabriel, 1939. 'Porthan ja "valon viholliset"', *Historiallinen arkisto*, 46, pp. 103–18

Schuchard, Marsha Keith, 1992. 'The secret masonic history of Blake's Swedenborgian Society', *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 26(2), pp. 40–51, <http://bq.blakearchive.org/26.2.schuchard>

Siukonen, Jyrki, 2000. 'Jälkilehtiä. Swedenborgin jälkivaikutus', in *Clavis Hieroglyphica, Emanuel Swedenborg*, transl. and introduction by Jyrki Siukonen (Helsinki, Gaudeamus), pp. 88–112

Sjödén, Karl-Erik, 1995. 'Swedenborg in France', *The New Philosophy*, 98(1–2), pp. 63–98

Smithson, I. H. (ed.), 1841. *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg, Late Member of the House of Nobles in the Royal Diet of*

Sweden, Assessor of the Royal Board of Mines, Fellow of the Royal Society of Upsala, and of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Stockholm, and Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg, collected by Dr. J. F. I. Tafel (Manchester, Joseph Hayward, Market-Place)

Swedenborg, Emanuel, 1988 (1745). *Om Guds dyrkan och kärleken till Gud*, transl. Ritva Jonsson (Lund, Natur och Kultur)

———2000. *Clavis Hieroglyphica*, transl. and introduction by Jyrki Siukonen (Helsinki, Gaudeamus)

———2008 (1749–56). *Secrets of Heaven*, vol. 1:1. *New Century Edition,* transl. Lisa Hyatt Cooper, <https://swedenborg.com/product/secrets-heaven-1-nce/> (accessed 3.2.2018)

———2010 (1758). *Heaven and Hell. The Portable New Century Edition,* transl. George F. Dole, < https://swedenborg.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/NCE_HeavenandHell_portable.pdf> (accessed 3.2.2018)

Thorpe, Lucas, 2011. 'The realm of ends as a community of spirits: Kant and Swedenborg on the Kingdom of Heaven and the cleansing of the doors of perception', *Heythrop Journal*, 52(1), pp. 52–75

Tweed, Thomas, 2006. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press)

Versluis, Arthur, 2004. *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, Art, and Consciousness* (Albany, State University of New York Press)

Williams-Hogan, Jane, 1998. 'The place of Emanuel Swedenborg in modern Western esotericism', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion: Selected Papers presented at the 17th Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Mexico City 1995*, eds. Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Peeters), pp. 201–52

———2005. 'Emanuel Swedenborg', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 13, 2nd edn, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MacMillan), pp. 8898–900

———2008. 'The place of Emanuel Swedenborg in the spiritual saga of Scandinavia', in *Western Esotericism,* ed. Tore Ahlbäck, Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 20, (Åbo, Donner Institute), pp. 254–80, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67339>

———2016. 'Swedenborgianism in Scandinavia', in *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer (Leiden, Brill), pp. 534–53

Rumi, Sufi spirituality and the teacher-disciple relationship in Eli Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.84280

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

BILLY GRAY

In William Patrick Patterson's *Struggle of the Magicians*, a detailed study of the relationship between the prominent figures of Western esotericism, G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky, he writes 'Only in a time as confused as ours could one think that the teacher–student relationship – an archetypal and sacred form – exists as an option, rather than a necessary requirement, a station on the way' (1997: 92). My paper examines the numerous ways in which the famous teacher–disciple relationship that existed between Muhammad Jalal ad-Din, known to the anglophone world as Rumi, and his spiritual guide and mentor, Shams of Tabriz, is represented in Elif Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2010) and how her depiction of this relationship is predicated upon her knowledge of, and belief in, the general principles of what can be termed 'Western Sufism'. Although she had previously thematised elements of Sufi dialectics in her earlier fiction and clear, if minor, references to Sufi philosophy permeated novels such as *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), Shafak's fascination with the teachings of Rumi and Shams of Tabriz reaches its culmination and most significant artistic expression in *The Forty Rules of Love*. Published in 2010, the novel situates a fictionalised representation of the relationship between Rumi and Shams at the centre of the narrative and provides an overt depiction of the emanationalist, perennialist and universalist ethics contained within Sufi dialectics. In addition, given that Shafak's text represents one of the more prominent and commercially successful contributions to what Amira El-Zein (2010: 71–85) has called 'the Rumi phenomenon' my paper examines how, in privileging the aesthetics and the interests of American readers over conveying a more complete and more nuanced image of Sufism, Shafak succumbs to the oversimplification and decontextualisation of Rumi's teachings perpetrated by the Western popularisers of his work.

> Only in a time as confused as ours could one think that the teacher–student relationship – an archetypal and sacred form – exists as an option, rather than a necessary requirement, a station on the way. (William Patrick Patterson 1997: 92, quoted in Caplan 2011: 44)

> Three short phrases tell the story of my life: I was raw, I got cooked, I burned. (Jalaluddin Rumi, quoted in Shah 1964: 69)

Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences
Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 29 (2020), pp. 124–46

Given the increasing public prominence accorded to discourses relating to complex global trends such as migration, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, it is unsurprising that within literary studies, increasing critical attention has been focused upon writers whose work engages with the political, cultural and human consequences of these momentous, at times overwhelming, global developments. One such writer is the Turkish novelist Elif Shafak,[1] who in texts such as *The Gaze* (2006), *Honour* (2012) and *Three Daughters of Eve* (2016) depicts Muslim, predominantly female protagonists who, caught in the maelstrom of globalisation, cultural upheaval, and the pervasive attractions of Western secularism, face numerous familial, generational and gender demands upon their emerging personal identities.

What is particularly noteworthy in relation to Shafak's writing is the extent to which its rejection of religious and cultural fundamentalism and the concurrent promotion of a more fluid, cosmopolitan response to the dilemmas confronting contemporary society is predicated upon her knowledge of, and belief in, the general principles of what can be loosely termed 'Western Sufism'. Shafak has on several occasions openly acknowledged her interest in Sufism, most noticeably in an essay entitled 'The Celestial Eye', contained in her collection of non-fiction articles *Black Milk* (2007). This specific autobiographical essay recounts how Shafak gravitated from a position of aggressive atheism based on her proclivity to 'wrap several shawls of "isms" around my shoulders', to one where a spiritual guide, euphemistically referred to as 'Dame Dervish', entered her life. Shafak reveals how 'motivated by her, I started to read about Sufism. One book led to another. The more I read the more I unlearned. Because that is what Sufism does to you, it makes you erase what you know and what you are sure of' (Shafak

1 Shafak, who writes in both Turkish and English, is the daughter of a Turkish diplomat. She was born in Strasbourg and spent her formative years in Madrid, before moving for a short period to the United States. She currently resides in Oxford, England. Shafak's writing has an unusual status within the English and Turkish literary worlds. While she was a well-established writer in Turkey (who was particularly popular among university students), in 2004 she took the deliberate decision to start writing in English and translate her novels back into Turkish in collaboration with professional translators. As regards the Turkish edition of *The Forty Rules of Love* Shafak has stressed that the Turkish version was not simply a translation, but was the product of an arduous process of rewriting the novel with her co-translator Kadir Yigit Us. The Turkish version was actually published one year before the publication of the original work in English.

2007: 4). She confesses that, of all the Sufi poets and philosophers she read about during those formative years:

> There were two that moved me deeply: Rumi and his legendary spiritual companion, Shams of Tabriz. Living in thirteenth-century Anatolia, in an age of deeply embedded bigotries and clashes, they had stood for a universal spirituality, opening the doors to people of all backgrounds equally. They spoke of love as the essence of life, the universal philosophy connecting all humanity across centuries, cultures and cities. As I kept reading . . . Rumi's words began to tenderly remove the shawls I had always wrapped around myself, layer upon layer.
> (Shafak 2007: 219)

This fascination with the teachings of Muhammad Jalal ad-Din, known to the anglophone world as Rumi, and his spiritual guide and mentor, Shams of Tabriz, reaches its culmination and most significant artistic expression in Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*, published in 2010.[2] Although she had previously 'thematised' Sufism in her earlier fiction and clear, if minor, references to Sufi philosophy permeated previous novels, such as *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2007), *The Forty Rules of Love* situates a fictionalised representation of the relationship between Rumi and Shams at the centre of the narrative and provides a more overt depiction of the emanationalist, perennialist and universalist ethics contained within what can be termed Sufi dialectics. The novel contains two parallel but interrelated narratives, the first of which is situated in contemporary Massachusetts, where Ella Rubenstein, an unhappily married forty-year-old Jewish American housewife finds temporary employment working for a literary agency. Her first assignment is to read and produce a detailed report on a work of fiction entitled *Sweet Blasphemy*, written by an unpublished novelist called Aziz Zahara, who claims to have written the book 'purely out of admiration and love for the great philosopher, mystic and poet Rumi and his beloved Shams of Tabriz' (15). The second narrative strand of Shafak's novel consists of the contents of Zahara's text which, situated in thirteenth-century Anatolia, relates how in a period of political instability, fanaticism and impending violence, Shams of Tabriz essentially transformed Rumi – at that particular time a prominent Muslim

2 All further references to this text will be provided in the body of this essay.

cleric and expert in Islamic jurisprudence – into a committed mystic and poet of incomparable ability. In relation to the two narrative strands contained in *The Forty Rules of Love*, a clear connection is drawn between the mystical love that binds Rumi and Shams of Tabriz, and the extramarital affair that arises between Ella and the Sufi adept Aziz, who, the novel suggests, may be the literal reincarnation of Shams himself. Reading *Sweet Blasphemy*, and becoming increasingly captivated by the tale of Rumi and Shams, Ella becomes estranged from her emotionally distant husband and expresses a growing dissatisfaction with her marriage, the restrictive gender roles she had previously embraced and the confines of her prosperous middle-class lifestyle. Ella's encounter with Aziz's manuscript, her exposure to Rumi's poetry and, ultimately, the personality of Aziz himself help her to recognise her need for a more spiritual lifestyle and an attachment to a form of Sufism which emphasises the essential unity of all faiths and the paramount importance of love.

'The Rumi phenomenon' in popular culture

The Forty Rules of Love is undoubtedly one of the more prominent and commercially successful[3] contributions to what Amira El-Zein has called 'the Rumi phenomenon' (El-Zein 2010; Barks 1995; Lewis 2007). While he has long been a renowned figure in the Persian and Turkish speaking worlds, as well as the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, in the last few decades Rumi has become a recognised poet in the West, particularly in the United States. Triggered by Coleman Barks's 1995 volume of translations (or more accurately 'renderings') entitled *The Essential Rumi*, and UNESCO's declaration in 2006 that the year 2007 would be the international 'Rumi year', the thirteenth-century Islamic mystic has recently achieved a remarkable public visibility, to the extent that in 1996 he became the bestselling poet in North America, selling in excess of several hundred thousand copies in a country where Pulitzer prize-winning poets struggle to sell more than 10,000 books. Rumi's posthumous literary success has been accompanied by a number of fictionalised biographies relating to his life and work, including not only *The Forty Rules of Love*, but also Nigel Watt's *The Way of Love* (1999), Muriel Maufroy's *Rumi's Daughter* (2005), Connie Zweig's *A Moth to the Flame*

3 The novel became an international bestseller and has sold more than 700,000 copies in Turkey alone.

(2006), Nahal Tajadod's *Rumi: The Fire of Love* (2008, originally published in French as *Roumi le Brule* in 2004) Ahmet Umet's *The Dervish Gate* (2012, originally published in Turkish as *Bab-I Esrar* in 2008) and Rabi Samkara Bala's *A Mirrored Life: the Rumi novel* (2015). Moreover, as Franklin Lewis has pointed out in his magisterial biography *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (2007), interest in Rumi has recently transcended the printed word and moved into various multimedia formats, inspiring musicians, choreographers, film-makers, video-artists and others, with a concurrent visibility in the outer reaches of cyberspace (Lewis 2007: 2). For example, the American minimalist composer Philip Glass has created a huge multimedia piece entitled *Masters of Grace*, complete with 3D glasses and featuring a libretto of 114 poems by Rumi (*ibid.*). In 1998, the celebrity New Age guru Deepak Chopra produced a CD entitled *A Gift of Love*, which included none other than Madonna, Martin Sheen and Goldie Hawn reciting some of Rumi's verses, and in the same year the same popular singer wrote and recorded a song entitled 'Frozen', included in her *Ray of Light* album (1998), which she claimed is based on a poem (unspecified) originally penned by the Sufi poet. These are just some of the more prominent examples of how the contemporary American hunger for metaphysical knowledge appears to have found in Rumi the ultimate source of inspiration and make it possible to argue, as Amira El-Zein has done, that 'more than any other past or contemporary poet … [h]e is considered by many Americans today as a spiritual guide' (El-Zein 2010: 71).

Rumi's success as a pop-culture icon in the United States can partly be explained by the various and gradual processes of domestication, appropriation and Americanisation of the Rumi narrative, as well as a result of the considerable effort that has been expended in presenting Sufism as an important counterpoint to the religious extremism which dominated the Islamophobic discourses following 9/11. It can also be fruitfully contextualised within what Georg Feuerstein has defined as the secular world's 'widespread revival of interest in the experimental, mystical dimensions of religion' (Feuerstein 2006: 14). According to Elena Furlanetto, this interest should not be viewed as a new or even isolated phenomenon but rather as a culmination of a much older cultural dialogue between American literature and Sufi poetry (Furlanetto 2013: 202). This is a perspective endorsed by Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh, who has charted the various ways in which readers in the West began to discover the work of Rumi approximately two hundred years ago, when the pioneers Orientalists and Romanticists of the late eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries – who perceived Rumi as part of the mystical and visionary Orient – paved the way for his impact on Western spiritual discourse (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2015: 287). Zarrabi-Zadeh charts the manner in which Rumi's teachings subsequently impinged upon Western consciousness and how he was considered a spiritual saint *par excellence* by advocates of New Age spirituality in the second half of the twentieth century, a position he has retained ever since (*ibid.*). Interestingly, Zarrabi-Zadeh also contends that the contemporary Western tendency to wrench Rumi from his Islamic context and reduce his sacred message to a bland commercial and consumerist product is, in historical terms, simply the most recent manifestation of a long tradition and he laments how the popular (as opposed to the scholarly) perception of Rumi's spirituality does not fully reflect the perennial philosophy to which the poet belongs and merely encourages 'a form of vague spirituality entangled in relativity and temporality' (*ibid.* 301), Zarrabi-Zadeh expresses concern with the manner in which 'the interpretation of Rumi's ideas through a circular hermeneutical process has been coupled with the imposition upon his Sufi system of foreign mystical philosophical and religious frameworks that are not necessarily congruous with his own mystical principles' (*ibid.* 288). Accordingly, this tendency has led to the decontextualisation of Rumi's mysticism from the epistemological context to which it belongs and represents an essential violation of the constituent parts of his Sufi system. This viewpoint is shared by Franklin Lewis, who has criticised those contemporary spiritual practitioners who have taken extensive liberties with the content of Rumi's poems and whose representations of his teachings consequently appear 'blurred and bland' (Lewis 2007: 8). Pointing out how 'when it came to differences of creed, we should not be deceived by his [Rumi's] tolerance into imagining that all beliefs were equal to him' (*ibid.* 12) Lewis states:

> It will simply not do to extract quotations out of context and present Rumi as a prophet of the presumptions of an unchurched and syncretic spirituality – while Rumi does indeed demonstrate a tolerant and inclusive understanding of religion … [He] did not come to his theology of tolerance and inclusive spirituality by turning away from traditional Islam or organised religion, but through an immersion in it; his spiritual yearning stemmed from a radical desire to follow the example of the Prophet Mohammad and actualise his potential as a perfect Muslim. (Lewis 2007: 20)

It has been argued – most notably by Elena Furlanetto, who has produced a noteworthy scholarly study on *The Forty Rules of Love* – that in her presentation of the Rumi narrative, Shafak 'succumbs to the oversimplification and decontextualisation of his work perpetrated by the Western popularisers of the Rumi phenomenon' and that she 'privileges the aesthetics and the interests of the American readers over conveying a more complete image of Sufism' (Furlanetto 2013: 204). It is my contention that the reality is somewhat more complex: while Shafak is certainly culpable of expunging essential references to Islamic doctrine in her depiction of Rumi's teachings and is undoubtedly complicit in presenting the Rumi's narrative as emblematic of a 'brand' of universal Sufism that is of increasingly global importance, this is, I believe, an inevitable consequence of her adherence to a form of Sufism which has been identified as essentially Western in orientation rather than traditionally Islamic.[4] While it is important to avoid essentialist or normative stances regarding what can be said to constitute 'Sufism', which is best understood as an umbrella term for a diversity of often competing religious traditions and spiritual activities, Mark Sedgwick has pointed out the various ways in which Sufism as popularised in the West has developed distinct characteristics related to important historical developments and the specificities of cultural reception (Sedgwick 2016; van Bruinessen and Howell 2012; Green 2012; Sorgenfrei 2013; Raudvere and Stenberg 2009). Limited space prohibits a thorough and detailed explication of the various ways in which so-called Western or 'neo-Sufism' can be said to differ from Sufism in its classical form; in general terms the former often – but not always – propagates a psychological system rather than a faith-based theological exegesis, and privileges the universalist strand embedded in Sufi philosophy.[5] Traditional Sufism, however, is often inextricably linked to the Islamic world, does not reject the world of conventional religious observance

4 In the list of 'sources' reproduced at the end of the novel, Shafak cites Coleman Barks, Idris Shah, Kabir Helmunski, Camille Hetminski, William Chitwick, Ann Marie Schiminel and R. A. Nicolson, all of whom would be considered figures of seminal importance within Western Sufism.

5 In the twentieth century, Western Sufism was propagated by figures such as the Greek Armenian George Gurdjieff (1866–1947), the Russian mathematician and philosopher Pytor Ouspensky (1878–1947), Alfred Richard Orage (1873–1934), editor of the influential New Age magazine, J. G. Bennett (1897–1974), a British scientist and reputed British spy, and most recently Idris Shah (1924–96), believed to have been the foremost exponent of Sufi ideas in the West.

and recognises Islam in both its exoteric and esoteric dimensions. This article argues therefore, that far from misrepresenting Sufism as such, Shafak's novel incorporates within its narrative design important elements of disembedded Sufism as they are generally perceived and promoted globally, not least her detailed depiction of the teacher–disciple relationship, which is such an essential aspect of Sufism in its various manifestations.

Jallaluddin Rumi and the Mevlevi Sufi Order

Who then was Jallaluddin Rumi and in what was his relationship to Sufism? Moreover, in what ways are important elements of his spiritual philosophy reflected in *The Forty Rules of Love*? As Franklin Lewis has emphasised, although there currently exists a bewildering array of materials on Rumi, both popular and scholarly (as well as devotional), 'we remain some way off from reconstructing an exhaustive biography detailing all that can be known about him' (Lewis 2007: 4). This difficulty is compounded by the indisputable fact that a hagiographical tradition, which uncritically perpetuated a legendary image of the poet, emerged immediately after his death in 1273. As regards reliable biographical information, it is accepted as fact that Rumi was born in 1207 in Balkh, Persia (today Afghanistan). When he was twelve years old, Balkh was invaded by Tatars and his father fled the province with his family and gravitated towards Rum (Asiatic Turkey). They eventually settled in Konya, where the future poet and Sufi scholar acquired the name 'al-Rumi', taken from the name of the area. Upon his father's death Rumi assumed the position of Shaykh in the religious community in Konya, where he taught and preached for several years. He met and became a disciple of the controversial Shams of Tabriz in 1244,[6] and is believed to have died in

6 As Franklin Lewis (2007: 135) points out, we know considerably less about Shams of Tabriz than we know about Rumi. It is believed that he came from a family of spiritual practitioners and there are suggestions that his forebears were connected to various fringe sects of Sufism whose affiliates experimented with highly unorthodox practices. While legend portrayed Shams as an untutored wandering dervish possessed of miraculous powers, it appears that Shams was fully apprised of the learning of his day, had studied Islamic law, and possessed extensive knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. As regards the remarkable influence that Shams was to wield over Rumi, Inyat Khan has written: 'The impact of Shams … upon the erstwhile scholar Rumi was so overwhelming that he became practically overnight one of the great Murshids (teachers) the Sufis

1273. The disciples and descendants of Rumi subsequently formed a confraternity, or Sufi Order, committed to following the mystical practices, spiritual discipline and teachings which they traced back to Rumi himself. This Brotherhood (which also includes female members) is officially called the Mevlevi Order, although the adherents of the Order are best known to the general populace as 'the whirling dervishes', after their distinctive practice of meditative turning. As Zarrabi-Zadeh has outlined, Rumi's significant contribution to the intellectual and spiritual development of Sufism was facilitated by the Mevlevi Order's amicable relations with their Ottoman rulers and Rumi's fame was spread, not only throughout Anatolia, but also in territories occupied by the Ottoman Empire (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2015: 287).

In relation to what Rumi actually taught, his doctrinal system was essentially based around his conviction that the entire path of mystical perfection is centred around Man's desire to return to his divine origin, thereby returning to the ontological unity he had once enjoyed. For Rumi, the all-consuming problem of human existence stems from the painful existence of imperfection caused by alienation from our essential source. His metaphysics depict the beginning of creation as a unified realm, where Man's inward reality and the virtual existence of all created things were present with God in a state of harmonious unity. In order to once again experience this original state of spiritual perfection, Rumi emphasises its gradual and progressive nature and insists that the mystical path involves passing through limitless successive spiritual 'stations' (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2015: 290). He characterises the starting point of Man's mystical journey as a purging of what are known amongst Sufis as the *nafs*, defined as the bestial aspect of Man's nature, an adversary that hinders each individual from achieving mystical advancement. It is, therefore, essential to struggle against the deceitful nature of the *nafs* and eradicate the deluding power of the partial intellect. If the appellant is successful in these attempts, the mystical journey can ultimately reach a stage where neither the *nafs* nor the intellect govern the soul; instead it is the soul's 'pure untarnished essence', or what Zarrabi-Zadeh refers to as the 'unrestricted and ineffable heart' (*ibid.* 291), which dominates the disciple's existence.

have ever known' (Feuerstein 2006: 25). Will Johnson, in his short but fascinating biography of Rumi's life and teachings, simply claims that 'Shams was the key to Rumi's lock' (see Johnson 2007: 12).

The Forty Rules of Love

Perhaps the most singular element of Rumi's spiritual doctrine and one which has significantly contributed to his current status as a precursor of modern, unchurched and syncretic spirituality is the emphasis he places upon the role of love as the major component of the entire mystical journey. A great deal of Rumi's poetry refers to the state where, through love, 'the seer becometh the eye, the eye, the seer', and when Man begins travelling on his spiritual journey it is the reciprocal love between the aspirant and God that plays the pivotal role in this gradual and arduous practice. Rumi attributes the motion of all particles through the cycle of forms to the powerful attraction of love and perceives all creation within both the physical and metaphysical worlds as a great upward spiral of transmutation (Zarrabi-Zadeh 2015: 296). If the individual soul frees itself from the taint which it has contracted in the material world, it can escape those subjective values which function as the veils of truth. When this occurs, it is possible to live in the realm of the Beloved and practise the art of love which resides in the depth of the psyche. In other words, whether its immediate object be human or divine, real or phenomenal, love ultimately leads to a knowledge of God. As Will Johnson attests: 'Become a lover. This is Rumi's message to us' (Johnson 2007: 42).

As the title of Shafak's novel suggests, *The Forty Rules of Love* engages with Rumi's philosophy of love on a number of seemingly unrelated but ultimately interconnected levels. This is partly due to the ideological positioning of the text; Rumi's advocacy of love and tolerance is presented by Shafak as evidence of an 'Other' Islam, far removed from the rhetorics of fundamentalism frequently associated with Muslim fanatics and equally the poet's religious message is used in the text to highlight the incompatibility of genuine spirituality and institutionalised religion, the latter being depicted as dogmatic, reified and essentially divisive. This viewpoint is frequently voiced by the character of Aziz, who, in a letter to Ella dated 2008, writes: 'I am spiritual … religiosity and spirituality are not the same thing and I believe that the gap between the two has never been greater' (145). More significantly, Shafak's literary agenda and belief in the timeless relevance of Rumi's teachings is primarily embodied in the character of Ella Rubenstein.

A rigidly disciplined personality, living a comfortable, bourgeois existence with no margin for unpredictability or surprise, Ella's life 'consisted of still waters – a predictable sequence of habits, needs and preference' (1).

She acknowledges how 'It was a pity that, at almost forty, she hadn't been able to make more of her life' (36). The fact that Ella is soon to turn forty is highly significant on a number of levels; firstly, Rumi is said to have deepened his spiritual search at this particular age (as did other prominent figures within the Islamic spiritual tradition, such as the Prophet Muhammad who received his first revelations while in the fourth decade of his life and Al-Ghazali was of a similar age when he, in a similar way to Rumi, turned from *fiqh* to *tasawwufas*). More mundanely, she is evidently suffering from the symptoms of a classic 'mid-life' crisis. As her birthday approaches, she commits to paper a list of resolutions aimed at providing a form of emotional ballast against an increasing sense of existential atrophy and stagnation. Confessing that 'I feel like I have reached a milestone in my life' (113), she blames herself for 'not ageing well', and feels 'particularly insecure about her body, her hips and thighs and the shape of her breasts, which were far from perfect after three kids and all these years' (304). Ella's crisis is compounded by her oldest daughter Jeanette's unexpected decision to inform the family of her impending marriage. When faced with her mother's outspoken disapproval, Jeanette responds by telling Ella, 'I love him, Mom. Does that not mean anything to you? Do you remember that word from somewhere?' (9). Her daughter's outburst forces Ella to confront her dispassionate and rational views on love, encapsulated by her banal protestation that 'women don't marry the men they fall in love with' (10), as 'love is only a sweet feeling bound to come and quickly go away' (10). For Ella love is simply for those 'looking for some rhyme or reason in this widely spinning world' (78). Nevertheless, Jeanette's pointed comments have clearly touched upon a troubling issue for Ella as, in a moment of contemplation, she confronts her true feelings on the subject of love, and asks herself: 'But what about those who had long given up the quest?' (78).

Ella's increasing awareness of the emotional and spiritual vacuum at the centre of her life is directly connected to the character of Rumi, as he is represented in Aziz's novel *Sweet Blasphemy*, a text which Ella has been asked to review. Rumi is depicted as suffering from an inexplicable sadness, a situation at odds with his visible wealth and numerous achievements. Described as a prominent scholar of Islam 'who knew everything except the pits of love' (74), Rumi, despite his increasing fame and public prominence, remains inwardly dissatisfied. When pondering upon his enviable litany of achievements he asks himself, 'Why then, do I feel this void inside me, growing

deeper and wider with each passing day? It gnaws at my soul like a disease and accompanies me wherever I go' (99).

At the mid-point of their lives, therefore, both Ella and Rumi find themselves afflicted by an existential emptiness, exemplified by a condition of spiritual and moral exhaustion. It is fortunate, therefore, that their lives are fundamentally transformed by the influence of two remarkable individuals – Aziz Zahara and Shams of Tabriz respectively – who, through their guidance and teaching, impart a more profound understanding of the potential of love in all its manifestations. Moreover, the parallel experiences of Ella and Rumi, separated as they are by gender, history, culture and religious affiliation serves as an important literary device whereby Shafak can investigate the function of the teacher-disciple dynamic within Sufism and the essential role such a relationship plays in the individual's esoteric odyssey.

Before examining the extent to which *The Forty Rules of Love* reproduces classic tropes and strategies of the teacher–disciple discourse ubiquitous to Sufism, it is important at this juncture to outline how, since time immemorial, Sufis of all persuasions have perceived authentic spiritual life as a matter of initiation and discipleship and championed the role that the authoritative spiritual guide performs in relation to the seeker's desire for inner growth.

Dimensions of the master-disciple relationship

While the concept of spiritual 'transmission' has largely been eradicated from contemporary, New Age discourses, within Sufism – and of course, other religious and spiritual traditions – the 'path' or 'the Way' is constantly renewed by successive teachers who are referred to as Sages (*arif*), Guides (*murshid*), Elders (*pir*) or Sheikhs. In relation to both the history and praxis of Sufism, a system of discipleship to spiritual teachers originated which involved the aspirant developing his/her spiritual proclivities under the supervision of a guide. This guide operates as an indispensable link between the disciple and his/her objective and is ultimately responsible for organising the inherent flexibility of the Sufi work. By practising a variety of structured activities, teachers endeavour to transmit to their pupils the 'Baraka' – essentially, an implacable force imparted to people, situations, places and objects for a specific reason – they receive from their own Masters. As Idris Shah writes: 'To be a Sufi and to study the Way is to have a certain attitude. This attitude is produced by the effect of Sufi teachers who exercise an instrumental function in relation to the Seeker' (Shah 1982: 24). In their

proper application, therefore, these teaching techniques depend upon an interrelation between the Master and the disciple, primarily because one of the major obstacles many seekers face is that they cannot access 'the real' without guidance from teachers who have transcended ordinary limitations and embraced the imperatives of esoteric knowledge.

Essentially, the teacher embodies and symbolises 'the Work' itself (of which s/he is a product) and also the continuity of the system (the chain of transmission). The Sufi teacher does not simply impart knowledge or expect mere behavioural modification on behalf of the disciple; rather the guru's principal function is to directly communicate transcendental reality. The ultimate objective of spiritual transmission therefore, is attuned to exploiting unexpected opportunities in which skilful intervention may catalyse a profound ontological shift in the student's awareness. Lex Hixton, a contemporary teacher of Sufism, has advised 'every seeker [to] receive traditional initiation and personal guidance from at least one authentic spiritual guide. Then one no longer simply experiments with contemplation but lives contemplative practice' (quoted in Feuerstein 2006: 223). This perspective is put more succinctly by Georg Feuerstein, who writes: 'I cannot imagine why one would dare to cross the shark-infested waters of the ego without a boatman' (quoted in Caplan 2011: 72).

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Rumi's 'boatman', Shams of Tabriz, informs a young villager how 'people everywhere are struggling on their own for fulfilment, but without any guidance as to how to achieve it' (207). For Ella and Rumi, who are the fortunate recipients of such guidance, the aim of their respective teachers is to act as a transmitter of grounded spirituality by facilitating their disciples' latent transformative capacities. This involves the deployment of a specific pedagogical methodology which is aimed at disarming the manifestations of the ego and facilitating the emergence of a more fully developed, intuitive approach to life. Ella and Rumi are taught that objective spiritual practice resides in the ego-transcendence, as opposed to the chimera of ego-fulfilment. This realisation leads to a fundamental shift in their inner perception and is accompanied by a recognition that authentic spiritual life is essentially deconstructive in nature. This perspective is evident in Rumi's disclosure that Shams 'has taught me to unlearn everything I knew' (192). Shams's specific teaching principles are designed to fundamentally challenge Rumi's reliance of the subjective phenomena of social conditioning and conventional morality. This approach is evident at their very first public meeting; when confronted by an unexpected query

The first meeting between Rumi and Shams of Tabriz. stillnessspeaks.com.

from Shams, Rumi recognises how 'when Shams asked me that question … there was a second question hidden within the first question (165). His curiosity aroused, Rumi's response is significant: 'I felt as if a veil had been lifted and what awaited me was an intriguing puzzle' (154). What 'awaits' Rumi is nothing less than a fundamental spiritual realignment. After each subsequent meeting with Shams, he feels 'intoxicated by a substance I can neither taste nor see', and is brought to an awareness that his normal condition of spiritual insentience could only have been overcome through the extraneous guidance of a fully-fledged Sufi teacher: 'Until he forced me to look deep into the crannies of my soul, I had not faced the fundamental truth about myself' (192).

Ella undergoes a remarkably similar transformation under the tutelage of Aziz Zahara, a man who defines himself as 'a Sufi, a child of the present moment' (160). When tasked with reading about the lives of Rumi and Shams in Aziz's novel *Sweet Blasphemy*, Ella initially expresses doubts about whether 'she could concentrate on a subject as irrelevant to her life as Sufism,

and a time as distant as the thirteenth century' (12). Her midlife crisis has left her 'beleaguered by questions and lacking answers', yet she finds herself becoming increasingly intrigued by the character of Shams, and soon realises that 'she was enjoying the story, and with every new rule of Shams, she mulled her life over' (129). Her growing interest in Aziz's depiction of the teacher–disciple component inherent in the relationship between the two prominent Sufis, is accompanied by an increasing awareness that her friendship with Aziz is essentially replicating the dynamic that existed between Rumi and Shams, with Aziz as the symbolic reincarnation of Rumi's great teacher. She is forced to confront Aziz's influence on her life and acknowledge his pivotal role in her spiritual growth: '… you meet someone … who sees everything in a different light and forces you to shift, change your angle of vision [and] observe everything anew, within and without' (263).

On a closer reading, it is evident that Shafak's interest in the teacher–student dynamic within Sufism is not limited to a broad understanding of the general principles governing such relationships; in fact, her depiction of the two main teacher–student relationships in *The Forty Rules of Love* reveals a detailed knowledge of how, in their proper application, Sufi teaching techniques are dependent upon a specific and individualised interrelation between the Master and his/her disciple. To the Sufis, the teacher's adoption of specific pedagogical approaches which are, of necessity, specifically tailored to the needs of each individual student, is an essential part of Sufi philosophy and a sign of flexibility rather than evidence of inconsistency. In relation to Ella, her predominant character flaw is a deeply engrained inability to relinquish control over her immediate surroundings and 'live in the moment', and tellingly, it is precisely this failing which is targeted by Aziz on numerous occasions. When the latter informs Ella that part of his spiritual education involved developing a disposition whereby he could adopt 'a peaceful acceptance of the terms of the universe, including the things we are currently unable to change or comprehend' (54), she responds with 'What a bizarre thing to say … to a woman who has always put too much thought into the past and even more into the future' (160). In a subsequent email communication Aziz writes 'instead of intrusion or passivity, may I suggest submission?' (54), and suggests that the act of surrender, both to a Higher Power and the possibilities of the present moment are an essential component of the spiritual journey. He instructs Ella to 'go with the flow', an approach to life that she attempts – successfully – to develop and refine: 'she had discovered that once she accepted that she didn't have to stress herself

about things she had no control over, another self emerged from inside – one who was wiser, calmer and far more sensible' (175).

In regards to Rumi, it is made abundantly clear that the main obstacle curtailing his spiritual development is the exceedingly high regard in which he is held by both the civic and religious communities in Konya. His strictly ordered life and unrivalled reputation as an orator of genius have brought him a welcome degree of material comfort and security in a period where the region is beset with political uncertainty. Inevitably, this prosperity has led to a burgeoning sense of self-regard and exponentially reduced the element of struggle viewed by the Sufis as an essential catalyst for spiritual renewal and regeneration. Although he is a relative newcomer to the region, Shams notes the exceptional deference accorded to Rumi by numerous important personages and informs an acquaintance that 'His [Rumi's] ego has not been bruised, not even slightly damaged by other people. But he needs that' (224). It is significant, therefore, that the specific type of teaching that Shams devises in order to 'shock' Rumi out of his spiritual impasse is precisely that form of guidance mostly designed to demolish Rumi's elevated standing within the local community. Interestingly, Shams deliberately exposes Rumi to a radical form of teaching commonly known as 'crazy wisdom' or 'holy madness',[7] so beloved by numerous Sufi practitioners. What 'crazy-wise' adepts have in common is a seemingly deliberate rejection of consensual reality, as well as the ability to instruct others in ways clearly designed to shock the conventional mind.

Crazy wisdom – transformative spirituality

In historical terms, some Sufis addressed the spiritual dangers of a pious reputation by intentionally acting in apparent contradiction to religious law or acceptable social standards. In order not to succumb to the temptation of false piety, they might shear themselves of all outward signs of social respect by exhibiting behaviour which would have clearly appeared bizarre by conventional standards. Such teachers may therefore act in ways that do not fit accepted moralistic ideas of how a teacher may behave. 'Crazy wisdom' practitioners, however, have insisted that despite the unconventionality of their

7 For a detailed overview relating to the role of the 'crazy wisdom' within esoteric traditions, see Georg Feuerstein's *Holy Madness* (2006).

doctrine, the teachings are always designed to serve the disciple's spiritual journey by drawing attention to the insidious rigidity of egoic identification.

In many respects Shams is viewed by the various communities in Konya as the true embodiment of a 'crazy wisdom' teacher. He is described by Jack Head, a minor character in the novel who represents Islamic Orthodoxy and fundamentalism, as 'a maverick of a dervish' and 'a heretic who has nothing to do with Islam. An unruly man full of sacrilege and blasphemy' (22). Even commentators sympathetic to Shams note how he 'fanned the flames of gossip, touched raw nerves and spoke words that sounded like blasphemy to ordinary ears, shocking and provoking people' (289). Shams deliberately fraternizes with social outcasts such as prostitutes, thieves and other criminals in order to provoke the religious authorities of Konya and, by association, expose Rumi to public ridicule and moral outrage. The latter's friendship with the itinerant dervish frequently leaves him open to criticisms and aspersions uttered by the orthodox clergy, resulting in Rumi's increasing social ostracism from the important spheres of political influence. In order to gauge Rumi's response to his increasing isolation, Shams remorselessly exacerbates his disciple's deep-seated fear of derision by setting 'tests', such as instructing him to publicly purchase wine in a tavern of ill-repute. He attempts to free Rumi from his conformity and his fear of opprobrium as well as stimulate a growing detachment from the assumptions and prejudices of conventional Islamic piety. Despite some major reservation amongst men who previously held him in high esteem, Rumi passes the 'test', by embracing social disrepute in the interests of spiritual development. He subsequently advises one of his own students to 'throw away reputation, become disgraced and shameless', and claims that 'Because of him [Shams], I learned the value of madness' (290).

The fact that Rumi is willing to renounce an enviable reputation for moral probity in order to follow the 'crazy wisdom' teachings of his master points both to the essential unconventionality of the Sufi Way as well as the manner in which the path of spiritual transformation is defined by fundamental risk. This is a truism irrespective of the personalised characteristics of each individual 'seeker'. The spiritual 'journey' is an inherently challenging one as the genuine teacher works towards a painful deconstruction of the disciple's personal universe of meaning. Guy Claxton has noted how enlightened teachers 'resemble … the demolition expert, setting strategically placed charges to blow up the established super-structure of the ego, so that the ground may be exposed' (quoted in Feuerstein 2006: 226). As

the ultimate objective of spiritual transmission is to fundamentally modify the subject's very state of being, the teacher constantly tries to provoke an ontological crisis in the disciple, with the intention of deepening the appellant's commitment to the spiritual process. This strategy is confirmed by Ken Wilber, who claims that what he terms 'transformative spirituality', 'does not legitimate the world, it breaks the world, it does not console the world, it shatters it. And it does not render the self content, it renders it undone' (quoted in Caplan 2011: 8).

The genuine teacher does not seek to remove the disciple's deep-seated aggravation about life; indeed, s/he will, in numerous subtle and not so subtle ways, attempt to augment the pupil's sense of frustration. If spiritual discipleship involves the voluntary acceptance of constraints in order to facilitate one's inner freedom, it also requires a tremendous act of courage, as, in the words of Al-Ghazadi, 'You must prepare yourself for the transition in which there will be none of the things to which you have accustomed yourself' (quoted in Shah 1968: 60). Marina Caplan, in more contemporary language, reiterates this fundamental principle when she writes: 'Ultimately, there is little value in playing it safe. Reality isn't safe and neither are Truth nor God' (Caplan 2011: 135). This is why, in *The Forty Rules of Love*, the narrative emphasises that both Ella and Rumi must embrace an element of risk if they are to make substantial progress on their spiritual journeys. This involves a recognition that values invariably cherished by most people, such as security, comfort and the avoidance of suffering, merely serve to inhibit progressive spirituality. As their relationship deepens, Aziz informs Ella how 'the stages along the path are easy to summarise, difficult to experience' (165) and warns her that 'spirituality is not something we can add to our life without making major changes there' (146). For Ella, these 'major changes' essentially relate to a necessary relinquishing of her obsession with the 'safety' of the domestic sphere, an attachment which serves as a mere subterfuge for her risk-averse personality. Under the guidance of Aziz, she retreats from her obdurate fussing over recipes and health related issues and embraces an inclusive relationship with life itself: 'She understood with chilling clarity and calm … she would simply walk out into the world where dangerous things happen all the time' (64).

For Rumi, the consequences of Shams's tutelage are perhaps even more radical in nature. At a formative stage in their relationship, Shams admonishes him for his seeming self-regard and instructs him that 'he [Rumi] must learn to practice mysticism, not just read about it' (289). This pointed

criticism of Rumi's reliance on the printed word is followed by a ritual burning of his beloved and coveted scholastic textbooks, many of which he has inherited from his beloved father. It is little wonder that Rumi subsequently confesses that 'Shams cut loose all the moorings that tied me to life as I knew it' (290), and, in reference to the transformation of his spiritual life, admits, 'Of the scholar and teacher, not even the smallest speck remains' (342).

For Shams, the greatest risk of all and one which every spiritual aspirant must, of necessity, take, is to embrace the experience of love in all its multitudinous manifestations. He tells the Novice (a minor character in the novel): 'Intellect risks nothing, but love dissolves all tangles and risks everything. Intellect is always cautious – intellect does not always break down, whereas love can effortlessly reduce itself to rubble' (66). Given Shafak's stated awareness that the doctrine of love formed the focal theme of the historical Rumi's practical teaching and the core of his mystical experiences, together with the centrality of Shams's doctrine of the forty rules of love to the narrative design of the text, it is evident that the Sufi perspective on love constitutes the single most important theme in her novel. As Mariana Caplan (2011: 248) points out, 'Sufi teachers, … in spite of their realisation of the void, illusion and emptiness, emphasise the role of love' and their efforts of will, discipline and selfless service are enacted, not for the purpose of self-fulfilment, but as expressions of love.

Conclusion: love as the basic tenet of spiritual ife

In *Growth to Selfhood: The Sufi Contribution*, Reza Aresteh notes how in Sufi dialectics 'the psychological laws of the "I"–"Thou" relationship which yield to unitary experience involve basically three elements – the "I" known in Sufism as lover, "thou" or the beloved, and the process known as "love". At the end of the experience these three elements are supposed to become one' (Aresteh 1980: 118). Sufism contends therefore, that whenever the apparent antithesis of 'lover' and 'beloved' is resolved by their transmutation in the universal essence of love, relatedness to time and space is often eradicated and the principle of unity becomes visible. To the Sufis, to perceive oneself as constituting an inimitable self-enclosed entity is to exhibit the classical symptom of spiritual atrophy and even a desultory reading of both classical and contemporary Sufi literature would reveal this precept as being perhaps the single most important component of their religious ontology.

Without the unifying experience of love, human beings appear incapable of understanding the basic tenets of spiritual life and continue to view their individual entities as constituting merely a single entity in the greater whole of humanity. Syaed Ahmed Hatif writes:

> If you give all to love, I'll be called a pagan if you suffer a molecule of loss. The soul passed through the soul of love will let you see itself transmuted. If you escape the narrowness of dimensions and will see the "time of what is placeless," you will see what has never been seen, until they deliver you to a place where you see "a world" and "worlds" as one. You shall love Unity with heart and soul; until with a true eye, you will see Unity. (Quoted in Shah 1968: 267)

In *The Forty Rules of Love*, these perspectives are primarily voiced through the 'lessons' and 'teachings' enunciated by Shams. He compiles a list entitled 'The basic principles of the itinerant mystic of Islam', which essentially constitute 'The forty rules of the religion of love', and frequently emphasises how a complete understanding of the 'forty rules' can 'only be attained through love and love only' (40). His teachings embody the centrality of this fact, as he, on numerous occasions, explains to Rumi and numerous others that love is the essential component of true mysticism. He explains to the prostitute Desert Rose how 'there is no wisdom without love' and asks her to 'remember, only in another person's heart can you truly see yourself and the presence of God within you' (221). Rumi's encounter with this aspect of Shams's philosophy triggers the completion of a paradigm shift in his approach to piety and spirituality and he discovers that beyond the safe, dry and socially approved forms of obedience and renunciation there exists a meta-spirituality of love which consists of joyously and creatively celebrating the existence of God. For Ella, her initial scepticism about love is frequently challenged by Aziz, who invariably interposes his letters and emails with injunctions concerning the value of love. In an early communication, he writes 'May love be always with you and may you always be surrounded by love' (14), and adds: 'because love is the very essence and purpose of life' (15). Ella inevitably moves from a position of outright opposition to what she views as the inane pieties of a hopeless romantic, to a subsequent recognition of the role love must play in her newly reconstructed life. While sharing a dinner with her estranged and incredulous husband David, she goes so far as to quote Rumi in an attempt to explain her 'new' philosophy

of love: 'Rumi says we don't need to hunt for love outside ourselves. All we need to do is eliminate the barriers inside that keep us away from love' (250).

It appears irrefutable, therefore, that, through their multifaceted teachings, both Shams and Aziz initiate a profound metamorphosis in the spiritual lives of Rumi and Ella respectively. Moreover, it is made clear in the novel that the profound benefits accrued from such teachings are not dependent upon a long-term, continued interaction with the spiritual guide himself; Rumi's and Ella's subsequent separation from their mentors – in Rumi's case due to Shams's obsessive need of independence, while for Ella the separation is enforced due to Aziz's premature death – merely reinforces their spiritual potential and self-reliance. Remarkably, one of the more manifest benefits of their discipleship is a renewed belief in the creative potential of the later life. Ella is particularly stuck by Aziz's assertion that 'there is no such thing as early or later in life … everything happens at the right time' and is convinced that true spirituality is unrelated to the ageing process: 'It's never too late to ask yourself "Am I ready to change the life I am living? Am I ready to change within?"' (324). For Rumi, his transformation, which is partly manifested in a love of poetry, music and meditative dance, is accompanied by an awareness of the benefits accrued from the ageing process: 'little by little, one turns forty, fifty, and sixty and, with each passing decade, feels more complete. You need to keep walking though there's no place to arrive' (342). For both Rumi and Ella, such a conviction is accompanied by an awareness that, in the words of Will Johnson, 'Behind this world opens an infinite universe' (Johnson 2007: 30).

Sufism, in its various manifestations, contends that if we are to glimpse this 'infinite universe' a spiritual guide is necessary, a view which *The Forty Rules of Love*, with its vivid depictions of the teacher–disciple dynamic appears to endorse. Shafak's novel with its erudite and fascinating portrayal of one of the most iconic relationships within the Sufi esoteric tradition, appears intent on convincing the reader that Sufism in its universalist and non-denominational form, is a living, breathing philosophy of life with contemporary relevance to a world beset with factionalism and orthodoxy. At the very least, *The Forty Rules of Love* serves as a literary confirmation of the view expressed by Aziz in *Sweet Blasphemy* when he writes how 'almost eight hundred years later, the spirits of Shams and Rumi are still alive today, whirling amidst us somewhere' (20).

Billy Gray is Associate Professor of English at Dalarna University, Sweden. He is one of three Series Editors for the Peter Lang Cultural Identity Series and edits the section on history, politics and culture in the peer-reviewed journal *Nordic Irish Studies*. He wrote his PhD thesis on the influence of Islamic philosophy on the work of Doris Lessing and has published widely on writers such as Hubert Butler, Chris Arthur, Patrick McCabe, Eoin McNamee, Derek Lundy, J. M. Coetzee and Jenny Diski, amongst others. He is coordinator of the MA programme in English Literature and currently active in the ISTUD research group at Dalarna University as well as a member of the DEDAL-LIT research group, based in Lleida, Spain, which primarily focuses on issues relating to Literary Gerontology.

References

Aresteh, Reza, 1980. *Growth to Selfhood: The Sufi Contribution* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul)

Barks, Coleman, 1995. *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco, Harper One)

Bruinessen, Martin van, and Julia Day Howell (eds.), 2012. *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (London, Tauris)

Caplan, Mariana, 2011. *The Guru Question* (Louisville, CO, Sounds True Press)

El-Zein, Amira, 2010. 'Spiritual consumption in the United States: the Rumi phenomenon', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 11(1), pp. 71–85

Feuerstein, Georg, 2006. *Holy Madness: Spirituality, Crazy-Wise Teachers and Enlightenment* (Chinbo Valley, AZ, Hohm Press)

Furlanetto, Elena, 2013. 'Between Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism: the case of Elif Shafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*', *European Journal of English Studies*, 17(2), pp. 201–13

Green, Nile, 2012. *Sufism: A Global History* (Hoboken, NJ, Wiley Blackwell)

Johnson, Will, 2007. *The Spiritual Practices of Rumi: Radical Techniques for Beholding the Life of the Divine* (Rochester, VE, Inner Tradition)

Lewis, Franklin, 2007. *Rumi – Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalalal-Din Rumi* (London, One World)

Madonna, 1998. *Ray of Light* [album] (Maverick/Warner Bros.)

Patterson, William Patrick, 1997. *Struggle of the Magicians* (Fairfax, CA, Arete Publication)

Raudvere, Catherina, and Leif Stenberg, 2009. *Sufism Today: Heritage and Tradition in the Global Community* (London, Tauris)

Sedgwick, Mark, 2016. *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age* (Oxford University Press)

Shafak, Elif, 2007. *Black Milk: On the Conflicting Demands of Writing, Creativity and Motherhood* (New York, Penguin)

——2010. *The Forty Rules of Love* (New York, Viking)

Shah, Idris, 1964. *The Sufis* (London, Octagon Press)

———1968. *The Way of the Sufi* (London, Octagon Press)

———1982. *Seeker after Truth: A Handbook* (London, Octagon Press)

Sorgenfrei, Simon, 2013. *American Dervish: Making Mevlevism in the United States of America* (Göteborg University Press)
Zarrabi-Zadeh, Saeed, 2015. 'Comparative mysticism and the problem of interpretation: Rumi and Meister Eckhart', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26(3), pp. 287–306

Experiencing the limits

The cave as a transitional space

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.85214

CARLES MAGRINYÀ BADIELLA

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

The meaning of the cave is ancestral. It is a transitional space that functions as a threshold between the real, the mystical, and the imaginary. Experiences in caves are highly important in the history of religions and literature, and have been adopted transculturally by mystics, esoteric organizations, alchemical treatises, and many literary forms, such as the Greek novel, Dante's *Commedia*, and chivalric romances. In my paper, I will first give an interdisciplinary overview of representations of this space in different traditions and literary works up to the Renaissance. I will then focus on how Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* updates these representations, and study how the visions and experiences of the knight in a cave are crucial in his recovery from insanity.

Introduction

During the episode of the Cave of Montesinos, Don Quixote passes through the three phases of liminality typically found in rites of passage. Cervantes in this episode is adapting a well-known motif in the history of classical literature that has its roots in ancient initiation rites and in the activities of mystics searching for a higher knowledge; the descent of the hero into a cave to achieve some sort of higher knowledge. What follows is a study of the meaning, functionality and different representations of the cave as a transitional space in cultural history and in *Don Quixote*. My objective is twofold: first, I will give a historical overview that will help to establish how this organic space belongs to a long tradition within the history of religions, Western esotericism, and literature; and secondly, my focus will be on Miguel de Cervantes's (1547–1616) novel *Don Quixote* (2003; originally published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615) and the episode in the Cave of Montesinos. There are a large number of cases of cave experiences; as such, my diachronic selection will be a representative sample, rather than a complete one, of various transcultural phenomena of a period up to the time of Cervantes's novel. To conduct this analysis, I will work mainly with the

concept of *liminality* to characterize the cave as a liminal space (from the Latin *limen*, 'threshold'), confirming that it is associated with initiations and fear, but also that it represents a secure and pleasant environment. I will also use the concept of *initiation* within the framework of Western esotericism studies and also in the field of research within literary studies that I have come to call *cave studies*; that is, the study of representations and functions of caves and subterranean spaces in literary works. Due to limited space, in this work I will not discuss concepts such as *mysticism*, or the *visionary*.

The cave as a liminal and initiatory space

The cave is the organic place in which, the belief is, mystics and prophets experience visions and revelations. As the medievalist Victoria Cirlot recalls (2017: 115), that which Saint Augustine called *locus qui est non locus* (the place that is not a place) leads to inner reflection and claims a specific form – materiality; in other words, visibility. When I speak about returning to the cave, I refer to that process in which the individual feels the impulse to look for a physical and protective place for inner exploration. Once in the cave, the subject is stripped of possessions and removed from the material world.

What characterizes this particular space is its variety of functions and depictions in the history of religion, Western esotericism, and European literature, suggesting a dichotomy or dialectic between a desired paradise and an unwanted hell. Poets, mystics, and philosophers all sought inspiration in caves. The cave can be also a refuge, a threshold to other planes of existence, or the Hereafter, and a place to which the candidate is taken and in which his initiation takes place. This variety of functions is shown in multiple aspects, ranging from a place of suffering to the site of symbolic significations suggesting an original maternal uterus where the neophyte is symbolically reborn and regenerated. It is what Mircea Eliade once called *regressus ad uterum* or return to the womb (1963: 79–81). In addition, the cave is the setting for the *catabasis* or descent into the underworld (*descensus ad inferos*). Classical European mythology formulates the adventure of the afterlife and the journey to the world of the dead in which the hero travels through a cave, has to pass an initiation test, and returns to speak of what he has seen (Piñero 1995: 8). *Descensus ad inferos* literally means the 'descent to lower places' or to the lower world and the Latin word *inferos* should not be confused with *inferna*. *Inferos* would be comparable to the English 'inferior', or 'lower world'. *Inferna* on the other hand is comparable to the English

'infernal', an adjective meaning hellish (Connell 2006: 264). The *catabasis* (a going down) must be followed by an *anabasis* (a going or marching up) in order to be considered a true *catabasis* rather than a death. First Arnold van Gennep and later Victor Turner elaborated on a similar three-phased scheme in their studies of rituals of initiation.

Among the fictitious representations of narrative space in literature, it is interesting to pay attention to those that involve some form of intermediate or border state for the characters; that is, some kind of threshold. Examples of such spaces are gardens, beaches, vehicles, and caves. Following this line of thought, it is relevant to recover the notion of *liminality,* based on the conceptual and terminological contributions proposed by the above-mentioned anthropologists van Gennep and, especially, Turner.[1] Van Gennep coined the term *rites de passage* (rites of passage) and suggested a scheme to highlight the transitions that affect the life cycle of the individual in his or her social development – for example, between youth and adulthood, singleness and the married state, travelling and returning. In the rites, first van Gennep and later Victor Turner distinguished three phases: separation, or the preliminal phase; transition, or the liminal phase or stage; and aggregation, or the post-liminal phase. The first involves a symbolic death, since it involves a separation from the old social environment. The next state is ambiguous for the candidate; he finds himself in a space between the old and new state. It is neither one nor the other. In the final stage of the rite, that of aggregation, or the post-liminal stage, the candidate rejoins society and acquires a new sense of being (van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967; Bogdan 2007, 2016). Such rituals are known in almost all cultures (Snoek 2016: 201). For Turner (Delanty 2006), liminality refers to a state of openness that is both free from the structures of society and beyond that which is considered normal. The crucial aspect of liminality is the 'between and betwixt' moments and 'moments outside and within time', such as carnivals, pilgrimages, or rites of passage – it is in this phase that the officers of the initiation transmit knowledge to the neophyte.

Indeed, the concept of liminality works well with that of *initiation* when studying cave experiences. The initiation method involves the use of rituals that belong to the larger class of the rites of passage (Snoek 2016: 201) and

1 These concepts are explained in van Gennep's *The Rites of Passage* (1960) and Turner's 'Betwixt and between: the liminal period in rites of passage' (1967).

the performance of rituals of initiation is an integral part of esoteric currents, traditions, religions in general, but also in literary works such as *Don Quixote*. Although not all rites of passage are rites of initiation (Bogdan 2007: 40) and van Gennep based his descriptions of rites of passage on non-Euro-American sources, the three-phase structure works when studying the topic of initiation. In Western esotericism studies, Henrik Bogdan's definition of esotericism is linked to initiation. He describes the former as 'a form of Western [in our case, we also include Middle Eastern] spirituality that stresses the importance of individual effort to gain spiritual knowledge or *gnosis*, whereby man is confronted with the divine aspect of existence' (Bogdan 2007: 5). This revelatory experience is for practitioners a meaningful inner process which might change depending on the social context and its moment in history. Initation has also to be connected to some of the points of Antoine Faivre's well-known taxonomy (1994: 3–19) of *imagination and mediations*, that is, imagination, considered as an 'organ of the soul' that enables access to different levels of reality (what Henry Corbin named *mundus imaginalis* or the imaginary world) through rituals, symbolic images or an intermediary being that gives access; the *experience of transmutation* of the subject; and *transmission* of the esoteric knowledge from one master to a disciple, which are of great importance in initiation and liminal experiences.

Henrik Bogdan defines initiation in the sense of admitting someone into something on the basis of a ritual of initiation, often of a secret nature, that the candidate has to go through. Finally, initiation can also be understood in the sense of an introduction into the mysteries of religion (Bogdan 2007: 39). The main difference with mystics then is that they might be isolated and not go through collective formalized and performative acts, as may be the case in a secret society. However, a common aspect might be the experiential knowledge, and eventually acquirement, of gnosis.

Liminality, on the other hand, is not exclusive to the second part of the rites of passage, as Bogdan points out (2007: 35). The term has also been used in literary studies and concerns space, time, the statutes of the characters characterized by indetermination, ambivalence, and the creation of a new identity.[2] In this sense, events in a novel can be structured, organized around *chronotopes*, which Bakhtin defines as 'the intrinsic connectedness of

2 See, for example, Viljoen *et al.* (2006) and Phillips (2015). See also, Gertsman and Stevenson (2012), and Forshaw (2016).

temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature' (1981: 84). The concept of liminality is therefore close to the Bakhtinian chronotope of the *threshold*, which combines temporal and topographical borders, and works well with the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life (Baktin 1981: 248; Castro 2007: 258). Furthermore, the notion of liminal space has given rise to new nouns and metaphors in the field of border studies (aesthetics and poetics), such as 'interstitial' or 'in-between' (Schimanski and Wolfe 2017). Although the interdisciplinary use of these concepts is potentially fruitful, I will refer mainly to Turner's work to delimit the framework and avoid equivocal and indefinite interpretations, and because, although the concept of liminal has its origin in anthropology, it is applicable in literary studies.

Another point to note is that in literary studies we speak about space in relation to the setting (the physical-sensuous world, time, and atmosphere of a work), or as Mieke Bal defines it, space is 'the places seen *in relation* [my emphasis] to their perception' (1997: 133). Place is thus related to 'the physical, mathematical measurable shape of spatial dimensions', and space to perception, meaning, and 'the way characters bring their senses to bear on space'. Thus it becomes important how the text endows meaning to a specific area, and how place becomes an 'acting place', that is, a thematized space (p. 136).

The caves throughout history

The significance of the cave goes back to ancient history. In Mesopotamia, initiations took place in caves. Inside a mountain of Ekur ('E' for 'house' and 'kiur' for 'mountain') in Nippur, there was a dreary and dark cave called the *chamber of destiny* (Mayassis 1962: 45). Literature also dealt with the journey of the hero to the Hereafter. This was the case in the third century BCE, with the Sumerian myth of the journey, *The Descent of Inanna,* and the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In this last text the hero, in his journey to the underworld, contemplates a delightful garden adorned with precious stones. From these texts, the voyages to the afterlife proliferated in universal literature: the Egyptians collected these ideas in the *Book of the Dead* (around 1550 BCE to around 50 BCE) and in *The Osiris Myth*. In the first, the deceased was required to pass through a series of gates, caves, and mounds guarded by a supernatural creature (Alvar 2010: 189).

Aeneas and the Sibyl. Unknown artist, 19th century. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

In the Greek tradition, the allegory of Plato's cave shows the passage from ignorance – a group of people who have lived enchained – to enlightenment; from the idea that we only see shadows that we consider to be the truth to the truth itself. The cave represents this world; ignorance and the indirect light that illuminates its walls point at the way the soul must go to find goodness and truth. The experiences of Pythagoras, Epimenides, Parmenides, and Empedocles could be envisaged as initiations; their descent into caves and underground chambers in the pursuit of divine revelation shows us how close they were to being seers and prophets (Ustinova 2009: 260–1). Caves and closed chambers were essential as settings for many mystery rites. The Temple of Eleusis in the Acropolis contained a venerated cave that served as the entrance to the world of the dead. There, Hades, the god of the underworld, appeared.

The motif behind the visit to Hades had great repercussions for the Western tradition. The *descensus ad inferos,* or *catabasis*, was transmitted to classical epic poems, such as Homer's *Odyssey* (8 BCE) and the *Aeneid*, Virgil's Latin (19 BCE). Cervantes specialists have pointed to the similarities between the descent of Don Quixote and the descent to hell of Ulysses – although

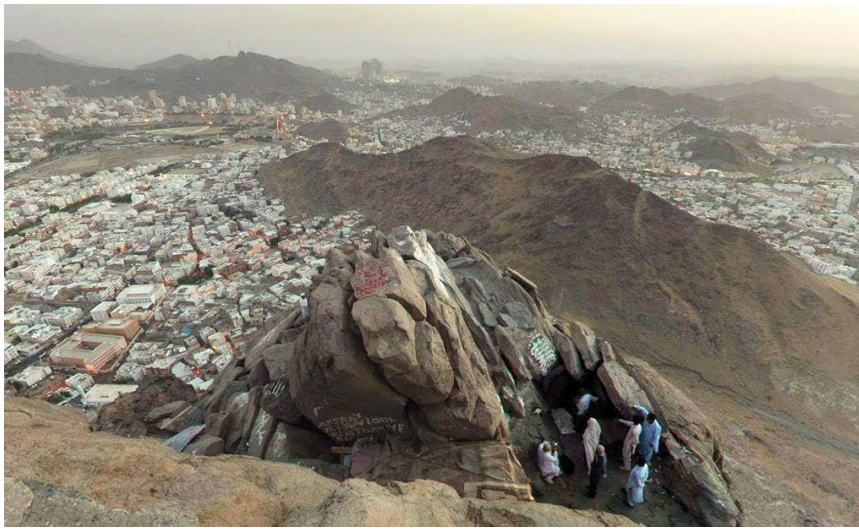
Ulysses does not descend into Hades; it is the dead souls that rise to the surface – and Aeneas. Aeneas, in his journey through the Elysian countryside, has Anchises as his guide. It is mostly from this classical background that the motif from this point on impacts on literatures and religions. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE), mentioned by Cervantes in the episode of the cave, includes accounts of *catabasis* as well.

According to the Jewish tradition, Rabbi Simeon ben Yoha and his son spent twelve years in a cave during their escape from the Romans. They devoted themselves to worship and study of the Torah until finally the Roman Emperor died (Ustinova 2009: 36).[3] Christianity adapted and actualized the theme of the visit to Hades in the famous parable of the Harrowing of Hell – *Descensus Christi ad Inferos* (the descent of Christ into Hell) (Connell 2006). Jesus Christ, who, it is believed, was born in a cave, was also buried in a cave. He supposedly spent three days in the underworld between his crucifixion and his resurrection, and rose triumphant to heaven.

During the times of the origins of Islam, the cave represented both a place of initiation and a refuge from threats, as the Islamic scholar Omid Safi recalls (2009: 97–103). Muhammad received the first revelation in the cave of Hira (*Jabal an-Nour* – Mountain of Light) and, later, on the way to Medina, fleeing from Mecca and his persecutors, he took refuge in a cave. The journey to the afterlife in the Arab world has, on the other hand, its counterpart in the *al-'Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj* (The Isra and Mi'ra, the two parts of the Night Journey) and ascent into the heavens of Muhammad; however, this did not occur in a cave. The mountain and cave are obviously very significant for Muslims. They are where Islam was born. There is broad consensus within Islam that Muhammad had his first visions and first encounter with Gabriel while sleeping. On other occasions, the visions occur while he is awake, such as the vision of Gabriel filling the sky.

The cave, which represents an opening inward, is also rich in symbolism. In Islam, the cave connects to the heart, another inward opening, where one can contemplate realities and seek illumination. The poetry of Rumi, like that of other Muslim mystics, invites its readers to 'Consider this heart as a cave, / the spiritual retreat of the friend' (in Safi 2009: 103). Muhammad states that after his experience in the cave of Hira, it is as if his heart were a

3 I would like to thank Carrie Sealine for providing me with an account of this during the conference 'Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences', 5–7 June, 2019, Åbo Akademi University.



Cave of Hira. hajjumrahplanner.com.

tablet upon which the words of the Qur'an were being inscribed. Up to this point, we can see that Muhammad encompasses the traits of prophet-hood: he retires to reflect on the historical conditions of his people, perceives the sufferings and aspirations of a community, and points out the need for change. On the other hand, not all mystics return to society. There are hermits who remain in caves and cloisters, and that for them is perfect peace.

Dante's *Commedia* (*The Divine Comedy*, 1472) also has a missionary/prophetic orientation. For the author, the work is not merely a theological piece of fiction but rather a prophetic vision with apocalyptic undertones that he felt was given to him by the divinity in order to admonish humanity (Carrera 1995: 91). In the *Commedia,* Dante takes Virgil as his guide and descends into the underworld/hell to the centre of the Earth. In Dante's work, hell is an underground cave, an immense cone-shaped abyss stretching down vertically from Jerusalem. The opening canto describes how Dante is lost in a dark forest and enters a cave at the foot of Mount Zion, near Jerusalem. It is interesting that within Western culture, the idea is that hell is full of flames, whereas for Dante it is ice; the cave, and darkness are associated with the house of Lucifer. Similarly, Cervantes, in his last novel, *The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda: A Northern Story* (1617), locates the action of half of the novel in far Northern Europe, a place that during the Spanish Golden Age was associated with the fantastical, darkness, and paganism.

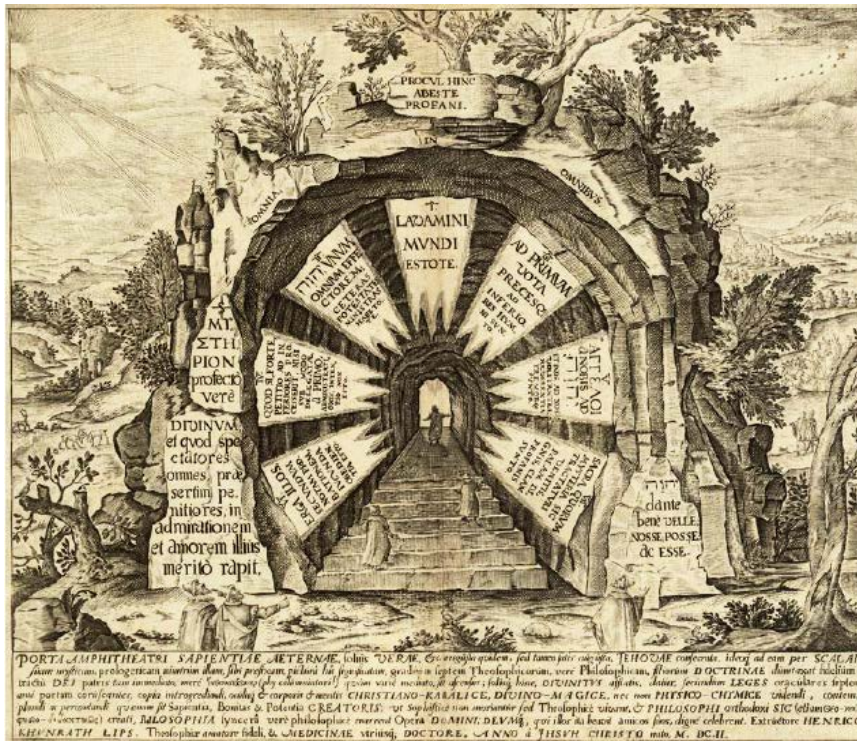
The novel begins with an anabasis; the protagonist is rescued from a dark dungeon, analogous to a cave.

In Spain, Spanish Catholic mystics retreat into caves to meditate, their objective being to get closer to God. The belief is that in around the year 1274 Ramon Llull (1235–1315) spent time in a humble cave located in Mallorca and received illumination. Presumably, his philosophical system was revealed to him inside the cave, the *Ars luliana* or *combinandi* (Lull's art or the *combinatorial* art). Llull's theological and metaphysical legacy – Lullism – also spread during the Renaissance and the eighteenth century in Europe as a result of the trail left by the art of philosophers such as Nicholas of Cusa or Leibniz. Two famous mystics from the Spanish Golden Age (1492–1681), Teresa of Avila (1515–82) and Saint John of the Cross (1542–91), sought refuge in the now famous caves of Segovia and Pastrana, respectively. Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), the founder of the Jesuit order, spent several months in retreat in a cave in Manresa, where he practised asceticism and composed his *Spiritual Exercises* (Meissner 1999: 90–100).

The cave recalls literal mystical experiences and also has metaphorical meanings. In the *Spiritual Canticle* (1578 [2007] by Saint John of the Cross, the cave represents the inner world (soul) where the Lover (the mystic) and the Beloved (God) must find each other. Later, Cervantes seems to parody another common metaphor that mystics used in their texts – that being, going into 'the deep caverns of the rock' – to explain a process of going inward and becoming nothing (in the mystical sense) so as to experience the divine, as Saint John himself states in his explanation of the stanzas: 'The reason why the soul longed to enter the caverns was that it might attain to the consummation of the love of God, the object of its continual desires; that is, that it might love God with the pureness and perfection with which He has loved it, so that it might thereby requite His love' (St. John of the Cross 2007: 148). Caves became symbolic of the passage from this world to the divine realm (Ustinova 2009: 32), and these texts and accounts seem to reflect the belief that the withdrawal into a cave was likely to lead to mystical experiences. It is worth mentioning that Spanish mystics were familiar with chivalric romances. For example, Saint Ignatius performs a chivalric ritual to become a knight of God in which he guards his weaponry throughout the night (Percas 1975: 481).

Also during the Renaissance, alchemists conceptualized the motif of descending into the cave, here a symbol of the inner self, with the acronym V.I.T.R.I.O.L. It stands for the Latin expression *Visita Interiora Terrae*

Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem, which synthesizes the alchemical Great Work. It translates as: 'Visit the interior of the Earth, and by rectifying (correcting or purifying) what you find there, you will discover the hidden stone'. The first mention of this term dates back to the second half of the sixteenth century among German Paracelsians (Telle 1988: 193), and it became popular thanks to the popular illustration that appeared for example in *Azoth* (1624: 146) by Basile Valentine (or Basilius Valentinus). In this work, the protagonist meets a mysterious character inside a cave during a trip to the holy city of Rome. The episode has some points in common with Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, as we shall see; the cave as a setting, similar preparations prior to the esoteric visions (i.e. invocation of God), and similar visionary experiences: the appearance of a guide full of light and the contemplation of a glass palace. Another famous engraving, in this case a Christian Kabbalist one (Forshaw 2015: 547), is in Heinrich Khurnrath's *Amphitheatrum Sapientieae Aeternae* (*The Amphitheatre of Eternal Wisdom*,



Portae amphiteatrum sapientiae aeternae, in Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, Hanau, 1609. Courtesy of the Gershom Scholem Library, Jerusalem National University Library.

1609). It depicts a cave – *the porta (gate, entrance) amphiteatri* – with Greek, Latin, and Hebrew inscriptions on its walls through which a person is moving towards a light. Above the entrance, we have a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*: *procul hinc abeste profane* (O you profane one go far away from here). The quote comes from the moment where Aeneas meets the oracular Syibil in a cave who gives him information (Forshaw 2011: 183; Virgilio 1990, book VI: 102). The cave, also, as we have seen, the symbol of the heart, is the place where the regeneration of a neophyte takes place, at which time he will receive knowledge (presumably in the form of light), and then be reborn. In contemporary Freemasonry, for example, the cave finds its analogue in the so-called Chamber of Reflection. During the ritual of the first degree before they are accepted into the brotherhood – that of Entered Apprentice – (Bogdan 2016: 252), the candidate is placed alone in a dark room to meditate on his commitment to the Order.

The cave is one of the most frequent literary *topoi* or commonplaces in tales of chivalry. The knight, as part of his apprenticeship and journey of initiation, descends into the depths of a cave, where he is made aware of new and extraordinary realities. The featuring of caves in chivalric romances leads to an ambiguous atmosphere where the fearsome and the delightful, darkness and light, blend. It is a place, then, in which everything is possible, and what happens inside it acquires a logic of its own, alien to the outside world. The use of caves as a magical space and location of the Hereafter is present in medieval and Renaissance texts such as *De nugis curialum* (1183) by Walter Map, *Itinerarium Cambriae* (*c.* 1191) by Giraldus (Alvar 2009: 131), and *Amadís de Gaula* (*Amadís of Gaul*, edited first in 1508). In Germanic and Arthuric legends, the cave is the space of the spirits of the past, a kind of enchanted underground court. In this sense, the episode in the cave in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* comes from an established literary tradition. However, as we shall see, it is extremely original and its significance transcends mere parody.

When it comes to stories of the Holy Grail, the cave (as well as the cabin in the woods) is where the knight meets a hermit who discloses the meaning of events. The hermit works as a hermeneutist who has the ability to interpret the esoteric side of the experiences of the knight. For instance, in *Perlesvaus* (*c.* 1230, translated as *The High Book of the Grail* or *The Legend of the Grail*) the protagonist acquires a new name, Parluifet, while he is living with the hermit in a cave (Cirlot 2017: 116), and I quote: 'But the good Hermit, the good King had named him Par-lui-fet, because he was a self-made knight'

(*The Legend of the Grail* 2006: 116). This symbolic name – *Par-lui-fet* (for-himself-made) – alludes, therefore, to the process of self-realization that is taking place.

Don Quixote in the Cave of Montesinos

Cervantes actualizes and parodies the motif of *catabasis* in a rite of transition in which Don Quixote descends into the Cave of Montesinos.[4] The main objective of Cervantes seems to be to demystify the classical topic and, in so doing, incorporate new traits: for example, (1) the 'hero' here suffers from madness; (2) Don Quixote's introspection is narrated by himself alone in a novel with multiple narrative voice shifts and points of view. The mission of the knight is to find his beloved Dulcinea and to lift the spell on her. In the solitude of the cave, a 'resurrection' occurs as a result, on the one hand, of dormant psychic states and, on the other, of a progressive step towards sanity.

Augustín Redondo (1998: 403) argues that Don Quixote undergoes a ritual of initiation in the cave. However, it is necessary to differentiate here between ritual of initiation and ritual of transition. 'Initiate' derives from the Latin *initiare* and means 'to begin or to originate' (Bogdan 2007: 35). The acceptance and pseudo-ceremony of initiation where Don Quixote is presumably admitted to an organization, that is, the ancient (and literary) Order of Knighthood, takes place at the beginning of the novel (I, chapter 3). The second occurs in a liminal and transitional place, the cave, after he has been already initiated (II, chapters 22–3). Whereas Aeneas and Dante had one guide, we notice that in the case of Don Quixote, he has two: one in the real and external world (the cousin), and another in the underworld (Montesinos). The function of these guides is to lead the way.

4 This episode has been interpreted from many different points of view: some have studied the sources and compared the novel to other chivalric novels (Alvar 2009); others have studied it from the perspective of demonology (Padilla 2011; Williamson 2015) or have argued that it is an Erasmian parody (Egido 1994). Helena Percas de Ponseti (1975), Edward C. Riley (2001), and Augustín Redondo (1998) have studied the presence of the classical allegory of descending into hell. I do not refute these studies but broaden them with the theoretical concepts that I use.

I mentioned that the descent into the underworld and rites of passage consist of three phases: preparation of the novice (i.e. separation); the trip to the afterlife or other dimensions of existence (the margin, or liminal phase); and the return or rebirth of the hero or candidate (aggregation). Let us see how this unfolds in the novel.

During the preliminary phase and separation of the world, an isolated place is needed. The setting of the cave meets this requirement perfectly. Crow symbolism and invocations evoke some sort of purification. Don Quixote does not submit to a physical ritual of purification, which would invalidate his rite; however, he does perform acts of faith and a purification of the location: the first is a prayer to God; right after, committing himself to the Beloved and unattainable Dulcinea; and finally, by cutting with his sword the thicket at the entrance of the pit. Don Quixote thus follows the chivalric literary convention of first committing himself to God and then to his beloved. The immediate mention of crows coming out of the cave is also significant. Besides bringing bad luck and being associated with death according to popular belief in Cervantes's time, the colour of the crow in terms of alchemical symbolism represents the raw material of the alchemical *nigredo* (blackness), blackened, on the way to the philosopher's stone. We can see an example of this representation in the aforementioned Valentinus's *Azoth* (Valentine 1624: 160). In the case of Don Quixote, the flock of crows flying from the cave is the first step to the access to the underworld (or liminal state). It is thus logical that the crow – that which has to be purified – appears before Don Quixote penetrates the womb of the cave. Don Quixote enters a place that is 'at the right hand' and into which a small light enters through small cracks. We do not know if he had the choice of going to the left, but the dark place inside the cave reveals itself as dazzling. Cervantes knew of a poem at the time that was attributed to Virgil – because of its similarities to his underworld – in which there is reference to the Pythagorean Y: 'The letter of Pythagoras, cleft by a two-pronged division, may be seen to display the very image of human life. For the steep path of virtue takes the right-hand way' (Magrinyà Badiella 2014: 188; Tucker 2003: 91–2). The idea of the Pythagorean Y is that men follow the same path until at a given moment it divides into two. A few take the right path, arduous and steep, which leads them to virtue, to wisdom, and to gnosis, while others take the one on the left, a flat and peaceful but 'sinister' path, which leads them to the path of vice. In the first quarter of the seventeenth century, connoisseurs of the *prisca teologia* (ancient theology) used

the symbolism of the Pythagorean Y to differentiate between the possible paths in philosophy: between the speculative traditional philosophy and the new philosophy of hermetic character (Arola 2012: 313). Don Quixote had already referred to Matthew (VII, 13–14) and to the path of the right or path of virtue versus vice in chapter 6 of the second part when talking about the benefits of chivalry: 'I know that the path of virtue is very narrow, and the road of wickedness is broad and spacious' (518). The distinction between those on the right and those on the left also has its representation in the Qur'an. Those on the right are those who will enjoy Paradise after the Day of Resurrection. Those on the left, on the other hand, will suffer the pains of Hell. This idea relates conceptually to that in Chapter 6 (II) of Don Quixote that we have just mentioned – that being that the path of virtue is narrow and hard, as opposed to the width and ease of the path of vice. Cervantes, consciously or unconsciously, refers to a Pythagorean, Christian, and Islamic doctrine.

The second phase (margin, liminal) corresponds to access to another state of consciousness after Don Quixote presumably falls into a 'deep sleep' and walks further into the cavern (II, 23). He insists that he is aware of his senses. Concomitantly, rituals also involve an impact on sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch (Bogdan 2016: 249). This represents a symbolic death, a kind of limbo state. Cervantes probably borrowed ideas from Macrobius, a commentator of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (The Dream of Scipio, 146 BCE). According to Macrobius, there are five kinds of dreams: the *somnium* or dream (the dream itself), the *visio* or vision (of prophetic and premonitory nature), the *oraculum* or oracle (includes the presence of an advisor who announces future events), the *insomnium* nightmares (dreams that deal with problems), and *visum* (apparition, when one is neither asleep nor awake). Egido (1994: 149) discarded the first three types of dreams and argued that the episode combines the last two. On the other hand, what Don Quixote experiences is some sort of dream-vision that reminds us of that *other* world of magicians, shamans and alchemists in what Victoria Cirlot calls *visionary experience* (2010: 15) – her conceptualization is developed from the already mentioned notion of Corbin's, *mundus imaginalis* (imaginal world), designating an intermediate or double place. We have indications that Don Quixote accesses another world on two occasions in in the words of Sancho: 'It was an evil moment and a worse time and an ill-fated day when your grace went down to the *nex*t [*otro* in Spanish, 'other'] world' (p. 637); 'may God be your guide and bring you back safe and sound and free to the light

of *this life that you are leaving* to bury yourself in the darkness you are looking for!' (p. 628). The allusion to the opposition of light and darkness permeates the novel, and it is present in the motto of the book cover of the first editions of the novel from both 1605 (I) and 1615 (II): *Post tenebras spero lucem* ('After darkness, I hope for light'). It should be noted, however, that this emblem was the trademark of the editor (Juan de la Cuesta) and that it was not specifically designed for the novel of Cervantes. The motto comes from the apostle John's phrase *Lux in tenebris lucet* (John 1:5 'And the light shineth in darkness'), found also in early modern works attributed to Ramon Llull or Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) (Forshaw 2017: 4).

Don Quixote now wakes up and finds himself in a *locus amoenus* (a pleasant or idealized place). We cannot actually rely on the knight's version of the events, as the main narrator will confirm afterwards. The very nature of the experience Don Quixote relates is intended to be mysterious and ambiguous. Cide Hamete Benengeli, the main Arabic narrator, abdicates responsibility and leaves it to the 'prudent' reader to judge (1) whether the events really happened, (2) whether somebody staged them, (3) whether Don Quixote made up the whole story, or (4) whether it was a dream or some kind of visionary experience. The only textual evidence is circumstantial and supports 3 and 4 and not merely the last, 4, as Riley suggests (1986: 141). Benengeli states that Don Quixote might have made up his account ('though certain it is they say that at the time of his death he retracted…', p. 640). As for the visionary experience, the words of Don Quixote give us his own version of a glimpse of his sense perception of the liminal experience: '… I was overcome by a profound sleep … I opened my eyes wide, rubbed them, and saw that I was not sleeping but really was awake; even so, I felt my head and chest to verify whether it was I myself …' (p. 630). In fact, the whole episode, together with the continuous contradictions and ambiguities later in the novel, for example, in the episode of the divinations of the divining ape, reflect this sense of mystery that Cervantes wants to display: 'The monkey says that some of the things your grace saw, or experienced, in the aforesaid cave are false, and some are true' (p. 654); there is the same ambiguity in the episode of the enchanted brazen head: 'With respect to the cave, replied the oracle, much may be said: the adventure partakes both of truth and illusion' (p. 786). The narrative voice shifts; the fact that Don Quixote is mentally ill, and the uncertainty as to whether what happened inside the cave was true or false, leads us to the conclusion that this

speleological adventure is structured around *doubt*. We never get a univocal explanation.

The visions are now suddenly majestic: a crystal palace full of transparency and purity. Similarly, the glass palace appears also in *Tristan and Isolde,* in the *Folie d'Oxford* (*c.* 1200) and in the alchemical text *The Green Dream* (n.d.) attributed to Bernard Trevisan (1406–90) in which the protagonist also falls into a deep sleep and meets a 'venerable' old man with silver hair. For Teresa of Avila, the inner castle is a simile of the soul addressing God and is made of glass. Then comes the meeting with the master Montesinos, also described as full of light, who guides him inside the cave. Don Quixote experiences a period of confusion, and he is given the experience of confrontation with death through the vision of an ancient knight (Durandarte, who, together with Montesinos are figures from a group of Spanish ballads of Carolingian chivalric derivation) lying in a sepulchre with his heart sprinkled with salt – note here the reference to the heart in the cave setting, yet with a different meaning than that of Saint John of the Cross.

Don Quixote in the cave. Antonio Gómez de los Ríos, *Don Quijote en la cueva de Montesinos*, tapestry from the eighteenth century (in Lenaghan 2005: 69).

The dream-vision henceforth set out is ludicrous, with the redemption of all the inhabitants of the cave (including Dulcinea) from the enchantment imposed on them by the wizard Merlin. It also touches on absurdity, which frustrates the knight's chivalric vision and ideals (the rosary beads the size of ostrich eggs, the vision of the maid of Dulcinea asking him for money and cutting a caper) (Riley 1986: 142). Without forgetting that it is Don Quixote who is narrating the episode, the presence of Merlin and the question of the enchantment, together with the majestic visions, create an ambivalent atmosphere that combines paradisiacal visions with hellish visions. It should be also stressed how this quixotic liminal space is an echo of the Roman opposed notions of *locus horridus* (fearful place) and *locus amoenus* (pleasant place). While the *locus horrridus* is menancing, gaunt, represents a wild and untamed aspect of nature, and evokes danger, fear and a constant remembrance of death, the *locus amoenus* is a place redolent of beauty, serenity, quietness and propitious for pleasant loneliness that stirs philosophical reflection or poetic inspiration in a safe and protected environment (Bodei 2008: 20; Giacomoni 2007: 84–5). The latter became a popular literary topos later on in the Renaissance in the development of the Pastoral novel, a genre in which Cervantes made his literary debut with *La Galatea* (1585).

The tricks and powers of Merlin are what keep the inhabitants of the delightful castle imprisoned. The figure is interesting in his ambivalence. According to Turner, liminal entities that are hybrid in nature can appear during rituals. In the same manner, in myths, legends, and folklore, we find ambiguous beings, such as shapeshifters, difficult to classify. Merlin has many representations in the history of literature, but in the chivalric novels, he is the prototype of the *Homo Sylvester*, a mixture of wizard and prophet brought up in the woods, whose function is to be the bridge between magic and the world of humans (Alvar 2010: 153). The nature of this being is dual: he is a cambion, an offspring of a woman and an incubus, but even the nature of his father casts serious doubts on the novel of Cervantes if we pay attention to how the wizard is defined in the staged representation of Merlin offered by the Dukes, after the adventure in the cave: 'I am Merlin, who, the histories say, was sired and fathered by the devil himself (a lie made true by the mere passage of time)' (p. 720). This portrayal of Merlin in the episode of the Dukes denies his devilish ancestry and highlights his attributes as a Zoroastrian magician as well as his admiration for the good deeds of authentic knights. For Don Quixote, it is out of the question to categorize what is inside the cave as infernal. He argues in his discussion with Sancho

and the cousin (the first guide) after the experience and before narrating it: 'You call it hell? … Do not call it that, for it does not deserve the name…' (p. 629).

The third phase of the *catabasis* leaves Don Quixote with a sensation of having been reborn. During the limbo and liminal state, time has a different dimension. Sancho and the guide lowered Don Quixote into the cave by a rope, waited for half an hour, and then pulled him up, only to find him asleep. It is very difficult for them to wake him up. Don Quixote says that he has been in the cave for three days – note the symbolic number (recalling Jesus) – and three nights without eating and sleeping, and that he saw Dulcinea in her enchanted form.

If a ritual means a kind of transformation, then the one that concerns us, after the hermetic three days, implies a change in Don Quixote's perception. In this dream, the hidalgo 'savours' a small death and the experience transforms him. There is a qualitative change in his perception that points towards Don Quixote's eventual rejection of chivalric fiction and his recovery of sanity. He is projected to a new perception of reality: now the other characters (like the Dukes) believe the fantasies of Don Quixote and create an alternative world for him. It is in Barcelona that his adventures end before he rides back to his hamlet. In this city – where he remains for three days (note again the number three) – he comes to experience real situations: he is confronted with fear and real death for the first time – that is to say, in the form of the cadavers, hanging from trees, of outlaws that Roque Guinart and other bandits killed because they broke the code of their fraternity of men.[5] In the Cave of Montesinos, Don Quixote begins to separate illusion from ideals, which is the beginning of sanity. He returns home, where he falls ill and then sleeps. Upon waking up, he is no longer crazy. This last dream means the end of ignorance and craziness, prior to death.

Conclusions

In all of the cases in the previous analysis, it is clear that liminality affects space and subjectivities, since much of the esotericism and practices of prophets, neophytes, mystics, and fictional characters such as Don Quixote deal with achieving higher forms of knowledge. Chambers of initiation are

5 The leader, inspired by the real historical character Perot Rocaguinarda, compares himself to Osiris, the Egyptian god of the afterlife and resurrection.

set in caves and this space also serves as a threshold or 'doorway' to contact with the world of death (Mesopotamia, Greek mystery rites and novels). It is where the experience of revelatory visions takes place (Llull, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of the Cross) thanks to the appearance of intermediary beings (Gabriel–Muhammad, Montesinos–Don Quixote). It is also a place for imprisonment and freedom (in Plato, Durandarte and the other characters in the episode of the Cave of Montesinos). On the other hand, the ambiguous trait of liminality is clearly expressed in the quality of these visions: in Don Quixote these are pleasant but also fearful, suggesting binary oppositons of light and darkness.

Personal transformation is at the core of initiation. Key to the motif of the *catabasis* is the trope of a journey to the realm of the dead and being transformed by the experience. And for this to occur it is crucial that all heroes, prophets or mystics – whether they are called Jesus, Muhammad, Ramon, Saint Ignatius, Ulysses, Aeneas, Dante, or Don Quixote – are isolated in caves. Excepting the account of Simeon ben Yoha and his son, who seek refuge in a cave, loneliness characterizes the cave experiences. The cave also provides metaphorical meanings in the plane of expression (Rumi, Saint John of the Cross) and structure an allegory (Plato).

Cervantes satirizes a classical myth that is present in chivalric novels as well as in alchemical treatises, which shows how continuities and discontinuities of the motif have evolved. In the ritual of transition in the Cave of Montesinos, Cervantes incorporates the symbology of the journey towards perfection of the alchemist, expressed in the form of V.I.T.R.I.O.L. in a crucial moment of the novel of crisis and break of the main character. The ritual embodies an experience that is is not only psychological but also physical. We can corroborate then that the Spanish author used rites as a structural device that led key moments in the process of transformation in a fictional characterization. Returning to the cave implies a passage from the organic and material to the metaphysical and spiritual. It is in this convergence that new realms of possibility are created.

Dr. **Carles Magrinyà Badiella** is a Senior Lecturer at Uppsala University and Dalarna University. His background is in literary studies and his research interests include alchemy and other esoteric disciplines in literature from the Spanish Golden Age and other epochs. His monograph about alchemy in Cervantes was awarded the Benzelius Prize by the Royal Society of Sciences of Uppsala. He has also published and translated into Spanish a commentated anthology of essays by August Strindberg about esotericism, religion and arts (*Una mirada al Universo,* 2016).

List of references

Alvar, Carlos, 2009. *El Quijote: Letras, armas, vida* (Madrid, Sial)
———2010. *De los caballeros del Temple al Santo Grial* (Madrid, Sial)
Arola, Raimon, 2012. *La cábala y la alquimia en la tradición espiritual de occidente Siglos XV–XVII* (Palma de Mallorca, Olañeta)
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M.* (Austin, University of Texas Press)
Bal, Mieke, 1997. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (University of Toronto Press)
Bodei Bodei, Remo, 2008. *Paisajes sublimes. El hombre ante la naturaleza salvaje* (Madrid, Siruela)
Bogdan, Henrik, 2007. *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (State University of New York)
———2016. 'Esotercism practiced: ritual and performance', in *Religion: Secret Religion,* ed. April De Conick (Farmington Hills, Macmillan), pp. 249–62
Carrera Díaz, Manuel, 1995. 'Dante y el viaje a los mundos de ultratumba', in *Descensus ad inferos. La Aventura de ultratumba de los héreoeses (de Homero a Goethe)* (Universidad de Sevilla), pp. 89–98
Castro, Andrea, 2007. 'El mito del umbral y el espacio liminal', in *Teorías hispanoamericanas de la literatura fantástica,* ed. José Miguel Sardiñas (La Habana, Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas), pp. 255–62
Cervantes Saavedra, Miguel de, 2003. *Don Quixote*, transl. Edith Grossman (New York, Ecco)
Cirlot, Victoria, 2017. 'Construyendo la cabaña: aproximaciones a la realidad interior' in *El monasterio interior*, eds. Victoria Cirlot and Blanca Garí (Barcelona, Fragmenta), pp. 115–38
———2010. *La visión abierta. Del mito del Grial al surrealismo* (Madrid, Siruela)
Connell, Martin F, 2006. '*Descensus Christi Ad Inferos*: Christ's descent to the dead', *Theological Studies*, 62(2), pp. 262–82, doi: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/004056390106200202>
Delanty, Gerard, 2006. *Community. Comunidad, educación ambiental y ciudadanía* (Barcelona, Graó)
Egido, Aurora, 1994. *Cervantes y las puertas del sueño. Estudios sobre* La Galatea, *el* Quijote *y el* Persiles (Barcelona, PPU)
Eliade, Mircea, 1963. *Myth and Reality* (New York, Pantheon Books)
Faivre, Antoine, 1994. *Access to Western Esotericism* (State University of New York)
Forshaw, Peter J., 2011. '"Behold, the dreamer cometh": hyperphysical magic and deific visions in an early modern theosophical lab-oratory', in *Conversations with Angels: Essays Towards a History of Spiritual Communication, 1100–170,* ed. Joad Raymond (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 175–201
———2015. 'Kabbalah', in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (London, Routledge), pp. 541–51

———2017. 'Introduction: the visual and the symbolic in Western esotericism', in *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*', ed. Peter J. Forshaw, Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism, 23 (Leiden, Brill), pp. 1–17, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004334953_002>

Gennep, Arnold van, 1960. *The Rites of Passage* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul)

Gertsman, Elina, and Jill Stevenson (eds.), 2012. *Thresholds of Medieval Visual Culture: Liminal Spaces* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press)

Giacomoni, Paola, 2007. '*Locus amoenus* and *locus horridus* in the contemporary debate on landscape', in *Das Paradigma der Landschaft in Moderne und Postmoderne*: *(Post-) Modernist Terrains: Landscapes – Settings – Spaces*, eds. Manfred Schmeling and Monika Schmitz-Emans (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann), pp. 83–92

John of the Cross, St., 2007 (1578). *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ*, transl. David Lewis (Grand Rapids, Christian Classics Ethereal Library)

Lenaghan, Patrick, 2005. '"El regocijo de las musas": la visión cómica del *Quijote* en los grabados del siglo XVIII', in *Don Quijote: tapices españoles del siglo XVIII (18th Century Spanish Tapestries)*, ed. Joaquín Álvarez Barrientos (Madrid, El Viso, SEACEX), pp. 63–87

Magrinyà Badiella, Carles, 2014. Post tenebras spero lucem. *Alquimia y ritos en el* Quijote *y otras obras cervantinas*, Acta universitatis Upsaliensis (Uppsala University)

Mayassis, Serge, 1962. *Mystères et initiations dans la préhistoire et protohistoire* (Athens, B.A.O.A)

Meissner, William W., 1999. *To the Greater Glory: A Psychological Study of Ignatian Spirituality* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press)

Padilla, Ignacio, 2011. *Cervantes en los infiernos* (Sevilla, Fundación José Manuel Lara)

Percas de Ponseti, Helena, 1975. *Cervantes y su concepto del arte* (Madrid, Gredos)

Phillips, Thomas, 2015. *Liminal Fictions in Postmodern Culture: The Politics of Self-Development* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan)

Piñero Ramírez, Pedro M. Manuel, and Carrera Díaz (eds.), 1995. *Descensus ad inferos. La aventura de ultratumba de los héreoes (de Homero a Goethe)* (Universidad de Sevilla)

Redondo, Augustín, 1998. *Otra manera de leer* El Quijote (Madrid, Castalia)

Riley, Edward C., 1986. *Don Quixote* (London, Allen & Unwin)

———2001. *La rara invención. Estudios sobre Cervantes y su posteridad literaria* (Barcelona, Crítica)

Safi, Omid, 2009. *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (New York, Harper One)

Schimanski, Johan, and Stephen F. Wolfe (eds.), 2017. *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections* (New York, Berghahn Books)

Snoek, Jan A. M., 2016. 'Freemasonry', in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, ed. Glenn Alexander Magee (Cambridge University Press), pp. 200–10, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139027649>

Telle, Joachim, 1988. '*L'art symbolique paracelsien: remarques concernant* une pseudo-tabula smaragdina du XVIe sicle', in *Présence d'Hermès Trismégiste*, ed. Antoine Faivre (Paris, Albin Michel), pp. 184–208

The Legend of the Grail, 2006. Translated and edited by Nigel Bryant (Cambridge, DS Brewer)

Trevisan, Bernard, n.d. *The Green Dream,* <http://jungcircle.com/mist/alchemy5.htm> (accessed 29.8.2019)

Tucker, George Hugo, 2003. *Homo Viator: Itineraries of Exile, Displacement and Writing in Renaissance Europe* (Genève, Librairie Droz)

Turner, Victor W., 1967.'Betwixt and between: the liminal period in rites of passage', in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press), pp. 93–111

———1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London & New York, Routledge)

Ustinova, Yulia, 2009. *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford University Press), doi: <https://www-oxfordscholarship-com.ezproxy.its.uu.se/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199548569.001.0001/acprof-9780199548569>

Valentine, Basile, 1624. *Azoth, ou le moyen de faire l'or caché des philosophes, de frère Basile Valentin* (Paris, Chez Ieremie & Christofle Perier, au Palais)

Viljoen, Hein, and Chris van der Merwe (eds.), 2006. *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature* (New York, Peter Lang)

Virgilio, Publio, 1990. *La Eneida* (Madrid, Austral)

Williamson, Edwin, 2015. 'The devil in Don Quixote', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 92(8–10), pp. 147–66, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2015.1106148>

Blending the vernacular and esoteric

Narratives on ghosts and fate in early twentieth-century esoteric journals

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.84869

KAARINA KOSKI

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Finnish spiritualist and theosophical journals of 1905–20 brought esoteric teachings and vernacular belief traditions into dialogue with each other. Theosophical journals, in particular, released interpretations of Finnish mythology and the national epic the *Kalevala*, connecting them with the Ancient Wisdom. Both spiritualist and theosophical journals published belief narratives, which ranged from traditional migratory legends taking place in rural environments to the personal histories of urban residents. In mainstream thinking of the modern era, belief traditions were valuable only as vanishing traces of the nation's past. In esoteric journals, they proved the existence of a spiritual reality. The narratives could be published as such, but traditional interpretations, especially those involving Christian morals, could be revised and replaced with explicit esoteric interpretations.

In this article, I analyse the use of traditional vernacular beliefs and mythology in Finnish esoteric journals published between the years 1905 and 1920. These were *Omatunto* (Conscience, 1905–7), *Tietäjä* (Sage, 1908–20), and *Spiritisti* (Spiritualist, 1909–13). These journals formed the first regular forum where esoteric and vernacular views of spiritual reality were brought together in Finland. While the decision to print pieces and interpretations of folklore in esoteric journals may have chiefly served the purpose of esoteric teaching targeted to wider audiences in the journals, it also had far-reaching consequences. Esoteric interpretations have left an imprint on, for example, Finnish vernacular ideas of the afterlife.

The belief traditions which were published and discussed in esoteric journals can be roughly divided into three different categories regarding their age and status in the modern environment. The first is the ancient mythology portrayed in epic and ritual folk poetry. This old poetry was already practically extinct in twentieth-century Lutheran Finland, but it had been collected into archives in numerous versions and also refined into the national epic, the *Kalevala*. It represented the prototype of folklore and had high prestige as a cornerstone of Finnish national culture (see Anttonen 2012). The

second is the belief tradition embedded in the everyday life of rural communities. From the modern perspective, it was backward and superstitious, but it was familiar and retained validity for many people. For folklore scholars, it had value as a remnant of the ancient Finnish world view. The third is belief narratives emerging in the modern environment. In those days, these were not regarded as folklore or tradition at all. They were simply items of news and arguments concerning spiritual reality – a discourse which belief narrative scholars today consider to be a folklore or vernacular belief tradition (see e.g. Valk 2012 and 2014). All these three forms of folklore were present in esoteric journals, and their different types of authority were used accordingly. They demonstrated that the ancient Finns had had an understanding of spiritual reality, that it was compatible with theosophy, and that spiritual reality was not only historically true, but also here and now. In esoteric journals, both old and new vernacular belief traditions were brought into a dialogue with international, recently formulated theosophical and spiritualist ideas.

Western esotericism and folklore in a modern world

Folklore and Western esotericism are two distinct cultural phenomena and are seldom handled together, especially because they belonged to entirely different social contexts. As scholarly concepts, however, they are quite similar in being construed umbrella terms for multifaceted traditions. Both these terms are modern conceptualisations for certain non-institutional traditions which were regarded as deviant and non-modern in the modern outlook. As such, they have been approached in the respective academic discussions either as a neglected but valuable cultural heritage or as an irrational and erroneous culture which needs to be avoided or corrected.[1] The same attitudes could be found in the public discussions in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century-Finland. Both the existing folk belief tradition and esoteric ideas were criticised, ridiculed and even demonised in the media; the folk belief tradition dismissed as backward superstition and barbarity (e.g. Koski 2011a: 84–5; Stark 2006: 34–6), and esotericism as an erroneous and ungodly trend which is scientifically untenable (Holm 2016). Yet, they both had practising groups and proponents who felt that the cultivation

1 For folklore, see e.g. Anttonen 2005: 50–1; Noyes 2012: 15–6; for Western esotericism see Hanegraaff 1998: 17–18.

of otherworldly contacts gives deeper knowledge and capabilities than the modern sciences or medicine alone could provide. Despite these similarities, the two traditions had very different contents, practices, and social distribution.

Western esotericism can be widely defined as a tradition of the learned. It includes writings, symbols and methods for accessing deeper knowledge and individual progress in relation to the metaphysical. The image of the esoteric as secret and exclusive does not mean that esoteric knowledge and rituals would only have taken place and been transmitted in secrecy and amongst restricted groups. Exclusivity also refers to the special effort which is required in order to acquire the knowledge (see e.g. Faivre 1994: 5–8; Hanegraaff 1998: 11). Spiritualism and Theosophy are occult movements which emerged in the late nineteenth century as modern reactions to the modern era itself. Even though they fought materialism and upheld ancient forms of spirituality, they did not oppose the basic modern developments such as the Enlightenment and democracy. They sought to combine the newest scientific progress with their own spiritual and moral agendas. Thus, they made a practical contribution to modern societal development (Faivre and Rhone 2010; Pasi 2009: 60–1). In the Finnish press, spiritual and theosophical writers called for freedom of thought, expressed sympathy for the labour movement and promulgated fraternity and equality between the sexes (e.g. *Uusi Aika* 1901(1): 1; *Tietäjä* 1908(1): 1–2). In particular, spiritualists offered naturalist interpretations of ghosts and expected scientific methods to develop further so that they would prove the naturalness and realness of spiritual phenomena (e.g. *Spiritisti* 1909(3): 53–5, 69). Esoteric movements which emerged in the late nineteenth century consciously opposed certain mainstream characteristics of the modern world, but were part of and contributed to the modern discourse.

The concept of folklore, in turn, was coined to denote the beliefs, practices and expressive culture of the uneducated, non-modern rural population. Unlike participants in esoteric movements who consciously promoted their ideas against the mainstream in a modernising society (Järvenpää 2017: 199–200), performers and audiences of folklore in rural communities were assumed to simply repeat the collectively legitimised traditions and, in ideal definitions, even to be unaware of their culture's and discourses' status as folklore (Honko 2013: 39–40). Folklore was defined as cultural items which were known by every member of the community. The idea of folklore being collectively created over generations presented folklore not only as old

and non-modern, but also as average and conventional. These definitions neglected to take into account the esoteric knowledge of vernacular specialists (see Ben-Amos 1972: 3–7).

The early ideological formations assumed a backward, common folk community whose expressive culture was bound to be wiped away by the arrival of modernisation and education. In a traditionalist and romantic outlook, folklore and especially traditional beliefs and mythology reflected the authentic collective consciousness of the nation, unspoiled by reason and modernity. Therefore folklore, particularly the ancient epic poetry and the *Kalevala* as a literary work reflecting it, played a central role in Finnish nation-building in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Anttonen 2012; Valk and Sävborg 2018: 13–14). The otherness of folk protected the researchers from facing the problem of supernatural beliefs which modern science could not accept (Koski and Honkasalo 2015). In the course of the twentieth century, the ideological and artificial requirement for the collectivity of an authentic folk tradition, as well as its otherness, has been gradually rejected (see Bronner 2000: 93–4). The personal creativity and special skills of individual folklore performers were acknowledged (Dégh 1995: 50–3). In Finland, special attention has been given to good rune singers and to the secret knowledge of vernacular ritual specialists; the *tietäjäs* (Siikala 2002: 79–84). This important similarity between esoteric and vernacular traditions was also noticed in esoteric circles and highlighted in their journals (e.g. *Tietäjä* 1908(1): 4–6). Starting from the 1960s, updated definitions of folklore also recognise that folklore as vernacular, culturally shaped forms of communication and meaning-making exists in all communities and also in the modern world and urban milieus. Folklore does not need to be old by definition, and its performers and users do not necessarily represent otherness (Anttonen 2005: 61–3; Knuuttila 2008: 448–56).

However, non-institutional belief traditions continued to be regarded as a form of otherness. A cultural or scholarly interest in them was only to be legitimised by their status as remnants from the past. Contemporary and non-agricultural beliefs in ghosts, spirits or witchcraft had no legitimate reason to exist in the modern world. Until the 1980s – and in many contexts to date – such phenomena had been written off as stupidity, or were approached as social, psychological or medical problems rather than being studied as part of a national or western culture (Hufford 2005: 26–7; Koski and Honkasalo 2015: 1, 4–6). In the 1970s, the folklorist Leea Virtanen's studies on vernacular belief narratives including telepathy and extrasensory

experiences still received an ambivalent reception within Finnish and international folklore scholarship and in the popular media, endangering the good reputation of the scholar herself (Enges 2014). Similarly, the learned esoteric traditions of experimenting with the spiritual world, labelled as superstition after the Enlightenment, were only settled into a serious and legitimate research of western esotericism during the last decades of the twentieth century (Hanegraaff 2013: 156–7, 355–61). It is therefore not surprising that the convergence of esoteric and vernacular traditions has not yet got much attention.

Theosophical and spiritualist journals in early twentieth-century Finland

Spiritualism and Theosophy were already being discussed in the Finnish press as contemporary trends in the late decades of the nineteenth century. These movements were thus familiar to the reading audience by the beginning of the twentieth century when the first esoteric journals came out (Holm 2016: 101–4; Kaartinen 2018: 20–1). Initially, spiritualists and theosophists such as Pekka Ervast, Martti Humu and Jalo Kivi published articles on esoteric issues in newspapers and journals of the labour movement. The first newspaper which engaged in esoteric teaching and regularly published theosophical essays was the weekly *Uusi Aika* (New Age), edited by Pekka Ervast and Jean Boldt for a short period during 1900 and 1901. Focusing on Theosophy, pacifism and the labour movement, it combined societal and spiritual issues and fostered equality, morality, and individual development (*Uusi Aika* 1900(0): 1). Even though *Uusi Aika* could be characterised as the first Finnish-language theosophical journal (Granholm 2016: 566), it did not proclaim itself to be one, and the theosophical content was reduced towards the end of its period of publication. Like the later esoteric journals, it published personal narratives and hearsay as anecdotal testimonies. But rather than establishing a spiritual reality it aimed to prove the existence of social injustice. Due to its pioneering position, *Uusi Aika* expressed its aims very clearly and thus elucidates the beginnings of the esoteric press in Finland.

The first actual theosophical journal, following the agenda of the international Theosophical Society, was *Omatunto* (Conscience, 1905–7). Martti Humu (an alias for Maria Ramstedt) functioned as the editor-in-charge, assisted by Pekka Ervast and Veikko Palomaa. *Omatunto* came out once a month and published both original and translated articles on occult and

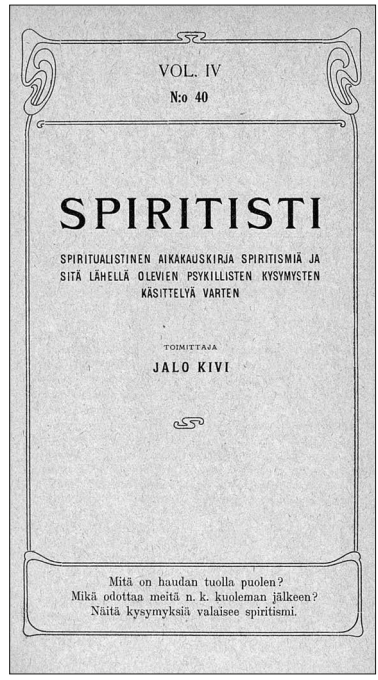

Tietäjä
Teosofinen Aikakauskirja
Toimittaja: Pekka Ervast
1908 Neljäs vuosikerta 1908
Helsingissä
Teosofinen Kirjakauppa ja
Kustannusliike

The first issue of *Tietäjä* in 1908. 'A theosophical journal. Editor Pekka Ervast. Fourth volume.' *Tietäjä* was identified with its predecessor *Omatunto* which came out three years; hence the first number already represented fourth volume.

related issues, as well as belles-lettres, reports, and correspondence. *Omatunto* encouraged readers to participate and send in their own pieces on related issues to be published in the journal. A regular column for questions and answers also invited interaction: readers were asked to send not only questions but also answers to earlier published questions. The Finnish branch of the Theosophical Society was established in October 1907, and the last issue of *Omatunto* in December included an announcement concerning a slight change of form and a new name for the theosophical journal: *Tietäjä* (Sage). The new journal was officially an organ of the new Finnish branch, and the new editor-in-chief was Pekka Ervast (*Omatunto* 1907(12): 253–4). Continuity between *Omatunto* and *Tietäjä* was highlighted for the readers by stating that it would be mostly produced by the same authors and have similar content as before:

> If we browse the volumes of *Omatunto*, we can notice that its columns have included contemplations upon many aspects of theosophical inquiry. There have been texts about the basics of theosophy and the aims of the Theosophical Society, general fraternity, esoteric research, all kinds of philosophical questions, the Bible and Christianity, vegetarianism, sexual life, societal problems, reincarnation, white and black magic, natural health care, evil and criminality, many religious dogmas, the religion of the ancient Finns, the role of women, mediumistic and spiritistic experiences, astrology etc. etc. … Writings of similar and new questions will be included in *Tietäjä* as well. (*Tietäjä* 1908(1): 1–2)

In the first issue, the new name was also thoroughly explained. The word *tietäjä* means literally 'the one who knows' and refers to adept local men and women who were believed among the common folk to be able to heal illnesses and locate stolen goods with the help of their special knowledge and second sight. These specialists of vernacular religion had held positions of authority and performed public rituals in earlier times. In the modern 'civilised' society, they were dismissed as backward quacks and charlatans. Therefore it was stated that the aim was not to bring back 'superstition' but to highlight that behind it there is an old wisdom which has been forgotten during the course of the Christian era. The new name was chosen not only for the appreciation of the truth in folk belief traditions, but also in order to encourage all people to seek hidden knowledge themselves (*Tietäjä* 1908(1): 4–6). The choice for the new name was clearly an alignment towards bringing together vernacular and esoteric views on spiritual reality. It also brought Theosophy closer to Finnish culture.


VOL. IV
N:o 40

SPIRITISTI

SPIRITUALISTINEN AIKAKAUSKIRJA SPIRITISMIÄ JA SITÄ LÄHELLÄ OLEVIEN PSYKILLISTEN KYSYMYSTEN KÄSITTELYÄ VARTEN

TOIMITTAJA
JALO KIVI

Mitä on haudan tuolla puolen?
Mikä odottaa meitä n. k. kuoleman jälkeen?
Näitä kysymyksiä valaisee spiritismi.

Spiritisti, April 1912. 'A spiritualist journal for handling spiritism and related psychic questions. Editor Jalo Kivi. What is beyond grave? What awaits us after so-called death? Spiritism elucidates these questions.'

The spiritualist journal *Spiritisti* (Spiritualist) was established in 1909, in a similar way as the Finnish Spiritualist Society,[2] and its editor was Jalo Kivi (Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi). Among its contributors, we also find theosophists; for example Martti Humu, who had been the editor-in-charge of *Omatunto*, now published in *Spiritisti* (see e.g. *Spiritisti* 1909(4)). Kivi's style was polemical towards the church and also towards theosophy despite their cooperation (Järvenpää 2017: 209). Spiritualism's relationship with Christianity, as well as the natural foundations of the spiritual world, was often discussed in *Spiritisti*'s pages. The journal also had a column for

2 In Finnish Suomen Spiritistinen Seura. Finns used the term 'spiritism' until the 1940s (Holm 2016: 114).

questions and answers, but the answers were declared to come from spirits – not from the editors as in *Tietäjä*. *Spiritisti*'s last issue came out in the spring 1913; the publication suffered from financial problems (Holm 2016: 90–1; Järvenpää 2016: 68).

Many active spiritualists and theosophists were also active in the labour movement and wrote for socialist newspapers. The labour organisations rejected cooperation with esoteric movements around 1906, however, because they felt that the class struggle was compromised by esoteric ideas of spirituality, love, charity, and especially the law of karma, which portrayed poverty and suffering as legitimate consequences of transgressions committed in earlier lives. The struggle for societal equality nevertheless remained a feature in esoteric journals (e.g. Järvenpää 2016: 37–9, 46–7 and 2017: 201–2; Kemppainen 2017: 186–9). It was important to disseminate the new, enlightening ideas to all societal levels:

> Thought belongs to everyone, and its light will shine in the humblest dwelling as well as in the drawing rooms of the sophisticated, bringing with it the more profound life which results from an emerging interest for higher issues. (*Uusi Aika* 1900(0): 1)

> Friends of light and truth, spread the light of truth everywhere! Spread 'Spiritisti' to every palace, to every hut; to the noble as well as to the lowly, and to the rich as well as to the poor. (*Spiritisti* 1909(2): 35)

There is no precise information about the circulation of the journals. However, Jalo Kivi had mentioned unofficially in 1912 that *Spiritisti* had about two hundred subscribers. It seemed to be being distributed in various parts of Finland (Järvenpää 2016: 66). Theosophical journals were more successful. *Omatunto* already had more than a thousand subscribers by 1906 (Granholm 2016: 566), which was before the Finnish branch of the Theosophical Society was established and the journal had changed its name to *Tietäjä*.

Mythology, belief traditions and belief narratives in esoteric view

The appreciation of Finnish mythology and the ancient worldview reached its peak with the reception of the Finnish national epic the *Kalevala*. The *Kalevala* was compiled by Elias Lönnrot and published first in 1835 and

later as a completed version in 1849. It is based on thousands of verses of folk poetry which Lönnrot and other collectors had written down from rune singers and sages in remote Finnish and Karelian villages. Finnish folklorists distinguished between the *Kalevala* as a literary work and the original poems. They focused their attention to the archived poems, their aesthetic form and historical development (Honko 1979: 142–3). Theosophists were well aware of the scholarly research but in their view academics only studied the outer form of the *Kalevala*, whereas theosophical inquiry found its true spiritual meaning. Theosophists regarded the *Kalevala* to be a holy book which included keys to esoteric knowledge (Carlson 2008: 416–7, 424; Ervast 1999: 3–11).

The firm status of the *Kalevala* as a building-block of Finnishness gave authority to the spiritual outlook of the ancient poetry as an alternative to materialism. The *Kalevala*'s connection to theosophy was also internationally acknowledged. The founder of the theosophist movement, Helena Blavatsky, had written an essay about the *Kalevala*, praised its animistic worldview and recognised its similarities with the Ancient Wisdom (*Tietäjä* 1909(3): 78).[3] Rudolf Steiner gave a public lecture in Helsinki in April 1912 on national epics and especially the *Kalevala* (Carlson 2008: 422). The *Kalevala*'s theosophical and later Rosicrucian interpretations were many. One of the leading esoteric interpreters of the *Kalevala* was Pekka Ervast. Following Blavatsky's views, he saw the *Kalevala*'s heroes as psychological or mental-spiritual powers which, nevertheless, exist independently in an invisible reality (*Tietäjä* 1917(4): 161; see also Carlson 2008: 417, 423). Detailed accounts of the similarities between the Finnish ancient mythology or religion and the Ancient Wisdom were written in theosophical journals by, for example, Martti Humu (*Omatunto* 1905(1–4)), and Väinö Valvanne (*Tietäjä* 1909(7–8)). These served readers who were already well-versed in Theosophy. For a wider audience, the main point was the spiritual world view. Pekka Ervast wrote about the world view of the *Kalevala* in 1917:

3 The Finnish translation of Blavatsky's essay titled 'Suomen kansalliseepos' was published in *Tietäjä* 1909(3). The original had come out in *Lucifer*. It was also emphasised that verses from the Kalevala had been included in Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* (Omatunto 1905(4): 60).

> The visible world is a representation of the spiritual, real world … This spiritual outlook is the Kalevala's own, as the Kalevala too saw beyond the form the reality; a nature full of life and living creatures. When we hold on to this Kalevalaic understanding of life, we immediately reject the materialist outlook, because we believe in souls and spirits and the invisible world. (*Tietäjä* 1917(4): 159–60)

Esoteric journals did not publish pieces of mythology but rather presented new interpretations, as the *Kalevala* was read in schools and was presumably familiar to everyone. My analysis concerns chiefly the belief tradition. Mythology was assumed to be extinct, while the belief tradition is connected to the social reality and everyday concerns of the community. Still, there was a strong continuity between the animistic world view of the *Kalevala* and the everyday beliefs of the rural villages. Especially the ritual specialists of the vernacular belief tradition, the *tietäjäs*, still used incantations in remote areas, and conceptions of magical harm and various supernatural beings were common. However, the belief tradition of early twentieth-century villages was strongly influenced by Christianity and involved popular Christian interpretations and moral arguments. A vernacular belief tradition never forms a uniform world view. Narrative and ethnographic materials collected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries show that belief narratives were the arena of a continuous debate between Christian and 'superstitious' views (Koski 2011a: 84–5; Stark 2006: 230–9), between modernisation and folk religion (Mikkola 2009: 205–11) and between vernacular belief and non-belief (Roper 2018: 223–7). The Finnish belief tradition provided ideas, for example, about omens and fates; various activities of the dead; guardian spirits of the natural and cultural environments; folk medicine and healing; magic practices aiming at improving one's success or harming one's rivals and enemies; adept men and women with magical abilities to heal or harm; breaches of the norm sanctioned by supernatural beings or powers, and so forth (see e.g. Jauhiainen 1998). The concern about other people's morals and the constant normative control by means of supernatural punishments were conspicuous characteristics of the Christian village cultures. Partly, it was legacy of the Lutheran Orthodox era which emphasised conformity and discipline (Koski 2011b: 10–2). However, the question was also concerning social dynamics: traditional belief motifs were used, for example, as ingredients of gossip in the local negotiations of social power (Koski 2011a: 58–61). In folklore studies, the various uses and meanings of recurrent belief motifs

have been exposed to detailed genre analysis (see e.g. Honko 1989; Koski 2016). Here, 'belief narrative' and 'legend' will be sufficient.

As a scholarly term, belief narrative is a wide concept which covers all types of stories with supernatural or speculative content. It does not matter whether the story describes one's own experience or whether it is a tale with an international distribution. The folkloristic definition of legend, in turn, necessarily includes a traditional plot or core motif, which researchers can recognise as a widely distributed piece of tradition. Legends are fluid and adapt to various uses as well as to new world views, environments and forms of communication. The traditional contents spread sometimes as news or gossip; they may transform into first-hand experience stories or be performed as pure entertainment. Legends reflect the local belief traditions and values and often discuss the interstices of social reality. They are not only performed as narratives but also imitated in real life and used as interpretative models for real events.[4] In this article I use the term belief narrative unless it is relevant to point to the traditionality of the plot as a legend. In the esoteric journals, belief narratives are referred to as ghost stories, extraordinary or supernatural incidents, or extrasensory phenomena.

The use of belief narratives and motifs as gossip or social arguments is a good example of the fact that a belief tradition does not simply exist because people would believe certain phenomena to be real and true. On the contrary: the narratives, arguments and rituals are doubted and contested even among their users. Their popularity depends on their usefulness and applicability to socially and culturally specific purposes, and their validity can be established in each context separately. Belief narratives and rituals can be vehicles for promoting or maintaining certain values and world views (Valk 2014). Belief tradition as it prevailed in Finnish rural communities was not all useful in Spiritualism or Theosophy. In esoteric thinking, conformity to traditional Christian morals and success in agricultural livelihoods were irrelevant. Those topics of belief narratives are missing in esoteric journals, and stories which include, for example, suicide do not highlight a moral disapproval. In some cases, the accustomed normative interpretations of rural villages are explicitly revised. The relevant topics were fate, omens and

4 About legends, see e.g. Dégh 2001: 97–102; Ellis 2003: 5–12; Koski 2016: 113–25.

precognition, activities of the dead, and existence of the spiritual world in many forms.

The publication of vernacular belief tradition and ghost stories in esoteric journals seems to have been initiated by the readers. However, in early modern newspapers, it is not always clear which texts have actually been sent by readers and which are in fact written by the editors. A first step towards paralleling vernacular and esoteric knowledge and including experience stories in the journals was made in *Uusi Aika* (no. 8) in 1901. An assumed reader shared her experience of visiting an uneducated healer and blood stauncher who lived in a croft and had the most remarkable occult and theosophical knowledge. The text was a testimony of the existence of spiritual expertise among vernacular specialists and of its similarity to western esoteric traditions. The practice of publishing belief narratives gradually developed in *Omatunto*. The common belief tradition and vernacular experiences were first brought up when, in a letter to the editor, a reader asked for an explanation for reported sightings of ghosts of the dead and guardian spirits. He was given an explanation which combined vernacular tradition and esoteric views. (*Omatunto* 1905(3): 54.) In the fifth issue, the first testimonial story appears, describing discussions with a man who had received a telepathic message about the birth of his son (*Omatunto* 1905(5): 111). Gradually, editors started to collect and narrate similar content themselves. In *Omatunto* (no. 5) in 1905, five different cases were described under the headline 'Extraordinary incidents'. These included stories about extrasensory experiences, omens, and unusual skills (*Omatunto* 1905(6): 140–2). The next issue, in turn, included personal descriptions of the writer's own ominous dreams (*Omatunto* 1905(7): 172–3). Traditional and personal stories involving the spiritual and extraordinary started to come out regularly in *Omatunto,* and this policy was continued later in *Tietäjä*, as well as in *Spiritisti*.

Belief narratives as proof of the existence of the spiritual world

In *Spiritisti*, belief narratives were published regularly under the heading 'Yliaistillisia ilmiöitä' (Extrasensory phenomena). The intention to publish such narratives was introduced in the journal's third issue and readers were invited to send their own stories too. The editor Jalo Kivi wrote: 'Under this title we will publish both from home and abroad factual narratives about extrasensory incidents which have taken place, so to speak, outside the spiritualist circles' (*Spiritisti* 1909(3): 69, 76). The credibility of the evidence

was enhanced by mentioning the impartiality of the source. Another persuasive strategy was the normalisation of the phenomena by highlighting their naturalness. In the spiritualist view, the western world erroneously assumed that these so-called ghost stories resulted from superstitious fears among the common folk which should be civilised. Kivi argued: 'But nature functions according to its own laws. It cannot be "civilised". Its secret powers do not cease to function even though we sit on the school bench and cram information into our heads.' It was highlighted that the narrators have affirmed the incidents as true and that they are not that uncommon after all: 'We do not need to fetch them from abroad, because even in Finland they are happening in various places almost daily' (*Spiritisti* 1909(3): 69).

After this first introduction, belief narratives under the title 'Extrasensory phenomena' appeared usually as such without further comments. Pure folk legends without any commentary stand out among the spiritually, scientifically and theologically educational texts. But they served a purpose. The stories were probably found entertaining by the readers, but even artistically elaborate folk narratives also tend to make a point. Narratives convey messages and arguments – yet sometimes only implicitly. They may take a stance on moral and ontological questions as well as in societal collisions (Koski 2011a: 45–8; Siikala 1984: 32–4). In *Spiritisti*, the stance was taken for example against materialists and the rationalist clergy. Besides the explicitly stated function to prove that such events happen, *Spiritisti*'s stories provided examples of how a spiritual reality manifests itself in physical reality. This was referred to in the introduction: 'We do not explain now the natural powers which are expressed as "ghosts". The explanation will be given later in *Spiritisti*'s columns' (*Spiritisti* 1909(3): 69).

The belief narratives in *Spiritisti* mainly reflected the vernacular world view and values which were sometimes in accordance with esoteric thinking and sometimes not. Folk legendry of rural villages was an arena for a continuous debate between Christian interpretations and others which were labelled superstitious and non-modern, but there were also widely accepted beliefs. In the vernacular belief tradition, it was self-evident that the dead only come back if they have sinned or if they have been mistreated or left without a proper burial. Jalo Kivi's explanation in *Spiritisti* likewise mentions for example suicides, crimes and bothering things as reasons for haunting (*Spiritisti* 1912(40): 86–7). It was also known in the belief tradition that ghosts had to be asked why they had come back because otherwise the problem would not be solved. This can be seen in the next story. It is the synopsis

of a narrative which came out in *Spiritisti* in a long and detailed version. It represents a well-known Finnish legend motif C325; 'Thief finds no peace, walks the earth upon death' (see Jauhiainen 1998: 100):

> A church warden died, and afterwards, his son and daughter-in-law who were farmers kept finding him at home at night reading the Bible as he had used to do. They were afraid and behaved as if the ghost was not there. The local Lutheran minister, 'a genuine materialist', heard a rumour about it and went to correct the couple for superstition and for spreading such stories. He refused to believe their assertions that it was true. But back home the minister found the ghost sitting at his own desk. He asked the ghost why he was there, and it turned out that the church warden had stolen money from the Church charity funds and his son should be requested to pay back the sum for him. Apparently the son did, because the ghost never came again. (*Spiritisti* 1909(3): 69–70)

This version includes a typical evidential pattern for affirmative legends: that the non-believer – here, the minister – finally witnesses the supernatural phenomenon himself and has to forgo his scepticism. It is also noteworthy that in this narrative, both the unbeliever and the sinner are men of the church. Nevertheless, it is the minister who solves the problem once he has learned the facts. Another legend from the same set lacks any references to these power struggles. This too is a synopsis:

> A man driving a horse carriage picks up a stranger near a bog by the road. They have a chat and the man says who he is. On the way, the driver has to pop into a house for some errands. Leaving the house he regrets he cannot stay longer, because this fellow is waiting there in the carriage and is probably bored already. The inhabitants of the house tell him that this particular person has recently committed a suicide on the bog. When they go out, there is nobody on the carriage. (*Spiritisti* 1909(3): 70–1)

This story is an early version of the legend 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker' which later became one of the most widespread urban legends. Attuned with the moral climate of rural villages, this version of the narrative portrays the ghost as a suicide. In late twentieth-century urban versions, the moral

fault of the deceased has been omitted, and the phantom hitchhiker is, for example, a victim of a car accident.[5] Both examples above included partly anonymised coordinates of place and time, implying that the narrator or editor knew the details but did not make them public.

Some extrasensory phenomena evoked explicit commentary in *Spiritisti*. A newspaper called *Kaiku* had published news about a man who was murdered far from home and nobody could identify the body.[6] So the murdered man appeared in a dream to his former boss and asked him to go and identify him. He also spoke about how he had been killed and what had been stolen from him. Below the report in *Spiritisti* it is commented:

> It would be nice to hear how materialists or church teachers explain this dream. The former do not believe that anything exists beyond death, and the latter also claim that a person can't inform about himself after death, and keep him buried until 'waking him up on the last day'.
>
> [This man] was now in any case totally self-consciously functioning after his death. (*Spiritisti* 1912(37): 17)

While the belief narratives in *Spiritisti* were chiefly about the returning dead, the belief narratives in *Tietäjä* handled a wider range of topics, ranging from healers and omens to guardian spirits. They were taken from newspapers, heard from friends and relatives, sent by readers, or experienced by the editors themselves. In *Tietäjä*, belief narratives appeared in various contexts, mostly in a regular column labelled 'Rajan takaa' (From beyond) which, however, also had other types of content. Without a general framing, the narratives were often commented upon separately. Here, in full length, is one narrative about fate, written by Väinö Valvanne:

> *The planning of our fate*. On 2 August 1914, Mrs M., one of the most notable members of our society, had a dream. In her womb, she had a fully developed foetus ready to be born into this world. The dream was

5 About the Vanishing Hitchhiker, see, e.g., Brunvand 1983: 30–41; Virtanen 1987: 70–5.

6 The story in *Spiritisti* was based on two reports of the murder which were published in 1911 in *Kaiku's* issues 142 and 144a.

> very impressive and remained in her memory in detail, also the date. She had been married but she had no intention to remarry. Before the end of the year, she had celebrated her wedding and when she felt she was pregnant, she remembered the dream and the date. And indeed: on 2 August 1915, she gave birth to a child.
>
> This is one of the best proven premonitions, because she had talked about her dream to many friends already before she got married and before the child was born. In astonishment, we must ask if our earthly life is really planned beforehand so that events so precisely in detail can be known on the other side in advance. A childbirth at least is by no means an event the timing of which we could determine ourselves. (*Tietäjä* 1915(7–8): 303)

The same issue of *Tietäjä* included a story based on an incident reported in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*. A house had burned down and the inhabitants had gone missing in the fire, but their remains had not been found in the ruins. A young boy had dreamed that the woman who had lived in the house complained that she has to rest under the cottage and not in consecrated ground. On closer inspection, a hidden cellar was found where bodies of two suicides were found. The author V. Valvanne comments:

> We often hear people saying that 'there is no proof about life beyond death. Nobody has returned to tell about it'. The factual event above is one of the numerous examples which show how great ignorance such talk expresses. If a human being entirely ceased to exist after death, nobody would have known in this case for years, or centuries, or ever, where [these people] had ended up. Nobody on earth would have known about them if they had not come to inform us about themselves. (*Tietäjä* 1915(7–8): 304)

Neither of these two belief narratives from *Tietäjä* would have been regarded as folklore in their time. The former story describes an individual's experience, and even though the beliefs that our lives and deaths are predestined and that the future can be seen in dreams are motifs of vernacular belief tradition, they are also common in European and Christian cultures in general. The second story is from printed news and therefore not from the 'folk', even though it represents the Finnish legend type A 801; 'Dead person

appears in dream … tells where own body is hidden' (Jauhiainen 1998: 79). What links these to the vernacular discourse in addition to the content's compatibility with belief tradition is the use of the rhetorical power of anecdotal evidence and the social nature of handling the issue.

Esoteric interpretations in belief narratives

The educational function of belief narratives is clear when they involve explicit esoteric interpretation. I will give two examples which fulfill this function in very different ways. The first is a description of the accidental death of a small child. The description only develops into a belief narrative when given an explicit karmic interpretation. It is first reported in the style of news, mentioning the full names of the people in question, as well as precise dates and times. However, the narrative also includes the mother's attempts to save the child and assures us that the parents would not have been able to prevent the accident from happening. It is noteworthy that the accident had taken place in the family of one of *Tietäjä*'s editors. He wrote the text himself, but in the third person, as if reporting someone else's life. The family lost their little daughter who was not yet two years old. Approaching the fireplace to warm herself, the girl had lost her balance and accidentally toppled a kettle full of boiling water on herself. Her skin was badly burned and she died on the following day in severe pain. The event is commented upon as follows:

> Words cannot express the grief which the family felt after this accidental death. But as the parents believed in the unwavering justice of nature, they see in this death the fulfilment of the law of karma. Never before had any children died in the family. So many times before had the hot water kettle been on the stove and the little girl had safely pottered around the fireplace. But in the blink of an eye the moment came when the child had to face the punishment of the law. She had, of course, during her previous lives done something 'bad' which now resulted in her physical death.
>
> In the morning of the day of the accident, the parents had felt a peculiar pressure, as the child was approached by the astral tornado which then destroyed her body. (*Tietäjä* 1908(1): 32)

In the early twentieth century, it was more common than today that not all children reached adult age. Christianity, which usually advises the bereaved to accept the situation, did not really provide answers to grieving parents who would like to know why it was just their child who had to face such a terrible death. The folk tradition, in turn, tends to blame the victims themselves, hinting that they had committed breaches of the norm, or had sinned, and deserved the punishment. In this theosophical interpretation, a reason is given but neither the parents nor the little child are blamed. Acts deserving punishment had all been committed in previous lives, and the story also gives moral advice, urging people to lead a better life here and now. While the text may have been the father's way of informing his fellow theosophists about the situation and coping with the grief, it could also provide a model for other parents in a similar situation.

The second example is a multi-episodic narrative about a haunting which turns out to be a benign spirit's attempt to communicate. A metanarrative framing device tells us about the story's transmission in a way typical of legends: the author relates his narrator's cousin's first-hand experience. In the introductory episode, the cousin and her husband are troubled with persistent knocking in their house near Viborg. They react to it in a rational manner, try to identify any natural causes and also think that it could be a trick on the part of playful neighbours. Finally, they are advised by a Russian professor who suggests that it could be a dead person who is trying to communicate with them by knocking. Thus, they get in contact with the woman's former fiancé, a man who had died 14 years ago and who had said he wanted to protect the family. They have kept a record of all their discussions with him. After this introductory episode, three other episodes follow. In one of them, the spirit asks that a certain labourer who is a heavy drinker will participate in their discussion. The man comes and is so thoroughly impressed by the encounter that he entirely changes his life and stops drinking. Another episode mentions that the deceased had warned about a danger which threatens a family member, and that the bad consequences can be avoided. These two are both well-known motifs of belief narratives.

The third episode is the most interesting in relation to the educational aspect of the narrative. It is a dialogue between the deceased and the living people who have gathered to meet him and to ask him questions. It goes as follows:

> They also asked him whether anything was troubling him. 'Nothing is troubling me.' Does he have a lot of unresolved issues? 'No, I do not.' Is he feeling fine? 'Everyone feels fine here.' Would you like us to take a clergyman to your grave? 'Take if you like, I don't need it, but I can pray together with him.' (*Tietäjä* 1914(5–6): 246–7)

This short dialogue debunks all the typical interpretations which would explain haunting in the prevailing Christian and vernacular discourses. Firstly, he is not a troubled soul who wants to come back to this world because of unresolved issues. Secondly, he is not suffering and is not in a 'bad' place where others would be suffering too. Third, he is not lacking a proper burial or blessing. Fourth, he is not a demon in disguise, as the Lutheran teaching would suggest, because he would find it appropriate to pray together with the minister. To apprehend the educational load in this short passage we need to know the cultural context and recognise the assumptions which it explicitly denies. It emphasises that there is nothing wrong with this spirit; he just finds it meaningful to be in contact with these people.

Negotiation of ontology and morals

It was not uncommon in the early press to publish belief narratives and legends as news. Ülo Valk has noted that the interpretations of folk legends in the Estonian press of the nineteenth century were usually Christian rather than vernacular, or they aimed at debunking the whole story. As such, they functioned in a way similar to vernacular oral narratives which expressed their narrators' opinions, interests and anxieties (Valk 2012: 244–9). In twentieth-century Finland, the debate concerning ontology and morals typical of belief legendry continued in written form in the press. Unlike other newspapers and journals, the esoteric publications defended spiritual interpretations. Folk belief tradition and esoteric movements of the early twentieth-century Finland shared an interest in the spiritual world and rejected materialist views. Brought together in the esoteric journals, these meaning systems gave validity and authority to each other. The contemporary domestic belief narratives provided good anecdotal evidence, and materials by which esoteric teaching could be linked to ideas which were already familiar to the wider audience. Older folklore, instead, linked them to prestigious pieces of national culture – the Kalevalaic poetry. Spiritualism

and Theosophy, in turn, contributed to the declining local belief traditions with new interpretations and vocabularies which linked them to modern sciences, urban milieus and novel societal values. Esoteric journals published some narratives as such but commented or revised others in order to bring forth their own ideologies. Similarly, the ancient mythology was, on the one hand, praised for its animist outlook, and on the other hand, given new meanings through theosophical study. Both the ancient folklore and contemporary narratives had significance for the esoteric movements for the same reason: they entailed the existence of a spiritual world and represented a world view which was not blinded by modern materialism.

Kaarina Koski is a folklorist and senior researcher at the University of Helsinki. She has previously worked as a university lecturer of folkloristics at the University of Turku. Her research interests cover vernacular belief traditions and narratives, especially concerning death, supernatural beings and the Lutheran church. Her recent works also concern uncanny experiences, contemporary death cultures, internet culture, and nightmares. For the last three years she has functioned as the editor-in-charge of the Finnish death studies journal *Thanatos*.

Sources

Newspapers and journals

Digital Newspaper Archives, the National Library of Finland
Kaiku
Omatunto
Spiritisti
Tietäjä
Uusi Aika

Literature

Anttonen, Pertti, 2005. *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*, Studia Fennica Folkloristica, 15 (Helsinki, SKS)

———2012. 'Oral tradition and the making of the Finnish nation', in *Folklore and Nationalism in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Timothy Baycroft and David Hopkin (Leiden, Brill), pp. 325–50

Ben-Amos, Dan, 1972. 'Toward a definition of folklore in context', in *Toward New Perspectives in Folklore,* eds. Américo Paredes and Richard Bauman (Austin, University of Texas Press), pp. 3–15

Bronner, Simon, 2000. 'The meaning of tradition: an introduction', *Western Folklore*, 59(2), pp. 87–104

Brunvand, Jan Harold, 1983. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Urban Legends and their Meanings* (London, Picador)

Carlson, Jöns, 2008. 'Kalevalan salainen oppi', in *Kalevalan kulttuurihistoria*, eds. Ulla Piela, Seppo Knuuttila and Pekka Laaksonen (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 416–25

Dégh, Linda, 1995. *Narratives in Society: A Performer-Centered Study of Narration,* FF Communications, 255 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica)

———2001. *Legend and Belief: Dialectics of a Folklore Genre* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press)

Ellis, Bill, 2003. *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults: Legends We Live* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi)

Enges, Pasi, 2004. 'Uskon ja epäuskon traditiot. Leea Virtanen, parapsykologia ja tutkijan suhde yliluonnolliseen', *Elore*, 11(1), doi: <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.78435>

Ervast, Pekka, 1999. *The Key to the Kalevala* (Nevada City, Blue Dolphin Publishing)

Faivre, Antoine, 1994. *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, State University of New York Press)

Faivre, Antoine, and Christine Rhone, 2010. *Western Esotericism: A Concise History* (Albany, State University of New York Press)

Granholm, Kennet, 2016. 'Theosophy in Finland', in *Western Esotericism in Scandinavia,* eds. Henrik Bogdan and Olav Hammer (Leiden and Boston, Brill), pp. 563–9

Hanegraaff, Wouter, 1998. 'On the construction of "esoteric traditions"', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion,* eds. Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Peeters), pp. 11–61

———2013. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge University Press)

Holm, Tea, 2016. *Spiritualismin muotoutuminen Suomessa. Aatehistoriallinen tutkimus*, PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki (Helsinki, Unigrafia)

Honko, Lauri, 1979. 'A hundred years of Finnish folklore fesearch: a reappraisal', *Folklore*, 90(2), pp. 141–52

———1989. 'Folkloristic theories of genre', in *Studies in Oral Narratives,* ed. Anna-Leena Siikala (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 13–28

Honko, Lauri 2013. 'The folklore process', in *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, eds. Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko, FF Communications, 304 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica), pp. 29–54

Hufford, David, 2005. 'Sleep paralysis as spiritual experience', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 42(1), pp. 11–45

Järvenpää, Juuso, 2016. *Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi. Spiritualismin esitaistelijan asema 1900-luvun alun Suomessa*, MA diss., University of Tampere, <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/98627>

———2017. 'Vainotun totuuden esitaistelija. Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kiven spiritualistisen identiteetin rakentuminen 1900-luvun alun Suomessa', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 115(2), pp. 198–210

Jauhiainen, Marjatta, 1998. *The Type and Motif Index of Finnish Belief Legends and Memorates. Revised and Enlarged Edition of Lauri Simonsuuri's Typen- und Motivverzeichnis der finnischen mytischen Sagen*, FF Communications, 267 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica)

Kaartinen, Marjo, 2018. 'Vera Hjelt and the calling of theosophical universal work, 1894–1904', *Approaching Religion*, 8(1), pp. 17–30

Kemppainen, Mikko, 2017. '"Korkein olkoon kanssamme!" Kirjailija Hilda Tihlä ja teosofia suomalaisessa työväenlehdistössä vuosina 1910–1918', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*, 115(2), pp. 184–197

Knuuttila, Seppo, 2008. 'Sankariaika suomalaisessa kansanrunouden tutkimuksessa 1930-luvulla', in *Entinen aika, nykyinen mieli,* eds. Ulla Piela and Sinikka Vakimo (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 444–69

Koski, Kaarina, 2011a. *Kuoleman voimat. Kirkonväki suomalaisessa uskomusperinteessä* (Helsinki, SKS)

———2011b. 'Uskomusperinne ja kristillinen kasvatus 1800-luvulla', *Kasvatus ja Aika*, 5(4), pp. 9–24, <https://journal.fi/kasvatusjaaika/article/view/68430> (accessed 29.8.2019)

———2016. 'The legend genre and narrative registers', in *Genre – Text – Interpretation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Folklore and Beyond*, eds. Kaarina Koski and Frog with Ulla Savolainen, Studia Fennica Folkloristica, 22 (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 113–36

Koski, Kaarina, and Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, 2015. 'Miten tutkia kummia kokemuksia?', *Elore*, 22(1), pp. 1–19, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30666/elore.79186>

Mikkola, Kati, 2009. *Tulevaisuutta vastaan. Uutuuksien vastustus, kansantiedon keruu ja kansakunnan rakentaminen* (Helsinki, SKS)

Noyes, Dorothy, 2012. 'The social base of folklore', in *A Companion to Folklore*, eds. Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem (West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons Inc), pp. 13–39

Pasi, Marco, 2009. 'The modernity of occultism: reflections on some crucial aspects', in *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam,* eds. Joyce Pijnenburg and Wouter Hanegraaff (Amsterdam University Press), pp. 60–7

Roper, Jonathan, 2018. 'Folk disbelief', in *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas*, eds. Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 223–36

Siikala, Anna-Leena, 1984. *Tarina ja tulkinta. Tutkimus kansankertojista* (Helsinki, SKS)

———2002. *Mythic Images and Shamanism: A Perspective on Kalevala Poetry*, FF Communications, 280 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica)

Stark, Laura, 2006. *The Magical Self: Body, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*, FF Communications, 290 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica)

Valk, Ülo, 2012. '"Sad and evil news…": on legendry in folklore and early Estonian newspapers', in *Finno-Ugric Folklore, Myth and Cultural Identity*, eds. Cornelius Hasselblatt and Adriaan van der Hoeven (Maastricht, Shaker), pp. 241–50

———2014. 'Belief as generic practice and vernacular theory in contemporary Estonia', in *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*, eds. Ülo Valk and Marion Bowman (Sheffield, Equinox), pp. 350–68

Valk, Ülo, and Daniel Sävborg, 2018. 'Place-lore, liminal storyworld and ontology of the supernatural: an introduction', in *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas*, eds. Ülo Valk and Daniel Sävborg (Helsinki, SKS), pp. 7–24

Virtanen, Leea, 1987. *Varastettu isoäiti. Kaupungin kansantarinoita* (Helsinki, Tammi)

Conceptualising magic in 1950s Germany

Shifting notions between stage shows, scientific culture, and home manuals

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.84864

TILMAN HANNEMANN

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

In an effort to explore the gap between pre-war occultism and the New Age movement, this article examines the public areas of stage magic, folklore magic, and handbook magic between 1947 and 1960. It firstly investigates possible connections between stage performance and the implicit character of religious beliefs and combines these observations with the notion of magic in the field of parapsychology. Then the latter approach is put into the context of mental health discourse, scientific culture, and the metaphysics of nature. The field of handbook magic, finally, relates to public debates about rationality and superstition as an attempt to popularise and legitimise knowledge and techniques of twentieth-century 'high magic'.

Introduction

In cultural and religious history, study of the post-war period of the German-speaking countries tends to be a neglected field. It is the founding narratives of Western Germany, such as the 'zero hour' or the 'religious springtime' of the churches, which have structured the collective memory until today. Beyond theology and church history, historical research has documented various currents of occultism and spiritualism, including the *völkisch* variants, and a broad field of activities and orientations that thrived between 1900 and 1940 (see e.g. Treitel 2004; Wolffram 2009; Gossman 2009). After World War II though, a large gap seems to extend until the late 1960s, when the New Age movement crossed the Atlantic and contemporary spirituality began to emerge in Western Germany. There are a few studies, however, that suggest to some extent the continuation and transformation of pre-war discourses, practices, and networks. Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe (2009) and René Gründer (2012) address Karl Spiesberger and his publications on rune magic and exercises (Spiesberger 1955b, 1958), which were instrumental for the survival of originally ariosophic body techniques, for example, in some neo-pagan groups. The institutionalisation of parapsychology in post-war

Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences
Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 29 (2020), pp. 192–215

Germany and Europe was the topic of a ground-breaking conference in 2014 (Lux and Palatschek 2016). While generally cautious about the idea of translating esotericist discourse traditions into the contemporary field of new religions, Christoph Bochinger's seminal study of New Age and modern religion is the first and only one to pay attention to the intense activities of Barth publishers that centred from 1948 onwards on mysticism, Eastern religions, and religious experience (cf. Bochinger 1995: 143–58 authors and trends, 629–36 list of titles).

A comprehensive survey of the relevant literature, whether it be labelled occultist, esotericist, or otherwise – the first of these terms fell out of use during the decade, the second term occurred within very few publications and was invested with various meanings – is still missing. However, it is safe to state that the writing output has been much more extensive and diverse than the instances mentioned above suggest. The following study will focus on a small, but important segment of the source material that identified itself as 'magic'. This field is in turn grouped into three distinguishable and interacting subfields that will be called stage magic, folklore magic, and handbook magic. My approach will relate the literary production with other sources on magic performance or practice. I will further enquire into the role of a public discourse on superstition, linked with both competition and transfer modalities between the subfields of magic and adjacent fields such as parapsychology or radiesthetics.

A positive view of modernisation dominated the public discourse, though it did not necessarily, nor entirely, favour the exclusion or abandonment of magic. While nation-wide media (e.g. the *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau*) promoted civic education and revealed the stage skills of professional illusionists, legitimate magic entertainment could extend well beyond the repertoire of rope tricks and cabinets. In March 1960, a local broadcast station, Radio Bremen, put the mental faculties of stage magician Alfred Mihiel, better known as Jac Olten, to the test. A review in the Swiss journal of parapsychology, *Neue Wissenschaft*, retakes different notions of the term 'magic' as they were presented in the radio programme. Introduced as a French count, Olten supposedly had as teachers 'African magicians and an Indian guru'. When asked to guess the question prepared for him by the radio crew – who wanted to learn more about the future prospects of a monorail traffic project – he employed 'magic operations' of geomancy – 'an ancient method of oracle and divination' – and came up with a satisfying response. Hans Bender, Germany's first and only professor of parapsychology, explained the result

to the listeners in the framework of telepathy and suggested the possibility that Olten's geomantic procedure 'was "magically" directed by telepathic information' (Ringger 1960: 41; on Bender, see Lux 2013).

In this radio presentation, three uses of the term 'magic' can be identified:

1. magical knowledge as residues of belief systems that survived in remote areas;
2. divinatory practice as an ancient modus operandi of magic transmitted via esoteric tradition;
3. magic as a kind of spiritual economy dependent on natural, invisible forces that cause the human mind to process extrasensory input.

In 1960, these categories do not seem to be new at all, since it is easy to trace their elements back to learned discourses of the nineteenth century. Without attempting to unearth the itinerant journeys of the term across the globalising landscapes of Mesmerism, occultism, spiritualism, comparative science of religion, and anthropology during that time period (see, for an introduction, Otto and Stausberg 2014), it will suffice here to state that the boundaries between academic debate about magic and positive self-reference as 'magic' are more permeable than generally admitted. Although they failed to obtain academic recognition, erudite apologists in works such as John Campbell Colquhoun's, *An History of Magics, Witchcraft and Animal Magnetism* (1851, German edition 1853), and Éliphas Lévi's, *Histoire de la magie* (1860, German edition 1926), set parameters for future research. From different perspectives (cf. Otto 2015: 421n6), these writers have not merely adopted but also valourised 'magic' as a hidden tradition of both scientific and religious knowledge about natural and supernatural forces that flourished in the cradle of civilisation and subsequently has been for the most part forgotten or discarded. In his *Primitive Cultures* (1871), the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, a vigorous critic of 'occult science', only needed to reverse the driving forces of history's arrow. Thus he replaced the decline of magic with an evolutionary progress of culture that gradually abolished 'primitive spiritualistic science which interpreted nature to the lower races' (Tylor, quoted in Larsen 2013: 476). However, both opposing positions describe 'magical history' and commonly select identifying feature areas from available source material. Magic could thus be recognised and scientifically explained – positively or negatively – in archaic survivals, esoteric traditions, and any manipulation of unseen forces.

Since these notions now seamlessly blended into a single public event, they have stepped out of the tower of academic distancing and comfortably settled within the culture of public discourse.[1] In their property as media events, they both respond to and shape popular understandings of the term magic. It is also significant that in the 1940s, Jac Olten worked in circus shows and was famous for his silk tricks (Höller 1999: 51; contrary to Höller, Olten/Mihiel was not a Jewish magician), while in 1960 he handled the radio medium as well as learned narratives about natural magic and the performance of clairvoyance. Later, in the sixties, he worked on a cruise liner. Olten's trajectory and his presentation as a magician reflect changing conditions of media and in public discourse, which in turn affect the plausibility patterns of magic agency between 1940 and 1960. To put it briefly: until the beginnings of the 1950s, popular notions of magic were oriented towards the experience of performances in stage entertainment, in healing, and in apotropaic rituals. From 1954 onwards, collections of magic handbooks appeared in esotericist publishing houses and attempted to popularise theosophic, hermetic, and occultist narratives and topics. In what follows it will be shown how this trend favoured an individual approach to spiritual experience. But firstly, a few brief case reports will help to elucidate the transition process while focusing on the discursive representation of magic performance, both as a cultural practice and in respect to religious and scientific interpretations.

Stage magic and religious beliefs

The years around 1950 were a final, post-war heyday for the magic theatre before it began losing ground to the spread of home television and other entertainment media. However, both the presentation and the reception of such feats as clairvoyance, mind reading, or invulnerability could convey notions that transcended the illusionist setting of the stage.

In June 1947, a Dutch trio – a prophet, his minister and assistant, and a healer who called themselves the 'Trinity' ('The invulnerable man' 1947: 103) – gave a guest performance at a Zurich theatre, the 'Corso'. The leading

1 Anna Lux (2013) discusses in detail how the transgression of the line between scientific discourse and public advertisement became a trademark of Bender's academic career.

performer had chosen the name Mirin Dajo – Esperanto for a 'miraculous thing' (on Arnold Henskes, alias Mirin Dajo, see Blum 2016: 79–82). He demonstrated the progressively fluid nature of his body in a series of rather hazardous experiments involving thin steel tubes as well as real knives and rapiers. As the police intervened and closed down the event to prevent further public offence, a support group enabled the continuation of the programme by restricting access to its members only. While the spectacle of Mirin Dajo's self-proclaimed 'undieability' might have contributed to this development, it is important to note that the Dutch artists conveyed a message with eschatological connotations to their audience. The progressive transformation of Mirin Dajo's body into the fluidal realm, his 'local dematerialisation' and 'dissolution into the divine' (Johnan 1949: 34), was regarded as an experimental breakthrough for the coming spiritual ascent of mankind and thus the establishment of world peace as soon as man would begin to realise his spiritual outreach. 'Currents of spiritual powers will flow into us, they will change first ourselves, then those close to us, and they, linked to the whole world, will change all mankind' (p. 43). In May 1948, Mirin Dajo entered his own garden 'Gethsemane' in Winterthur and died of internal bleeding following the consumption of 'a 35 cm long dagger-type instrument tapered to a razor-sharp point' (Egloff 1949: 16–17). The engineer Traugott Egloff – who stood in close contact with some former O.T.O. members in Zurich and copied a relevant handbook of magics, the writings of 'Abramelin' in the 1950s (cf. König 1995: 9–10) – prepared an obituary and considered the deceased to stand as 'an exponent of belief in our poorly believing world' (Egloff 1949: 20). Mirin Dajo's performances in Switzerland were personally – and perhaps conceptually – linked with other developments that have been referred to as 'popularisation [processes] in the discourse of scholarly magic in the twentieth century' (Otto 2018: 89).

In the larger public arena, the message from the 'Corso' stage contributed to another rhetorical framework that was built along the basic tenets of the New Thought movement – Paul Brunton's *Wisdom of the Overself*, for example, was translated into German in 1949. The popular author defends 'the essentially mental character of the world' and guides his disciple-reader towards the realisation 'that he is no longer imprisoned by the body, that an inexpressible spaciousness of being is now his' (Brunton 1943: 23, 238). Mirin Dajo added to the spiritual liberation of the individual a social dimension that related world harmony with unconditional belief. Between the faiths of Yoga practitioners, anthroposophists, and Christians, which

intersect and diverge in this discursive field, the variety theatre provided an open space where these general notions could easily create a common ground.

Thoughts are forces – Ralph Waldo Trine's famous catchphrase (Trine 1897: 24; first German edition in 1905) gained new currency in post-war Germany and provided a leitmotif for stage magic events, as in the opening act of Carl Sundra (alias Karl Nopper) and his magic show. Hans Bender reported an evening at Kurhaus Badenweiler, 4 October 1946, to the police administration of southern Baden who wanted to ascertain whether the *Gaukeleiparagraph* (§ 68 Bad PolStGB) law against paid fortune telling applied here too (Bender 1946, IGPP archives). In his introductory speech, the magician referred to parapsychology as well as to the history of religions, to the experience of yogis and fakirs and to self-education via suggestion. At times the audience was invited to participate in the show that included a demonstration of hypnotic catalepsy with a 16-year-old assistant – according to Bender 'a degrading spectacle that encourages bad instincts' – and an experiment in psychometry. 'Sundra received … objects from the audience and tried to establish situations that occurred in relation to these objects.' Bender states that the magician demonstrated an advanced level of 'telepathic tapping' and recommends further scientific study (Bender 1946, IGPP archives).

Two and a half years later, the University of Heidelberg organised a test of Carl Sundra's magic capacities under the auspices of Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, an art professor with esoteric interests. In this laboratory setting, Sundra did not achieve any remarkable results (Protokoll 1949, IGPP archives). Hartlaub eventually scored better all round and published a collection of essays that include topics like 'Magism as a power in art production', the 'Problem with the term "superstition"', and a general introduction to 'the magic world-view'. Like the magician on stage, the academic appeals to the authority of science whose progress now has embarked into the realm of 'the inexplicable'. To this end, he presents an extensive selection of disciplines that supposedly back his claim: physics, biology, parapsychology, Jungian psychology, folklore studies, archaeology, history of arts and religions, psychology of religion, ethnology, philosophy, and theology, both Catholic and Protestant (Hartlaub 1951: 33–8). In a later article for Bender's journal, the *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, Hartlaub envisages the teleological scenario of a struggle between materialism and spirituality, culminating in the re-enchantment of metaphysics and

Fig. 1. Carl Sundra's extrasensory perception is examined by a journalist of the *Badische Neueste Nachrichten* in Karlsruhe. Photo: Horst Schlesiger by permission of Stadtarchiv Karlsruhe (8/BA Schlesiger A4/21/3/9A).

practice when magic will be reinstated through occultism and its successor, parapsychology:

> While enlightenment in its latest form, that of atheist and Marxist propaganda, has arrived in the East and Southeast only recently, Western high civilisations begin already to stop and think things over. This 'revision of the enlightenment' … applies particularly to those positions that seemed most radically 'done away' with: meta-religious and profane Magism, and its occultist succession. (Hartlaub 1960/1: 88)

For some in Sundra's theatre audiences, academic patterns of plausibility translated into forms of religious experience. A doctoral student of biology in Erlangen reports how the magician's tapping into the memory of objects evoked for her 'the unity of the whole living world'. The stage performance could trigger 'insights into transcendental processes' and thus orientate individual religious pathways (Koettnitz 1996: 146–7).[2] On the one hand, the presentation of magic inspired a conservative 'revision of the enlightenment' and a critique of modernity; on the other hand, it contributed to late twentieth-century developments of religious individualisation.

The above examples illustrate how the meaning of 'magic' is constantly questioned and redefined from within the field, involving three distinguishable and interacting groups:

1. stage producers who may include, but are not always identical with, the magician;
2. expert witnesses who evaluate authenticity and introduce their opinions into public discourse;
3. audiences who associate individual expectations with stage acts and emphasise meaningful experience.

The professional interplay of expectation and satisfaction between groups 1 and 3 shares basic features with a comparable 'exhibitionary complex' that has been addressed in regard to British and North American spiritualist

2 The author does not mention Carl Sundra's name, however, it was possible to identify the anonymous 'clairvoyant' by the unique pseudonym of his assistant 'Agyra Mara' (Koettnitz 1996: 144).

entertainments of the nineteenth century. As generally in stage magic, the culture of science enjoyed a prominent position in spiritualist séances and stage shows: the audience is attracted by a 'phenomenon that escaped normality to enter the dimension of curiosity and wonder'; the producers 'mingled scientific lectures with stage magic'; and both stage producers and audiences inserted their 'religious and spiritual viewpoints within a positivistic and scientific framework' (Natale 2016: 4). This preoccupation with scientific explanation, experiment, and evidence on the stage platform not only bolstered religious statements of all groups about the meaning and authenticity of the event; it also informed these belief claims on a conceptual basis.

In order to access the positionings and placements of scientific and religious claims within the interactional setting of magic performance, it is crucial to take the 'substantial ambiguity' of the show elements into account. 'Claims of authenticity' coexist 'with a spectacular frame' and 'rational explanation' accompanies 'extraordinary experience' (Natale 2016: 9–10). Astonishment and wonder were integral parts of awe-inspiring, persuasive aesthetics – including the sensual production of transcendence; the notion of a scientific lecture applied to the style, technique, and authority of the speaker rather than to positivist curricula; on the whole, the framework endorsed the content that it held within it. While or after being immersed and inside the created experience, the audience could engage with 'different, potentially divergent interpretations of the event' (p. 9). An expert observer like Bender fully realised that under such conditions the persuasiveness of a religious message would depend on its rhetorical openness, as he emphasises in his account of a test with Kurt Trampler, a busy spiritual healer of the 1950s (on Trampler, see Mildenberger 2005–7):

> Dr Trampler starts his treatment with a lecture in front of the assembled patients, describing illness as a disturbance in the connection to the creative powers of the Divine from which depends the balance of life forces. … The analysis of the patients' belief revealed a dominance of transference processes and dispositions for faith that are … far less directed at Trampler as a person than on the mission announced by him, which is extensive enough to take in the most different imaginations and expectations. It activates forces of faith that manifest on all levels, from the creation of true religious trust to the obscure magic anticipation of a miracle to the simple conviction that it is from here where help has to come. (Bender 1959: 143–4)

It would be misleading to adopt the distinction between 'truly religious', 'obscure magic', and 'simple conviction' that Bender obviously based on a contemporary – and today obsolete – typology of religion and magic. A detailed report of the spiritual healing experiment provides fascinating insights into the non-specific use of a dynamistic terminology derived from phenomenology of religion; for example, 'charged with Mana' (*manageladen*) for either positive or negative affection, or the 'somehow numinous character' of the 'affective field' created by the healer. In this context, the attribute 'magic' refers to the healer's strong efficiency in relation to his emotional and affective force (Strauch 1958: 62). However, Bender's categories still point to different modes of expressing belief in explicit or implicit ways. The capacity of evoking and directing emotion, of creating bodily, grounded evidence for belief via expectation and imagination is certainly a prominent feature of a healing performance. But, as we have seen, the same structural interaction processes apply to a number of other settings, including stage magic. Since parapsychology turned out to be an important voice in the second group – the expert evaluation of magic agency – the following section will discuss briefly its position in the religious field and preliminarily investigate related conceptions as well as the impending risk of superstition.

Science, imagination, and folklore magic

Bender's description of telepathy as a mode of interaction with magically directed, that is, invisible forces could be considered a contemporary scientification of magic. This is partly due to the dynamistic explanation model of forces and powers that dominated the discourse in the phenomenology of religion (e.g. van der Leeuw 1986: 23–8). The invisible and supposedly primordial force of Mana has been portrayed as Mesmerist fluidum, or explained as electricity – and, as such, it provided a metaphor that borrowed its plausibility from physics (cf. Gladigow 1991). Furthermore, parapsychology established itself as the scientific discipline devoted to the study of telepathy, considered to be one of the two main types of extrasensory perception (the other, directed at objects, was clairvoyance). Since a viewpoint like that of Hartlaub would directly associate the 'essence of the magical' with the 'results and problems of parapsychological research' (Bender 1964: 2), magic itself became subject to the scientific tools of parapsychology; namely, to experiment, taxonomies and instrumentation (cf. Asprem 2011: 651–3).

A compelling argument for the institutionalisation of parapsychology in post-war Germany was the emphasis on *Psychohygiene*, the German rendering of the term 'mental health', which assigned societal functions to the research at the margins of psychology. The related discourse displayed strong affinities to, if not a continuation of, earlier arguments that 'presented [parapsychology] as a possible saviour of Western civilisation amidst the impending dangers of a loss of religion and the degeneration of society' (Asprem 2011: 647). Bender saw the principal challenge of his research in maintaining the boundaries of 'a beneficial enlightenment' against immoral and criminal superstition attacks on one side and Lenin's materialistic theory of causality on the other.[3] Experiencing the 'essence of true mediumism' protects, according to Bender, against 'dubious procedures of counselling' and the removal of 'phantasms' allows for a transference of the 'fascinans of magic … into a "room of discretion"' (Bender 1959: 8). It is thus not only that magic settles within Rudolf Otto's famous categories of numinous experience; moreover, in alignment with the ethical mission of mental health, true magic would help to get rid of superstition. To consider parapsychology as a religion of its own is certainly going too far. However, the legitimation of the discipline was derived at least partly from the fact that it claimed to take over an ethical model position from religion and thus entered the religious field as a competitive player. The curious point in Bender's strategy, though, is placing the element of magic at the centre of his argument.

However, it is possible that shared religious world views provided a bridge between the different milieus that came out of pre-war 'occulture'. The following considerations about these implicit notions of religion will begin with a 'particularly persuasive aspect of scientific activity' created by technological instruments that translate 'the confusing mishmash of nature to simple, ordered signs' (Asprem 2011: 653). Technology has been interpreted not only by scientists in the laboratory, but sometimes even more efficiently by ordinary folk. In the 1920s, deradiation or shielding devices started to appear that manifestly sported references to the material culture of technology. A study from the late 1950s lists 51 different models that were available on German and Austrian markets (Schäfer 1959: 196–7). These objects

3 In context, this anti-communist flavour of Bender's argument aimed to discredit Degesa, the German Society for Protection against Superstition that counted among its various members Theodor W. Adorno (cf. Schneider 2016: 293–4), see also below.

were popular items invested with protective value for persons and livestock and used as a safeguard against potentially dangerous terrestrial radiation. Some were designed with a chemical approach in mind, like the 'Guardian Angel' box that contained 12 bottles of formic acid labelled with 'Poison', 'Ray-death', and 'Leadzinn',[4] all connected with each other through 40 copper coils (p. 198, fig. 43). The 'Ether Regulator' invented by Franz Wetzel, who also named it 'Terrella' after a similar looking apparatus designed by Karl Reichenbach, father of the Od force, favoured obviously general assumptions about the mode of operation of invisible forces (see Fig. 2).

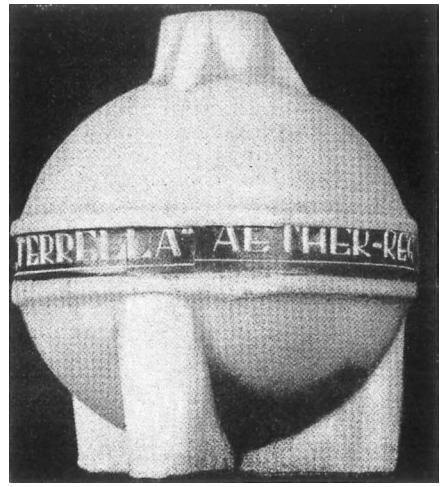


Fig. 2. Wetzel's Ether Regulator (Terella). Schäfer 1959: fig. 38.

Wetzel was president of *Verband für Ruten- und Pendelkunde*, the Austrian and German Association for Rod and Pendulum Sciences, the leading organisation of dowsers and radiesthetists, from 1948 until he passed away in 1956. Parapsychology and radiesthetics were both disciplines devoted to measuring and classifying invisible forces and they had strong conceptual and personal ties with each other. Wetzel's obituary in *Neue Wissenschaft* highlights his religious curriculum vita that led him from scientific doubts about Catholicism in his youth to a vision of Christ in World War I and finally to the notion of 'Transphysis', viz., 'deep layers … in the cosmos and man that no longer stand under the categories of space and time' (Frei 1956: 188). Wetzel himself describes how his involvement with a nuclear research project in Austria led to a confrontation with black magic (Wetzel 1956). Transphysis provided, according to Wetzel, a conceptual solution to the question of whether man is 'a psychocentric being, like the tradition of all religions requires', or if Stalin's dogma of materialism, which also happened to be the 'state religion of the Third Reich' would prevail (Wetzel 1955: 4–5).

4 The latter term is my individual attempt to render the German creation 'Bleitin' into English.

Since parapsychology experimentally substantiated the existence of forces beyond physical causality, the whole cosmos could be considered to be a form of transphysis, a contact zone between metaphysis and physis, 'floating in and pervaded with the realm of God' (p. 17). In the 'sea of ether' (p. 14), the 'natural objects around us arise out of their spiritual urimages, and, directed by mental forces of formation, enter … visibility' (p. 3). Adopting a religious rhetoric, this tableau participated in a larger discourse of nature-philosophy that related to Edmund Husserl's student Hedwig Conrad-Martius and her teleology of nature (p. 12; cf. Conrad-Martius 1944).

It seems no risky speculation to guess that in Wetzel's view, his ether regulator did not represent an actual physical resource. Mental forces had to be applied if one wanted to confine the negative effects of harmful radiation. Wetzel combined the 'influential epistemological tradition of urimage/image-representation as access to truth' (Grieser 2015: 461) with the iconic repertoire of mid-twentieth-century technology. Technological objects serve as a focus of the imagination and thus structure access to the invisible layers of transphysis. It is tempting to shift this notion a little bit: 'resolute imagination is the beginning of all magical work' (Douval 1956: 70), says the magician Henri Eduard Douval, echoing Paracelsus.

At this point, it is important for the purpose of this study that 'imagination' is not merely considered a part of magic procedure. As such, it would suggest a substantial integration of Douval's reference to Paracelsus into the esoteric tradition of 'vis imaginativa' that Antoine Faivre (2000) selected to represent Western magic symbolism, or of Sundra's presentation of psychometry into the theosophical variation of imagination as clairvoyance stressed by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2017). There is no doubt that specialised knowledge and techniques of both these currents inform the notions of the German protagonists. However, as an analytical term, imagination refers to much more dynamic moments of religious and magic practice in which various aesthetic configurations at an individual level situationally intersect and organise meaningful experience. The imaginative act continuously accompanies sensory perception. It proceeds with an actualisation of available symbolic resources that involves all the senses, not only the visual ones, and associates selected sensational forms with relevant emotions, attitudes, and arguments (cf. Grieser 2015: 462–3). While some German magicians of the 1950s stood more firmly in the esoteric strand, they also had recourse to contemporary cultural techniques and methods that influenced their notions about the meanings and effects of imagination, as will be discussed below.

When deradiation devices and Od forces were meaningless in regard to negative influences, many people resorted to witchcraft for a plausible explanation of a run of bad luck.[5] In 1953, around 70 so-called 'witch trials' were held in the courts, a number that inspired – among other reasons – the foundation of the Degesa, the German Society for Protection against Superstition (Schneider 2016: 281–2). In the course of the criminal investigation, a 1950 edition of a grimoire and 'magic-sympathetic house treasure' (cf. Peuckert 1957: 177) from the early nineteenth century, the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses*, was brought to the attention of the public media. The success story of the book goes back to Johann Scheible's famous 'collection of old "miraculous and curious" German literature, *Das Kloster*', from 1845 to 1849 (Davies 2009: 123). In the 1920s and 1930s, 'at least five publishers were producing editions' (p. 248) and the book played a role in a number of court cases. Beginning in 1950, Planet publishers in Brunswick released several editions of no less than 9,000 prints. The book sold well and in 1955, only 200 copies were left in stock (Oberstaatsanwalt Braunschweig 1955, Nds STA WF).

Initiated and supported within the network of the Degesa, a highly mediatised lawsuit against Planet publishers united 'the rather unlikely coalition of those inspired by anti-clericalism, professional medical hegemony, and Catholic authority' (Davies 2009: 259). In 1956, the defence lawyers proposed three expert witnesses who should 'assess the question whether – "the Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses" is a manual of superstitious healing or if it represents real occult writing and folk literature' (Oberstaatsanwalt Braunschweig 1956, Nds STA WF). They assured the support of Will-Erich Peuckert, a professor of folklore studies in Göttingen, to testify in favour of the latter position. With Hans Geisler, they came up with the chief editor of *Okkulte Stimme*, a journal that belonged to the Löwen printing house, the parent house of Planet publishers, until both Geisler and the journal moved to Freiburg in October 1958. Later, the journal evolved under the title *Esotera* into a leading voice of the New Age scene in Germany. The third candidate, the bookseller Richard Schikowski in Berlin, was just building

5 Herbert Schäfer (1959: 27–125) gives a tendentious overview. For further references, see Davies (2009: 252–61, 345–7). A classic anthropological fieldwork by Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980) offers rich material from France that points to comparable, if not similar rural contexts.

up his position as an insider authority of magic knowledge. Schikowski's publishing activities focused on literature concerning 'high magic' in the interpretation of the *Fraternitas Saturni*, an important German offspring of the O.T.O. (cf. Hakl 2006). The proximity of a group that 'has never sought the spotlight of publicity' (p. 382) to this public affair allows for some interesting insights concerning pragmatic choices in conceptualising and publicising magic. In a handbook published by Schikowski, Hans Arnold, aka H. Atkinson-Scarter or Ray Atkinson, considered the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* a 'hot potato' and denounced the 'truly American publicity fuss' that could not 'earn much sympathy for the book' (Atkinson-Scarter 1960: 25). However, although it was Lenin who repeatedly brought up the dictum 'learn from the enemy', Hans Arnold and others studied the American way and experimented with new marketing strategies.

Magical handbooks, education, and experience

Until recently, the bookshop of Richard Schikowski had maintained a high profile across the whole of Germany's esoteric scene (cf. Scharna *et al.* 1985). This fame is partly based upon a book series that the publishing house launched in 1954, entitled 'The Magical Handbooks'. The collection features, on the one hand, re-editions of classical textbooks – for example, William Maxwell's *De Medicina Magnetica* (1631/9),[6] a manual of natural magic that, perhaps because of the title, had been already noticed in Scottish Mesmerism during the 1840s (Lang 1843: 1–2) and was prepared for publication by Ernst Issberner-Haldane, a *völkisch* Yoga teacher, after the German Scheible edition of 1855 (Maxwell 1954). Considering the importance of Abramelin's book of practical magic for Aleister Crowley's pursuit of the 'Holy Guardian Angel' (cf. König 1995: 19–45; Davies 2009: 180–2; Pasi 2012: 70–3), the decision to re-translate the English version consultated by Crowley – which itself was created from a French version of the German original[7] – is not so far-fetched as the parapsychologist Gebhard Frei complains in his review of the magical handbooks (Frei 1959, on Beecken 1957). Hans Arnold prefaced a significantly abridged version of

6 There is little known about the author except that he probably sat in Robert Fludd's parlour in London between 1631 and 1637 (cf. Kassell 2007: 100–2).

7 The earliest print available is again a Scheible edition of 1853 that relates to a now-lost edition of Peter Hammer publishers, Cologne 1725.

Helena P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* and stressed the importance of her life and teachings for occultism and parapsychology (Arnold 1958).

On the other hand, the handbook series offered genuine writings of authors close to the *Fraternitas Saturni* who cover topics like Tarot, astrology, magic spells, clairvoyance and Tattva visualisation, and 'oriental' magic. From the periodical of the brotherhood, *Blätter für angewandte okkulte Lebenskunst* (1950–63), it is evident that the independent acquisition of knowledge about these questions was required from its members, who numbered about a hundred initiates at the time. However, the publications of Schikowski were far more widely distributed and the same authors, such as Hans Arnold, Ernst Issberner-Haldane, Willy Schrödter, Karl Spiesberger (Fig. 3), and Joachim Winckelmann, contributed to journals like *Neue Wissenschaft* and *Okkulte Stimme*. Both Schrödter and Winckelmann compiled dictionaries that represented the history of magic in convenient and accessible registers; Winckelmann had published instalments of an 'Occult ABC' as appendices to *Okkulte Stimme* before he united the issues into a Schikowski handbook (Winckelmann 1956). *Neue Wissenschaft* mirrored this trend with a 'Parapsychological Dictionary', commencing in January 1952.

In order to appreciate the contribution of this publication strategy to the discursive field of popular magic, two points need to be considered. Firstly, when magic circles realised that a public debate about superstition tended to blame occultism and folklore magic for Germany following a path 'into a racist totalitarian state' (Davies 2009: 252), they adopted the response of parapsychology that emphasised *Psychohygiene* or mental health. This approach translated into a new importance of 'high magic' as a key to individual ethics, to be obtained through inner knowledge and insight. As a general rule, the commitment to the *Fraternitas Saturni* meant converging with the 'laws of harmony' that are 'anchored in the cosmos' and perceived as 'reflections on earth' and 'revelations in nature' (Gregorius 1950: 1,2). The initiates thus take part in 'a spiritual brotherhood … that consciously works for the evolution of mankind. Thoughts are forces!' (1,7), as Gregor A. Gregorius, aka Eugen Grosche, the founder of the brotherhood, reminds them. The achievement of this goal required a collaboration with academia, namely the fields of comparative religion (cf. 2,9) and parapsychology. However, the brotherhood understood this liaison primarily as an educational project directed at the common and ignorant folk. 'The circles behind us always deprecated the idea of giving ancient wisdom [directly, TH] into the hands of the people where it always causes only harm. Therefore we demand on every occasion

Fig. 3. Karl Spiesberger (Fra Eratus) illuminates a light bulb using his 'Od-magnetic force' (Spiesberger 1955a: 11).

the establishment of professorships in parapsychology and related occult areas' (2,8).

This educational impetus called for a well-monitored popularisation of academic knowledge about magic. The print number of the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* had demonstrated the market potential that lies behind a sales strategy that allows for the appeal of pulp literature. What if the product did not serve superstition, but rather guided the reader towards the magical imagination? For this task, no one was better qualified than Hans Arnold. He wrote his first book for Eden publishers in Berlin, *Der Blonde Assassine* (The Blond Assassin) in 1937, later contributed to a series of '50 Pfennig' crime thrillers, and, after the war, moved to biographical portraits of astonishing figures from history such as Cleopatra, Madame Pompadour, and Rasputin. In 1958 for the same publisher he submitted two paperbacks; one entitled *Magie, Liebestränke, Hypnose* (Magic, Love Potions, Hypnosis), the other *Hexenwahn und Hexenprozesse* (Witch Mania and Witch Trials). The latter came with a print run of 20,000 copies that more than doubled the previous model title of Planet publishers. Arnold signed both his books with his artist pseudonym Ray Atkinson. He enticed the customer with a cover and illustrations that promised a good dose of sex-and-crime pulp history (see Fig. 4). However, the first two chapters of 'Witch Mania and Witch Trials' proceed with a basic narrative type that sets up the history of magic with Babylonian astrology, gnosis, and Neoplatonism (cf. Atkinson 1958: 6–18). The author later refers to the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* and remarks: 'Still today, rural people often apply sympathetic remedies and actually achieve certain successes. They content themselves with the results and do not think about the fact the success was caused by autosuggestion, the force of their own imagination' (p. 182). It is obvious from product placement, layout, and content that these books represent an educational attempt to reach out to the target group of folklore magic.

The second point relates to the importance of applied experience that dominates in the teaching methods of various textbooks, not exclusively in the Schikowski series. Between 1954 and 1956, Henri Eduard Douval, for example, introduced twelve volumes of practical magic. He claimed to provide a systematic learning programme for the apprentice that consists of a few hundred body exercises related to, for example, the use of drugs, Od body training, meditation, the training of the senses, or solar plexus resonance. Neither the religious leanings and ritual preferences of individual readers nor the different perspectives of theosophy, parapsychology, or mentalism actually mattered here. The development of magical skills required first and foremost a set of body techniques that may appear embedded within different narratives. As a consequence, the self-teaching curricula of Douval or the magical handbooks of the *Fraternitas Saturni* were successfully passed with the embodiment of knowledge:

Fig. 4. The book covers of Hans Arnold's 'pulp' histories of witchcraft and magic (Eden Verlag, 1958).

> … it is not absolutely true that magical forces can be acquired always or merely through initiation into antique mysteries or their modern branches. Many of these rites are certainly very useful for the achievement of magical power or for spiritual inspiration. However, the very disciplines prescribed for the adept at his initiation into the mysteries have been and still are the principal cause of bodily change in which the success of initiation consists. (Fra Peregregius 1959: 63)

Conclusion

In post-war Germany, the fields of stage magic and folklore magic came under two different kinds of public pressure. First, a structural transformation of the profession reduced the importance of the stage; second, a campaign of disenchantment against superstition meant to dispel the demons of the past and criminalise ritual practices in popular culture. These processes were commented upon and evaluated by parapsychologists who introduced their own category of magic in order to discriminate between 'false' superstition and 'true' effects of non-physical causes. The scientific assessment drew on dynamistic models of forces that were plausible starting points in the phenomenology of religion and on a philosophical model of 'transphysis' that naturalised manifestations of metaphysical realities in the physical world. The individual imagination organised the access to such 'numinous fields' of magic which could heal, protect, or harmonise the subject in relation to invisible forces. This methodical approach proved to be compatible with the paradigms of 'high magic', whose practitioners, in response to the public debate, set up ways of popularising their knowledge without the mediation of the stage. Since any evidence of invisible forces required an experience of transcendental qualities, the embodiment of knowledge through exercise and imagination took up a prominent space in their teachings.

Tilman Hannemann is scientific assistant for the study of religions at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Oldenburg, Germany. After his PhD of 2003 concerned with legal and religious history in the Maghrib, he began to focus on European history and the age of late enlightenment and romanticism. Religion and scientific discourse (Mesmerism), aesthetics and materiality of religion, religious learning and transmission are his main fields of interest. His current research explores interdependencies between popular and academic understandings of religion between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries.

References

Archives

Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene (IGPP) Archives, Freiburg i. Br., Germany
E/23 1200 Gutachterliche Tätigkeit von Hans Bender
Hans Bender an das Landeskriminalpolizeiamt Baden, Freiburg i. Br., 30 October 1946
Protokoll einer Veranstaltung mit Karl Sundra im Hörsaale der Univ. Augenklinik Heidelberg, 26 Februar 1949
Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv, Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel (Nds STA WF), Germany
62 Nds Fb. 3 Nr. 5/4 Strafsache vor dem Landgericht Braunschweig gegen die verantwortlichen Leiter des Planet-Verlages in Braunschweig, Handakte Band 1
Oberstaatsanwalt Braunschweig, Bericht über die Wiederaufnahme des Verfahrens, 4 May 1955
Oberstaatsanwalt Braunschweig an den Niedersächsischen Minister für Justiz, 8 June 1956

Primary literary texts

Arnold, Hans, 1958. 'Zur Einführung', in Helena Petrowna Blawatsky, *Die Geheimlehre: Das heilige Buch der theosophischen Brüderschaft*, ed. Victor Eckert, Die magischen Handbücher, 8 (Berlin, Schikowski), pp. 5–20
Atkinson, Ray [Hans Arnold], 1958. *Hexenwahn und Hexenprozesse*, Drei Türme Bücher, 19 (Berlin, Eden)
Atkinson-Scarter, H. [Hans Arnold], 1960. *Sympathie-Magie und Zaubermedizin: Ein Handbuch zur magischen Krankheitsbehandlung*, Die magischen Handbücher, 12 (Berlin, Schikowski)
Beecken, Johann Richard (ed.), 1957. *Die Heilige Magie des Abramelin: Die Überlieferung des Abraham von Worms*, Die magischen Handbücher, 6 (Berlin, Schikowski)
Bender, Hans, 1959. 'Wunder und Magie als Wege der Heilung', in *Wege der Heilung: Eine Vortragsreihe*, Das Heidelberger Studio (Stuttgart, Kröner), pp. 133–47
——1964. 'Gustav F. Hartlaub zum Gedächtnis', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 7(1), pp. 1–6
Brunton, Paul, 1943. *The Wisdom of the Overself*, 3rd edn (London, Rider)
Conrad-Martius, Hedwig, 1944. *Der Selbstaufbau der Natur: Entelechien und Energien* (Hamburg, Goverts)

Douval, Henri Eduard [Herbert Döhren], 1956. *Magische Phänomene: Eine umfassende Einführung in die Welt magischer Manifestationen; Nachschöpfung in methodischen Experimenten; Erschließung des 'Reiches des Magischen'*, Bücher der praktischen Magie, 10 (Freiburg i. Br., Bauer)

Egloff, Traugott, 1949. 'In memoriam Mirin Dajo', in Mirin Dajo, *Leben, Glaube, Tod, Klärungsversuch* (Zurich, Furttal), pp. 12–20

Fra Peregregius, 1959. *Tattwa, Hellsehen, Astralwallen*, Die magischen Handbücher, 9 (Berlin, Schikowski)

Frei, Gebhard 1956. 'Dr. Franz Wetzel zum Gedächtnis', *Neue Wissenschaft*, 6(5/6), pp. 186–8

——1959. 'Die magischen Handbücher' [review]', *Neue Wissenschaft*, 8(6), p. 283

Gregorius, Gregor A. [Eugen Grosche], 1950. 'Die Systematik des okkulten Studiums', *Blätter für angewandte okkulte Lebenskunst*, 1–2, pp. 1–8, 1–12

Hartlaub, Georg Friedrich, 1951. *Das Unerklärliche: Studien zum magischen Weltbild* (Stuttgart, Koehler)

——1960/1. 'Parapsychologie als Revision der Aufklärung', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 4, pp. 81–99

Johnan [Johann de Groot], 1949. 'Mirin Dajos Untötbarkeit', in Mirin Dajo, *Leben, Glaube, Tod, Klärungsversuch* (Zurich, Furttal), pp. 28–37

Koettnitz, Lore, 1996. 'Begegnung mit dem Paranormalen: Berichte und Überlegungen', *Grenzgebiete der Wissenschaft*, 45(2), pp. 143–53

Lang, William, 1843. *Mesmerism. Its History, Phenomena, and Practice: With Reports of Cases Developed in Scotland* (Edinburgh *et al.*, Fraser, Orb, and Curry)

Maxwell, William, 1954. *Magisch-magnetische Heilkunde*, ed. Ernst Issberner-Haldane, Die magischen Handbücher, 1 (Berlin, Schikowski)

Peuckert, Will-Erich, 1957. 'Das sechste und siebente Buch Mosis', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 76, pp. 163–87

Ringger, Peter, 1960. 'Radio-Interview mit einem Magier', *Neue Wissenschaft*, 9(1), p. 41

Schäfer, Herbert, 1959. *Der Okkulttäter: Hexenbanner – Magischer Heiler – Erdentstrahler* (Hamburg, Kriminalistik)

Spiesberger, Karl, 1955a. 'Ein interessanter Experimentalbericht: Sichtbarmachung der odmagnetischen Kraft', *Okkulte Stimme*, 6(1), pp. 10–12

——1955b. *Runenmagie: Handbuch der Runenkunde* (Berlin, Schikowski)

——1958. *Runenexerzitien für Jedermann: Die Erhaltung der Gesundheit, die Erlangung von Erfolg und magischer Kräfte durch die Kraft der Runen*, 2nd edn (Freiburg i. Br., Bauer)

Strauch, Inge, 1958. 'Zur Frage der "Geistigen Heilung"', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 2, pp. 41–64

'The invulnerable man', 1947. *Life*, pp. 103–6

Trine, Ralph Waldo, 1897. *In Tune with the Infinite: Or, Fullness of Peace, Power, and Plenty* (New York, Crowell)

Van der Leeuw, Gerardus, 1986. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton University Press), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400858026>
Wetzel, Franz, 1955. 'Transphysis: Die Brücke zwischen Natur und Übernatur', *Natur und Kultur*, 47, pp. 2–17
——1956. 'Zwei Fälle von schwarzer Magie', *Neue Wissenschaft*, 6(5/6), pp. 188–90
Winckelmann, Joachim, 1956, *ABC der Geheimwissenschaften*, Die magischen Handbücher, 4 (Berlin, Schikowski)

Secondary literature

Asprem, Egil, 2011. 'Parapsychology: naturalising the supernatural, re-enchanting science', in *Religion and the Authority of Science*, eds. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion, 3 (Leiden and Boston, Brill), pp. 633–70, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004187917.i-924.189>
Blum, Iris, 2016. *Mächtig geheim: Einblicke in die Psychophysische Gesellschaft 1945–2009* (Zurich, Limmat)
Bochinger, Christoph, 1995. '*New Age' und moderne Religion: Religionswissenschaftliche Analysen*, 2nd edn (Gütersloh, Kaiser)
Davies, Owen, 2009. *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford University Press)
Faivre, Antoine, 2000. 'Vis imaginativa: a study of some aspects of the magical imagination and its mythical foundations', in *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism* (Albany, State University of New York Press), pp. 99–136
Favret-Saada, Jeanne, 1980. *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Cambridge University Press)
Gladigow, Burkhard, 1991. 'Naturwissenschaftliche Modellvorstellungen in der Religionswissenschaft zwischen den Weltkriegen', in *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik*, eds. Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi (Marburg, Diagonal), pp. 177–92
Gossman, Lionel, 2009. *Brownshirt Princess: A Study of the 'Nazi Conscience'* (Cambridge, Open Book), doi: <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0003>
Grieser, Alexandra, 2015. 'Imaginationen des Nichtwissens: Zur Hubble Space Imagery und den Figurationen des schönen Universums zwischen Wissenschaft, Kunst und Religion', in *Religion – Imagination – Ästhetik: Vorstellungs- und Sinneswelten in Religion und Kultur*, eds. Lucia Traut and Annette Wilke, CSRRW, 7 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), pp. 451–85
Gründer, René, 2012. 'Runengymnastik: Die soziale Konstruktion eines esoterischen Körper-Kultes', in *Körper, Sport und Religion: Zur Soziologie religiöser Verkörperungen*, eds. Robert Gugutzer and Moritz Böttcher (Wiesbaden, Springer VS), pp. 341–56, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18976-5_15>

Hakl, Hans Thomas, 2006. 'Fraternitas Saturni', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden and Boston, Brill), pp. 379–82

Hanegraaff, Wouter J., 2017. 'The theosophical imagination', *Correspondences*, 5, pp. 3–39

Höller, Hannes, 1999. *European Jewish Magicians 1933–1945* (Düsseldorf)

Kassell, Lauren, 2007. 'Magic, alchemy and the medical economy in early modern England: the case of Robert Fludd's magnetical medicine', in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, c. 1450–c. 1850*, eds. Mark S. R. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 88–107

König, Peter-R., 1995. *Abramelin & Co.*, Hiram Edition, 20 (München, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen)

Larsen, Timothy, 2013. 'E.B. Tylor, religion and anthropology', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 46(3), pp. 467–85, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087412000039>

Lux, Anna, 2013. '"Vom spielenden Gelingen": Der Parapsychologe Hans Bender (1907–1991) und die mediale Öffentlichkeit', *Historische Anthropologie*, 21(3), pp. 343–66

Lux, Anna, and Sylvia Paletschek (eds.), 2016. *Okkultismus im Gehäuse: Institutionalisierungen der Parapsychologie im 20. Jahrhundert im internationalen Vergleich*, Okkulte Moderne, 3 (Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter Oldenbourg), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466638>

Mildenberger, Florian, 2005–7. 'Heil und Heilstrom: Die Karrieren des Dr. Kurt Trampler (1904–1969)', *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 47–49, pp. 149–62

Natale, Simone, 2016. *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press)

Otto, Bernd-Christian, 2015. 'A Catholic "Magician" historicises "Magic": Éliphas Lévi's Histoire de la Magie', in *History and Religion: Narrating a Religious Past*, eds. Bernd-Christian Otto, Susanne Rau and Jörg Rüpke, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, 68 (Berlin and Boston, de Gruyter), pp. 419–43, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110445954-026>

——2018. 'Das Motiv der "Perfektionierung" im gelehrtenmagischen Diskurs des 20. Jahrhunderts', in *Die Perfektionierung des Menschen? Religiöse und ethische Perspektiven*, eds. Thomas Bahne and Katharina Waldner, Vorlesungen des Interdisziplinären Forums Religion der Universität Erfurt, 13 (Münster, Aschendorff), pp. 81–105, 305–19

Otto, Bernd-Christian, and Michael Stausberg (eds.), 2014. *Defining Magic: A Reader* (London and New York, Routledge)

Pasi, Marco, 2012. 'Varieties of magical experience: Aleister Crowley's views on occult practice', in *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, eds. Henrik Bogdan and Martin P. Starr (New York, Oxford University Press), pp. 53–87, doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199863075.003.0003>

Scharna, Michael *et al.* (eds.), 1985. 'Europas bekannteste Buchhandlung: Richard Schikowski', in *Berlin okkult: Der erste esoterische Stadtführer der Welt* (Berlin, Frieling), pp. 76–9

Schneider, Martin, 2016. 'Soldaten der Aufklärung: Die "Deutsche Gesellschaft Schutz vor Aberglauben" und ihr Kampf gegen Parapsychologie und Okkultismus (1953–1963)', in *Okkultismus im Gehäuse: Institutionalisierungen der Parapsychologie im 20. Jahrhundert im internationalen Vergleich*, eds. Anna Lux and Sylvia Paletschek, Okkulte Moderne, 3 (Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter Oldenbourg), pp. 277–306, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110466638-011>

Treitel, Corinna, 2004. *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore MD, The Johns Hopkins University Press)

Wedemeyer-Kolwe, Bernd, 2009. 'Runengymnastik: Von völkischer Körperkultur zur alternativen Selbsterfahrungspraktik?', in *Völkisch und national: Zur Aktualität alter Denkmuster im 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Uwe Puschner and G. Ulrich Großmann (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft), pp. 329–40

Wolffram, Heather, 2009. *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870–1939*, Clio Medica, 88 (Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789042027299>

The paranormal

Conceptualizations in previous research

https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.84823

CRISTOFFER TIDELIUS

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

In this article, I explore previous conceptualizations of 'the paranormal' within religious studies and the social sciences. Introducing some statistics on paranormal variables in Western populations, I argue that the empirical data make a strong case for future studies of paranormal variables, as well as warranting conceptual clarification. Sketching an outline of previous conceptualizations of 'the paranormal', I conclude that definitions tend to stress that purportedly paranormal phenomena transgress the boundaries of scientific explanation, as well as demonstrate a degree of tension towards both mainstream or institutionalized science and religion. Lastly, I present the main contribution of the article: an attempt at a new working definition of the term 'the paranormal' based on the conceptualizations reviewed, encompassing substantial and discursive components and, possibly, functional ones.

Studies suggesting that paranormal beliefs are on the rise are several, and there are signs of longitudinal growth (Bader *et al.* 2011: 189–201; Sjödin 1995 and 2001; Partridge 2004: 58–9). Paranormal, esoteric and occult ideas are further increasingly being disseminated in popular culture, resulting in what the media scholar Annette Hill (2011) has described as a 'paranormal turn' in culture, or what the religious studies scholar Christopher Partridge has called 'occulture': that is, a pool of elements through which esoteric, occult and paranormal ideas, motifs and practices are formulated and reformulated. According to Hill (p. 170), the growth of paranormal media, such as ghost hunting shows or paranormal romantic fiction, reflects a transfer of paranormal motifs 'from the margins to mainstream', which is reflected in a rise in belief in paranormal phenomena: 'polls around the world indicate 50 per cent of the global population believe in at least one paranormal phenomenon such as extrasensory experiences, hauntings, or witchcraft'.

I would argue that any attempt to study the increase, decline or change overall of paranormal beliefs, or their significance to those who hold them,

Approaching Esotericism and Mysticism: Cultural Influences
Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis, 29 (2020), pp. 216–38

needs to address the meaning of the category of 'the paranormal'[1] itself. What does it denote, and entail? Is it possible to differentiate the category from, for instance, religion and spirituality? My own PhD project is on the distribution and contents of paranormal beliefs, practices and experiences in contemporary Sweden, using a variety of methods. Conceptualizing 'the paranormal' is thus key, and any reasonable conceptualization should, arguably, be anchored in previous attempts. This article addresses this very need to conceptualize and elaborate 'the paranormal' as a working category. At this point, I would merely like to hint at the resulting conceptualization, namely as a category of narratives, beliefs, practices and/or experiences relating to purported phenomena transgressing the boundaries of conventional, mainstream and/or institutionalized science and religion, with some degree of tension to the latter two. Indeed, the very prefix *para* in the word paranormal implies something that would go beyond the normal, or normality.

One aim of the article is to provide a general overview of the concept of 'the paranormal', as it has been used previously within religious studies and the social sciences. The article could be classified partly as a conceptual review, insofar as authors' contributions to the concept of the paranormal are assessed. The main aim is, however, to suggest a working definition of 'the paranormal' for future research, derived as a synthesis from previous conceptualizations. A delimitation of the article's content is the exclusion of emic and invested conceptualizations from actors or groups mainly interested in the truth-claims or reality of paranormal phenomena, such as paranormal investigators (be they ghost hunters or ufologists, for instance) or sceptics and debunkers respectively. It could further be added that the texts referred to are Western, mainly English or American, with a few Swedish examples.

The article first presents some quantitative data on known distributions of 'paranormal' variables in Western populations. The purpose of this statistical outline is twofold. First, it serves to illustrate that paranormal variables (*i.e.* beliefs, practices and experiences relating to 'the paranormal') are already an object of study within the social sciences, albeit under different labels. Second, the quite ample empirical evidence warrants the main purpose and contribution of the article, which is namely to conceptualize 'the paranormal'. Following the presentation of quantitative data a conceptual

1 Henceforth placed within quotation marks to stress that it is this contested concept that is the main focus of the article.

overview of 'the paranormal' within the social sciences and religious studies will be presented. A separate section follows, focusing on 'the paranormal' as defined by relations to both mainstream or institutionalized religion and science. Lastly, I present the main contribution of the article, that is, a tentative working definition of 'the paranormal'. The article closes with a brief discussion and concluding remarks.

Quantitative data on paranormal variables

Paranormal variables – that is to say, approximations of beliefs, practices and/or experiences relating to purportedly paranormal phenomena – have been measured for quite some time, and under different labels. Take, for instance, the following survey question:

> Have you ever, when believing yourself to be completely awake, had a vivid impression of seeing, or being touched by a living being or inanimate object, or of hearing a voice; which impression, so far as you could discover, was not due to any external physical cause? (Cited in Finucane 1996: 192)

The above was formulated and studied by the Society for Psychical Research as early as 1889, which points to the common origin of terms such as 'the paranormal' and psychic or psychical research, and serves as a reminder that survey methodology has evolved since the nineteenth century. In the following I will present a selection of quantitative data on Western populations from the last decade(s), which illustrates that paranormal variables are already, at least in part, the subject of large-scale empirical studies, and that the frequencies reported warrant conceptual clarification on what 'the paranormal' in fact might signify.

An American Gallup survey in 2001 states that 54 per cent of the American population affirm belief in psychics or spiritual healing, 50 per cent belief in extrasensory perception, and 42 per cent belief in haunted houses (Irwin 2009: 1). Further, a CBS News poll in 2005 claimed that 48 per cent of Americans believe in ghosts, and an American AP/IPSOS poll in 2007 showed that 48 per cent of the American population affirmed belief in extrasensory perception, while 14 per cent claimed to have seen a UFO (Bader *et al*. 2011: 7). A 2018 YouGov poll in late October shows that a majority of Americans believe in ghosts, albeit only 15 per cent claim to

have seen one, while 35 per cent believe that extraterrestrials have landed on Earth (Francovic 2018). There are other polls that point to near majorities in the US concerning the existence of UFOs and intelligent extraterrestrial life (Partridge 2006: 165). Results from the Baylor Religion Survey (Bader *et al.* 2011: 129) show that a majority (68%) of Americans affirm belief in at least one paranormal phenomenon, including belief in psychic powers and divination, the existence of lost civilizations such as Atlantis, ghosts and extraterrestrials, while 51 per cent claim to have had some sort of paranormal experience, such as consulting a psychic or medium, or having an out of body experience (p. 75). A YouGov poll (Dahlgreen 2016) in the UK somewhat enticingly concluded that 'British people are more likely to believe in ghosts than a Creator'. Partridge refers to polls from 1981, according to which a majority of respondents (54%) believed in telepathy (Partridge 2006: 217). A survey in Great Britain 2009 showed that 37 per cent of the British adult population report having at least one paranormal experience (Castro *et al.* 2013: 1–4).

A Swedish poll in 2012, on behalf of the Swedish TV channel TV4, claimed that every fifth Swede would be willing to consult a medium, and every fourth claimed some previous contact with spirits.[2] Looking further at the Swedish context, Ulf Sjödin (2001) could prove that paranormal – or parascientific – beliefs indeed are on the rise, through the use of longitudinal data on variations of roughly the same survey questions on items such as belief in ghosts, divination and reincarnation. Parascientific beliefs are not properly defined by Sjödin. However, it becomes apparent from an introductory chapter (Sjödin 2001: 13–25) that what is intended are alternative views going against the 'tested experience' (p. 150) of both religion and science as traditional institutions of knowledge. In other texts Sjödin refers to the same set of belief statements as 'the paranormal' (Sjödin 2002) and 'the occult' (Sjödin 1995), neither thoroughly defined. Sjödin (2001: 40–2) rightly asks whether the increase of those affirming parascientific statements represents a genuine growth of parascientific belief in the population, or rather an increased acceptance of affirming these statements, but settles for the former interpretation. One could, of course, make the argument that these might be two mutually reinforcing processes.

2 In Swedish: 'Enligt en Novusundersökning, gjord på uppdrag av TV4, kan var femte svensk tänka sig att ta hjälp av ett medium och var fjärde menar att de har haft någon form av kontakt med andar' (Novus 2012).

One could argue that paranormal variables have been studied on several occasions within large-scale quantitative surveys, such as the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and the European Value Survey (EVS). For instance, in the 1981 edition of the EVS, the following survey question was included:

> Did you ever have any of the following experiences? A) Felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away from you; B) Seen events that happened at a great distance as they were happening; C) Felt as though you were really in touch with someone who had died; D) Felt as though you were close to a powerful, spiritual life force that seemed to lift you out of yourself. (EVS 2015: question 228, wave 1981)

In the ISSP Religion (several waves), variables that Benno Torgler (2007) operationalize as 'superstition' were included: good luck charms sometimes do bring good luck; some fortune tellers really can foresee the future; some faith healers do have God-given healing power; a person's star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their future. Indeed, Torgler refers to superstition as a possible sub-category of the paranormal (p. 715). In the Swedish Enköping study (Enköpingsstudien), presented and analysed statistically by Jonas Bromander (among others) in the anthology *Guds närmaste stad?* (2008), a wide-spanning survey (n=1045) was distributed to residents within Enköping municipality. Several alternative spiritual practices, such as yoga, astrology and divination were included. More interestingly still, spiritual, religious or anomalous experiences, of which several might qualify as paranormal, were included as binary variables. These included, to mention just a few, experiences of contact with the dead, telepathy and out of body experiences, referred to as 'New Age experiences' (Bromander 2008: 77–82).[3] These – the EVS, ISSP and Enköping study – are but a few examples of how large-scale survey projects include variables targeting 'the paranormal'.

Whether or not paranormal variables are more widely distributed within certain strata in the population is subject to debate. Several studies show that women are generally more affirmative of, or prone to accept, paranormal

3 'New Age-upplevelser' and 'New Age-inriktade upplevelseformer' in Swedish.

beliefs than men (Irwin 2009; Bader *et al*. 2011; Sjödin 2001), but there are exceptions: within the American context, Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson Mencken and Joseph O. Baker (2011: 195) found that men are more prone to accept belief statements concerning UFOs. Socioeconomic variables such as income or level of education show ambiguous relations to paranormal beliefs. For instance, Bader, Mencken and Baker (2011: 195) found that subsets of paranormal beliefs appeal more to relatively marginalized people, such as psychic powers or ghosts, while elites are more prone to experience certain purportedly paranormal phenomena, such as out-of-body experiences or witnessing UFOs.

How 'the paranormal' relates to traditional religious belonging, belief and behaviour is likewise ambiguous. While certain data sets show that the traditionally religious are less prone to accept 'the paranormal', other studies point in the opposite direction. Bader, Mencken and Baker (2011: 92) further note variations between different faith communities, but even so, a majority of respondents from all congregations (Christian or not, be it Protestant or Catholic, liberal or conservative) affirm belief in at least one paranormal phenomenon. In the Enköping study, Birgitta Laghé (2008: 152) as well as Bromander (2008: 99–100) found that several 'new age' experiences[4] were more common among respondents classified as regular worshipers[5] or strongly Christian[6] respectively. Bromander (pp. 99–100) further found little or no supporting evidence of the supposed rivalry between Christian affiliation and belief on the one hand, and alternative spiritual practice and experience on the other, as suggested by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005: 8–9) in terms of the congregational domain and the holistic milieu, formulated as two distinct and competing religious environments, or 'heartlands'.

Concluding this introduction on quantitative data on paranormal variables, I make the argument that 'the paranormal' has been studied for quite

4 This category, the result of factor analysis, included the following items: to, in a supernatural fashion, be able to predict the future; to communicate with spirits of the dead; to communicate with someone telepathically; to experience the presence of some sort of spirit (Bromander 2008: 79, my translation).

5 In so far that they attend ceremonies in the Church at least monthly (Laghé 2008: 145).

6 This term is based on the degree to which the respondent identifies as Christian on an ordinal scale (Bromander 2008: 64–7).

some time within the sociology of religion and religious studies, albeit implicitly, and often as part of studies aimed at mapping alternative religion (e.g. Ramstedt 2018) or alternative spirituality (e.g. Willander 2014). As the sociologist of religion Abby Day notes, in relation to fieldwork and interviews on belief in northern England in the 2000s, there are clear overlaps between 'the paranormal' and different conceptualizations of religion and spirituality:

> At the time, I was particularly struck by a prevailing tendency within the sociology of religion to stretch the definition of religion to include a wide variety of phenomena, much of which I would describe as paranormal. Scholars often defined paranormal experiences as religious or spiritual, renaming them as, folk, common, invisible or implicit. (Day 2013: 158)

Day describes how 'the paranormal' is bound up with other central categories within religious studies, such as religion and spirituality, or theoretical concepts such as invisible religion.[7] One could add more terms used interchangeably with or overlapping 'the paranormal' in some sense, such as the aforementioned superstition (Torgler 2007) and parascience (Sjödin 2001), or esoteric and occult beliefs (Höllinger and Smith 2002). The latter two are not explicitly defined, besides referring to the survey items (e.g. belief in spirits in old houses, contact with the dead, psychic healers and telepathy; all of which are simultaneously designated as 'paranormal') of interest to Franz Höllinger and Timothy B. Smith (2002: 234). The purpose of introducing these varying terms is not to assess them as alternatives to 'the paranormal', but rather to illustrate that paranormal variables have been studied under many different names and labels. Next, I will turn to how 'the paranormal' has been defined within the social sciences and religious studies, highlighting key traits of different conceptual contributions.

7 This refers to Thomas Luckmann's study of the new social form(s) of religion, the latter understood as 'systems of "ultimate" significance' (1967: 87), as highly individualized and idiosyncratic, relegated to the private sphere and set apart from the primary social institutions of modern society. It is worth noting that Luckmann (p. 48) views any meaning systems transcending individual biological nature and consciousness as 'fundamentally religious', rendering any social or intersubjective meaning-making inherently religious. It is thus a quite extreme functional definition of religion.

'The paranormal', a conceptual review

In order to contextualize the use of 'the paranormal' within the social sciences and religious studies, I will first present two general definitions from encyclopedias, the first of which is popular rather than academic, that capture several recurring features.

'Paranormal events' the Wikipedia page on the paranormal states, 'are purported phenomena described in popular culture, folk and other non-scientific bodies of knowledge, whose existence within these contexts is described as beyond normal experience or scientific explanation'. This aligns partially with another definition, taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*:

> Paranormal phenomena are those supposedly due to powers of the mind that go beyond the normal, such as extra-sensory perception, or perception by means independent of the normal use of the senses, telepathy, psychokinesis, precognition or powers of prophecy, and survival of bodily death. (Blackburn 2016)

Both definitions have in common the fact that they place purported paranormal phenomena outside of the boundaries of conventional, or normal, science. As another dictionary entry – from *A Dictionary of Psychology* – makes clear, paranormal phenomena are sometimes called psychic or psychical (Colman 2015). Thus, 'the paranormal' as a concept is tied up with the history of psychic or psychical research, and later parapsychology (Penman 2015; Kripal 2011). Given these relations, a brief etymology of the terms may be appropriate.

Leigh T. I. Penman (2015) shows how the term 'the paranormal' is assumed, somewhat mistakenly, to originate in the 1920s. He further notes how 'the paranormal' lately has come to signify anything supernatural. In its inception, the concept of 'the paranormal' is bound up with the founding of the British the Society of Psychical Research (SPR), in 1882. The term psychic, or psychical, referred to phenomena seemingly contradicting the known laws of nature, such as Mesmerism, Spiritism and Spiritualism, and extrasensory perception (e.g. the aforementioned phenomena of telepathy and psychokinesis). At the onset, one of the founding figures, Frederic Myers, designated the 'debatable phenomena' in question as 'supernormal' (Penman 2015: 32). The launch of the term 'paranormal' in the English language

seems to derive from French works on anomalous phenomena. In French, 'the paranormal' can be traced back to at least 1848. It appears in English translations of the Bordeaux physician (and SPR member) Joseph Maxwell in 1905, with the designation paranormal intact. As used by Maxwell, 'the paranormal' designated phenomena such as 'clairvoyance, clairaudience, teleaesthesia, telepathy… [and] exteriorisation of motor power' (Maxwell as quoted by Penman 2015: 33). During the 1920s, 'the paranormal' gained a more widespread use within psychical research journals, often used interchangeably with the earlier term supernormal, eventually surpassing the latter in the 1930s (Penman 2015: 33). As Jeffrey Kripal (2011: 8) notes, the category of 'the paranormal' is early on imbued with spiritualist associations and relations, resulting in 'religious connotations'. Therefore, the term *psi* was coined in order to provide a more descriptive term for the anomalous phenomena in question during the 1940s, denoting 'what was thought to be the underlying unitary nature of the disparate telepathic, precognitive, and psychokinetic phenomena' (p. 8). Indeed, as Egil Asprem (2010) has shown, paranormal phenomena as phrased within a parapsychological nomenclature can be understood as an attempt to redefine, or naturalize, what previously belonged to the domains of the supernatural, on scientific terms.

A more technical and thoroughly elaborated definition of 'the paranormal' is provided by Harvey J. Irwin, an associate professor in psychology. Irwin, it might be added, focuses on paranormal beliefs rather than practices or experiences (or paranormal phenomena themselves, for that matter). Irwin proposes the following conceptualization of paranormal belief:

> … a paranormal belief is defined on a working basis as a proposition that has not been empirically attested to the satisfaction of the scientific establishment but is generated within the nonscientific community and extensively endorsed by people who might normally be expected by their society to be capable of rational thought and reality testing. For these people, the belief is phenomenologically a part of their sense of reality and truth rather than 'a proposition they endorse'. Like other types of belief, a paranormal belief will be either intuitive or reflective; will have cognitive, affective and (sometimes) behavioural components; will be distinct from a value or simple statement of preference; will be relatively stable and thus somewhat resistant to the influence of counterargument; and will be dimensional, that is, marked by various

> degrees of endorsement between the poles of extreme scepticism and extreme gullibility. (Irwin 2009: 16–17)

Irwin further provides the reader with an inventory of referents of 'the paranormal', such as superstitions, psi processes (including the previously mentioned extrasensory perception, or ESP), divinatory arts (such as numerology or the tarot), esoteric systems of magic, New Age therapies, Spiritism, Eastern mystico-religious beliefs, Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, extraterrestrial aliens, and cryptozoological creatures, or cryptids (Irwin 2009: 3–7). Used thusly, the paranormal belief category is wide ranging indeed. Do note how Irwin does not differentiate between beliefs associated with organized or institutionalized religion, and those falling outside of it. This lack of delimitation is problematic, and I will return to relations between religion (alongside science) and 'the paranormal' later.

Another conceptualization is provided by sociologist Erich Goode. Goode shifts the focus and rephrase 'the paranormal' as the concept 'paranormalism', understood as a disposition, attitude or pattern of interpretation: 'Paranormalism is *a non- or extra-scientific approach to a phenomenon* – a scientifically implausible event is believed to be valid and literally and concretely true' (Goode 2000: 19–20, italics in original). Transgressions of scientific thinking are thus the defining feature of paranormalism. For this reason, Creationism is viewed as '*paranormal* in nature' (p. 101, italics in original). Much like Irwin, Goode employs an inclusive approach to 'the paranormal', boundaries to religion remaining open. Goode (pp. 165–75) thus writes about traditional religious paranormal beliefs (i.e. belief in the devil or heaven and hell) and non-religious paranormal beliefs (i.e. belief in extrasensory perception or UFOs). Sticking to delimitations (or the lack thereof) between religious beliefs and 'the paranormal', I now turn to conceptualizations of 'the paranormal' within religious studies, and whether or not beliefs, experiences or practices related to 'the paranormal' fall within the purview of religious studies.

The historian of religion Jeffrey Kripal's definition of 'the paranormal' is quite different from the ones previously introduced. According to Kripal, 'the paranormal' could be defined 'as *the sacred in transit from the religious and scientific registers into a parascientific or "science mysticism" register*' (Kripal 2011: 9, italics in original). Thus, according to Kripal, 'the paranormal' is a mode of the sacred in the sense employed by, for instance, Rudolf Otto or Mircea Eliade. If I interpret Kripal (p. 9) correctly, 'the paranormal' as an occurrence

of the sacred would denote sui generis phenomena, or 'the mystical … as both fucking scary (*tremendum*) and utterly fascinating (*fascinans*)'. However, the sui generis approach to the sacred and, by extension, religion, is problematic, in effect rendering religious phenomena to be something qualitatively different and irreducible or, in the words of Russell T. McCutcheon (1997: 26): 'autonomous, strictly personal, essential, unique, prior to, and ultimately distinct from, all other facets of human life and interaction'. Given my reservations towards the sui generis approach to the sacred and religion, I am reluctant to extend it to the category of 'the paranormal'.

Joseph P. Laycock, assistant professor of religious studies, refers to and critiques Irwin's conceptualization of paranormal belief in an issue of the journal *Nova Religio* explicitly dedicated to 'the paranormal'. The main point of Laycock's critique is that the working definition Irwin proposes is far too broad, making it 'effectively useless as a category for critical analysis' (Laycock 2014: 5). Laycock is positive concerning studies of paranormal beliefs from the viewpoint of religious studies, the main reason being that large segments of the American population believe in one or more paranormal phenomena. The popularity of paranormal belief is an empirical reality that needs to be accounted for theoretically, argues Laycock (p. 11), placing 'the paranormal' within the center of key theories within the sociology of religion: 'what would it mean for the secularization narrative if persons who identify as having no religious affiliation turn out to be keenly interested in ghost hunting?' Investigating and analysing claims of UFO phenomena or hauntings could further, from a strategical viewpoint, demonstrate the instrumental value of religious studies or, as Laycock (p. 13) himself puts it: 'Can we be trusted to speak on the historical, cultural and political significance of religion if we cannot even talk about UFOs?' In the same volume, David Feltmate (2014), sociologist of religion, argues as well in favour of studying 'the paranormal' within religious studies. Omitting it mainly reifies normative, implicit assumptions on what counts as religion proper. Feltmate (2014: 90) prefers, instead, to deconstruct the delimitations between religion and 'the paranormal', both understood as etic or academic constructs, viewing 'the veil' in-between as 'tenuous and incongruous'.

In the same issue of *Nova Religio*, David G. Robertson provides an inventory of paranormal phenomena, similar to Irwin's:

> Popular definitions typically include psychic phenomena such as telepathy and clairvoyance, and alleged anomalous physical phenomena such as ghosts, crop circles, UFOs and reincarnation. Somewhat less common are cryptozoological animals such as the Yeti or Loch Ness monster, alternative medical therapies, and religious, mystical or magical practices, with Western Christian experience less likely to be included. (Robertson 2014: 60)

Robertson, however, finds that the conceptualization through a headcount of common referents of 'the paranormal' is unsatisfying, urging us instead to study 'the paranormal' discursively, mapping out a genealogy of 'the paranormal' and its potential normative assumptions. Prior to Robertson, both David J. Hess (1993) and Jeremy Northcote (2007) have approached (mainly English-speaking) debates on paranormal phenomena on discursive terms, viewing subject positions such as New Agers, sceptics and parapsychologists as determined or mutually constituted by these very debates. While the religious studies scholar might choose to bracket truth claims of paranormal narratives (often interpreting them as expressions of the mystical), disciplines such as psychology often view 'the paranormal' from a pathological viewpoint, both perspectives being based on 'epistemic norms' (Robertson 2014: 60) of our culture. The rationale that relegates some phenomena into the domain of 'the paranormal' is not absolute or ahistorical, but based on 'assumptions which are contested, negotiated and subject to change over time' (p. 61). For this reason, Robertson claims that 'the paranormal' cannot be understood without considering the dominant epistemology of our time. The latter would not only be that of scientific materialism, but organized, institutionalized and mainly Christian religion as well, at least for 'large sections of the population' (p. 61).

Christopher Bader, F. Carson Mencken and Joseph O. Baker, all American sociologists, conceptualize 'the paranormal' in a manner resembling Robertson's. According to them (2011: 24), 'the paranormal' designates beliefs and experiences that 'are dually rejected' by both science and mainstream religion. Thus, 'the paranormal' includes phenomena (or beliefs and experiences related to these) such as extrasensory perception, ghosts and spirits, astrology, extraterrestrials and cryptids. 'Belief that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead' the authors infer, 'would not qualify as part of the paranormal per this definition, since Jesus is associated with the majority religion in the United States' (p. 24). Thus, unlike the definitions provided

by Irwin or Goode, it is possible to delimit 'the paranormal' from the realm of religion, albeit the distinction might be historically contingent and far from absolute. This is a strength in Bader, Mencken and Baker's working definition.

The common feature between Robertson's conceptualization of 'the paranormal' and the one provided by Bader, Mencken and Baker, is the relationship to mainstream religion and science. Unlike the previously introduced definitions of 'the paranormal', it would not suffice that the included phenomena go beyond (or against) conventional scientific approaches. Rather, for any phenomena (or beliefs, practices and/or experiences relating to them) to be ascribed the status of paranormal, they would need to transgress the boundaries of *both* science and religion. I will elaborate on this in the next section.

Beyond science and religion

The two approaches suggested by Robertson (2014) and Bader, Mencken and Baker are quite different, yet result in similar consequences for the concept of 'the paranormal'. In common for phenomena usually ascribed the status of paranormal is some degree of tension in relation to mainstream or institutionalized science and religion as 'epistemic authorities', according to Robertson (2014: 61). Robertson opens up possibilities for studying the power structures of 'the paranormal' and subject positions there within, ranging from those denying it to those who engage in it as a form of epistemic critique. Thus, descriptions such as paranormal, or the related concept of conspiracy theory, might be used by those loyal to the established epistemic authority of science and religion, in order 'to marginalize viewpoints that differ from epistemic norms' (p. 62). From the other way around, expressions of paranormal belief as well as conspiracy theories can be viewed as counter-epistemic positions, or 'a critique of hegemonic authority' (p. 74). Bader, Mencken and Baker's (2011) conceptualization of 'the paranormal' is partly based on classifications of the people engaged within paranormal subculture, and the survey respondents of the Baylor Religion Survey. Nevertheless, they all frame 'the paranormal' (and, by extension, the variables encompassed by the category) as alternative views of knowledge, marked by a tension in relation to mainstream religion and science and falling outside of the boundaries of both. This further resembles the parascientific (or paranormal) beliefs studied by Sjödin (2001: 150), as ideas transgressing the

domains of the Church and science as institutions or 'guarantees' for 'tested experience'.

It is further possible to view both 'the paranormal' and conspiracy theories as parts of a shared 'counter-epistemic milieu' (Robertson 2014: 74), which recall the features of the cultic milieu, as conceptualized by Colin Campbell (2002, first published in 1972). Like Robertson, Bader, Mencken and Baker seem to be indebted to this concept of the cultic milieu, describing 'the paranormal' as:

> … a set of ideas and experiences, which have not yet been adopted, at least wholly, by the dominant religions in a given society. They lack the stability and organization that characterize successful religious groups. They lie on the periphery of American religion, spreading through conferences, the media, and the Internet rather than through sermons. And yet the paranormal comprises a pool of concepts from which new religions can draw a set of ideas that may prove to be the content of future religions. (Bader *et al.* 2011: 14)

The concept of the cultic milieu was originally coined by sociologist Colin Campbell, and is defined as follows:

> The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society … . Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals, and media of communication associated with these beliefs. Substantively, it includes the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure. This heterogeneous assortment of cultural items can be regarded despite its apparent diversity as constituting a single entity – the entity of the cultic milieu. (Campbell 2002: 14)

The cultic milieu was formulated in order to capture the source from which new religious movements, cults and other culturally heterodox groups emerge. 'The paranormal', as rephrased in alignment with the cultic milieu, comes close to the concept of occulture, as defined by Partridge. Partridge seems to employ several versions of what occulture signifies. For instance, it is described as 'magical culture' (Partridge 2004: 40), or as an 'environment/

reservoir/library of beliefs, ideas and meanings and values which inform the processes of thinking, of symbolizing, and of reflecting on experience' (p. 187). At other times, it is rephrased as the 'occultural milieu' (p. 121), which seems to refer to nearly the same phenomena as the cultic milieu. Take, for instance, the following description:

> It will be a milieu of constantly changing spiritualities and religious trends. Within the occultural milieu, new religious groups will coalesce, of which some will fade and others grow. Spiritualities will emerge stimulated by occultural peaks – such as interest in UFOs, fascination with ancient societies, apocalyptic speculation, eco-spiritualities, and so on – and then fade with the general fading of media and public interest. Others will emerge around particular charismatic figures, only to die with their passing. For some, routinization may lead to the continuation of new religions and alternative spiritualities for many years. (Partridge 2004: 187)

So what, if anything, differentiates occulture from the cultic milieu? In a later text, Partridge (2013: 45) argues that occulture is less prone to aggravating tension in the surrounding society, it is thus 'something more ubiquitous, more ordinary and less oppositional'.

Viewed in this way, as a pool of elements or a loosely organized milieu, 'the paranormal', occulture and the cultic milieu all show some resemblance with the New Age movement, as conceptualized by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996). The New Age movement was, in his view: '***the cultic milieu having become conscious of itself … as constituting a more or less unified "movement". All manifestations of this movement are characterized by a popular western culture criticism expressed in terms of a secularized esotericism***' (Hanegraaff 1996: 522, boldface and italics in original). The esoteric or occult heritage reproduced within contemporary paranormal beliefs, practices and experiences, thus becomes salient. An alignment with belief in conspiracy theories further points to either shared roots, or functions, of various forms of rejected or stigmatized views of knowledge, which Tommy Ramstedt (2018) points out in his study of the Finnish fringe science scene Rajatieto. Rejected knowledge is a term derived from James Webb which denotes a cultural underground of occult or esoteric ideas, much like the cultic milieu, in which 'different claims … can be reshaped, combined, and reinterpreted' (Ramstedt 2018: 42). Stigmatized knowledge, developed by Michael Barkun, refers

to a similar reservoir of heterodox ideas, or 'a broader intellectual universe into which both rejected knowledge and the cultic milieu may be fitted' (Barkun 2013: 38). Whether these different concepts should be viewed as complementary, as related but separate cultural environments, or as aspects of essentially the same thing is debatable.

A characteristic uniting all of the concepts addressed in this section, from 'the paranormal' to stigmatized knowledge, is that they give rise to some degree of tension within mainstream epistemic authority and expressions of alternative views on knowledge. Indeed, this was apparent back in Campbell's (2002: 16) original formulation of the cultic milieu, elements thereof being defined in relation to religion and science as dominant cultural orthodoxies. In the next section, I will return once more to the concept of 'the paranormal', at last proposing a working definition that might be employed (and assessed in the light of) future research.

'The paranormal' as a tentative working definition

For any future conceptualization of 'the paranormal', I would argue that it needs to account for at least two components, possibly more. First, I believe that we need a *substantial* component. As the *para* in paranormal implies, the phenomena in question ought to, somehow, go alongside or beyond what is currently accepted as conventional, or normal, science. The transgression of the boundaries of mainstream scientific theory and practice might serve as a minimal substantial definition, rendering 'the paranormal' a relational category. However, since the contents and boundaries of contemporary scientific explanation are subject to change, relations between 'the paranormal' and the normal ought to be stressed further, which brings me to the second component. This might be achieved through the use of a *discursive* understanding of 'the paranormal', as suggested by David G. Robertson. By stressing relations with, tensions in and contestations of the epistemic authorities of mainstream, or institutionalized, science and religion, the historicity of the category, as well as underlying normative assumptions, may become salient. It may help capture the contingency of the category, and how items encompassed by it are likely to change over time, as the limits and boundaries of scientific explanation shift. Uniting the substantial notion of 'the paranormal' as that which falls outside of the boundaries of 'normal' science with a discursive view of the contingency of these boundaries, we

might come to terms with a concept marked by historicity and relations rather than any fixed or unitary content.

One could argue that a family resemblance type of conceptualization can be combined with the two above stated components, or even be preferable, which might indeed be the case. According to family resemblance approaches, referents encompassed by a category are united through commonality and similarity rather than identity. The referents are thus 'like' one another to some extent. A good example of the conceptual use of family resemblance comes from anthropologist of religion Benson Saler (Saler *et al.* 1997), and his analysis of a particular mythic narrative within contemporary ufology; namely that of a UFO-crash 1947 at Roswell, New Mexico. The occurrence of a mythic (albeit not supernatural) narrative, non-hypothetical (*i.e.* practicably unfalsifiable) truth-claims, superhuman beings (the extraterrestrials) and the evocation of powerful emotions are the shared features of a particular ufological narrative and religion, making the Roswell myth 'an effort at enchantment in an increasingly postmodern world' (p. 149). Saler elsewhere (2000: 213) suggests that the scholar of religion employs what he calls a prototypical approach, that is, to view the category of religion as a 'pool of elements': phenomena are compared to 'prototypical examples' (such as Christianity or Islam), that the phenomena may resemble to a lesser or greater degree. Religion thus becomes an 'unbounded category' (p. 25). Accordingly, phenomena could be classified as 'more or less' religious. The main point here is, through analogy, that referents within the category of 'the paranormal' might be brought together through common traits, or family resemblance, rather than any set and strict criteria. Further, paranormal referents could be viewed as somewhat similar to phenomena encompassed by the category of religion, without the former formally belonging to the latter category. As Saler (p. 226) states: 'elements that we may apperceive as "religious" are found in phenomena that numbers of us, for a variety of reasons, may not be prepared to dub religions'. This view is reminiscent of one of the founding fathers of the sociology of religion, Émile Durkheim, and his acknowledgement that many objects of folklore could be viewed as elementary phenomena of religion(s): 'In general they are the debris of vanished religions, disorganized remnants; but some are formed spontaneously under the influence of local causes … A definition that fails to take them into account would not cover everything religious' (Durkheim 2001: 36). The prototypical approach suggested could start out from prototypical paranormal referents, such as the objects described within ufology, cryptozoology

or psychical research, and assess any other candidate as more or less like these prototypes of 'the paranormal'.

Lastly, one might attempt to capture *functional* components of 'the paranormal', or what 'the paranormal' does rather than what it is. As Annette Hill (2011: 75) has observed through audience reception studies of paranormal media such as ghost hunting TV, paranormal media can function as a way for viewers to negotiate identity positions of unbelief and belief respectively, or to navigate between 'a revolving door of scepticism and belief'. These instances might be viewed in light of ambiguities or contradictions associated with modernity, to which the audience employ '[s]trategies for re-enchantment' (p. 171), modernity being characterized by shifts between rationality and irrationality, or disenchantment and enchantment (p. 125). Consumption of paranormal media thus becomes a method for 'identity work and playful experimentation with paranormal beliefs' (p. 171). Further, 'the paranormal' might be employed as a strategy (or even compensator, reminiscent of rational choice or deprivation theory) to accommodate the universal human fact of mortality (p. 167), alongside existential, social and cultural insecurities and anxieties, some of which might be specific to certain temporal, cultural and socioeconomic conditions (p. 175–6). Viewed alongside Robertson, beliefs or activities relating to 'the paranormal' could thus be employed in order to negotiate various identity positions, to accommodate or compensate for personal or social anxieties, or to construct counter-epistemic positions in order to challenge dissatisfactory cultural hegemonies. Surely other functions might be included, this presentation being in no sense exhaustive. And as with any functional definition of religion, we might run into trouble when trying to differentiate 'the paranormal' from other social and cultural phenomena, if indeed we should.

Attempting to combine the first two of the components I have addressed, namely the substantial and discursive, a tentative definition of 'the paranormal' might be formulated as:

> The paranormal refers to purported phenomena, or narratives, beliefs, practices and/or experiences related to these, which fall outside of the boundaries of current scientific explanation. These phenomena are marked by some degree of tension in relation to mainstream or institutionalized science and religion, and are to some extent rejected by the two as epistemic authorities.

Trying to include functional components, an additional, secondary and provisional section would be:

> The paranormal can further serve as a way for individuals or groups to: navigate or negotiate between different identities pertaining to belief and skepticism; reflect on or handle hardships such as mortality or individual, social and cultural stress and anxiety; formulate a form of cultural critique against perceived cultural and epistemic authority, or hegemony.

The latter, functional supplement would not be a necessary component in a conceptualization of the paranormal, but can serve to capture some common functional traits that are recurrent in various instances of paranormal beliefs, practices and experiences.

Discussion and concluding remarks

What might, or might not, qualify as paranormal is prone to change, since the relations between, and boundaries of, the epistemic authority of science and religion, are themselves subject to change. For instance, a cryptid found, classified and explained by science would not be a cryptid, but a known species. UFO phenomena or hauntings that would fit within the explanatory frameworks of conventional science would also step out of paranormal nomenclature. This, too, is reminiscent of how Partridge understands occulture as part of popular culture, in the sense of a reservoir of ideas and practices that might, or might not, be deemed alternative, and give rise to some degree of tension in relation to mainstream culture. In fact, Partridge argues, much like Hill, that occulture is moving in from the margins: 'occulture/non-traditional spirituality becomes increasingly less alternative, less exotic, less deviant, and more respectable – it becomes *popular* occulture' (Partridge 2004: 184, italics in original). This mainstreaming of the paranormal, and related social and cultural phenomena such as conspiracy theories, might prove a challenge to earlier conceptualizations such as the cultic milieu, previously formulated as a heterodox cultural underground, giving rise to a high degree of tension relative to the cultural mainstream.

As several others (Penman 2015; Robertson 2014; Kripal 2011) have pointed out, 'the paranormal' as a historical category is bound up with the appearance of research dedicated to psychical and spiritualist phenomena

in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In part, the difficulties of defining 'the paranormal' might be due to the term's history, or how a concept rooted in a particular historical context translates into subsequent ones. Implicit in the word 'paranormal' itself is the process of going beyond or transgressing normality, for any referent encompassed by the category. As the boundaries of epistemic authority, or normality, shift and change, so too will the contents of 'the paranormal'.

In this article, I have presented various conceptualizations of 'the paranormal' as the term has been used within the social sciences. I have argued that the meaning of the term is contested, as is its place as an object of inquiry within religious studies. A recurring feature is that purported paranormal phenomena fall outside of the boundaries of mainstream science. 'The paranormal' is further marked by some degree of tension or conflict with scientific and religious traditions as epistemic authorities. The extent to which Western populations are willing to affirm belief in 'the paranormal' speaks, in itself, in favour of studying 'the paranormal' – or paranormal variables – as social and cultural phenomena: it represents an empirical reality that begs explanation. The main contribution of the article is, however, an attempt at synthesizing previous conceptualizations of 'the paranormal' into a working definition that could be used in future research.

Cristoffer Tidelius is a doctoral student in sociology of religion, the Department of Theology, Uppsala University. His project is on the prevalence and contents of paranormal beliefs, practices and experiences in contemporary Sweden, using mixed methods.

References

Books and articles

Asprem, Egil, 2010. 'Parapsychology: naturalising the supernatural, re-enchanting science', in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, eds. Jim R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden, Brill), pp. 633–70

Bader, Christopher D., F. Carson Mencken, and Joseph O. Baker, 2011. *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in religion and Culture* (New York University Press)

Barkun, Michael, 2013. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, University of California Press)

Bromander, Jonas, 2008. 'Enköpingsstudien. En religionssociologisk analys', in *Guds närmaste stad? En studie om religionernas betydelse i ett svenskt*

samhälle i början av 2000-talet, eds. Göran Gunner and Kajsa Ahlstrand (Stockholm, Verbum), pp. 53–102

Campbell, Colin, (1972) 2002. 'The cult, cultic milieu and secularization', in *The Cultic Milieu*, eds. Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw (Lanham, MD, AltaMira Press), pp. 12–25

Castro, Madeleine, Roger Burrows, and Robin Wooffitt, 2013. 'The paranormal is (still) normal: the sociological implications of a survey of paranormal experiences in Great Britain', *Sociological Research Online*, 19(3), pp. 1–5, doi: <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3355>

Day, Abby, 2013. 'Everyday ghosts: a matter of believing in belonging', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures*, eds. Olu Jenzen and Sally R. Munt (Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited), pp. 149–58

Durkheim, Émile, 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford University Press)

Feltmate, David, 2014. 'When the veil is thin: The Simpsons' Treehouses of Horror popular and academic comparisons of paranormal and religious phenomena', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 18(1), pp. 79–98

Finucane, Ronald C., 1996. *Ghosts: Appearances of the Dead and Cultural Transformation* (Amherst NY, Prometheus Books)

Goode, Erich, 2000. *Paranormal Beliefs: A Sociological Introduction* (Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press, Inc.)

Hangegraaff, Wouter J., 1996. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden, E.J. Brill)

Heelas, Paul, and Linda Woodhead, 2005. *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford, Blackwell)

Hess, David J., 1993. *Science in the New Age: The Paranormal, Its Defenders and Debunkers, and American Culture* (Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press)

Hill, Annette, 2011. *Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits, and Magic in Popular Culture* (London, Routledge)

Höllinger, Franz, and Timothy B. Smith, 2002. 'Religion and esotericism among students: a cross-cultural comparative study', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 17(2), pp. 229–49, doi: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1353790022012520 8>

Irwin, Harvey J., 2009. *Psychology of Paranormal Belief: A Researcher's Handbook* (Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press)

Kripal, Jeffrey J., 2011. *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (University of Chicago Press)

Laghé, Birgitta, 2008. 'Andlighet och gudstjänstliv', in *Guds närmaste stad? En studie om religionernas betydelse i ett svenskt samhälle i början av 2000-talet*, eds. Göran Gunner and Kajsa Ahlstrand (Stockholm, Verbum), pp. 137–58

Laycock, Joseph P., 2014. 'Approaching the paranormal', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 18(1), pp. 5–15

Luckmann, Thomas, 1967. *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Societies* (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.)

McCutcheon, Russell T., 1997. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford University Press)

Northcote, Jeremy, 2007. *The Paranormal and the Politics of Truth: A Sociological Account* (Exeter, Imprint Academic)

Partridge, Christopher, 2004. *The Re-enchantment of the West*, vol. 1: *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London, T&T Clark International)

———2006. *The Re-enchantment of the West*, vol. 2: *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London, T&T Clark International)

———2013. 'Haunted culture: the persistence of belief in the paranormal', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures*, eds. Olu Jenzen and Sally R. Munt (Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited), pp. 39–49

Penman, Leigh T. I., 2015. 'The history of the word paranormal', *Notes and Queries*, 62(1), pp. 31–34, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gju253>

Ramstedt, Tommy, 2018. *Knowledge and Identity within the Finnish Fringe-Knowledge Scene*, PhD dissertation (Turku, Åbo Akademi University)

Robertson, David G., 2014. 'Transformation: Whitley Strieber's paranormal gnosis', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 18(1), pp. 58–78

Saler, Benson, 2000. *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (New York, Berghahn Books)

Saler, Benson, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore, 1997. *UFO-Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian)

Sjödin, Ulf, 1995. 'Paranormal beliefs among Swedish youth', *YOUNG*, 3(2), pp. 46–57

———2001. *Mer mellan himmel och jord? En studie av den beprövade erfarenhetens ställning bland svenska ungdomar* (Stockholm, Verbum)

———2002. 'The Swedes and the paranormal', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 17(1), pp. 75–85, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537900120098174>

Torgler, Benno, 2007. 'Determinants ofs, *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 36(5), pp. 713–33, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2007.01.007>

Willander, Erika, 2014. *What Counts as Religion in Sociology? The Problem of Religiosity in Sociological Methodology*, PhD dissertation (Uppsala University)

Webpages and data sets

Blackburn, Simon, 2016. 'Paranormal', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref-9780199541430-e-2309?rskey=UQFtuE&result=2269> (accessed 9.7.2019)

Colman, M. Andrew, 2015. 'Paranormal', in *A Dictionary of Psychology*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067.001.0001/acref-9780199534067-e-6032?rskey=bBEJoT&result=6154> (accessed 9.7.2019)

Dahlgreen, Will, 2016. 'British people more likely to believe in ghosts than a Creator', YouGov, 26.3.2016, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/03/26/0-we-of-little-faith> (accessed 9.7.2019)

EVS, 2015. 'Longitudinal data file 1981–2008', European Values Study 1981–2008 (GESIS Data Archive), doi: <10.4232/1.12253> (accessed 28.8.2019)

Frankovic, Kathy, 2018. 'Americans think ghosts are more likely than aliens on Earth', YouGov, 31.10.2018, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/philosophy/articles-reports/2018/10/31/americans-think-ghosts-are-more-likely-aliens-eart> (accessed 9.7.2019)

'Paranormal', Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranormal> (accessed 9.7.2019)

Novus, 2012. 'Tron på andar och medium ökar i Sverige', Novus, 31.10.2012, <https://novus.se/nyhet/tron-pa-andar-och-medium-okar-i-sverige/> (accessed 9.7.2019)