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SWEDENBORG
REVIEW

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SUMMER 2019

26 Cold Bath Fields reproduced from a photograph from the Swedenborg Archives. Photographer unknown.

03 | AN EVENING WITH MR BENN

Artist and writer David McKee in conversation with Stephen McNeilly.

07 | VERNON LEE AND SWEDENBORG

Following on from a panel discussion staged at Swedenborg House, Avery Curran takes a comparative look at two multi-disciplinary writers.

08 | DISTANT VOICES CLEARLY HEARD

Gary Lachman reviews John S Haller, Jr's new book *Distant Voices: Sketches of a Swedenborgian World View*.

09 | FLAXMAN'S BUST OF SWEDENBORG

A report of John Flaxman's links to the Swedenborg Society through the holdings of its fascinating archive.

11 | NOW IT IS PERMITTED

Paul O'Kane reviews the exhibition *Now It Is Permitted: 24 Wayside Pulpits*, curated by Bridget Smith and Stephen McNeilly.

13 | THE HUMBLE SERVANT

A look back at ceramic artist Diane Eagles's exhibition inspired by William Blake, Swedenborg and Wedgwood pottery. Photographs by Malcolm Smith.

15 | NO. 26 COLD BATH FIELDS

Casebook notes from Stephen McNeilly tracing the topography of London from the standpoint of Swedenborg's life and influence.

18 | THE LOST SKULLS OF SWEDENBORG

Jefferson Small's series of Polaroid photographs documenting the *Ad Caput Capitas: the Lost Skulls of Swedenborg* exhibition. Text by Willshaw Hughes.

20 | THE POST-HUMAN AND JOHN MURRAY SPEAR

Alex Murray's essay examines nineteenth century spirit science in the form of John Murray Spear's fantastic invention of the 'New Motor'.

24 | THE VASTATION OF DR SINGER

James Wilson's essay proposes a Swedenborgian reading of Adrian Lyne's 1990 film *Jacob's Ladder*, starring Tim Robbins.

28 | SEVEN SONNETS FOR SWEDENBORG

Stephen McNeilly looks at Swedenborg's vast influence on poetry, on this occasion focusing on William Blake's 'The Divine Image'.

29 | THINGS HEARD AND SEEN

The *Swedenborg Review's* round-up section of news and forthcoming activities.

29 | ENGLISH ROMANTICS

30 | TEN POETS

31 | DRAWING AND EXPLORING

32 | CARTOGRAPHY OF THE BRAIN

32 | IN MEMORIAM: NORMAN RYDER

33 | BLOOMSBURY FESTIVAL

33 | SWEDENBORG RADIO

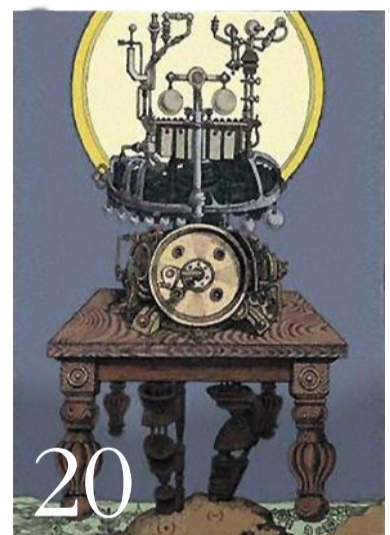
33 | PUBLISHING NEWS

34 | GRAFFITI ART

34 | BUILDING NEWS

34 | SWEDENBORG FILM FESTIVAL

35 | BOOKSHOP



An Evening with Mr Benn, and David McKee

An abridged interview with the artist and writer from the public screening of *Mr Benn*. Swedenborg House, 2017. ¹

DAVID MCKEE IN CONVERSATION WITH STEPHEN MCNEILLY

Stephen McNeilly: Before we begin, and by way of introduction, I would like to say a few words about our event this evening and also about our guest.

Mr Benn is 50: a remarkable achievement. And in celebration, the Illustration Cupboard Gallery in Green Park is staging an exhibition of original Mr Benn artwork,² and here this evening we have David McKee, its creator, who will be telling us about his work and also taking our questions.

We have just been listening to a wonderful CD, *As If By Magic*,³ with music by the Duncan Lamont Big Band featuring Kenny Wheeler and others, drawn from and inspired by the *Mr Benn* series, and which I hope we will speak on in a moment. After the Q&A we will also be holding a screening of all episodes of *Mr Benn*, back-to-back.

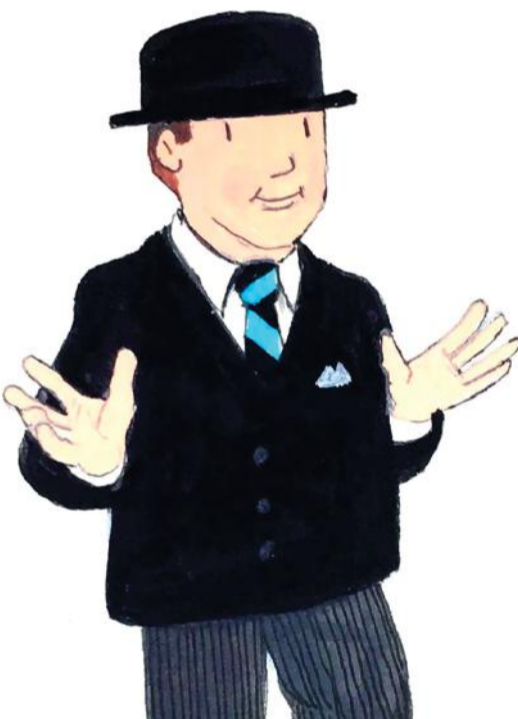
I have often privately thought that if one were to render Swedenborg's other-worldly experiences into a format accessible to children, the end result might not differ too much from the world of Mr Benn. There are the themes of transformation, of parallel worlds, of the blurring between the real and the imaginal and also the general sense of decency. But one would need an artist and writer as good as David McKee to make it work. And then, of course, there are the wonderful parallels between the magical realm of the costume shop and Swedenborg House.

David McKee is a world-renowned artist and writer, and in addition to his work on Mr Benn he is the creator of Elmer, King Rollo and Melric the Magician; he has published cartoons in *Punch*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Reader's Digest*; he has also written and illustrated numerous books, which have been published in over twenty languages. A personal favourite is *Six Men*, but other standout titles include *The Hill and the Rock*; *Not Now, Bernard*; *Two Monsters*; *Two Can Toucan*; and *Denver*. On top of all this he has also received two honorary degrees.

So to finish this brief introduction, I would like us now to turn to our speaker. It is a great and rare privilege to have David with us this evening, and to be able to share this space with him, and with everyone present. So let us give a warm welcome to one of our greatest artists and writers, David McKee. [loud applause]

David McKee: We'll see if there's this much applause at the end! [loud laughter]

As you can probably tell by the accent, I was brought up in South Devon, in Tavistock. Tavistock is a haunted town. It has ghosts and many different kinds of ghost stories. When I was growing up, we didn't have a great amount of books, but we lived in a world of storytellers. My mother told stories, the teachers told stories, at Scouts they told stories, and some of these were of the ghosts of Tavistock, and others were just stories. So later, I also told stories. People often



Mr Benn with his signature bowler hat, suit and pinstripe trousers © David McKee

ask me where do stories come from? And I think this is a very interesting question. My feeling is that they are in the air. For instance, now, in this room, there are signals of all television and radio programmes, and all those telephone conversations, and if we had the right receiver we could just pick them up. I think stories and music are there as well. And if you happen to be a receiver then you can receive them.

Of course, after that, there's a lot of work to be done, which is a bit unfortunate. But I really think it works like that. My son writes music and he says it is the same for him with music also, so I believe him because he's my son.

Later, I went to a grammar school and when I was 15 the careers master—who I thought up to that point was the biology master—suddenly revealed himself in this other garb and said,

'What are you going to do after?' 'Well', I said, 'I'm going to go and work with my father'.

Now, my father worked with farmers, repairing and selling machines, and he had two weeks' holiday a year. So when I actually said that to the careers master I thought about it and realized: I've got three months' holiday a year at school and he's only got two weeks', and I'm going to go and do that? So I went off that idea. I preferred the idea of three months' holiday, and the only way I could do that would be to stay at school, and the only way they'd let me stay at school was to become a teacher. I was usually top in art and I'd always drawn anyway, so the only reasonable thing for me to teach was art, so I was advised to go to art school. And then, while at art school, I thought—you know—why only take three months' holiday? Twelve months' would be nice. So I never got a job. At art college I started selling humorous—hopefully humorous—drawings to the national press and by the time I'd left college I was earning enough to keep myself, and very shortly after I was earning more than my father was.

So that was the beginning. It started with cartoons. At that time I discovered two artists, André François who was in France and Saul Steinberg in New York—both Romanians—who influenced me a lot. But François particularly, because he has published a book called *Crocodile Tears*—which you might know—and the text is in both French and English. I thought: I can do this, I can tell stories. At college I used to tell stories to my friends. So why not do this, I thought. So I began writing and drawing books and sending them to publishers, and they would send them back.

And it was exactly the same with the cartoons. But eventually, every so often, one of the cartoons would be accepted, and the books also. So this is the background. I don't—luckily in some ways, I suppose—have a great selection of career options that I can talk about, such as being a spy, or something else. I haven't even worked with farming machinery, like my father. All I do is sit at home and draw and write. So in many ways you might say it has been a pretty boring life. But actually it's fantastic, and I wouldn't swap it for anything else.

After I'd published a few books, the BBC wrote and asked if I would be interested in doing a *Watch With Mother* series. I knew the *Watch With* >

Mother series because we'd recently bought a television—I think I bought it in a sale from Harrods. It was a big one, and white. It must have been in the sale otherwise I'd have never been able to get it. But these programmes at midday, like *Trumpton*, were watched by my children (with father, as well as mother), and so *Mr Benn* came out of that. I had another idea for the BBC, and I presented it but they said: 'No we don't like that, thank you very much'. And then I said: 'Well, I've got this book'.

The first book of Mr Benn had already been published—the second one, where Mr Benn was a prisoner, came out in '70—and they liked the idea. So they said: 'Go away and write some stories and we'll see, we'll talk about it'. It was amazingly free. I just turned up with the stories. They didn't want the prisoner story, for reasons that are fairly obvious. I suspect they thought that a lot of mothers might be watching with the children because father was one of the prisoners. I also wrote one about Father Christmas, but this was also turned down because it would control when it could be shown. So I wrote a replacement for the Father Christmas story—the prison one I'd already replaced—and they said: 'Fine, we'll give you some money to make a pilot. How will you do it?' I said, 'I'll ask somebody'.

So I spoke to John Ryan, who made *Captain Pugwash*, and he was terrific. He was very helpful and very nice but his system wasn't my system. So I decided just to make it. I worked on my own system, which is incredible really because I didn't use storyboards. They were fifteen-minute films. Now I wouldn't make fifteen seconds without a storyboard. And there are all those other programmes that other people have said I've storyboarded, which, I suppose was to make up for not using storyboards for *Mr Benn*.

For *Mr Benn* I used written directions, and I would have a detailed drawing with a series of frames, which were in television proportion, but of all different sizes. Then I'd select what I wanted on screen and I'd have an overlay over the drawing. I would mark what I wanted to be on the screen and say, 'Hold for two seconds'. Then I'd mark where it was going to go to, frame again what I wanted to end with, and say, 'Pan (or zoom) to B in five seconds; hold for two seconds'. And that was built up into the film. It's very strange. I've never heard of anyone else using this system. It works quite well actually. But there are other ways now. So that was it, and *Mr Benn* hit the screen.

You may have some questions, and Stephen has said he's got some questions. Before we began he asked if I would like to know what the questions are. And I said, 'Well, not really, otherwise I might not be able to answer them!'

SM: [laughter] Yes, I would very much like the opportunity to ask a few questions.

DM: Do you want to whisper them to me?

SM: [laughter] My first question, which I hope is quite straightforward, is related to the number of episodes of *Mr Benn*. I believe there were only thirteen original episodes, and subsequently an episode made in 2005, which strikes me as extraordinarily few in relation to their cultural impact. Why were there so few? Likewise, if you were commissioned today to make another thirteen, what costumes would Mr Benn choose?

DM: Yes, there were only thirteen films.⁴ I did offer to make a second series, but the BBC at the time said people wouldn't



(from previous page)

NOTES

1. The event took place at Swedenborg House on 14 September 2017.
2. The exhibition was entitled *50 Years of Mr Benn with David McKee* and ran from 16 August to 16 September 2017.
3. *As If By Magic... the Duncan Lamont Big Band featuring Kenny Wheeler plays Mr Benn.* Label: Jellymould Jazz, audio CD (25 Nov. 2016).



realize it was another series, they'd just think it was more of the same—which was strange, but I suppose they know. Interestingly, I was also asked by a big company (who will remain nameless) if they could have Elmer make films, but I said no. One of the reasons was that, at that point, I didn't have so many Elmer stories. I said: 'You won't be content with 26 episodes'. And they said: 'Oh no, we start with 104, with a couple of specials'. I replied: 'Well, I can't be sure about writing that many good stories'. And they replied, 'No, no, it's alright, we'll have writers'.

This conversation was quite a few years ago now, so the times have changed since I made *Mr Benn*. The freedom I was given then, nobody would be given now, especially not me. Now they have a sort of a committee response to things, and everybody on a committee has to say something or they're not going to keep their place. If they just agree and say, 'Yes I think that's very good', then after a couple of weeks someone else will say, 'There's no point in having him or her'. So they have to say something like: 'Well, it's very good, but wouldn't it be better if he was taller?' Or, 'Shouldn't we have a black cat because I've got a black cat?' You know, it's this kind of thing that only happens on committees. Now, because there was that freedom with *Mr Benn*, there were also a lot more mistakes. It wasn't always smooth. He walks like John Cleese because, you know, I'd never animated before. But making mistakes also means having a stronger identity. You have much more of a voice, one voice.

As for new episodes . . . well, somebody once asked if he would ever go in drag and I thought, 'Not really'. But I did do a weekly comic story for about 3 or 4 years, I think. So there were a lot more costumes. You can come round and see them if you like. My wardrobe's packed! And another aspect I'd like to draw attention to is the way he's dressed. I didn't want him to be a superhero. I wanted him to be somebody who was fairly ordinary: much more of a catalyst than somebody who was stronger or faster than everybody else, or better looking. He wasn't any of those things. I wanted everybody to be able to associate with him, and to have that sense of correctness that his clothes implied but without stating what he did, and so on.

SM: Speaking of this sense of correctness, Mr Benn has such a consistent and well-rounded personality. He feels like a real person. I was interested recently in reading a conversation between yourself and Ray Brooks, who narrated *Mr Benn*, wherein Ray Brooks suggested that the ideal cover for his autobiography would be a picture of him having a pint with Mr Benn. Apparently this was followed by an awkward silence after which you replied: 'Mr Benn only drinks halves'. And I found this very funny, and also very authentic. My question is this: if Mr Benn were here today, what would he be doing? What books would he read? What music does he listen to? And what would he make of all this?

DM: I've got no idea, and I'm not sure of what I make of it all really! I've always thought if you're going to draw a big man then you don't just say, 'I'll draw a big man'. You try to think of somebody who is big, that you know, and you try to draw him. It probably won't be like him, but it'll be much more authentic. The people in the street where Mr Benn lived were actual people who lived there. I based the street on Festing Road in Putney, where I used to live. Interestingly, the people who live there now tried to rename the road, which I thought was fantastic: but this obviously >

4. The animated television series was originally transmitted by the BBC in 1971 and 1972. Episode titles comprise: 'Red Knight'; 'Hunter'; 'Clown'; 'Mr Benn Goes Ballooning'; 'Wizard'; 'Spaceman'; 'Cook'; 'Caveman'; 'Zoo Keeper'; 'The Frogman'; 'Cowboy'; 'Mr Benn and the Magic Carpet'; and 'Pirate'. A further episode was made in 2005 entitled 'Gladiator'. Four of the Mr Benn stories were published originally as books: *Mr Benn - Red Knight*; *123456789 Benn Big Game Benn*; and *Big Top Benn*. Two more were planned, but were never published. Images: Stills from the episode *Clown* first screened on 11 March 1971. © David McKee

wasn't possible because you'd have to go and change all those maps and things. But there is a walk between Festing Road and Ashlone Road, which they've named Festive Walk.

I think it's incredible that something like that could happen. But anyway, when drawing the people who lived there, I imagined him not in the house I lived in—I lived in 54—but in 52, as my neighbour. At the time there were two ladies who lived there, a young lady with her mother, or perhaps I should say a mother with her daughter, depending on which way you want to look at it. I don't know if they minded Mr Benn living in their house, but he did anyway.

SM: This blurring of the distinction between the real and the imaginary draws attention to an interesting detail in the series, namely the souvenirs that Mr Benn returns with after each adventure, and which he keeps in his living room in Festive Road. This rather gives weight to the thought that his adventures are real, and not merely flights of fancy. As a child I found this very important and I wonder what your thoughts are on this?

DM: I didn't do that in the books to start with. This was something I introduced into the films because I hated the idea of stories where a boy or a girl—or a person, a dog, or an animal—would have a wonderful adventure and then at the end of the story they'd wake up and it was all a dream. That, for me, was always the biggest cop-out. I couldn't accept that. I thought, if you're going to have an adventure, let's have it. Let's live dangerously, not dream dangerously. So, the souvenir was to establish—as you said—the idea that the adventure did really happen. Other than that, there's not a lot to say about the souvenirs except that the stories also emerged from what was happening in the street beforehand. So, if in the street there were children sword fighting, or something else, then the story might have something to do with knights. Or if Mr Benn was looking at the clouds, then this would give rise to the balloon story.

SM: Following on once more from the earlier reference to Mr Benn's clothes, and the sense of correctness, I have always felt that Mr Benn was a thoroughly decent man. He's a man that you'd feel you could rely on. You have mentioned somewhere of being interested, as a child, in fables and myths. There is something of this mythic quality in the decency of Mr Benn. He is a force for good, isn't he?

DM: Well, my parents were very correct, and I was brought up in a very old-fashioned and correct way. This was during the war when there weren't many men around. So I was taught to help old ladies across the road (whether they wanted it or not!), or to help carry bags (and not take anything out!). And it was this kind of correctness that has stayed with me. I think I was very influenced by my parents. That sort of correctness was always there.

And it's interesting to note that, during the war, women were doing all the things that men had done previously, like working in the fields or working as a mechanic in a garage. And I've often wondered how this general sense of equality disappeared after the war because, you know, during the war women were doing everything really. This has got nothing to do with Mr Benn, of course, though if he'd been there, it might have. What kind of suit would he have put on during the war? That's an interesting question.

SM: As an artistic creation, I would say that the *Mr Benn* series is an incredible body of work, and the equal of anything produced by other British artists over the last 50-100 years—say David Hockney, Peter Blake, or more recent figures. The artwork, the narration, the storyline, the animation technique and the overall concept: it is a wonderful aesthetic synthesis. It has entered our national and collective vocabulary. And there is also the music, the wonderful soundtrack . . .

DM: The original soundtrack was written by Duncan Lamont.⁵ But he wrote it under another name for contractual reasons. When we first talked about the music I just said: 'Look Duncan, I'm making these films'. He was already a friend and I was a fan of his. We have boys who were born on the same day, and they played together all the time in the nursery from 2 years old. As we were non-working fathers, or fathers at home, we would go and collect them, and we would talk while we were waiting and we'd have evenings together. When he was playing at The Bulls Head I'd go and listen.⁶ So, when the films came up I said: 'Do you want to do the music?' And he said, 'Fine'. The only thing I asked was for him not to think it's for children. So he wrote the music, which I thought was fantastic.

And then some years later there was a concert for which he wrote the big band version of the balloon music to *Mr Benn*, that lovely dreamy sort of music. And I said to him after the concert: 'Duncan, one of these days we're going to have to do more big band stuff of the other music'. And we talked over the years and he'd say: 'Yeah, yeah, fine Mac, good idea Mac, yeah.' But then about three or four years ago I had some money come in for something to do with *Mr Benn*—it was probably an advance on the film option or something like that. He's older than I am—and I'm old enough for goodness' sake!—so I said, 'Let's just do it because I want to hear it'. And he replied, 'You know you're not going to get your money back'. And I said that some things just have to be done because we have to leave traces.

So I gave him a budget of £12,000 and he asked how many people? And I replied, as many as you want, it's big band. And so the cost was immediately doubled! But the recording was fantastic and the musicians obviously enjoyed it, and they realized it'd been a good day's work. And the only thing I could think about was all that other music, and where could I get the money to do another album? It was really fantastic.

SM: This is the music we were listening to at the beginning of the evening. Before we open it up to the floor, I have one last question: all these various characters you have created, Mr Benn, Elmer, King Rollo, etc.: do they exist in different universes or is there a place in your mind where they might come together and sit down and have a cup of tea?

DM: I think Elmer is Mr Benn, I think that they're probably all part of the same personality really. Because they say it's all self-portraiture and I guess in some ways it is. This would include King Rollo, Melric the Magician, and all of them. ■

● DAVID MCKEE is a writer and artist best known for his children's books and animations. His creations across books and television include *Mr Benn*, *Elmer* and *King Rollo*, which have appeared in more than forty languages. As well as his own characters, David has also done illustration work for the *Paddington Bear* books and has published cartoons in *Punch*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Reader's Digest*.

5. Duncan Lamont (1931-), jazz musician and composer. Lamont has played with Frank Sinatra, Rosemary Clooney and Paul McCartney. In addition to his soundtracks for *Mr Benn*, he has also worked on Disney films and other children's television programmes.
6. The Bulls Head pub in Barnes.

Correspondences: Vernon Lee and Emanuel Swedenborg

Swedenborg House hosted the 'Vernon Lee, Swedenborg and Psychological Aesthetics in the Art Gallery' panel discussion on 26 September 2018.

AVERY CURRAN

Vernon Lee and Emanuel Swedenborg share a crucial problem: well known and widely read in their own time, they became, through the shifting preferences of their successors, somewhat lost in our understanding of the intellectual past. They both, however, have experienced something of a resurgence in recent years.

Lee (1856-1935) was remarkable in her late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century milieu. She held politically controversial views, opposing World War One fervently; she had romantic relationships with women, which were often crucial to her work; she dressed in masculine clothing, and her Singer Sargent portrait features her in glasses, with an upturned collar and a sober black jacket. She was also a prolific author, whose works range across a vast number of subjects, from her collection of supernatural stories *Hauntings* (1890), to *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance* (1899), to her study on the emotional response to music, *Music and Its Lovers* (1932).

Most important to the issue at hand is her work on aesthetics, and in particular her 1903 essay *The Psychology of an Art Writer*, which has been reintroduced in English translation by David Zwirner Books. In September, the Swedenborg Society and Zwirner Books collaborated on a panel discussion on 'Vernon Lee, Swedenborg and Psychological Aesthetics in the Art Gallery'. This discussion featured the novelist and 2007 Turner Prize judge Michael Bracewell, Professor of Victorian Literature at the University of Surrey Patricia Pulham, Athens-based artist and novelist Cally Spooner and Francesco Ventrella, Lecturer in Art History at the University of Sussex. This group spoke about a variety of subjects, from Lee's association with Decadence, and how she believed in (according to Professor Pulham) not art for art's sake, but art for life's sake, to the role of physical ennui in her understanding of the experience of viewing art. The event drew an enthusiastic crowd with a variety of interests, and the appropriately beautiful environment of Swe-

denborg Hall provided just the right atmosphere.

The synaesthetic aspect of Lee's writing that was touched upon struck me as particularly significant in the context of Emanuel Swedenborg's ideas. Lee was aware of Swedenborg, and some of her acquaintances had an interest in his work, including Henry James and H G Wells. She was fascinated by the eighteenth century, writing about it extensively, and so would have had an



Vernon Lee (1881), oil on canvas, by John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) © Tate, London 2019

understanding of the intellectual milieu in which Swedenborg operated. As previously mentioned, the arcs of public interest in their work also have similarities.

The affinities between Lee and Swedenborg go further. As Constance Classen puts it in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire*, Lee believed that the senses were inextricable from the 'corporeal and mental whole' and did vital 'cultural work'. This 'cultural work' can be connected to the nineteenth-century interest in synaesthesia, which is now understood as a neurological trait that causes the senses to merge—for example, by

experiencing different colours as sounds. In Lee's time, many saw synaesthesia as a creative concept, reflecting an inherent association between one thing and another. Indeed, Lee wrote an essay, 'Chapmaster Kreisler: a Study of Musical Romanticists', referring to a character written by E T A Hoffmann, a German Romantic author, who used synaesthesia in his work. Chapmaster Kreisler wore 'a coat the colour of C-sharp minor with an E-major coloured collar'.

Hoffmann was influential to the French Symbolists and their theory of correspondences—an idea that, to a reader aware of Swedenborg, is very familiar. As Gary Lachman has noted, the Symbolist poet Baudelaire, who wrote a poem entitled 'Correspondances', was inspired by Swedenborg in his belief that there is a connection between what we experience in the physical world (sights, sounds, smells) and the metaphysical world, where these stimuli have innate meanings. Vernon Lee's understanding of the importance of the senses and physical reactions to art should, then, be seen in the context of Swedenborgian correspondences.

Her commitment in her 'Gallery Diaries' to documenting with astounding specificity each response her body had to art—'I am keeping my mouth tight shut and breathe hard through the nostrils, with accent on expiration'—feels similar to Swedenborg's *Journal of Dreams*.

Swedenborg recorded each of his dreams, frequently mentioning the significance of the imagery within them. Lee and Swedenborg's parallel practices of careful recording and their understanding of the importance of the deeper meaning of things suggest a connection between the two of them, which is ripe for further examination. ■

● AVERY CURRAN graduated from Oxford University with a degree in History and will soon undertake an MA in Victorian Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. She has experience in publishing and gallery curation. Her research interests lie in late-nineteenth-century gender and cultural history, in particular the gendered aspect of spiritualist mediumship.

Distant Voices Clearly Heard

Distant Voices: Sketches of a Swedenborgian World View by John S Haller, Jr. Foreword by Devin Zuber.
Cased bound, 396 pp., £12.95, Swedenborg Society 2017, 978-0-85448-202-3.

GARY LACHMAN

John S Haller, Jr's *Distant Voices: Sketches of a Swedenborgian World View* is an impressive testament to the influence the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and religious thinker Emanuel Swedenborg had on the modern world. To be sure, Swedenborg's presence has already been noted in several areas, for example, in the impact his work had on poets such as William Blake and Charles Baudelaire, on composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, and even on environmentalism, in the form of John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, who spread both apple trees and the doctrine of the New Church across North America in the nineteenth century. But like Swedenborg's *Maximus Homo*, or Grand Man—a central theme in the book—the work of the Enlightenment polymath loomed large across practically the whole of the last two centuries, and can be found in some (at first glance) unlikely places.

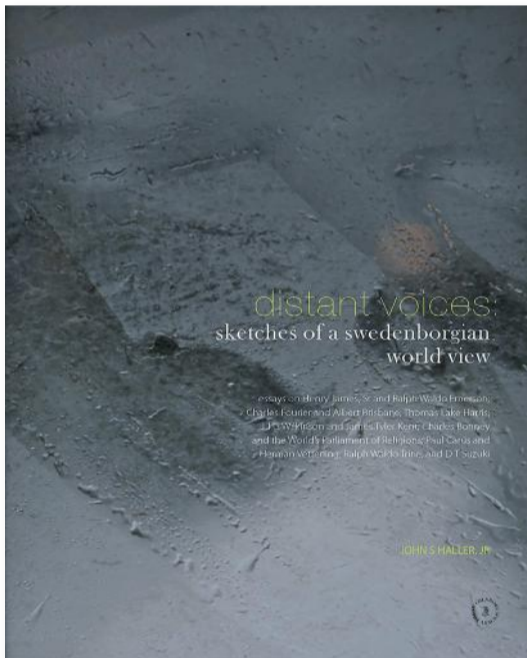
Haller's work goes beyond the familiar examples of Swedenborg's impact, and places him in the context of a wide-ranging progressive sensibility, too diffuse to be called a movement, yet whose disparate elements were nevertheless infused with some common fructifying influence. As Haller shows in these elegant biographical essays, the common catalyst inspiring them all and linking them together is Swedenborg.

Haller's range is considerable, taking in utopian visions of social reform, the metaphysics of New Thought, the rugged individualism of American Transcendentalism, the dark abyss of 'vastation', religious pluralism, and the *satori* of Zen Buddhism, along with several other cultural ports of call. The overall idea informing the free-standing but linked chapters is that of an optimistic vision of personal regeneration and social improvement, which embraces the positive elements of the modern world while rejecting those that deny the validity of the spirit.

Unlike that of our own time, the intellectual milieu of many of the figures in this book did not see science as an opponent of religion, nor was religion seen as an obstacle in the path of our intellectual growth. The unitive vision running throughout the book, which sees science, religion, culture and morality as all part of the same pursuit—that of a brotherhood of man and union with the Divine—may seem today like a very distant voice indeed. For us science and religion are radically opposed, and in their most extreme forms fall prey to fundamentalism, a strict literalism that does not unite but sharply divides. Haller's comprehensive survey reminds

us that these two human pursuits, each offering its own enlightenment, which Swedenborg himself embraced, were not always so antagonistic. Knowing this, we are justified in the belief that a future union may be possible.

The common themes corraling Haller's suggestive collection are: curiosity about Asian philosophies and religions, the belief in a regenerated society, an experience-based individual spirituality and, of course, Swedenborg. This net of interests allows him a rather eclectic catch. Here we find the social reformer Henry James, Sr (father to two illustrious sons, Henry Jr and William), whose presence as a spiritual pragmatist underscores much of the book; the



utopian socialist Charles Fourier and his American advocate Albert Brisbane; the New Thought philosopher Ralph Waldo Trine, whose namesake Ralph Waldo Emerson is another overall guiding spirit; the spiritualist prophet Thomas Lake Harris; Charles Bonney, who made the World's Parliament of Religions of 1893 a reality; the homoeopaths J J G Wilkinson and James Tyler Kent; the Theosophist, Swedenborgian and Buddhist Herman Vetterling; the theological popularizer Paul Carus; and the apostle of Zen Buddhism Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, who started his career as a Swedenborgian and remained one throughout it.

This roster gives an idea of the diversity of character and personality that Haller presents, and to which this brief review can only allude. The reader is treated to an assortment of creative and influential individuals who, in different but related ways, brought Swedenborgian ideas into a

productive mix with notions of world-betterment and the belief in the fundamental unity of all religion.

Key to this theme is the possibility of personal regeneration, a necessary step in the larger regeneration of society that is not without its perils. Haller's account of the 'vastation' of Henry James, Sr, an existential ambush that sent the theologian into a nihilistic tailspin, shows how the start of one's regeneration may begin with a very dark night of the soul. Like others who had been waylaid by such bleak visions—the Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg comes to mind—Henry James, Sr began his recovery through a reading of Swedenborg.

Yet although Swedenborg's calm voice guided James through the darkness, James himself was unable to say exactly what he had learned from him. As Haller shows, James's many formulations of the insight he had gained all fall short of relating explicitly what it was, and this painful inarticulateness led to splitting several Swedenborgian hairs with his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson.

On a lighter note, Haller's long essay on D T Suzuki, which is almost worth the price of admission alone, goes far to show how Swedenborg's radical Christian vision shares much with the sudden illumination of the 'Zen experience'. An approach to enlightenment that depends more on anti-logic and what is often called 'crazy wisdom' than rational persuasion seems far afield from the meticulous and often notoriously dry arguments of the one whom Suzuki called 'the Buddha of the North'. But when laid out in detail (as Haller does), the meeting points between the two, which Suzuki charted early in his career, seem obvious. Swedenborg spoke of the insights and illuminations he had received from spirits hailing from what he called Great Tartary. Haller shows how in his seminal works on Zen, whose impact reached the Beat and hippie scenes of the 1960s, Suzuki brought the Swedenborgian word to an audience that might otherwise have missed it. ■

● GARY LACHMAN is the author of twenty-one books on topics ranging from the evolution of consciousness to literary suicides, popular culture and the history of the occult. His recent publications include *Dark Star Rising: Magick and Power in the Age of Trump* (2018) and *Beyond the Robot: The Life and Work of Colin Wilson* (2016). Gary was a founding member of the pop group *Blondie* and in 2006 was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

John Flaxman: miniature wax bust of Swedenborg

The first of a series of catalogue notes exploring key items within the Museum Collection at Swedenborg House.

STEPHEN McNEILLY

Best remembered for his funerary monuments and illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, John Flaxman (1755-1826) was once among the most successful sculptors of the early nineteenth century and as famous in his day as Thomas Gainsborough and Sir Joshua Reynolds. J W Goethe once described him as 'the idol of all dilettanti', and amongst his public works are included commissions for national monuments to Lord Mansfield (1801) and James Montague (1804) at Westminster Abbey, and also to Lord Nelson (1818) at St Paul's Cathedral. A stunning collection of drawings and graphic works can also be found at the Flaxman Gallery at University College, London, and many other works are held in the collections of the British Museum, Princeton University Art Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

A close friend of William Blake, Henry Fuseli, Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, William Sharp, John Emes, George Sanders, Richard Cosway and Thomas Spence Duché, Flaxman was also one of the central influences of the early dissemination of Swedenborgian thought in London during the late eighteenth century. It has been suggested that it was Flaxman who introduced Swedenborg's books to William Blake, and it was certainly Flaxman who did much to arrange Blake's three-year stay at Felpham on the Sussex coast (the only time Blake and his wife ever lived outside London). In a letter from Felpham Blake addressed Flaxman as the 'Sublime Archangel' and 'My Friend and Companion from Eternity'.¹ Earlier in his career (1775-88) Flaxman had also collaborated with Josiah Wedgwood (1730-95), another artist with Swedenborgian connections, and for a time his wax models used for ceramic casting were among the most sought after in London. Flaxman was also instrumental in gaining a commission for Giovanni Giuseppe Caputi to make a small cameo head of Swedenborg, 'cut in sardonyx in very full relief'.

FLAXMAN AND SWEDENBORG

It is now generally accepted that Flaxman first came across the work of Swedenborg around 1784. He was sufficiently committed to have been included as one of thirty 'Gentlemen of respectability'² who joined the Theosophical Society—the first Swedenborgian-related public group in the UK—sometime before 1787. Between 1797-9 he is also known to have attended the newly formed New Church³

in Cross Street in Hatton Garden (but later resigned due to factional squabbling) and copies of first Latin editions of Swedenborg's works, signed by Flaxman, show him to have owned most of the key texts. He produced a series of memorable drawings inspired by passages of Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia*, as well as numerous plaster friezes related to his reading of *Conjugial Love*. Perhaps just as importantly he was also a founding member of the Swedenborg Society in 1810—then entitled The Society for Printing and Publishing the Works of the Hon. Emanuel Swedenborg—and was elected a member of its board and served on the governing committee in 1811, 1815 and 1817. He remained a member of the Society until his death in 1826, and gave at least two public speeches at the Society urging its activities to ever-greater success.

THE WAX PORTRAIT

The miniature wax portrait of Swedenborg shown here (roughly actual size) is no bigger than 2 cm in height, and most likely cast from a small plaster mould. A letter by Charles Pooley to Mr Bragg—dated 3 May 1890 and now in the Society's archive—indicates that the wax portrait was commissioned by C A Tulk to assist Giuseppe Caputi, a medallist and gem engraver working in Rome during the first half of the nineteenth century, who visited London to prepare a small marble cameo (see *Fig. 3* overleaf). The extremities of the features are slightly worn—along the nose and the hair—indicating that it may have been handled and intended for personal use. Transportable

and tactile, it was perhaps for this reason that it was later placed within a small wooden box lined with magenta velvet, not dissimilar to the small personal lockets kept for small engravings or tufts of hair, or other personal items often associated with nineteenth-century iconography.

Other examples of Flaxman's miniature wax models in public collections include portraits of Inigo Jones, Josiah Wedgwood, Henry Fuseli, Swedenborg's cousin Carl Linnaeus, Isaac Newton (V&A) and Captain James Cook, most of which were hand painted and framed. Whether Flaxman based the Swedenborg portrait on sketches or another work is not known. The exact date is also uncertain.

Other items within the Swedenborg Collection include signed first editions of Swedenborg's *De Telluribus in Mundo nostro Solari* (1758) (L/130), *De Ultimo Judicio* (1758) (L/130) and *De Nova Hierosolyma et ejus doctrina*

FIG. 1. (centre) Flaxman's miniature wax bust of Swedenborg, from the collection of the Swedenborg Society. Reprinted here actual size.

NOTES

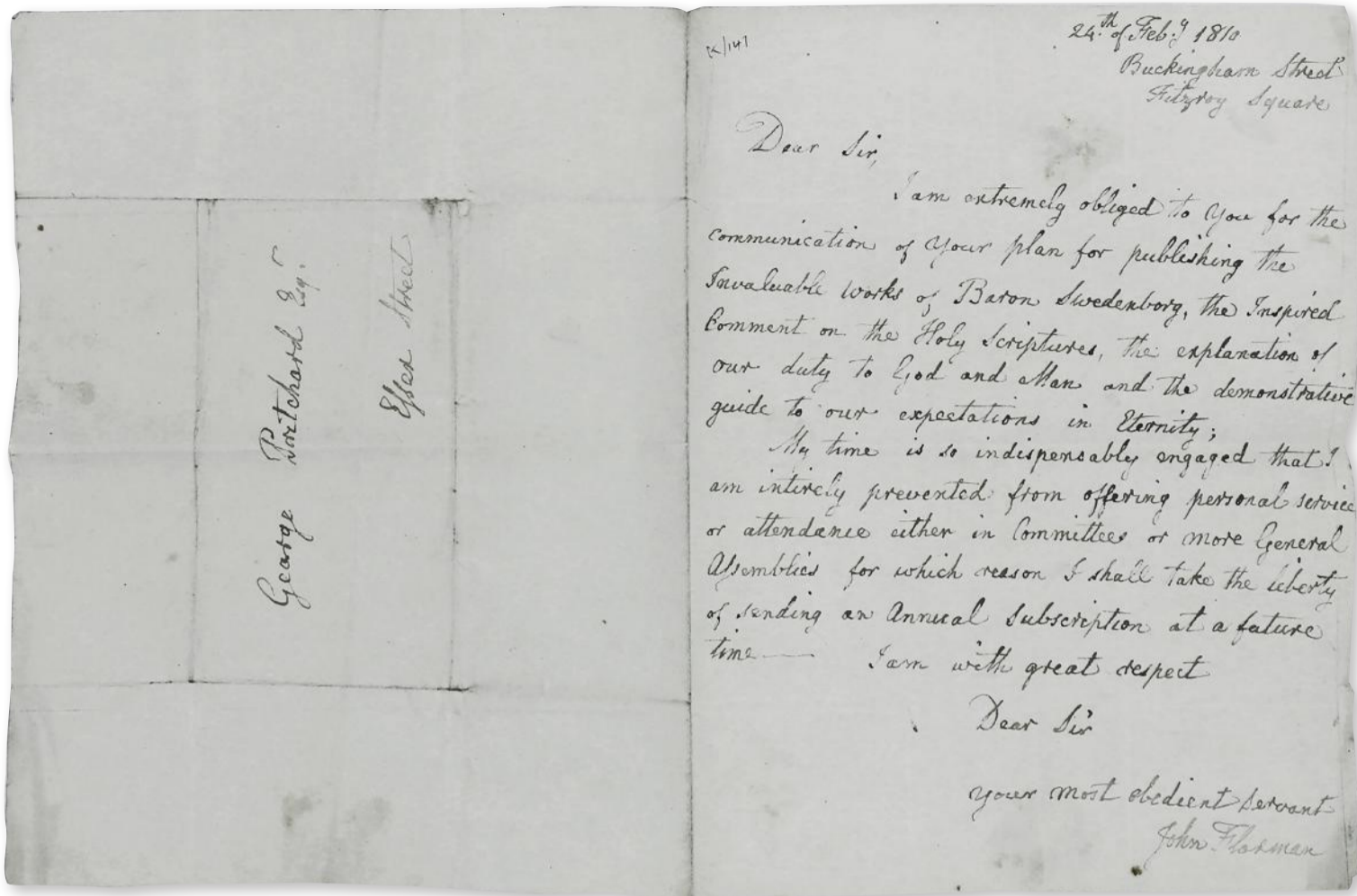
¹ William Blake, letter to Flaxman, 21 September 1800.

² Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, ed. Edward Madeley (London: Hodson & Son, 1861), p. 23.

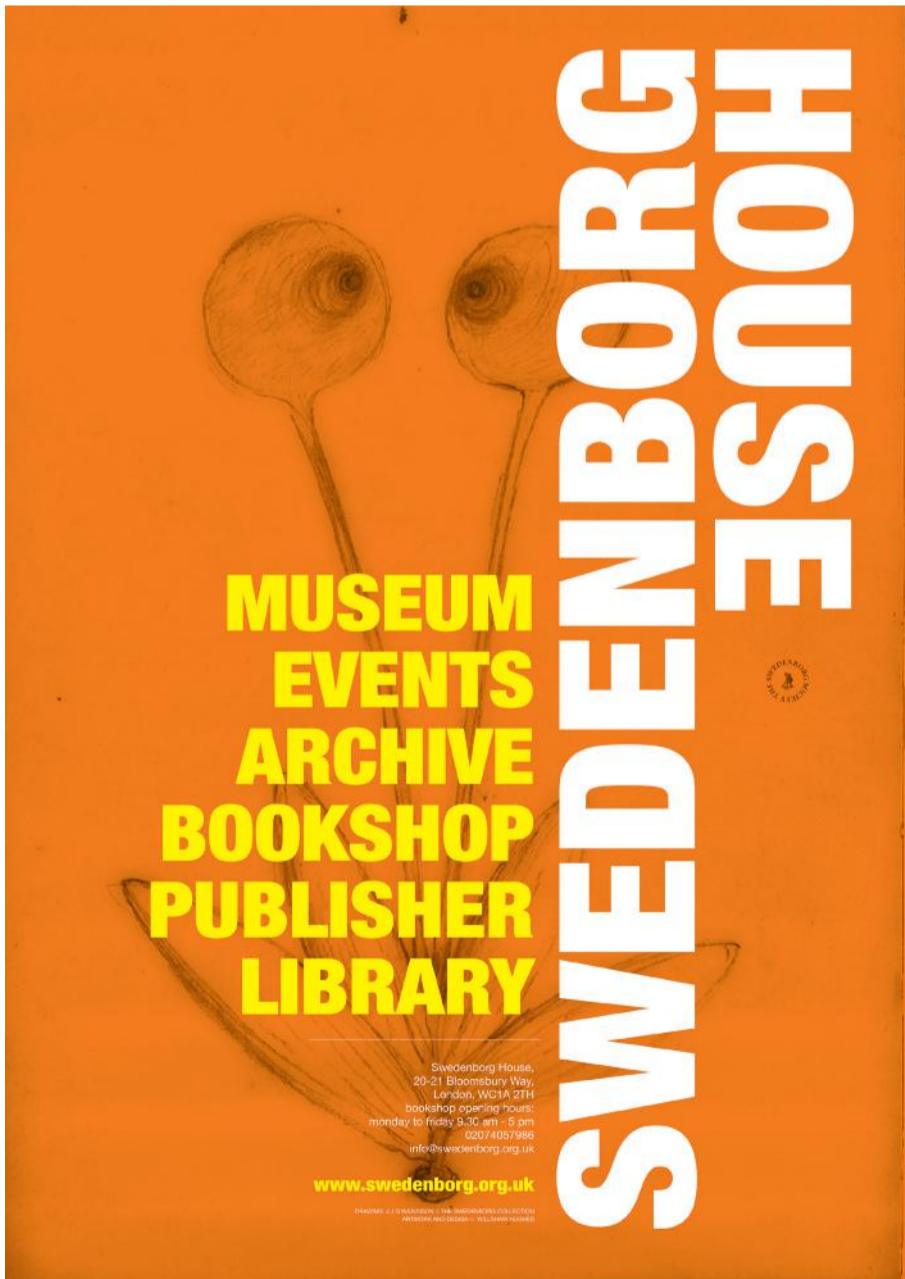
³ 'New Church' is often used as an umbrella term to describe the various Christian denominations that incorporate Swedenborg in their worship.



FIG. 1



figs. 2 & 3. (above) Flaxman's letter to George Pritchard, 24 February 1810, and (below) a photograph of the cameo by Giuseppe Caputi. Both held in the Swedenborg Society Archive.



Coelesti (1758) (L/130). There is also a signed first Latin edition of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* (L/105), the very copy from which Flaxman drew inspiration for his series of drawings now held variously at the British Museum, the Princeton University Art Museum and in private hands. The collection also holds three signed letters, one of them addressed to George Pritchard, regarding an invitation to serve on the Society's committee (K/147). With the exception of the three letters by Flaxman, the precise provenance of these items is unknown, but it is most likely that they were presented to the Society by Flaxman's sister-in-law Maria Denman, to whom Flaxman bequeathed his estate and who later became bankrupt. ■

● STEPHEN MCNEILLY is the Executive and Museum Director of the Swedenborg Society. He has curated numerous exhibitions at Swedenborg House and is the series editor of the *Swedenborg Archive Series* and the *Journal of the Swedenborg Society*.

‘Now It is Permitted: 24 Wayside Pulpits’

Conceived and curated by Bridget Smith and Stephen McNeilly at Swedenborg House,
Wednesday 19 – Saturday 29 October, 2016 (part of the Bloomsbury Festival).

PAUL O’KANE

Swedenborg House is, we might say, nothing if not didactic. Though you enter through a browsey bookshop space which feels at home in literary Bloomsbury, the main focus of the building is clearly its hall, which, immediately upon entering, impels your attention towards the dais, where a bust of Swedenborg himself inevitably stands. A lectern also generally awaits a speaker there, but most visitors, on most occasions, are inclined to quietly take a seat amid the ranks of creaky wood and leather chairs provided, and there to await further instruction.

Despite the unprecedented opportunities we now have to debate, communicate and represent our opinions, we still look to leaders, to charismatic and powerful figures, to guide us and provide answers to our collective and individual concerns. However, we are perhaps more aware than ever today that the means by which any sense of reassurance is provided is itself an artful contrivance.

‘God is dead’ and ‘Nothing is true, everything is permitted’ are two of the most memorable slogans that have signposted our journey into and through modern and postmodern paradigms. And Nietzsche (with whom both phrases are associated) also began one of his books with the following beguiling challenge: ‘Supposing truth to be a woman, what then?’

Meanwhile, both the ancient Greeks and modern debating societies (at our ‘better’ schools and universities at least) have never been embarrassed by the term ‘rhetoric’. Both examples might assume that the most reliable approximation of truth we can attain is our ability to convince others of a certain reality by means of artfully deployed words and images (a few statistics can, of course, also help).

On entering Swedenborg Hall today Bridget Smith and Stephen McNeilly have surprised us by removing its old and all-too-familiar chairs, thus thoroughly transforming a room designed for sermons and lectures into a free-flowing, undirected, gallery-like space within which we now feel encouraged to perambulate and contemplate, stopping where and when we please, making our own judgements and enunciations, casually encountering and lingering with others while communicating professionally, critically or merely socially.

We may however feel slightly disoriented, as if we have lost our home or ‘comfort zone’ to a space that no longer provides any particular focal point from the direction of which we might hope to receive guidance. This leaves us newly, strangely free, yet slightly bereft. It could therefore be read as a materialization of

our contemporary philosophical, religious and political condition.

The dedicated art space, and the way art has come to use the widest possible variety of spaces, has been the subject of much critique and experimentation effecting much of curating’s own historical tendency toward didacticism. The ‘salon hang’, the programmatic or chronologically imposed visitor narrative, along with the notorious press release, wall-mounted caption and catalogue essay, have all seen their power questioned, experimented with or diminished, as their establishment and authority gradually concedes to that prioritized and cherished right to experiment, progress and thus refuse both tradition and presumption.

Art’s audience is thus granted greater respect, treated less hierarchically, invited to comment, write our own captions, progress and rest as we please, and to conduct our own critiques and further research.

On the walls of the newly liberated Swedenborg Hall Smith and McNeilly have installed a host of posters, fifty-eight in total, each of which vies to tell us something or at least share a thought or image as we pass. The posters are inspired by and visibly emulate ‘24 Wayside Pulpits’, a series of posters recently discovered, rescued and incorporated within the Swedenborg Society’s archives.

Some of these appear elsewhere in the building, installed on stairways, corridors and in the bookshop. These relative classics, rescued by Swedenborg director Stephen McNeilly from a derelict Swedenborgian institution in Manchester, deliver their own,

less equivocal messages, in a sans serif font which betrays their mid-twentieth-century provenance. Here the words are surrounded by an abstract pattern rendered in a compelling blue and augmented by black and grey on a cream-white paper ground, providing a frame which seems to force someone else’s thoughts off the wall into your mind.

Meanwhile, the contemporary equivalents commissioned from a variety of contemporary artists, writers and thinkers by Smith and McNeilly, also utilize pattern and a vivid, even fluorescent, though carefully delimited palette. However, in the new equivalents the audience might discern a distinct difference in what we might call the ‘tone’ of their messages.

Colour and pattern may withstand the test of time, albeit revisited and dressed in the flattering garb of the ‘retro’, ‘vintage’ or ‘classic’, but it is the ‘tonal’ difference of the words, suggestive of their source and their apparent intention, which illustrates most clearly any gulf there might be between the culture from within which the original posters emerged and that from which their twenty-first-century emulations now arise.

FIG. 1. (centre) Title poster for the exhibition. ‘Now It Is Permitted’ is a translation of Swedenborg’s Latin phrase *nunc licet*, which he saw written above a temple door in one of his visionary experiences. Poster design by Fraser Muggeridge Studio.



FIG. 2. (centre)
fifty-eight posters
from contemporary
artists featured in
the exhibition in
designs by Fraser
Muggeridge Studio.
Poster by
Bridget Smith.

But just what is the difference, between then and now, between that culture and this, between the singular-seeming writer of those authoritative diktats and the multiple creators of these relatively playful posters?

Today, God—if such a concept can be entertained and justified at all—speaks through or to us ironically, self-consciously, playfully and equivocally, aware not only of the impermanence of each and every claim but also of the influence on its validity of its particular manifestation. One of the contemporary phrases is bent by the contributor into an oval, others have constructed equally eye-catching forms. In one example those habitually conjoined words ‘sexual’ and ‘intercourse’ have had their syntax disturbed, been sliced horizontally and precisely in half, and then united as a now barely decipherable, apparently fornicating word couple.

Most of the contributions bring a smile or cause you to pause and rethink as you register a moment of surprise and enlightenment. Thus their artful invention often amounts to an optimistic affirmation. However, doing the rounds of the walls, and stopping in front of each ‘pulpit’ you also pick up some sense of the current tensions and anxieties humming through our troubled society. Fears of fascism, xenophobia, sexism, isolationism, etc., are also subtly, implicitly aired, reminding you that such posters emerge as much from a political as from a religious tradition.

The original posters that inspired the event are encountered elsewhere in the building and are, by contrast, and more clearly, articles of faith and creed, each a lapidary maxim designed to be understood, learned, remembered and heeded, their words apparently directed ‘down’ to us, as if from ‘above’, in the great tradition inaugurated by Moses and his tablets.

The relatively playful and light (Nietzsche would have again approved)—we might also say mild and ‘mixed’—messages gathered in the main hall can entertain us, provoke some thought and reveal a philosophical or cultural snapshot of contemporary society—at least as represented by the chosen contributors.

However, in light of recent political developments (which we might justifiably regard as an escalating ‘crisis’), we should perhaps pause and consider the possibility that it is just such a fragile filigree of sophisticated, ironic and non-committal equivocation that has been found so wanting in response to a new barbarianism which can currently claim to be the monopolistic master of effective sloganeering.

‘Take Back Control’ and ‘Build That Wall’ are the kinds of brutal phrases that have suddenly proved capable of turning our world upside down, leaving—I suspect—all of those whose slogans are represented in this show feeling shocked, fearful, disappointed and gloomy, their own hopes and world view potentially doomed.

Postmodernism, its cultural relativism, multiculturalism, innate play, simulation, truthlessness, irony and pastiche have often been pronounced dead by contemporary artists and thinkers if only to find that, as a paradigm, Postmodernism has yet to be truly supplanted by any equally convincing and comprehensive cultural theory.

Postmodernism almost certainly arose, and served—for a

generation or two—as a bulwark against fascism. And only today does it seem, finally, to have been supplanted, not by a superior argument but by a clear re-emergence of fascism (and it is probably wiser to announce that fact clearly than to remain equivocal about it any longer).

The ‘vintage’ Swedenborgian posters rescued by McNeilly, which inspired and influenced Smith and all the participants in this show, for all their design values, seem, by comparison with the new, to rather bark their faith, somewhat crudely insisting upon our compliance with their often clumsily wrought aspirations to guidance and wisdom.

And yet their implicit force also reminds us that an unexpectedly different way of thinking and of speaking always threatens to blow away our own proudly cherished sentiments—including all those gathered on the walls of Swedenborg Hall—like so many leaves, scattered blossoms or seeds.

Today, an age of fighting, debating and arguing for humanity and the planet seems to be being brutally supplanted by an age of shouting for the self and the homeland, an absurd fascist aim that can only hope to ultimately, violently, pointlessly implode, as have all dumb, short-sighted fascisms that precede it, but not of course before reaping immense destruction amid all that is more civilized, considered, caring, conscientious and carefully crafted.

This exhibition is an experiment that leaves us with important questions to consider, concerning the contemporary value and status of truth, faith and the power of the word linked with design, to guide us through the dark era that seems to lie ahead. Meanwhile, its historical aspect subtly implicates and reminds us of the fact that artists, writers, thinkers and designers have risen to such occasions before.

This exhibition may not provide an effective model by means of which to respond to a newly emergent form of fascism, but it does allow us to begin to consider problems and possibilities concerning our potential responses to that fascism. After all, in light of serial defeats and humiliations, we (also exploring this presumptuous ‘we’, of course) surely need to consider clarifying and perhaps unifying

our currently heterogeneous statements.

If so we might need to prepare to become ourselves newly unified, didactic and less equivocal, in order to contend with and survive an age when just three or four words, combined into a belligerent chant, prove capable of supplanting intricately, intelligently constructed, informed and finely worded checks and balances conscientiously designed to underpin an increasingly civilized and progressive society.

Perhaps it is such a new, unequivocal, truthful and non-ironic didacticism, a didacticism of the political Left, that Bridget Smith and Stephen McNeilly might regard as ‘Now Permitted’ in their title. ■

● PAUL O’KANE is an artist, writer and lecturer. He completed a Ph.D. in History at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2009. He now lectures in Critical Studies at Central St Martins and University of the Arts London. His art focuses on the mechanized image, and he is a founder member of the artists’ book publishing imprint eedo, with whom he published *Where Is That Light Now?* (2014).



The Humble Servant: Diane Eagles's ceramic art inspired by William Blake and Swedenborg

An interview with ceramic artist Diane Eagles following her exhibition at Swedenborg House in October and November 2017.

STILL-LIFE PHOTOGRAPHY: MALCOLM SMITH

Inspired by the engravings of William Blake for a pattern book of Josiah Wedgwood's Queen's Ware tableware in 1817, and adorned with quotations from Swedenborg's writings, these four hand-crafted ceramics by Diane Eagles were on display at the bookshop in Swedenborg House from 18 October until 30 November 2017.

The designs originate from 1815, a time when Blake's financial and public fortunes were at a low ebb, and replicate the creamware of the period, with hand-applied coloured lead glaze and transfer printing. It is likely that John Flaxman, one of the most significant artists employed by Wedgwood (and a founding member of the Swedenborg Society too), was the link for the improbable etching commission. The works are in stark contrast to the visionary imagery Blake is famous for, perhaps indicating his desperate circumstances at the time, and one of his brief letters to Wedgwood shows Blake signing himself 'humble servant'.

However, rather than the Wedgwood etchings being seen as a humiliating and servile act of a forgotten man, the ideas of domestic wares, of service to others, of the giving and taking in of actual and spiritual nourishment, offer instead a fitting memorial to Blake, Swedenborg and Flaxman. To accompany



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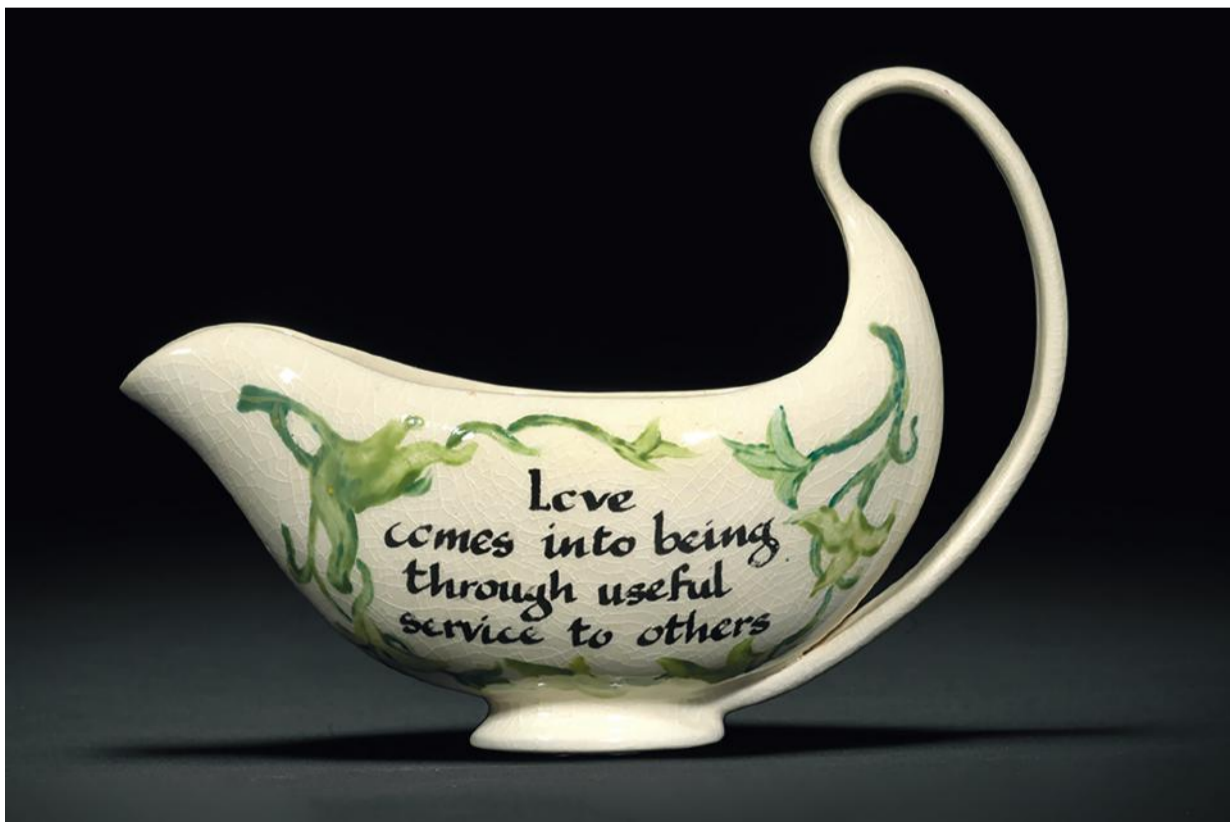


FIG. 1. (above) Diane Eagles's plate based on Blake's engravings nos. 916 and 917 from the proofs for Wedgwood's *Catalogue of Earthenware and Porcelain*. The motto is drawn from Swedenborg's *Apocalypse Explained*, §325.

FIG. 2. (left) Diane Eagles's gravy boat based on Blake's engraving no. 115 from the proofs for Wedgwood's *Catalogue of Earthenware and Porcelain*. The motto is drawn from Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love*, §266.

FIG. 3. (left) Diane Eagles's jug based on Blake's engraving no. 580 from the proofs for Wedgwood's *Catalogue of Earthenware and Porcelain*.

The motto is drawn from Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*, §47.

FIG. 4. (below) Diane Eagles's egg cups based on Blake's engravings nos. 1219 and 1220 from the proofs for Wedgwood's *Catalogue of Earthenware and Porcelain*. The mottos are various key themes and terms of Swedenborg's.



the exhibition the following Q&A with the artist Diane Eagles and photographs were included within the exhibition guide.

Where did the idea for the project come from?

A few years ago whilst doing some online research about William Blake, I came across an image of two of Blake's engravings which he prepared for Wedgwood, alongside an accompanying letter. The images are very unlike Blake's works, and yet I think they hold a sliver of his 'style', adding vitality to these static objects. As a ceramic artist I immediately wanted to do something linked to the images, but at the time, I wasn't sure what form this would take.

When did the opportunity arise to work on the idea?

I used to work near the Swedenborg Society and I knew about their work and promotion of the arts linked to Swedenborg's writings, although predominantly through film. I called in one day and saw the poster for *Wayside Pulpits* curated by artist Bridget Smith and Stephen McNeilly. I'd known for a long time about William Blake's link with Swedenborg, and it was then that I had the idea of combining the words of Swedenborg with the Blake ceramic engravings. I had a meeting with Stephen McNeilly, Executive Director, and he mentioned that Wedgwood was a Swedenborg follower and

just recently he'd been thinking about how to represent this with ceramics in the bookshop. It felt providential.

How did you go about making the work?

I knew something of Swedenborg's writing but I had to look for short quotes, similar to the religious motto ware of the period. I also wanted to put something of Blake's better-known creative work into the designs. In particular I was drawn to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. These inspired the ceramics' decorative elements. I did further research at the V&A looking at Wedgwood Queen's Ware and also examined Blake's eighteen original Wedgwood engravings in the British Museum Print Library, they're surprisingly small, and very intense.

It seems like the work took a long time?

Yes, the research around replicating eighteenth-century earthenware of the period took quite a lot of time. I used a white earthenware clay and casting slip and a low-fire glaze to simulate creamware formed in the style of Wedgwood Queen's Ware. I then made plaster moulds and tried to emulate Blake's calligraphic style for the transfer lettering. In a matter of weeks I also had to learn about overglaze painting with powdered enamels for the motto style, a very tricky process—and slow, with each stage requiring a different firing. Most of the works were fired four to five times or more.

There's a lot about William Blake in the work.

Yes, I wanted my work to stay close to Blake's home studio style of printing and hand colouring. I was also touched by the link to Wedgwood from Blake's friend John Flaxman, who was one of the principal designers for Wedgwood. It seems possible that Flaxman supported Blake to get the engraving work, in response to Blake's financial need. It seemed to me a particularly Swedenborgian gesture from Flaxman and Wedgwood to give friendship and support in this way, and the letter from Blake to Wedgwood signing himself 'your humble servant' seems to acknowledge his gratitude to them. ■

● DIANE EAGLES is a London-based ceramic artist. Diane has exhibited work at The Wellcome Collection; Kingston Guildhall; Draper Hall; Dulwich Artists' Open House; Morley Gallery, Waterloo; and the Contemporary Crafts & Design Fair, Chelsea. Her work has also featured on the cover of *The International Journal of Art Psychotherapy*. She is also a founding member of the ceramic artists' collective, The Associated Clay Workers Union (ACWU). To view examples of Diane's work visit her website at www.edensclay.co.uk



26 Cold Bath Fields

Walking in the lanes and thoroughfares of the eighteenth century, we present the first in a series of casebook notes tracing the topography of London from the standpoint of Swedenborg's life and influence.

STEPHEN MCNEILLY

Swedenborg visited London on at least seven different occasions. The first in 1710, aged 22, when he studied under Edmond Halley (1656-1742) and John Flamsteed (1646-1719), and attended lectures by Sir Isaac Newton at the Royal Society. The last visit was during 1771, when he lodged in Cold Bath Fields, following a very brief spell with a Mrs Carr in nearby Warner Street, and it may have been in an inn near here where Swedenborg had his famous vision of snakes and frogs crawling on the dining room floor in 1745. Swedenborg wrote about London in his *Last Judgment* and *Spiritual Diary*, and he published many of his visionary works in London. 26 Cold Bath Fields, however, offers special insight into the story of Swedenborg's time in the capital. It is here that Swedenborg wrote his last work, *The Coronis*, which he described as the crowning glory of his writing, but which was sadly lost. It is also here that he received the final sacrament from Dean Ferelius, Pastor of the Swedish Church, in the presence of Mr Bergström, an old Swedish friend with whom Swedenborg had previously lodged in Wellclose Square. Eight days later, on 29 March 1772, he left this world having predicted the precise time of his passing.

Swedenborg stayed in Cold Bath Fields on at least two occasions. The first was during 1769, when he saw his *Interaction of the Soul and Body* and *Brief Exposition* through the press. The second was from August 1771 until his death in 1772. The house was owned by Richard Shearsmith, a peruke-maker who had a shop at street level, and with his wife, children and their maid occupied the two floors at the top of the building. Swedenborg stayed in two furnished rooms directly above the shop. The two photographs printed here are the only extant images. The entrance to Swedenborg's lodging was via the door at the bottom right of the premises (see *Fig. 1*).

In Swedenborg's day Cold Bath Fields was situated on the edge of the city, close to the countryside with the small village of Islington to the north-east. In describing the lodgings, Richard Shearsmith spoke of the rooms as sparsely furnished, containing a bed, a writing desk and a chest of drawers for clothes and other sundry items. His study held manuscripts, indices, a Bible and some clothes, which he brought with him. And with the exception of three close friends, namely Dr Hartley, Dr Messiter and Mr Cookworthy, Swedenborg rarely took visitors.

His desk (thought to be the table now situated in the Wynter Room at Swedenborg House) supported letters from famous people across Europe, all of which were sadly destroyed on Swedenborg's death. The majority of his personal effects—his manuscripts and clothing—were returned to Sweden, but some items found their way to Swedenborg House and are now part of the Society's Collection. These items include the writing desk, a walking stick, a fragment of Swedenborg's blotting paper and a lock of Swedenborg's hair.

Until very recently it was assumed that the house in which Swedenborg lived stood on the north side of the square, towards the present-day Topham Street. However, if we examine the photograph from c. 1930 in the Swedenborg Archive (*Fig. 2*) we arrive at a different conclusion. Here,

when following the line of buildings framed in box A (some of which are still standing) we see that no. 26 stood on the opposite side of the square, now currently Baker's Yard. This is shown in box B. A comparison of street maps from 1790 and the present day are shown in *Fig. 3*. No. 26 was knocked down as part of a redevelopment during the early years of the twentieth century. In its place there stands today a courtyard with commercial premises for local businesses. Many of the streets in the nearby locality remain as in Swedenborg's day, and so it is possible to retrace his steps to Mr Hart, his bookseller in Poppins

Court, and to Mary and John Lewis, his printers, in Paternoster Square.

Another famous resident of the square was Mrs Lewson, or Lady Lewson, as she was generally known, who died in 1816, aged over 100 years old. Swedenborg would no doubt have encountered this lady. She lived in Cold Bath Fields all her life, but later became something of a recluse and rarely took visitors. Today the spring at the centre of the square has been converted into underground sewer outlets. Topham Street—named after Thomas Topham, the Strong Man of Islington—and Warner Street have kept their names and general position. On the north-west corner of the square, where once stood Coldbath Fields Prison (also known as the Middlesex House of Correction), there now sits Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant Mail Centre.

Following Swedenborg's death in 1772, visitors often called on Shearsmith for information about his former Swedish lodger. One of these was Robert Hindmarsh, the founder of >

Fig. 1. (centre and front cover) A photograph of 26 Cold Bath Fields (the middle one of the three properties) taken circa 1930 and kept in the Swedenborg Society Archive. The room at the front, with the two arched windows, would have been Swedenborg's study. William Allingham, in his notes to his collection of lyrical poems entitled *Nightingale Valley* (1860), described Swedenborg in these rooms as dressed in 'black and green velvet outfit, a placid, venerable, thin man of eighty-four, of erect figure and abstracted air, wearing a full-bottomed wig, a pair of long ruffles, and a curious-hilted sword'.

NOTES

- ¹ Hindmarsh was instrumental in organizing the first General Conference of the New Church in Great East Cheap in London, in 1789, which saw a separatist denomination established. He also ordained its first two ministers.
- ² This affidavit, dated 24 November 1785 and signed before Thomas Wright, Lord Mayor of London, is kept in the Swedenborg Society Archive (D/39).



FIG. 1.



16

FIG. 2 (above). Topham Street and the junction of the south-west corner of Cold Bath Square, looking southwards. Some of the buildings in box **A** still stand today and it is possible to identify the house framed in box **B** as No. 26, where Swedenborg is thought to have lodged with the Shearsmiths.



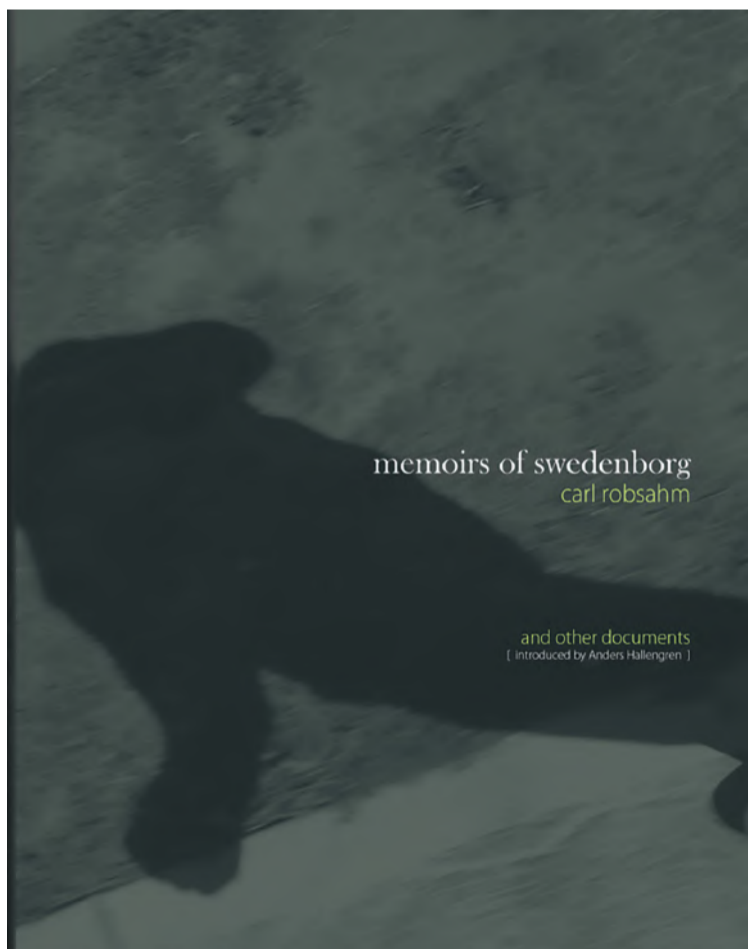
FIG. 3 (above). The map on the left shows the 1790 street layout superimposed upon a current map with no. 26 Cold Bath Fields blocked out in red. The map on the right shows where the approximate location of no. 26 would be if situated in Baker's Yard today.

the New Jerusalem Church,¹ who drew from the wigmaker the following affidavit² detailing Swedenborg's final hours whilst in the care of Shearsmith and his maid. Unable to write, the document is signed by Shearsmith with an X. The interview was transcribed as follows:

“ That the late Honourable Emanuel Swedenborg came to lodge a second time to his this deponent's house, No. 26, Cold Bath Fields aforesaid, in the month of July or August, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-one, and continued to lodge there until his death, which happened the twenty-ninth of March following. That a short time before Christmas, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-one, he had a paralytic stroke, which deprived him of his speech, and occasioned his lying in a lethargic state for three weeks and upwards, during the whole of which time he took no sustenance whatever, except a little tea without milk, and cold water occasionally; and once about two tea-spoonfuls of red currant jelly. That about the expiration of three weeks from the time he was so struck, he recovered his speech and health a little, and ate and drank toast, tea, and coffee, as usual. That from that time to the time of his death, he was visited but by a very few friends only, and always seemed unwilling to see company. That about a month before he died, he told this deponent, then Elizabeth Reynolds, spinster, who was then a servant to her fellow-deponent, and Mrs. Shearsmith her then mistress, that he should die on a particular day, which to the best of her re-collection and belief happened on the day he had foretold. That about a fortnight or three weeks before he died, he received the sacrament in bed from the hands of a foreign clergyman, and enjoyed a sound mind, memory, and understanding, to the last hour of his life. That about five o'clock on Sunday, the twenty-ninth day of March he asked her, this deponent, and her then mistress, who were sitting by his bed-side what o'clock it was? And upon their answering him that it was about five o'clock, he replied, “Dat be good, me tank you, God bless you,” or to that effect; and in about ten minutes after, he heaved a gentle sigh, and expired in the most tranquil manner. And these deponents jointly and severally on their oath declare, that to the best of their recollection and belief, no person whatever visited him either the day before, or the day on which he died. And these deponents positively declare, that they never did, either directly or indirectly, say or assert to any person or persons whatsoever, that the said Emanuel Swedenborg had a few hours before his death retracted or contradicted any part of his Writings, as hath been falsely reported; nor did they ever hear him, nor do they believe he ever did say a word that expressed or implied such an idea; nor were these deponents ever asked a question relative to that circumstance, by any person or persons whatsoever, until the twenty-second day of October last, when Mr. Thomas Wright, of the Poultry, London, Watchmaker, and Mr. Robert Hindmarsh, of Clerkenwell Close, Printer, called upon them to inquire into the truth or falsehood of such report, which these deponents then declared to them, and now again on their oaths declare, to be a false and groundless report,
 RICHARD SHEARSMITH. (The Mark of X).
 Elizabeth Shearsmith.' ■



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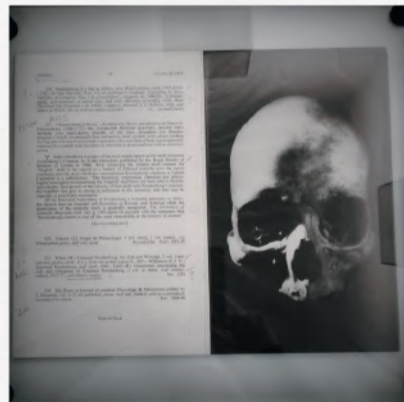
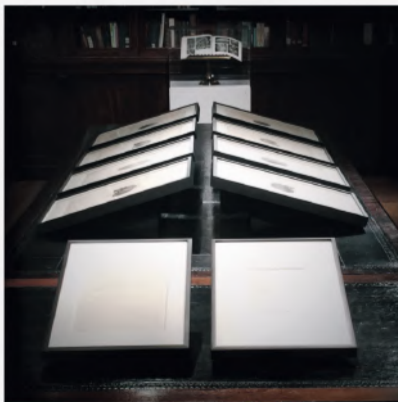


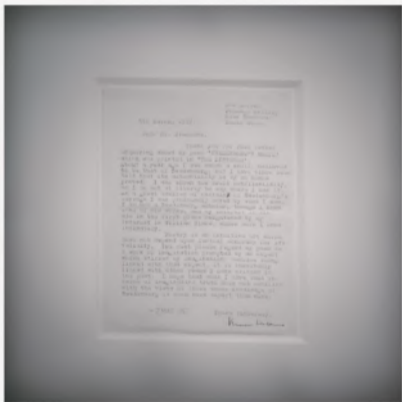
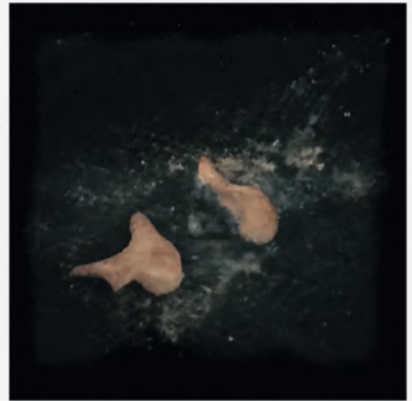


AD CAPUT CAPITIS: THE LOST SKULLS OF SWEDENBORG

WILLSHAW HUGHES
POLAROIDS BY JEFFERSON SMALL

During October 2017 Swedenborg House was home to an exhibition of material related to the uncommon story of Swedenborg's skull. Buried in East London in 1772, Swedenborg's skull was stolen on at least two separate occasions. The first was in 1816 and on its later return it was replaced with a 'ringer'. The second theft of the wrong skull occurred a year later, after which it found itself in the care of C A Tulk, a friend of William Blake, S T Coleridge and John Flaxman (who made a life-size plaster cast copy). The real skull resurfaced many years later in Swansea, during the 1950s, and was later put up for auction at Sotheby's. Over the years both the 'real' and 'false' skulls have been the subject of intense literary focus, giving rise to numerous poems, essays, books, replicas and eulogies. Curated by Stephen McNeilly, with talks by Iain Sinclair, Colin Dickey and a flag by artist Jeremy Millar, the polaroids shown here offer a snapshot of the artefacts on display. The photographs were taken on a Polaroid camera held in the Society's archive. ■





The Post-Human and John Murray Spear: Spirit Science and the New Motor

New research into historical figures of the Spiritualist movement and their connection with other important themes of the nineteenth century.

ALEX MURRAY

NOTES

¹ John Benedict Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 96-7.

² Jill Galvan, 'The Victorian Post-Human: Transmission, Information and the Séance', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, eds. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Wilburn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 79-96 (p. 81).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴ See Buescher, pp. 42-73 for a more detailed account.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶ John Murray Spear, *The Educator: Being Suggestions, Theoretical and Practical, Designed to Promote Man-Culture and Integral Reform, with a View to the Ultimate Establishment of a Divine Social State on Earth...* (Boston: Office of Practical Spiritualists, 1857), p. 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁸ Buescher, p. 96.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Recent historical theory surrounding the Spiritualist movement of the nineteenth century has tended to focus on the relationship between spiritualism, science and technology. This interest centres on the appropriation of emergent early-to-mid-nineteenth century scientific discourses by the Spiritualist movement itself, and its attempt to present its religion in empirical, rational terms. It has also included explorations of the seance as a technological mechanism, post-humanist sentiment in Spiritualist rhetoric and lengthy discussion of Spiritualism's preoccupation with electricity and magnetism. It is strange, then, that alongside this there has not been a revival of interest in the figure of John Murray Spear, a man whose attempted fusion of technology with 'spiritual-science' rhetoric led to, possibly, one of the most bizarre and interesting incidents in the whole movement's history: the attempted invention of a perpetual motion machine that would supply a near limitless amount of free energy as well as amplify humanity's understanding of spiritual truths. He called this the New Motor. John Buescher, in his biography of Spear, sums up the intentions behind the New Motor thus:

'A New Man, a New Motive for Man, a New Movement for Man, a New Movement of the Infinite springing forth in the mind, a Novel Combination of materials, a New Kind of Machine, a New Microcosm, a New Society in miniature, a New World, and a New Heaven materialising on a new Earth'.¹

Its manifold roles were to be contained within a mechanism built to represent human biology in hermaphroditic form, standing at the intersection between the technological, the human and the divine.

As Jill Galvan notes in her essay on the post-human and the seance, 'one surprising thing to realize about nineteenth-century spiritualism is, indeed, that it was not ostensibly a movement about spirits. At bottom, it was really about what constitutes the human'.² As this essay will argue, in Spear's attempted creation of the New Motor, and the theoretical spirit-science that informed it, the question of 'what constitutes the human' is pushed to its limits and enters into a space that could be described as an analogue of the post-human. While Galvan's essay deals with the post-human firmly in relation to the seance, her ideas form a useful framework through which it is possible to analyse the New Motor. Galvan states that 'the discourse of the post-human is not contained within technological constructs—these are only one expression of it. More generally, we can say that its core involves re-envisioning the definitions, agencies and prerogatives

of the human'.³ Such re-envisioning of the human can be witnessed in both the spirit-science that informed the New Motor and in the construction and subsequent attempts to power the device. This essay will look at both of these subjects in turn, but, before that, a brief biographical sketch of Spear will help contextualize the events that led to the creation of the New Motor.

Starting out as a Universalist minister from a poor background, John Murray Spear (1804-87) occupied a position of prominence in various antebellum American reform movements such as abolitionism, prison reform and various pacifist and anti-war campaigns. After discovering the work of Andrew Jackson Davis in 1847, Spear went through a series of episodes during which he felt that a spiritual hand was guiding his movements. This period was also defined by him coming more and more into contact with various Spiritualist figures (including Davis himself) and eventually led to his adoption of the role of spirit medium in 1852.⁴ After a year spent establishing himself as an impressive spirit healer and medium, Spear came to believe that he was in contact with a group of twelve spirits of famous historical figures.⁵ They called themselves the 'Association of Beneficents' and told Spear that they had formed seven separate associations in the spirit world, 'each having charge of a specific department in the great work of earth's regenerations'.⁶ It was one of these seven associations, the 'Electric-izers' that would lead Spear in the creation of the New Motor.

Led by Benjamin Franklin, the other members of the Electric-izers were no less famous, the group being made up of Benjamin Rush, Arthur S Lee, Oslie Shallee, Richard Johnson, Joseph Hallett and, enigmatically, 'a name in mystical characters'.⁷ Through Spear they (and the seven other associations) transmitted various treatises covering revelatory ideas that would change the face of human society. These treatises were transmitted to Spear before, during and after the creation of the New Motor and were eventually published as *The Educator* in 1857. In November 1852, Spear received the first message from Benjamin Franklin 'who announced the imminent advent of a "New Motor"',⁸ and work commenced on the project in July 1853 with Spear picking High Rock Cottage in Lynn and the tower built on the land as his base of operations.⁹ It was here that Spear would enter into trances and transcribe the schematics that the New Motor would be built from.

Here, it is worthwhile to pause for some time to consider the 'Papers Relating to Electric, Magnetic and Ethereal Laws'

that make up part of *The Educator* in their relation to wider Spiritualist beliefs, as well as how their contents inform this essay's assertions. This reflection on Spear's spirit-science will also help to inform later discussion that will treat of the New Motor itself.

THE GRAND ELECTRICAL FOCUS

Bret Carroll in *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* asserts that two defining influences were incorporated into American Spiritualist religion, those of the theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg and the mesmerist movement of the 1830s and 1840s. Swedenborg gave to the movement 'the bulk of its defining features and was therefore its most important source'. Whereas from mesmerism they took the belief that 'the universe was a harmonious physical and spiritual unity in which an invisible, universal, and all-pervasive fluid acted as the crucial integrating element'. Also important to this is the idea that 'the body and soul could be affected by means of a magnetic force transmitted from one person to another in the trance state'.¹⁰ In line with scientific mores of the day, they posited this 'all-pervasive fluid' as electricity and magnetism, which became 'a crucial metaphorical concept in comprehending the operation of the spiritual universe'.¹¹ Spear himself was apt to conflate the terms *electricity* and *magnetism* and used them interchangeably.¹²

Underpinning this was an acceptance of the scientific model of empiricism and the definition of spiritual phenomena as an extension of natural laws. The Spiritualists approached science with an 'almost worshipful attitude' and this led to them applying 'the ideas and vocabulary of the physical sciences to their understanding of spirit, tapping the epistemological authority of empirically based knowledge to suit their religious ideology to the demands of a scientific age'.¹³ As Richard Noakes notes, 'Spiritualists [reclassified] the spiritual as natural or "ultra-mundane"'.¹⁴ They achieved this through adhering to materialism, asserting that the spirit was matter (i.e., electricity), and therefore scientific investigation was free to include 'the invisible spiritual sources of causation and inner sources of illumination'.¹⁵

With the above in mind, Spear's (or, should it be the Electric-izers?) assertion in the pages of *The Educator* that 'the grand instrumentality, the native element, by which all things move, is ELECTRICITY', and that 'It is the GRAND MOTIVE-POWER OF ALL THINGS',¹⁶ can be seen to conform to the basic tenets of spirit-science. Conceiving of God as the 'Grand Electrical Focus', and the 'MIND OF ALL MINDS', Spear states that 'all minds emanate, like streams from a reservoir' from this grand focus.¹⁷ Via a modification of Swedenborg's theological idea of influx, Spear posits a network of minds emanating from the Grand Electrical Focus, or the Grand Central Mind, as he also dubs God. A great 'telegraphic communication, by means of what may be termed an Electric chain', in which all minds are linked from higher to lower, like the spokes radiating out from a wheel. Minds that are closer to the centre, that is the Grand Central Mind, are closer to spiritual truth and, in turn affect the mind below them in the chain.¹⁸ Within this, 'each individual person has his or her position in the grand whole. Each mind acts on surrounding minds; and each mind this acted on, in its turn acts upon minds which surround it. Thus mind is constantly affecting mind—the higher always controlling the lower'.¹⁹

When humans themselves are added to this, things take a turn for the remarkably post-human:

'Yet man is really an *invisible* being; he lives, thinks, moves, sees, hears, feels; but no merely human eye ever yet

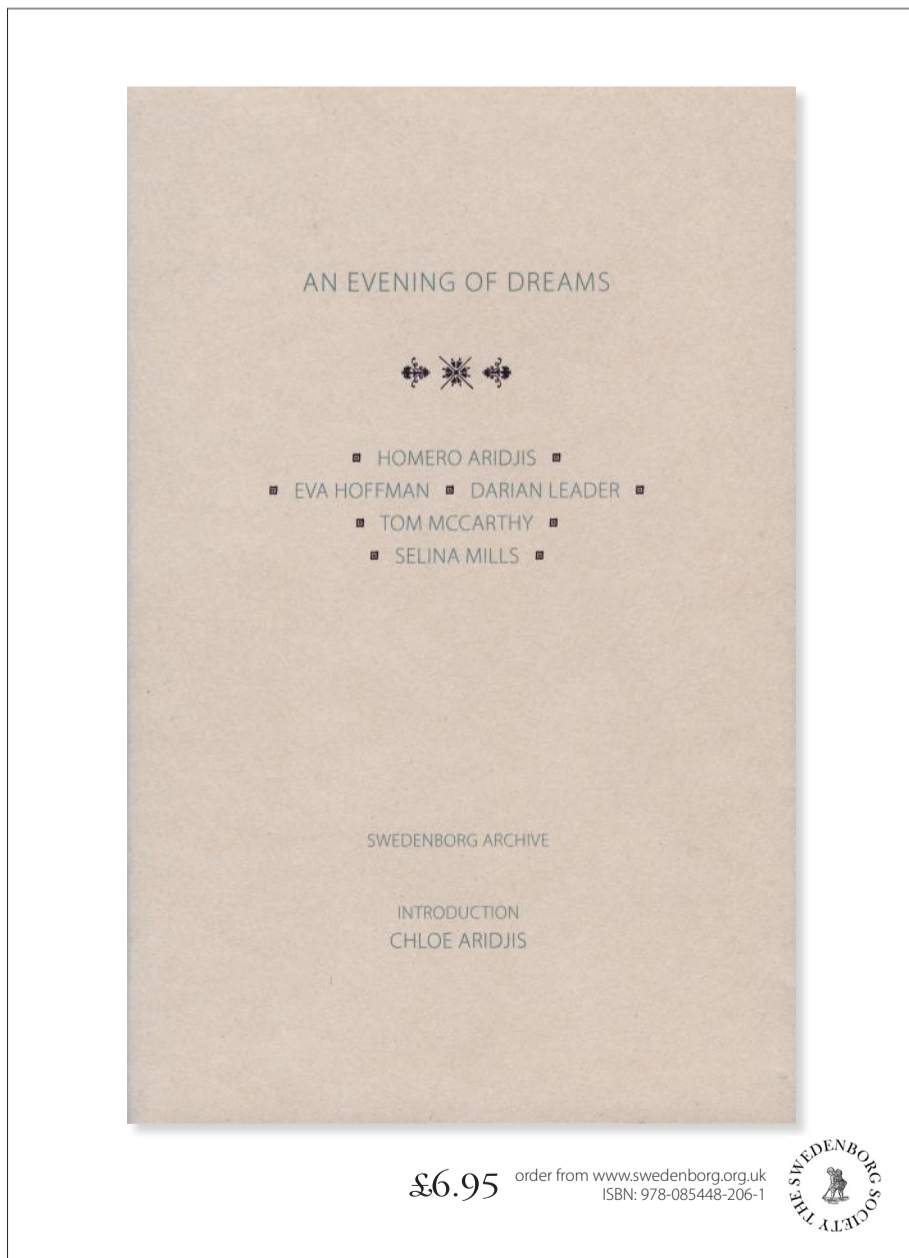
saw a man. He is as truly invisible as is God himself. All that is seen of man is the *beautiful mechanism in which he moves*'.²⁰

Spear reduces the physicality of humanity to that of a piloted automaton, a simple encasing that 'man' occupies for some time before ascending into a more prominent position within the network. The *real* 'man' then, is actually the spirit and as Spear states, 'spirit is but rarefied Electricity—nothing else'.²¹ Even emotional and physical perception is nothing more than 'differences in the *amount* and *quality* of . . . Electricity'.²²

In this we see that, for Spear, humanity exists within a vast network. Life and thought itself are directed through a series of nodal points in constant interaction with each other, that Spear reminds us are 'governed by fixed, universal laws'.²³ Indeed, due to this electrical network, Spear's belief was that 'independence does not exist', and that 'self-generation is a fallacy'.²⁴ Humanity's independence entirely removed, Spear reduces the human to a series of electrical impulses governed by an ultra-mundane electrical centre, piloting a mechanism that has the illusion of physical and emotive action within its frame. In some ways, Spear asserts that we are already post-human. Virtual networked entities of data, plugged into a central mainframe whose signal becomes weaker the further it travels from its source. This state forms an analogue of one of Galvan's definitions of the post-human as 'virtual states, wherein human identity is translated as information itself and can thus be transferred from one physical substrate to another'.²⁵ It is also possible to see within this the slow >

NOTES

- ¹⁰ Bret E Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1997), p. 18.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ¹² Spear, p. 161.
- ¹³ Carroll, p. 66.
- ¹⁴ Richard Noakes, 'The Sciences of Spiritualism in Victorian Britain: Possibilities and Problems', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, pp. 25-54 (pp. 36-7).
- ¹⁵ Carroll, pp. 67-8.
- ¹⁶ Spear, p. 159.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164 (last emphasis mine).
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 517.



Clearly the divine traits of humanity could not be ignored by the Spiritualists, as well as their place in direct contact with God.

NOTES

²⁵ Galvan, p. 80.

²⁶ Carroll, p. 87.

²⁷ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Love and Wisdom* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1987), p. 2.

²⁸ Swedenborg, *The Delights of Wisdom on the Subject of Conjugal Love Followed by the Gross Pleasures of Folly on the Subject of Scortatory Love* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1996), p. 37.

²⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, Drawn from Things Heard and Seen* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), p. 295.

³⁰ Spear, p. 203.

³¹ For a more detailed description see Spear, *The Educator*, p. 240.

revealing of how something like the New Motor could come into existence. It essentially would only need to tap into the network to draw on its power.

From the above it would appear as if God in actuality was nothing but cold, dead energy and this appears to be a subject, according to Carroll, that Spear himself was not entirely comfortable with.²⁶ Yet Spear describes moving closer to God as an ascendance towards spiritual truth, which imbues God with at least some emotive faculties. At play here is another modification of Swedenborgian doctrine.

Swedenborg, in standard mystical tradition, holds that God Himself is infinite love,²⁷ which is also analogous in Swedenborg's writings to the words 'truth' and 'good'. This is translated into humans via influx (or 'inflow' as some translations style it) as 'wisdom' and 'love'. The reception of wisdom and love in humans is split between genders, man receiving wisdom and woman receiving love.²⁸ It is only in the unification of marriage and, indeed, sex that these two concepts are united and become whole. Swedenborg mentions that married angels in heaven appear as one person due to the uniting of these concepts.²⁹

While Spear opts for the term single 'truth' in *The Educator*, he is happy to borrow Swedenborg's term 'influx' to describe the translation of truth through the network. Spear also borrows from Swedenborg the gendering of love and wisdom, but takes this a step further than Swedenborg claiming that 'The Mind of all Minds is, moreover, both feminine and masculine', something which he conflates, later on in *The Educator*, with the more scientific terms 'positive' (masculine) and 'negative' (feminine).³⁰ This concept also has important ramifications for the hermaphroditic nature of the New Motor as will be discussed later.

Spear, then, utilizes Swedenborgian concepts to imbue this electrical God and, therefore, humanity with emotive, divine colouration. While not completely explicit on the subject, one must assume that due to Swedenborg being one of the major influences on the Spiritualist movement these ideas would have been understood by a contemporary reader. Spear's interchangeable use of the words *mind*, *electricity* and *truth* also seem to suggest that he was reconciling all these terms into one. With this final point in place, discussion can now turn to the New Motor itself.

THE NEW MOTOR

The parts and construction that went into the New Motor were of a deeply symbolic nature. A curious collection of magnets, wires and various metals held together with steel uprights all placed upon a kitchen table, these parts were specifically chosen and arranged in representation of human biology.³¹ As Spear held, 'mineralistic substances' that existed in the human body '[become] an *attractor* of the currents of vital electricity, or magnetism in its various conditions, and thus motion exists in the organism'. If these

substances were configured correctly 'in the form of a mechanism', then 'such a structure may thus be made to attract celestial magnetism, and become "a thing of life" as truly as is the human mortal body'.³² The machine was also of a hermaphroditic nature with, 'the positive and negative, or male and female elements. . . represented by the contents of two jars, with their several ingredients (composed of peculiar chemical preparation, from substances respectively positive and negative). The wires connecting the two represent sexual intermingling, so that the two become one and by this process a third is produced'.³³

The general principle behind the New Motor was a demonstration, transmitted from the spirit world 'with the alleged view of disclosing to mankind the principle of Perpetual Motion, or Universal Activity'.³⁴ It appears, however, in the process to have become the construction of a new human in mechanized form. These two assertions are not necessarily separate. As Buescher notes, the goal behind the New Motor was to become 'an image of the medium acting as a channel for divine energy, a new, more sensitive type of human'.³⁵

Galvan sheds some interesting light in this direction when she sets up an exploration of the medium as a transmitter and 'communications device operated on by the dead'.³⁶ While Galvan limits the medium to just communications from the dead, it is clear from Spear's spirit-science that this role was to be expanded in the case of the New Motor to the raw output of divine energy. Given the Swedenborgian nature of God that Spear borrowed, this energy was still, in part, a communicative transmission, one that went straight to the source of spiritual truth as it were. Also inherent in mediumship, as Galvan notes, is what we would today understand as 'noise', or 'part of a transmission that adds to or interferes with the signal or message, either obscuring or distorting it', as she defines it.³⁷ This is a phenomenon that Spear also acknowledges in his spiritual, electrical network when he posits that the higher amount of minds a thought (i.e., information) has to pass through (which is mediated by how close one is to spiritual truth), 'the more imperfect, and the less reliable, is the impression it makes upon the terminal mind, or the medium through whom it is expressed'.³⁸

In this way, the New Motor would perfect the role of the medium, projecting from the source what the medium could only tap from their less privileged position in the network. Galvan expands greatly on this when she posits that:

'In large part, what the spirit-seekers wanted was a human who was also a machine. They were perturbed when the data she [the medium] communicated was not reliable. . . Inversely, however, spiritualists wanted a machine who was also a human. Like the modern trope of the android whose mechanical perfection leaves a sense of deficiency, some capacity for emotion still wanting, the spirit medium as *only* a transmitter would never do'.³⁹

Clearly the divine traits of humanity could not be ignored

by the Spiritualists, as well as their place in direct contact with God. Therefore, the New Motor had to exhibit at least an analogue of this privileged, *human* position for it to be effective.

Attempts to power the machine, or, as Spear would have it, bring it to life, saw the blurring of the divide between the human and the mechanical taken to the absolute extreme. After some eight or nine months spent building the New Motor, it was finally complete.⁴⁰ Spear then went through a series of processes to power the machine. The first was to give the machine a shock from a static generator. This being done, people were then brought into contact with the New Motor, individually, or in small groups, sitting in a circle around the New Motor in the codified electrical pattern of the seance.⁴¹ These contact sessions were stratified, so that persons of a lower spiritual nature were introduced to the machine first, and then ascending through people deemed closer and closer to spiritual truths. This rudimentary form of programming, Spear presumed later, was to connect the intermediate links between the physical parts of the New Motor with that of the more spiritual aspects that would ‘act upon and in it’.⁴² As Buescher notes, at this point people around the machine began to attempt to mix their identities with the New Motor by ‘[acting] like—and even [making] themselves, in part—machines’. One of the ways they tried to achieve this, was to ingest some of the same metals they had built into the machine, thereby making themselves more ‘metallic’.⁴³

If this wasn’t strange enough, things took a turn for the even stranger when Spear donned a suit of what can only be described as spiritual armour, covered in various metals, jewels and rudimentary batteries, and began interacting with the device. Falling into a deep trance, a witness, defined as a ‘clear-seer’, described a spiritual ‘umbilicum’ connecting Spear with the New Motor. Upon waking, ‘the condition of extreme exhaustion in which he was found at the termination of this process indicated conclusively that “virtue,” of *some* sort, “had gone out of him” by this novel mode of transfer’.⁴⁴

These events largely speak for themselves. The programming of the New Motor, the participants muddling their identities with it and Spear’s act of imparting his spiritual essence to the machine are all clearly indicative of post-human states. Through Spear’s quasi-abstract conception of the human as a networked electrical force, humanity itself had become more mechanized. Now, through its application in the New Motor, the mechanical could also become more human.

There is, however, one more event left to describe that forms the climax of this bizarre post-human ritual. Spear had only imparted the masculine, electrically positive charge needed to power the device—to complete it a feminine, negative charge would also be needed. This was to be found in Sarah Newton, ‘the Mary of a new dispensation’.⁴⁵

While *The Educator* is reticent on the details of Sarah Newton’s role, Buescher’s biography contains the full story. Newton was summoned to High Rock Tower by Spear, who had been ‘impressed’ to invite her. Apparently, for some time prior to her arrival she had been party to visions of a maternal nature, and had started exhibiting signs of pregnancy.⁴⁶ Upon her arrival, according to prominent nineteenth-century Spiritualist Emma Hardinge’s recounting of events, ‘all parties concerned recognized their correlation to each other and the singular piece of mechanism’.⁴⁷ When Newton came close to the machine, her sensations of pregnancy

intensified and she fell into a sort of spiritual labour for two hours in which she felt that the most interior parts of her spirit were absorbed by the New Motor.⁴⁸ The unification of positive and negative spirit now complete in the New Motor, there was apparently ‘a slight pulsatory action [that] became perceptible in the extremities, that is the pendent magnetic balls around the circumference of the mechanism’. This motion apparently increased over time until it reached ‘a visible vibratory motion, first on the positive, and shortly afterwards on the negative side’.⁴⁹

Whether we take this claim of motion as true or not is unimportant. The interest here is in the actions of Spear and Newton. Through their quasi-copulatory act they had taken part in a post-human nativity, in which the line of procreation had been crossed to include the mechanical as well as the biological.

CONCLUSION

Of course, Spear’s New Motor was unsuccessful. As Buescher reports, when it failed to display any more activity, Spear had the New Motor dismantled and moved to a farm in Randolph where it was reassembled. This was near a place Spear and his associates had dubbed ‘Mount Telegraphis’, which they believed had electrical qualities that might be used to further charge the New Motor. This plan was put an end to when a mob broke in one night and destroyed the New Motor.⁵⁰ While Spear may not have imparted a source of infinite energy to the human race, he certainly imparted a sense of the uncanny that is analogous to modern attitudes towards the post-human. Through a confusion of facts it was feared by some members of the public that ‘an unnatural abomination was being born’, that it could procreate (though this might have been an actual intended function by Spear) and that ‘sex might be mechanized’. A letter from a Josiah Wolcott, printed in the periodical *New Era*, perfectly sums up these fears surrounding the New Motor. In it he recounts a dream he had in which the ‘New Motor had multiplied in a pyramidal expansion and taken over the earth’.⁵¹

This confrontation with the uncanny aside, the idea of harnessing spirits, or the power of spirits, to ease the burden of labour appears to have been in the zeitgeist of the mid-nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement in America. At least one writer unconnected with the Spiritualist movement, Nathaniel Parker Willis, makes mention that the spirit-force exerted in the shaking of tables and chairs could eventually be harnessed to power machines.⁵² It appears that no one other than John Murray Spear, however, had made the jump to actually attempting to do so. In the building of the New Motor, Spear pushed those ideas beyond the limits of ante-bellum American society’s credulity, attempting to redefine humanity in such a way that it could readily meld with the technology of the day. Though incapable of achieving these goals in his own time, maybe modern technology will one day see at least some of Spear’s ideas come to fruition. ■

● ALEX MURRAY is the librarian and archivist at the Swedenborg Society. His research interests have included Spiritualism; James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-99); and infant school pioneer and educator Samuel Wilderspin (1791-1866). He is currently researching late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century social reform movements, with particular emphasis on Swedenborgian involvement.

NOTES

³² Spear, p. 188.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁵ Buescher, p. 103.

³⁶ Galvan, p. 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁸ Spear, p. 162.

³⁹ Galvan, pp. 94-5.

⁴⁰ Spear, p. 110.

⁴¹ For a full description of this see Carroll, p. 135.

⁴² Spear, p. 242.

⁴³ Buescher, p. 112.

⁴⁴ Spear, p. 245.

⁴⁵ Buescher, p. 114.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Emma Hardinge in Buescher, p.114.

⁴⁸ Buescher, p. 114.

⁴⁹ Spear, p. 247.

⁵⁰ Buescher, p. 137.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵² Nathaniel Parker Willis, ‘Post-Mortuum Soiree’, in *The Rag Bag: A Collection of Ephemera* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1855), pp. 184-94 (p. 192).

The Vastation of Dr Singer: *Jacob's Ladder* and the Swedenborgian Afterlife

Originally written to accompany a screening of *Jacob's Ladder* in Swedenborg Hall on 3 September 2010, this essay is the first in a series of studies to look at cinema through a Swedenborgian lens.

JAMES WILSON

The only thing that burns in hell is the part of you that won't let go of your life; your memories, your attachments. They burn 'em all away. But they're not punishing you... They're freeing your soul... if you're frightened of dying and you're holding on, you'll see devils tearing your life away. But if you've made your peace then the devils are really angels freeing you from the earth. It's just a matter of how you look at it, that's all.

(DANNY AIELLO AS LOUIS, IN *JACOB'S LADDER*)¹

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¹ Danny Aiello as Louis, in *Jacob's Ladder*, dir. Adrian Lyne, screenplay by Bruce Joel Rubin (Carolco Pictures Inc., 1990).

² Swedenborg, *The Spiritual Diary*, tr. James Buss (London: James Speirs, 1902), vol. V, §§5693-4, pp. 12-13.

³ Cf. Swedenborg, *The Spiritual Diary*, tr. W H and A W Acton (London: Swedenborg Society, 2002), vol. I, §1039, p. 314.

⁴ Bruce Joel Rubin speaking in *Building Jacob's Ladder*, dir. Charles Kiselyak on *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) (DVD, Optimum Releasing Ltd., 2008).

images: (right) The 'Vibroman' witnessed in one of Jacob's hellish visions. (right hand page) Tim Robbins as Jacob Singer in one of the film's most iconic scenes

Swedenborg uses the term 'vastation' in many of his works to describe a process or series of processes that a soul undergoes in the afterlife in preparation for its ultimate destination of heaven or hell. Vastation seems to be a kind of purification, a stripping away of the soul's more earthly and exterior aspects to its fundamental and spiritual core. Swedenborg's descriptions of vastations often read like punishments and torments, confusing and painful periods that can last from days to years (even as long as fifty).² God even permits evil spirits to do evil acts on those undergoing vastation,³ though ultimately this is part of a necessary and helpful process which will lead the soul to realize what

it truly is and where it really belongs. This ordeal of vastation has a great resemblance to the experiences of Jacob Singer, the eponymous hero of Adrian Lyne's film *Jacob's Ladder* (1990).

Bruce Joel Rubin's script for *Jacob's Ladder* always had big metaphysical questions at its core. Its origins were in a dream Rubin had where he was locked in a deserted subway station late at night. "The ultimate trap of that dream was that there was no way out. The only way out was *through* it and I had to go down into the darkness of my own existence in order to find a way to some kind of liberation".⁴ With this dream the premise for the opening of a movie was born. As Rubin began work on the script, building on the





germ of an idea found in Ambrose Bierce's short story 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge' (1890) and its subsequent film adaptation *La rivière du hibou* (1962) by French director Robert Enrico, he soon found that he was weaving a lot of his personal eschatology and philosophy into it:

'Although Jewish by birth, I had spent many years delving into the mystical and philosophical teaching of Eastern religions. I had traveled for nearly two years in the Orient, visiting many spiritual centers, including a Tibetan monastery, where I lived for about three months. Many of these religions propound a vision of heaven and hell, but these realms are projected as states of mind or states of being rather than actual locales. . . The trick for me was, how do I write a movie about all this?'⁵

Although Rubin's main influences were Eastern, with the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* cited in particular,⁶ there are congruencies with some of Swedenborg's thought and it is interesting to note that in a heavily worked scene that was cut from the script prior to shooting, Rubin voiced his four key metaphysical concepts through a character called *Emanuel Stern*:

'First, that the world of matter and individual consciousness are both manifestations of one Divine Reality. . . Second, human beings are capable not only of knowing about this Divine Reality by inference but can realize its existence by direct intuition, superior even to reason. . . Third, man possesses a double nature, an ego and an eternal self, what we call "spirit" or "soul." . . Fourth, and most important, man's life on earth has only one end and purpose, to learn to let go of the separate ego and to identify with the Divine spark within.'⁷

These doctrines all sit quite harmoniously alongside Swedenborg's teachings (as well as those of Buddhism), but when it came to portraying the afterlife in his screenplay, Rubin was keen to emphasize more traditional Judaeo-Christian archetypes, his visual influences being illustrated Bibles, Gustav Doré, Hieronymous Bosch and William Blake; and literary inspirations such as Milton and Dante.⁸ Although Swedenborg has some similarities with this traditional imagery, his afterlife is more detailed, more 'scientific', often reading like an analytical study of the infrastructure of the spiritual world.⁹ Swedenborg, aware of the subjectivity of his (and everyone's) experiences of life after death, tended to concentrate less on the visuals and more on the mechanics, the protocols and practices of the

next life. His writings focus on and stress the humanity of the hereafter: heaven and hell are each shaped like a man, a 'Grand Man', as he terms it; and they are constituted of and populated by human beings—all devils, angels and spirits were once earthly men and women.

In *Jacob's Ladder*, the 'humanity' of the afterlife is brought to the screen by the film's director, Adrian Lyne, who rejected the prominent role scriptwriter Rubin gave to traditional archetypes—Bosch-like demons, floating >

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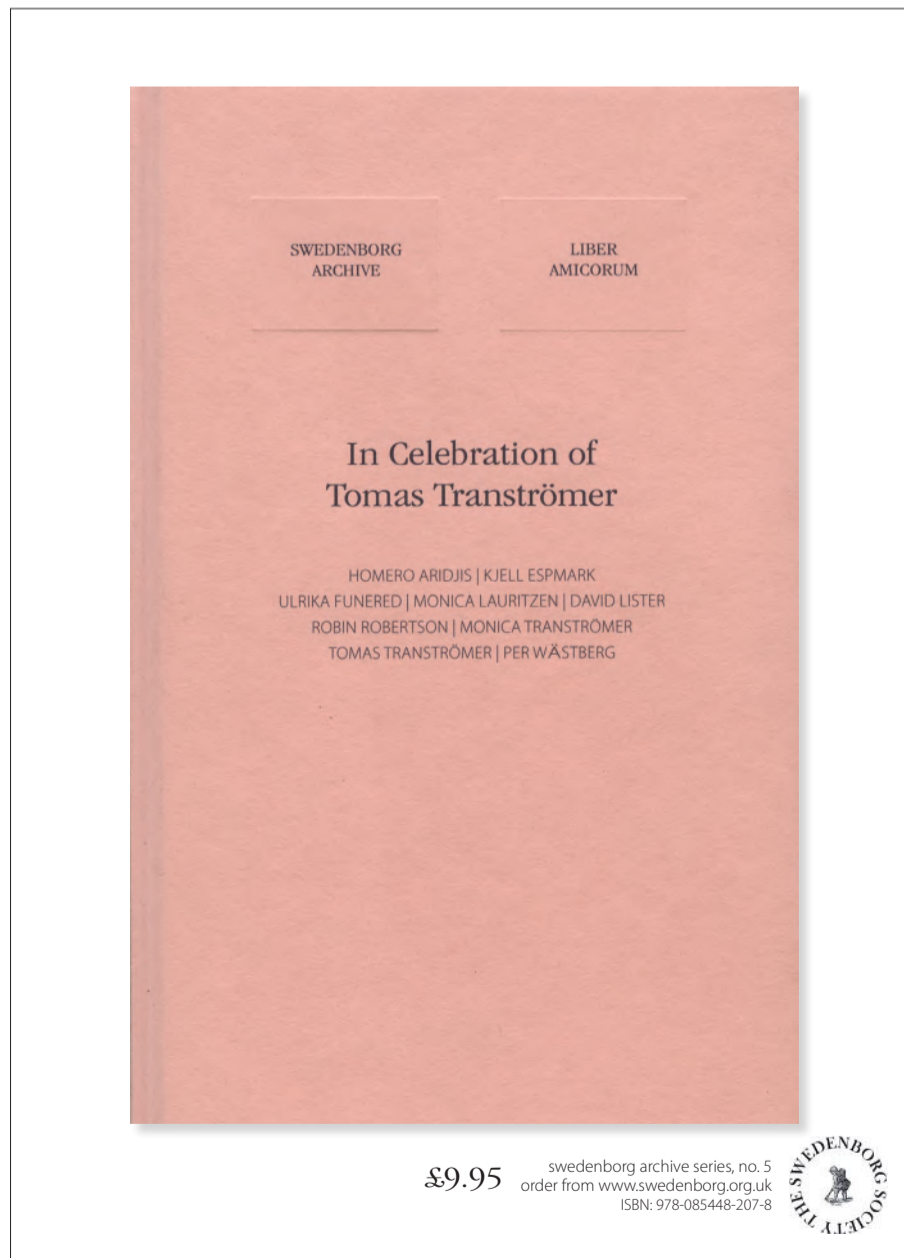
⁵ Bruce Joel Rubin, 'Jacob's Chronicle,' in *Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990), p. 150.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷ Bruce Joel Rubin, 'Scenes Deleted Prior to Production,' in *Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990), p. 116.

⁸ Bruce Joel Rubin, *Jacob's Ladder* (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990), pp. 179, 195, 184, 119.

⁹ Nevertheless, the voluminous quantity of Swedenborg's writings mean there is still more description and imagery of the afterlife to be found in his work than in most who wrote on the subject before him. Most notably in *The Spiritual Diary* (written 1745-65), *Heaven and Hell* (1758), and the so-called 'Memorabilia' sections of *Apocalypse Revealed* (1766), *Conjugal Love* (1768), and *The True Christian Religion* (1771).



NOTES

¹⁰ Thalidomide, when taken during early pregnancy, was found to cause a malformation or absence of limbs in children.

¹¹ Cf. Adrian Lyne's 'Director's Commentary' on *Jacob's Ladder* (1990) (DVD, Artisan Entertainment Inc., 1998).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rubin is given 'Associate Producer' credits for both *Ghost* and *Jacob's Ladder*, but it seems he was more present and influential on the set of the former than the latter, travelling with its production to both Los Angeles and New York.

¹⁴ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §§427, 278.

¹⁵ *What Dreams May Come*, dir. Vincent Ward, screenplay by Ron Bass (Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 1998), can

perhaps lay claim to being the film most directly influenced by Swedenborg, it being adapted from Richard Matheson's novel of the same name (New York: Putnam, 1978¹⁵), in which there are

direct citations from Swedenborg.

The film, however, is like reverse alchemy, taking a profound and interesting subject matter and converting it into the most insipid of sentimental melodramas.



angels, clouds, and so on. Lyne feared such imagery could look too familiar, even ridiculous on screen. The demonic imagery was influenced instead by the paintings of Francis Bacon, the photography of Joel-Peter Witkin, and the tragic effects of the sedative thalidomide, withdrawn from the UK market in the 1960s.¹⁰ Everything was to be 'rooted in flesh'. There would be no post-production special effects, everything being shot in-camera. Lyne worked closely with the editor, Tom Rolf, determined that the audience should see only glimpses of the horrific, and fill in the gaps with the far more potent resources of their imaginations. The cuts would also leave the viewer in the same uncertain position

as the film's hero, Jacob, doubting the reality of what they were seeing.¹¹

On the heavenly side of things, Rubin's screenplay's Edenesque paradise of light, and biblical celestial stairway (archly dismissed by Lyne as the 'Liberace sequence'),¹² are replaced by something more humble: a flight of steps in the Singer family's Brooklyn apartment. Rubin was dismayed at some of the alterations to his script's ending, but they benefit the film, grounding it in humanity and avoiding the nauseating schmaltz and fantasy of *Ghost* (1990), a film that went into production at the same time as *Jacob's Ladder*, and which was also scripted by Rubin.¹³ Lyne's introduction of heaven as home and family also strikes me as a very Swedenborgian concept. Swedenborg talks about people being greeted by friends and relatives after death and also about the correlation, in heaven, of wisdom and innocence.¹⁴ In *Jacob's Ladder*, Jacob is met and led by his deceased son, Gabe, who possesses an innocence and wisdom that sees a role reversal, with him becoming his father's guardian. But more than family, Swedenborg affirms that heaven (and hell) are where you belong and feel comfortable: hellish spirits find heaven an unbearable torture just as much as angels find hell repugnant. There can surely be no better metaphor for this notion of 'belonging' and 'comfort' than that of home.

The key to *Jacob's Ladder*, and the reason why, in my opinion, it is the most Swedenborgian portrayal of the afterlife in cinema,¹⁵ rests in the quotation given as an epigraph at the start of this essay. Danny Aiello plays Jacob's chiropractor, Louis Schwartz (in the script, he was renamed Louis Donato in the film). Louis is 'a priest, he's a father, he's a doctor, a psychiatrist, he's a philosopher' (Danny Aiello); 'Louis is the voice of wisdom, he is the guru, the teacher, the mentor' (Bruce Joel Rubin); he is 'more than what he appears to be' (Adrian Lyne).¹⁶ It seems that Aiello, Rubin and Lyne deliberately avoid restating the reveal that Jacob gives in the movie: 'you look like an angel, Louis'.¹⁷ Indeed, in his role as chiropractor, with Jacob prostrate/supine and in his care, Louis resembles an amalgamation of the celestial and spiritual angels that Swedenborg talks about as sitting at the head of a newly deceased person and,

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THE SWEDENBORG SOCIETY

whilst appearing to work on the ‘body’ (stripping away the skin of the face in Swedenborg; chiropractic manoeuvres in *Jacob’s Ladder*), reveal to the person that they are now a spirit.¹⁸ In the epigraph above, Louis’ words are a paraphrase of the medieval German theologian Meister Eckhart. They describe what is happening to Jacob Singer and are importantly repeated in a voice-over near the film’s end, as Jacob finally realizes and accepts what has happened to him. Perhaps with the substitution of ‘world of spirits’ for ‘hell’, Louis’ words also outline succinctly Swedenborg’s notion of vastation. Conversely, looking at what Swedenborg writes about vastation can serve as an illumination to the dark, disturbing and disorientating experiences undergone by Jacob in the film:

‘The memory which man properly calls the memory, is the natural memory, because it is of the natural mind, and is the memory of particulars, or of material ideas which correspond to words; this memory perishes when man dies. His soul retains the faculty of reasoning and of understanding from a certain spiritual memory, or the memory of ideas rational or immaterial, as they are called. It is his memory that causes a man after death to know no otherwise than that he is still in the life of the body. But because this memory is born from the natural memory it is replete with fallacies, and it still disturbs, obscures, and, if left to itself, perverts truths; wherefore this memory also successively vanishes, insomuch that even the rational born therefrom perishes. But this memory is nevertheless retained for some time, and is imbued with the cognitions of truth, even until it can be obliterated. At length the man remains—so far as he is a man—which is the part remaining, together with the things acquired, which is the soil in which new, or heavenly seed is sown. From this there arises a new man, that is, a heavenly paradise within man, with all heavenly felicity, peace and innocence. 1747, Dec. 15’.¹⁹

‘I heard from others that he [a certain spirit] had been sent to sleep, and I was instructed that some were sent into such states of sleep and sustain vastations through dreams, perhaps also through brief intervals of wakefulness, until they have been deprived of the phantasies which they have drawn with them [from the world]. 1747, Dec 30’.²⁰

‘Whether there is any vastation of evil without some feeling of pain or unpleasantness, I do not as yet know; for those who are being introduced into heaven are sometimes led to the last state of desperation, which desperation is the inmost of spiritual sufferings. 1748, Feb. 26’.²¹

These extracts, and others like them, shed light on Jacob’s confusing and uncomfortable shifting around different parts of his life (living with his wife and children; Vietnam; living with his lover Jezzies), often after sleeping or losing consciousness. They are all memories ‘replete with fallacies’ and are successively vanishing (most overtly signalled in Jezzies’ burning of Jacob’s family photographs, but more generally in Jezzies’ character as a whole—she is constantly diverting Jacob away from his past(s)).

Just as passages of Swedenborg can demand repeated reading, throwing up new insights each time, *Jacob’s Ladder* is a complex, layered film that warrants repeat viewing, revealing new details and questions with every visit—was there an homage to *Battleship Potemkin* in that scene? did that shot reference Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson*?—and often leaving one reeling at the strength of some of the performances. What a decision by Lyne and his casting agents (Risa Bramon Garcia, Billy Hopkins and Heidi Levitt) to use Tim Robbins, whose boyish face and natu-

ral good humour give necessary levity to the otherwise unendurable spectacle of Jacob’s suffering.²² Elizabeth Peña is magnificent in the role of Jezzies Pipkin, who fluctuates up and down the scales of the familiar/the other, the real/the other-worldly, and the angelic/the demonic, essentially in response to the projections of Jacob’s state of mind. Maurice Jarre’s subtle, phosphorescent score emerges out of and disappears back into the soundtrack and the sound effects like scent from an unstopped and recapped bottle.²³ Then there is the rich detail of the set designs and props, notably Jake and Jezzies’ apartment, based on a location in a high-rise block in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which proved too small to film in and so was rebuilt as an exact replica on set, only one foot larger in each direction to allow for the cameras. The camerawork and cinematography, meanwhile, are compelling and innovative, from the use of handheld cameras in the Vietnam sequences to ape documentary and news footage, to the ‘Dutching’ of camera angles to heighten a sense of discomfort and anxiety, and the regular use of top shots of Jacob, somehow adding to the nebulous burden pressing down on his existence, and providing us with the standout iconic image of the film: a pair of red-rimmed eyes slowly blinking open as the camera draws back to reveal Tim Robbins’ pale, spectral face half-emerging from a bath of ice water—the eyes hold the camera, the camera holds the eyes, in a bond of absolute astonishment and uncertainty. ■

● JAMES WILSON is the author of a novel *Three Bridges* (2014) and two collections of prose poems, *All the Colours Fade* and *The Song Remains the Same* (both 2012). He has also translated two books by the French writer Guy de Maupassant, *To the Sun* and *The Foreign Soul & The Angelus* (both 2008).

NOTES

- ¹⁶ Aiello and Rubin speaking in *Building Jacob’s Ladder*; Lyne on the ‘Director’s Commentary.’
¹⁷ Tim Robbins as Jacob Singer, in *Jacob’s Ladder*.
¹⁸ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §§449-50.
¹⁹ Swedenborg, *The Spiritual Diary*, vol. I, §353, p. 106.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, §427, p. 137.
²¹ *Ibid.*, §1042, p. 314.
²² A casting practice and rationale that has subsequently trailed Robbins’ career in films such as Frank Darabont’s *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and Clint Eastwood’s *Mystic River* (2003).
²³ *Jacob’s Ladder* made a mild impact on the UK music scene of the late 1990s, Jarre’s score and dialogue from the film being sampled in UNKLE’s collaboration with Thom Yorke ‘Rabbit In Your Headlights,’ from the album *Psyence Fiction* (Mo’Wax, 1998).
Images: Danny Aiello as the angelic chiropractor Louis.

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Seven Sonnets For Swedenborg

Cited as instrumental to Romantic, Symbolist and Modernist literary movements, Swedenborg has served as a source of inspiration to numerous poets including Coleridge, Tennyson, Elizabeth and Robert Browning, Paul Valéry, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, W B Yeats, Czesław Miłosz, Jorge Luis Borges and many more. In the first of seven articles, we open with a brief study of William Blake's 'The Divine Image'.

STEPHEN McNEILLY

1. WILLIAM BLAKE

The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
All pray in their distress;
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is God, our father dear,
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk, or jew;
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

Under the category of 'Rare Books' at the British Library, one can still handle the first English edition of Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom* once owned by William Blake. At §220 Swedenborg writes: 'a spiritual idea does not derive anything from space, but it derives everything from state'. Blake clearly agreed and has shown his approval with a pencil note that reads: 'He who loves feels love descend into him & if he has wisdom may perceive it from the Poetic Genius'. Elsewhere in the volume Blake has also underlined a passage by Swedenborg on the nature of space and time with the inscription, 'a poetic idea'. In both cases Blake sees something in Swedenborg akin to his own system, and in the latter case, as a source of inspiration.

Blake in fact was the first poet to utilize the literary and aesthetic power of Swedenborg's correspondences, and in the form of 'Memorable Fancies', he was also the first to adopt aspects of Swedenborg's literary methodology. We see this influence in the early works *There is no Natural Religion* (c. 1788) and *All Religions are One* (c. 1788), and we also see it in the late epic poems *Milton* (c. 1804-10) and *Jerusalem* (c. 1804-20). Around 1790, however, and in between these works, Blake developed a critical view of Swedenborg which culminated in his monumental *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (c. 1790-3).

Blake himself affirmed this changing view of Swedenborg to Crabb Robinson, the diarist and friend to Wordsworth, when at the end of

his life he said that his reading of Swedenborg was often marked by a negative sense of pride, but that Swedenborg was nevertheless 'a divine teacher'. Recent scholarship in turn tends to view Blake's turn against Swedenborg in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as a response to early followers of Swedenborg. Robert Rix, for example, in his *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (published by Ashgate, 2007), has written that Blake may well have been one of 'a group of believers driven out, as the clerics in the New Jerusalem Church embarked on a conservative course' and that it is clear there was a 'shakeout of unwanted tendencies that flourished in the early milieu, when more liberal ecumenicalism was the order of the day'.

The poem printed here, drawn from his now famous *Songs of Innocence* was written around 1789, and soon after Blake's reading of Swedenborg's *Divine Love*

and *Wisdom* noted above. It presents a fully Swedenborgian view of the universality of divine attributes in the human form, a signature concept that was to remain with Blake throughout his work. As with Swedenborg, Blake sought to assert a unified vision of life, in which contraries and opposites were held together in an infinite embrace. The poem comprises five quatrains. In English poetry this rhythmic form is often employed in hymns and nursery rhymes, and here the gentle tone and repetition of key phrases combine to evoke an uplifting sense of the sacred and the divine. ■

THINGS HEARD & SEEN

Welcome to 'Things Heard and Seen', a regular news, correspondence and preview section for the *Swedenborg Review*. The title of this section will be familiar to many readers as it is named after *Things Heard and Seen*, the thrice-yearly newsletter of the Swedenborg Society, created and edited by P L Johnson, that ran for 48 issues between Spring 2000 and 2017.



Swedenborg Hall set up for the exhibition last Autumn.

English Romantics

Exhibition at Swedenborg House 17 October - 2 November 2018

AVERY CURRAN

In the days leading up to the Bloomsbury Festival of 2018, vitrines were carried up and down stairs, artefacts brought up from the archive and text carefully prepared and printed. All this was in service of the upcoming exhibition, *Swedenborg and the English Romantics: items from the Swedenborg Collection*. Curated by Stephen McNeilly, the exhibition sought to make clear the ways in which generations of English Romantics were influenced by Swedenborg, drawing exclusively from items in the archive.

From 17 October to 2 November, the Hall was filled with over thirty unique objects from an array of figures, such as William Blake, S T Coleridge, John Flaxman and JJG Wilkinson. These included a set of original prints from Blake's *The Book of Job*, which have recently been acquired by the Swedenborg Society. Another vitrine held a series of



Baptismal font by John Flaxman, originally for the Cross Street Church, Hatton Garden.

automatic drawings by JJG Wilkinson, with eyes on plant-like stalks, strange spirals and abstract florals. Swedenborg's own body was represented in the exhibition as well, whether through locks of his hair and a velvet-lined box containing his ear bones or the tiny wax bust of him by John Flaxman.

The English Romantics comprised loose, overlapping groups of artists and writers, connected by their desire to emphasize the role of the imagination and, as Isaiah Berlin put it, a 'preoccupation with perpetually changing inner states of consciousness'. A number of these Romantic figures were deeply interested in Swedenborg. Blake owned and annotated Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, among others, and attended the first General Conference of the New Jerusalem Church at Eastcheap in 1789. He, and many others, found their search for the sublime reflected in Swedenborg's life and writings.

The opening of the exhibition was packed with people, strolling around the room with glasses of wine. The Bloomsbury Festival is always an excellent opportunity to bring new faces to Swedenborg House, and this was no exception. The items on display represented the breadth and depth of the Swedenborg Collection and there was something to captivate each person who attended. ■

The 2019 Birthday Meeting: An ensemble of Ten award-winning poets

x10: an ensemble of award-winning poets
took place at Swedenborg House on Saturday 26 January 2019.

DENISE PRENTICE

The 2019 Swedenborg Birthday Meeting was marked by the launch of the latest work in the Swedenborg Archive series: *In Celebration of Tomas Tranströmer*. Attended by Swedish Ambassador Torbjörn Sohlström, the event brought together ten award-winning poets reading from their work, including Mexican poet and environmental campaigner, Homero Aridjis; journalist and Chair of the Nobel Committee, Per Wästberg; and poet, translator and opera librettist, Ruth Fainlight.

Adam O’Riordan’s *Vanishing Points* explored the fading memorabilia of family life preserved through letters, photographs and fragmented recollections. A row of beach huts in Milford, 1930 evoking the faded nostalgia of family holidays, and a letter written in 1906 awakening the essence of a family relationship, both convey snapshots of lives ‘distilled before you disappear forever’. The theme of letters preserving the essence of an individual was explored further by Declan Ryan, inspired by letters written by the poet Alun Lewis to his married lover Freda Aykroyd, in which he describes a glimpse of her in public as a ‘flash of a sword’.

Sarah Howe paid recognition to the skill of literary and poetic translators who make the works of poets like Tranströmer accessible in the English language. Her series of readings revealed a poignant and searing personal history through her mother’s abandonment as a child in mainland China in 1949, as the Communists were beginning to cement power. ‘Islands’, a poem in the voice of Howe’s mother recalled a group of migrants journeying by boat in a vivid fragment of ‘sea drizzle, diesel and damp black hair’. Howe drew on forms of folklore and fable to bring light to the hidden, yet widespread practice of female infanticide in China in her reading of ‘Tame’, darkly prefaced with a Chinese proverb: ‘It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters’.

Ruth Fainlight read from her latest collection of poems, weaving synaesthetic pathways in *Meditations on Yellow*, a vivid examination of the ‘morning sunlight streaking through the blinds, the acid yellow of a lemon meringue, the yellow star of Ashkenazi Jewish roots, the flaring solar centre you must not stare into’.

Helder Macedo’s poetry roamed the ‘linguistic



Swedenborg Society President, the poet and environmental campaigner, Homero Aridjis, reading in Swedenborg Hall, accompanied by his daughter, novelist Chloe Aridjis, who read the English translations of his work.

kabbalah of the Iberian Peninsula’, in a collection of Portuguese poems in reference to a hurdy-gurdy man, with the rhythmic undulations of the Portuguese language playing on the tongue and conveying the buoyant spirit of the subject. A later poem, read by Chloe Aridjis, presented a strange inversion in the story, depicting an old man playing a soundless hurdy-gurdy that only the dogs can hear.

Homero Aridjis explored an emotional terrain in his range of self-portraits, ‘Poetry is a second life’, read first in Spanish, with an English translation read by Chloe Aridjis. ‘Tigre’, his self-portrait at age 16, refers to the eponymous brand of cheap cigarettes, which he first smoked at a time in his life lived with a ‘love for making love to everything, with a desire which could take shape anywhere’. ‘Ode to the Monarch Butterfly’ opened the focus from the personal to the global—a statement of environmental activism in reverence to the rivers of butterflies migrating from Canada to the Mexican hills, and their threatened extinction

through the disregard for the balance of nature.

‘The Ghost of a Dog’ explored the spectral visitations of a beloved family dog, long gone but remembered in Homero’s dreams, connecting their bond across time and space as they reunite for imaginary walks through Mexico City. This deeply personal and touching tale, combining memories, longing and the eternal nature of love, captured the pulse of the event as a whole: life stories through a breadth of perspectives, savouring the everyday and rendering the commonplace miraculous. ■

● DENISE PRENTICE has worked in the sectors of law, retail and finance. Her diverse professional background has taken her into both the private and public sectors, informing her expertise in business operations and organizational development. In addition to her work at the Society, Denise runs a communications consultancy providing copywriting and communication strategies to businesses and creative projects.

Drawing and exploring: Swedenborg House and its hidden treasures

'Discover the hidden treasures of Swedenborg House', drawing workshops for children with artist and author Sally Kindberg, 20 October 2018.

WORDS: AVERY CURRAN PHOTOS: JACOB CARTWRIGHT

On 20 October I found myself standing at the door of the Swedenborg House bookshop, checking names off a list as a host of parents and children crowded in excitedly to participate in a workshop here. The usually very stately oak-panelled room was strewn with brightly coloured pamphlets and signs, ready to direct those attending to the rooms of Swedenborg House—the Gardiner Room being transformed for the day into a quill pen workshop and the Wynter Room into a comic book workshop. These classes were run in conjunction with the Bloomsbury Festival, an annual celebration of the neighbourhood's creativity and energy, and most of those who arrived were unaware of Emanuel Swedenborg. Those of us who work at Swedenborg House found ourselves trying to summarize an eventful life in a few short sentences, before directing them to the fantastically charming booklets the artist Sally Kindberg had prepared.

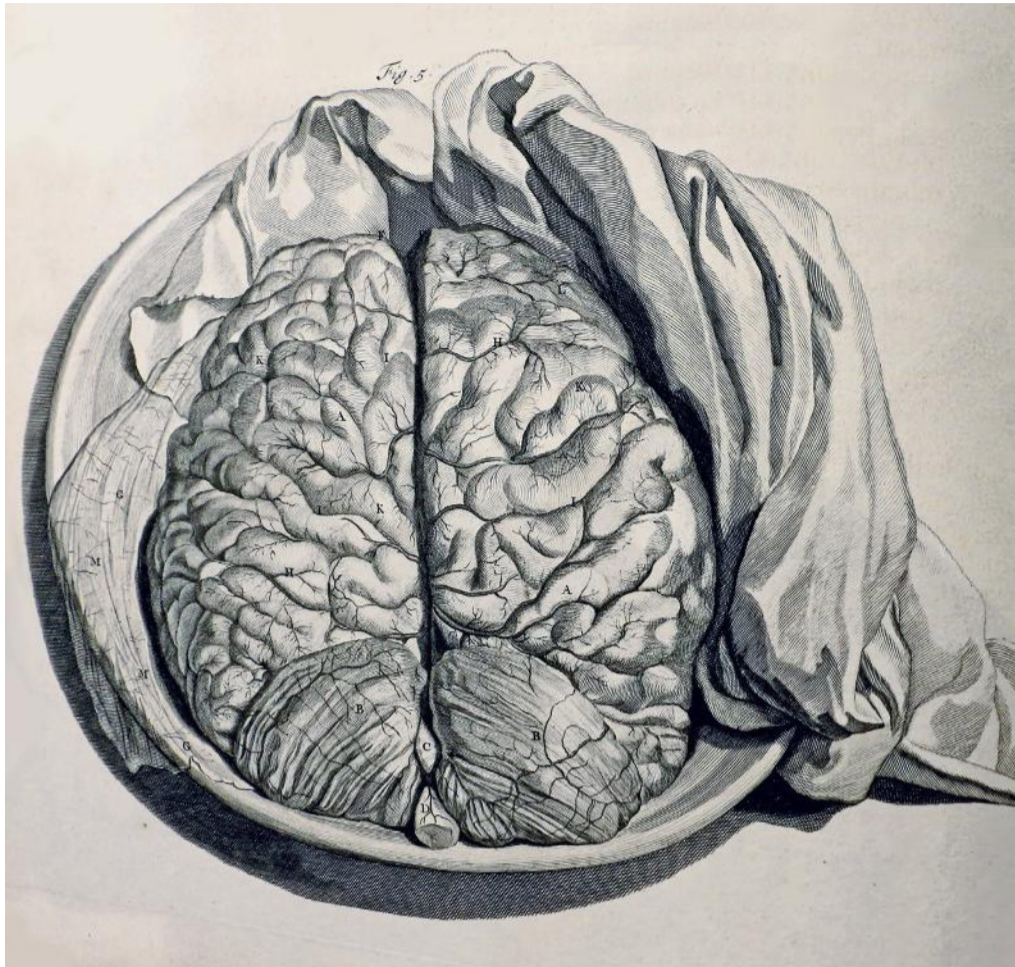
Sally has been the creative force behind all of the workshops, in her capacity as a comic book artist and designer. Her style brings clarity and humour to intriguing images, from a quill pen to a smiling Swedenborg himself. One of the best-loved activities from the workshop was a fill-in-the-blank of the bust of Swedenborg; we all loved seeing the children's playful renditions of a familiar face. Her depictions of items around the building which, when seen every day, might fade into the background, were a treat—I might never have questioned the purpose of some of these knick-knacks!

Of course, the interactive element was a big part of the fun of the event. The Gardiner Room was full of chattering children and their patient parents, as everyone took up their real quill pens. Because of the proximity to Halloween, there emerged a number of spooky black cats, as well as drawings of Swedenborg and some elegant calligraphy. Our own Jacob Cartwright produced an impressive medieval menagerie!

Overall, the event was a resounding success. It's always good to see new faces at Swedenborg House, especially when those faces comprise such a lively group. We are very grateful to everyone who attended, and especially to Sally Kindberg for making it such an enjoyable experience. ■



Pictures from top left to bottom: a quill pen drawing emerging from the hand of a young artist; replica wig (of the type worn by Swedenborg) being examined by a young visitor; artist and author Sally Kindberg demonstrating drawing techniques during her comic book workshop; workshop assistant Denise Prentice with visitors in the David Wynter Room.



Cartography of the Brain

A series of seminars run by Dr David Lister taking place at Swedenborg House on 18 July, 1, 15, 29 August and 5 September 2019. 12-2 pm in the Gardiner Room at Swedenborg House WC1A 2TH. Free entry. Please book your place by emailing avery@swedenborg.org.uk

32

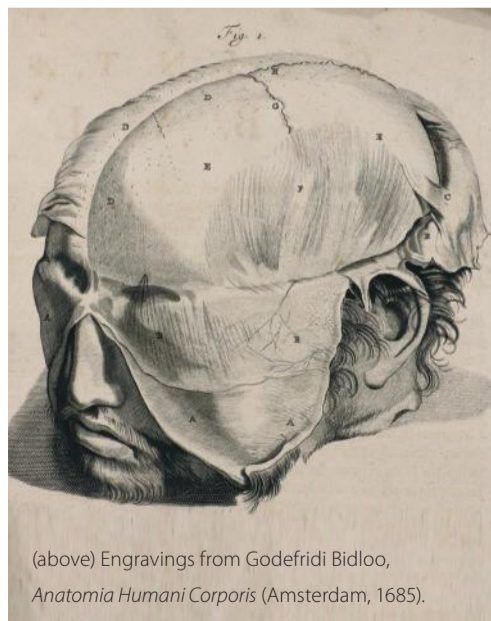
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AVERY CURRAN

We are delighted to have Dr David Lister, the current Chairperson of the Swedenborg Society, return to give another seminar series at Swedenborg House this summer. In 2017, David gave an excellent lecture for the Swedenborg Birthday Meeting on ‘The Anatomy of Heaven’, which was followed by a seminar series on how the brain forms the basis for a description of heaven. This summer, David is returning with a five-part seminar series on the cartography of the brain, to be held from 12-2pm every other Thursday in the Gardiner Room at Swedenborg House. During these five sessions, David will discuss map-making, the cartography of the brain, the infundibulum, EMDR therapy and Near-Death Experiences. He will touch on a wide range of topics, from the map-making capacity of honeybees, to an interpretation of the hormone oxytocin as ‘spirit’, to Christopher Polhem witnessing his own funeral through Swedenborg’s eyes.

To book your place for these free seminars on 18 July, 1 August, 15 August, 29 August and 12 September, just email avery@swedenborg.org.uk. Refreshments will be provided!

Dr David Lister has been a member of the Swedenborg Society for the last 25 years. His diverse

interests—scientific, spiritual and charitable—reflect those found in Swedenborg’s writings. David was a medical missionary in India and then a surgeon in Denmark, before returning to England to practice as a GP for the latter part of his career. David is the author of *The Feeling of What Happens/Smile or Die* (no. 8 in the Transactions of the Swedenborg Society series) and *Biblical Darwinism*.



(above) Engravings from Godefridi Bidloo, *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (Amsterdam, 1685).



In Memoriam: Norman Ryder (1933-2018)

● The passing last July of Norman Ryder saw the Swedenborg Society lose one of its greatest scholars. Norman served on the Society’s Advisory and Revision Board for 53 years and was a key figure in a string of landmark projects, including the third Latin edition of *Arcana Caelestia*; the English translation of Lars Bergquist’s biography *Swedenborg’s Secret*; and *A Lexicon to the Latin Text of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1688-1772). Indeed, editor John Chadwick reserved his ‘greatest debt’ to Norman for his work on the last publication mentioned, Norman’s ‘care and patience [resulting] in improvements and corrections on every page’. These words could, in truth, have been said by almost any member of the A&R Board in the last half a century, for there was scarcely a publishing project that came before the Board that Norman didn’t help to improve with his careful proofreading, his familiarity with New Church history, and his knowledge of languages, in particular his expertise in Hebrew.

Norman’s scholarship is perhaps best presented and remembered in his multi-volume reference work *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1688-1772). The ‘Biblio’, as it would be referred to warmly in house, has presented over 25 years’ worth of painstaking research to the benefit of academics, librarians and interested readers of Swedenborg all around the world, and will be cherished for many years to come. The dedication, sacrifice and determination to produce such a high quality of work can probably be imagined; the affection for the task can also be felt by anyone browsing through the thousands of pages of the Biblio. Perhaps what some readers won’t realize is to just what an extent Norman’s work brought people together, fostering an international community of Swedenborg-based research and publishing amongst individuals and institutions that had previously been somewhat isolated by their specialisms.

On a personal level, Norman’s regular appearances at Swedenborg House to work in its library and archive will be missed by all the staff, volunteers and trustees here at the Swedenborg Society. So too will his lively reports on his work, often the highlight of A&R Board meetings, giving light to Norman as raconteur, detective, friend and avid bibliophile. ■ JAMES WILSON



Store Street lit up for the Bloomsbury Festival, 2016.

Bloomsbury Festival

● All of us at Swedenborg House are very much looking forward to this year's Bloomsbury Festival in October. The Bloomsbury Festival is an annual programme of events of all kinds, celebrating everything Bloomsbury has to offer, from talks and readings to performance art. This is always a highlight of the year for the neighbourhood, and historically has been an opportunity for some very exciting events for us. Last year we marked the Festival by hosting another of our much-enjoyed children's drawing workshops, and by

putting on an exhibition that ran from October to November on *Swedenborg and the English Romantics: items from the Swedenborg Collection*. This year, the theme of the Bloomsbury Festival is 'Small steps and giant leaps'. Plans are still being finalized, but our contribution will involve the completion of Bridget Smith's artist-in-residency at Swedenborg House. Bridget is a visual artist with a doctorate from the Royal College of Arts, whose work has touched on Emanuel Swedenborg and his ideas. She participated in a previous contribution by Swedenborg House to the Bloomsbury Festival in 2016, *Now it is Permitted: 24 Wayside Pulpits*, and is represented by Frith Street Gallery. ■ AVERY CURRAN



Swedenborg Radio

● A new project out of Swedenborg House is launching soon! Swedenborg Radio has been a long time in the making, but the details are being finalized and recordings lined up for our first audio productions. Over the years we have had many people tell us they are unable to attend our events for one reason or another, and instead of allowing more people to miss out, we will be recording our events and, where possible, making them available online for anyone to listen to. That's not all Swedenborg Radio will have to offer: expect to see poetry readings, interviews and more. Stay tuned! ■ AVERY CURRAN

Publishing news

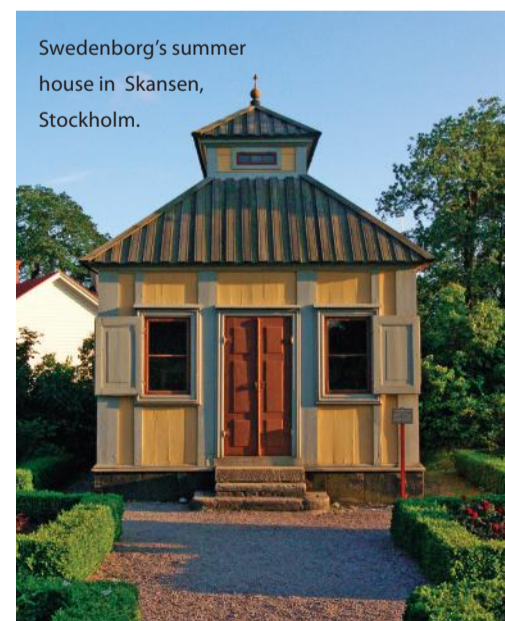
● Publishing plans are in the works at Swedenborg House for a wide range of new titles. Most imminently, the forthcoming Four Teachings have been finalized and are at the printers. This series will be a new set of dual-language English and Latin editions of Swedenborg's four linked works, the *Teaching Concerning Life*, *Teaching Concerning Faith*, *Teaching Concerning Sacred Scripture* and *Teaching Concerning Faith*. They have been translated and edited for us by John Elliott.

We also have a series of introductory books coming up, which will be an accessible point of first acquaintance with various crucial aspects of Swedenborg's thought. One will focus on his doctrine of correspondences, by the acclaimed writer Gary Lachman (*The Secret Teachers of the Western World*, 2015). Another will be on Swedenborg's concept of heaven, by Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang (*Heaven: A History*, 1988). As this series develops we intend to bring out books on topics such as Swedenborg's mathematical work and his cosmology. Work continues on *Death is Waking Up: A Conversation with Marina Abramović*, a book-length interview between Devin Zuber and the performance artist Marina Abramović. Their discussion ranges from Buddhist practice to personal experiences of the transformative effect of performance art to the importance of Swedenborgian ideas to Abramović's work, even before she was aware of his writing.

Two other projects are in earlier stages, the first being a book on Swedenborg's summer house in Stockholm. The summer house is a beautiful yellow and sage-green wooden structure and will feature in this artistic project contributed to by artists including Iain Sinclair, Bridget Smith and Ken Worpole. There is also an upcoming photographic work based around the 'Story of Swedenborg in 99 Objects', delving into items seen every day at Swedenborg House (such as the 1879 Preston Powers bust that resides in the bookshop) to those found deep in our archives (a child's suitcase filled with mysterious cassette tapes).

We are all looking forward to bringing this exciting array of new books into the world!

■ AVERY CURRAN



Swedenborg's summer house in Skansen, Stockholm.



'Swedenborg' tag,
Leake Street, London

Graffiti Art

● Passing through London's famous Leake Street some time ago (also known as 'Banksy Tunnel') readers of Swedenborg will have noticed something quite extraordinary. At the south end of the street, spanning a 4-metre stretch of wall, there was a wall painting entitled *Swedenborg*. Situated just behind Waterloo Station, Leake Street is famous throughout the world for hosting some of the most innovative and popular street and graffiti art. It is the only street in London where graffiti and street art are entirely legal. Fortunately a camera phone was at hand and the work was captured before its inevitable erasure. Spraying over previous tags is an accepted part of graffiti practice. And as visitors to this part of London will know, Leake Street is a constantly shifting mosaic of images. Who made the Swedenborg tag? We have no idea. By definition graffiti artists are a secretive bunch, and completely anonymous. Apparently it is via the 'tag' that a graffiti artist is identified. Of course most street art today is considered entirely respectable, and even graffiti art has its own aesthetic subculture. Will we see the Swedenborg tag again? ■ STEPHEN McNEILLY

34

Building news

● As part of our effort to develop our role as an environmentally friendly organization, Swedenborg House is currently undergoing an environmental audit to identify and tackle areas where our sustainability could improve as a building. Everyone here looks forward to coming up with creative solutions to the challenges of effective energy use and waste reduction in our eighteenth-century Grade II-listed building.

Swedenborg House is also undertaking renovations, and hardly a day goes by when one improvement or another is not being made to the premises. Some of this work has involved very pleasant surprises, including when the Building Manager Jacob Cartwright came across some beautiful tiling at the entrance to 20 Bloomsbury Way. It's still unclear just how far the tiling stretches, or when it was originally put in, but it has certainly added to the historic character of the building. There is also a new set of striking posters designed by Willshaw Hughes featuring striking images and bold text. We have been releasing each poster on social media over a period of weeks, so even if you're unable to travel to London you'll be able to see the new designs. ■ AVERY CURRAN



Oona Grimes
u. e. u. (2018)

Swedenborg Film Festival 2019

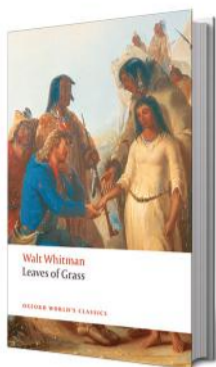
Submit your film at
www.filmfreeway.com/SwedenborgFilmFestival

AVERY CURRAN

The Swedenborg Film Festival 2019 is coming! The Festival is held every year in November in the Grade-II-listed Swedenborg Hall, organized around a theme relating to Swedenborg and his thought. It is curated by Nora Foster (of Frieze) and Gareth Evans (of Whitechapel Gallery).

Last year, the festival was organized around the theme of 'Correspondences', the Swedenborgian doctrine that has found its way into so much of art and literature. The three winners (Oona Grimes, Andrew Kötting and Alcaeus Spyrou) offered an incredible variety of filmmaking techniques, subjects and atmospheres. The guest judge was the late Susan Hiller, a groundbreaking artist who pioneered the use of audio and visual technology in art. We were very lucky to have met and worked with her prior to her passing in January.

Every year during the spring we open the call for submissions and receive many short films from around the world. The shortlisting process takes place over a few months, leading up to an evening of screenings and an eventual prize-giving by the guest judge. This year's guest judge is the writer Chloe Aridjis, so check back on the Swedenborg House website and social media for more information. ■



Leaves of Grass
By WALT WHITMAN

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS 1998
478 PP; £8.99
ISBN: 978-0-19-283409-6

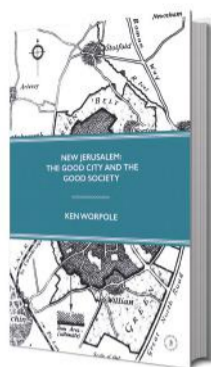
The first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was met with apathy and antipathy in equal measure, and it took a lifetime of rewriting to reach the status it now holds. Whitman offended with his candid celebration of the human form and its delights, but he was unwavering in his belief that our natural existence provides gateways to spiritual understanding. This was undoubtedly inspired by his reading of Swedenborg—in 1858 he predicted that Swedenborg would make ‘the deepest and broadest mark upon the religions of future ages, of any man who ever walked the earth’. ■



**Louis Lambert/
The Exiles/Seraphita**
By HONORÉ DE BALZAC

ANTIPODES PRESS 2015
284 PP; £17.95
ISBN: 978-0-98820-267-2

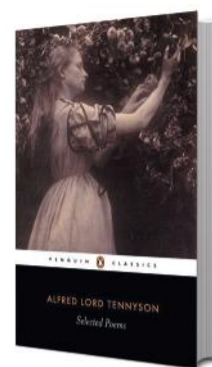
In this selection from *La Comédie Humaine*, Balzac largely eschews the realism with which he became most associated and delves into a fantastical world of magic, mysticism and metaphysics. Here, the French writer’s interest in Emanuel Swedenborg comes to the fore; one can hardly miss the influence of the Swedish philosopher in the meditations of Louis Lambert and the lectures of Dr Sigier. In *Séraphita*, Balzac even dedicates an entire chapter to a (somewhat embellished) history of the life and works of Swedenborg, providing an excellent starting point for new readers. ■



**The New Jerusalem:
The Good City
And The Good Society**
By KEN WORPOLE

SWEDENBORG SOCIETY 2017
81 PP; £6.95
ISBN: 978-0-85448-204-7

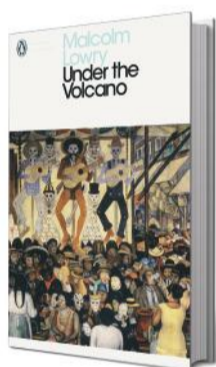
This volume is dedicated to utopian movements to improve living arrangements from the nineteenth century onward. Ken Worpole deftly traces the shifting strategies of city reformers, through Victorian social reformers’ developing ideas about the dangers of cities to the formation of social housing, all the way to the question of where to put a ring road. Worpole demonstrates the continuing preoccupation amongst the idealistic of how to create ‘the good city and the good society’ and offers ways for us to re-imagine what utopia might look like today. ■



Selected Poems
By ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

PENGUIN 2007
384 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-0-140-42443-0

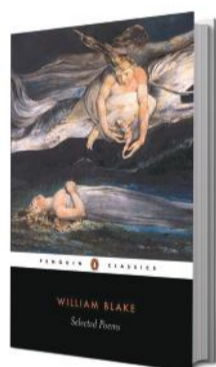
Tennyson, like Blake, is often considered a ‘great British poet’ whose works need to be read with no more sensitivity than the lyrics of the national anthem. This collection of his poems shows us otherwise. The inclusion of the whole of ‘In Memoriam’ alone demonstrates the whole gamut of Tennyson’s work: from the rollickingly hopeful ‘Ring out wild bells’ to the pleading, onomatopoeic desperation of ‘Be near me when my light is low’. Finally, ‘Crossing the Bar’, which Tennyson wanted at the end of all editions of his poetry, is a gentle memento mori, one that sees death not as a calamity but a restful inevitability. ■



Under the Volcano
By MALCOLM LOWRY

PENGUIN 2000
376 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-0-141-18225-4

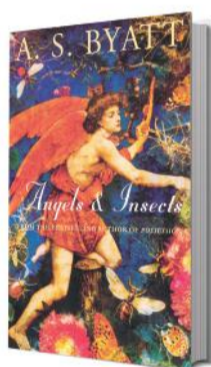
Under the Volcano is a late Modernist masterpiece. Set in a small Mexican town, the novel follows the exploits of Geoffrey Firmin (which mainly involve drinking heroic quantities of Mezcal) as he reflects on his failures in life. His drunken stream-of-consciousness, full of philosophical musings and literary references, is in itself intoxicating, somewhere between Joyce and Jean Rhys. Amongst Lowry’s breadth of reference one can even detect his interest in Swedenborg and the iconography of his theological works serves as an apt companion to the depiction of a man’s inner hell. ■



Selected Poems
By WILLIAM BLAKE

PENGUIN 2005
362 PP; £10.99
ISBN: 978-0-140-42446-1

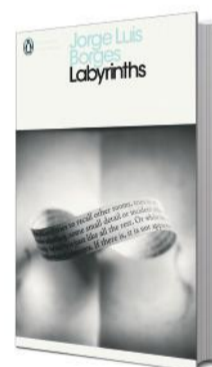
In probably the most famous example of Swedenborg’s influence on literature, William Blake was reading the Swedish philosopher during his most prolific period in the 1790s. Though Blake’s attitude to Swedenborg often points to a fractious, vacillating relationship, where inspiration is often followed by a sense of betrayal, there is no doubt that Swedenborg’s visionary works left their mark on Blake’s own visionary and prophetic verse. As well as Blake’s annotations to Swedenborg, why not look at Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* alongside Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*? ■



Angels and Insects
By A S BYATT

VINTAGE 1993
304 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-0-099-22431-0

In *Angels and Insects*, two novellas in one book, impossible relationships, loss and the search for belief all appear against a mid-nineteenth-century backdrop that will be familiar to those who have read Byatt’s *Possession*. The second novella, ‘The Conjugal Angel,’ focuses on the connections between the living and the dead. One character, an ardent Swedenborgian, opines on conjugal love, as Tennyson mourns the loss of Hallam and a spirit medium wishes for the return of her husband, lost at sea. Its fascinating, fictionalized examinations of Victorian culture are certainly worth reading. ■



Labyrinths
By JORGE LUIS BORGES

PENGUIN 2000
287 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-0-141-18484-5

Jorge Luis Borges once said that Swedenborg—‘if we admit such superlatives’—was ‘the most extraordinary man in recorded history’. Containing such classics as ‘The Library of Babel’, ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’ and ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’, *Labyrinths* exemplifies the intertextual, anti-naturalistic approach Borges took with his writing. It contains the deep interest in language and sense of amusement he took in other areas of his work, such as his translations of Swedenborg and subsequent original works passed off as Swedenborg’s own. ■



SWEDENBORG REVIEW

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THE SWEDENBORG REVIEW is a biannual periodical from Swedenborg House featuring articles and reviews on contemporary events and books plus other cultural and literary activities.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Described by Jorge Luis Borges as 'the most extraordinary man in recorded history' Swedenborg is today acknowledged as one of the most important writers of the eighteenth century and a pioneering figure in the history of Western thought. He was a key influence on William Blake, Honoré de Balzac, W B Yeats, S T Coleridge, Fyodor Dostoevsky and many others, and his theory of correspondences is rightly understood as one of the defining influences on Romantic and Symbolist thought. His work has also shaped the reception of Zen Buddhism in the West and more recently, through Czeslaw Milosz, Italo Calvino, A S Byatt and Iain Sinclair, we see his name re-emerge in relation to 'pyschogeography', 'historical realism' and 'magical realism'. For more biographical details visit www.swedenborg.org.uk

SWEDENBORG HOUSE is home to a wide range of cultural, artistic, educational and intellectual activities. Based in Bloomsbury, London, it boasts a bookshop, a museum, an exhibition and lecture programme, reading rooms, a unique historical archive and library with a rare collection of artefacts, and Swedenborg Hall: a stunning neoclassical

lecture theatre. To keep up to date with the latest news regarding our events and publications, visit our website and join our mailing list. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Wordpress.

For information on submitting work to the *Review* contact the email address below.

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