

Hellish Love:

an exhibition of objects from the swedenborg collection

STEPHANIE BROWN | LOUISE CAMU
MOLLY COLDICOTT | GREER DALE-FOULKES | MENGYANG FAN
GERTRUDE GIBBONS | LYDIA GRANGER | MALVINA JANASIK
SARAH KHAN | WESLEY KNOWLER | CHENYUAN LIANG
BINYAO LIU | YUZU ONO | SICILY SCARLET
MAXIMILIAN SCHUCH | HARALD SMART | JOHN VAUGHAN

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Swedenborg.

CONGRESS.
PORTRAITS.

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| An Introduction to *Hellish Love* |

Sally O'Reilly

Every year, the Royal College of Art Writing Programme students collaborate with an external organization to produce new work.¹ The concerns and characteristics of this partner provide fuel, shape and context for thought, conversation and some sort of public production, which might be a publication or a series of talks and performances. This year's students were invited into the archive of Swedenborg House to select an object and write a text that dwells on that artefact's provenance and connotations while reflecting their own interests. It was made clear that the excavation of historical truths was not the aim here.

Nevertheless, I could feel the group's tentative first contact with these laden objects, and their struggle with the burden of responsibility that old, important things inevitably demand. We all felt the formidable Emanuel Swedenborg bearing down. How, they asked, can we write about enigmas at the brink of the all-consuming, ever-expanding past? How can we know about spirits that barely showed themselves to the by now long dead? But these writers are resourceful. Taking a cue from Swedenborg's own suggestion that there is an equilibrium between heaven and hell, they rejected the primacy of fact, knowledge, consensus and unity over speculation, digression, revision and multiplicity. If hellish love is love of the self and the world, then bring it on!

Archival artefacts are treated here not as museological specimens, but as spurs, projectors and foils. They are approached obliquely, as tangled mnemonics, faded

symbols, remnants of half-remembered events and possessors of secret lives. Some objects are riddles that can take a little rough and tumble; others must be managed with delicacy; yet others discharge emotions at close range or engulf the cosmos with their complexity. Each has proved a mode of mental transport, a carriage of ghosts, a platform in the rushing present from which to glimpse something eternal or already gone or yet to arrive. And all have been handled with the utmost hellish love.

The group are keen to present their texts as caught up in a collective web of themes, images and perspectives. They have encouraged parallels and crossings, foreshadowing and echoes. Many were drawn to blurs, scrawls and other uncertainties; many to marginalia and relics, to small things that can be snipped off or dug out: hair, tree bark, ear bone—oh, and a skull. All this was then channelled into partial accounts, wild conjecture, intimate reflections, sighs and hopes. In what follows, shadow selves and nether realms, lapsed magics, lost voices and marked silence have been escorted up from the dim basement for contemplation in the bright light of lives in motion.

NOTES

- ¹ Previous organizations include Kettle's Yard, Turner Contemporary, David Chipperfield Architects, Margaret Howell, Musicity, Siobhan Davies Dance, Museum of London, Royal Opera House and Flat Time House.

Hellish Love



1

A Piece of Swedenborg's Poplar Tree Bark

FRAGMENT OF BARK FROM A POPLAR TREE IN EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S GARDEN (N/11)

Gertrude Gibbons

*Souvent dans l'être obscur habite un Dieu caché;
Et comme un œil naissant couvert par ses paupières,
Un pur esprit s'accroît sous l'écorce des pierres!*

(Often within the dark being dwells a hidden God;
And like a nascent eye masked by its lid,
Beneath the stones' skin grows a pure spirit!)
—Gérard de Nerval¹

The ending of Gérard de Nerval's sonnet 'Vers Dorés' (1854) reveals that all things of the natural world are sentient. Even stones contain a secret life. Their stillness is deceptive; their opaque exterior obscures an indwelling 'hidden God'. The promise of an eye on the verge of waking is 'nascent', suggestive of a bud about to open. When the poem ends with 'skin' covering stones, the noun *écorce* in French means an exterior aspect, fruit peel or, more commonly, tree bark. As a verb, *écorcer* is to peel or strip a tree of bark. The words here work to peel away the appearance of the least sentient-seeming of things, stones. Yet the 'skin' to these stones is the 'skin' of trees, and its nascent eye is like leafy buds. In this way, the poem's concluding stone or 'dark being' gives the sense of a tree. Growing under the bark of this tree, representative of all things of the natural world, it is left for the reader to imagine what the 'pure spirit' becomes.

Alone and with visitors, Emanuel Swedenborg would walk in his garden. He would observe the work of his own hands within the garden, and he would walk across it to his summerhouse at the west end where he would write. His

thoughts would unravel into words as his eyes overlooked this garden. As such, Kristin King writes that his garden is a useful metaphor, 'laid out along formal lines, but with eccentricities and flourishes, all nicely reflecting Swedenborg's own mind—open but protected, useful and abundant with life'.² If his garden is viewed as a metaphor for his mind, each natural thing representing a thought, it is suggestive of a correspondence between outside and inside things, between tangible and intangible worlds. Charles Baudelaire, who, along with Nerval, was strongly influenced by Swedenborg's writings, wrote that Swedenborg 'taught us that *heaven is a great man*; that everything, shape, movement, number, colour, scent, in the spiritual as in the natural, is meaningful, reciprocal, opposing, corresponding'.³ Writing the poem 'Correspondances' (1857), which largely reflects on these ideas, Baudelaire begins with nature as a 'temple' containing 'living pillars' that give voice to vague and confused words.⁴ Humankind walks across these 'forests of symbols' which look back at him.⁵ Trees, 'living pillars', are symbols as they stand; to put a hand upon its bark is to touch a symbol.

One visitor, long after Swedenborg's death, recounts his pilgrimage to Swedenborg's summerhouse in 1895. Professor Carl Theophilus Odhner claims it disappointing, laid out for the benefit of tourists, and of the 'once famous and extensive garden nothing now remains, excepting perhaps a very ancient and decaying poplar tree just outside the summer house'.⁶ If it was Odhner who pulled a fragment of bark from this old tree, perhaps it was with a sense that he was tearing a veil between the tree and something beyond, between the natural object of the tree and its spiritual life. As it was 'just outside the summer house', the tree was within easy reach, marking the step between the garden outside and the indoor space of Swedenborg's writing place. Holding the piece of dead wood, he sought a connection by touch, across time, to Swedenborg. This collected fragment looks like an eye, Nerval's nascent eye. Turning it, it feels wrong to see the other side of the bark, a sacrilege, like looking inside a violin, or stepping behind an altar. Somewhere, part of the tree could stand naked and vulnerable.

Though the wood itself does not speak of its journey from the garden, its reliquary-like container might. In a box bearing a dispensing chemist's name,

James Tilson of Tydd Gote, the fragment of bark perhaps found its way into the collection via Odhner's friend, the Reverend Robert James Tilson, sharing the chemist's name and also from Tydd Gote, librarian for the Swedenborg Society in the 1890s. Under Tilson's name, some blotting paper and a wax seal came into the collection. There is an urge to draw a connection between these objects, just as Nerval and Baudelaire's Swedenborg-influenced poems fuse all natural things together under the idea of their mysterious inner lives. They are all things taken from their context, no longer really useful, holding invisible traces of touch. The blotting paper, soaking excess drops of wet ink, gestures towards the unidentifiable writing it dried, books closed, letters folded. The wax seal suggests closed writing, correspondence, and the weight of a hand pressing into its warm softness. The bark evokes a leaning hand, wandering eye, a natural thing given a name and secret life by the hand that touches it.

It is as though a nascent eye waits to open in these objects soaked with a sense of significance through their link with Swedenborg; behind even the stony still surface of dead tree bark, a pure spirit waits to blossom in waking.

NOTES

- ¹ Gérard de Nerval, 'Vers Dorés', in *Les Chimères* (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2017), p. 48. Translation mine.
- ² Kristin King, *Gardens of Heaven and Earth* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2011), pp. 84-6.
- ³ Charles Baudelaire, *L'Art Romantique* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1868), p. 317. Translation mine. Swedenborg's influence on Nerval and Baudelaire's preoccupation with 'analogies' between 'the natural and spiritual' and 'universal harmony' is noted by Jacques Dupont (ed.), in Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), pp. 263-4.
- ⁴ Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, ll. 1-2, pp. 62-3.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 3.
- ⁶ Carl Theophilus Odhner, 'Professor Odhner's Visit to England and Sweden', in *New Church Life* (December 1895), p. 187.

2

Ward and Ballast

FRAGMENT OF BARK FROM A POPLAR TREE IN EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S GARDEN (N/11)
PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER IMAGES OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S RESIDENCE AND SUMMER
HOUSE (M1/121)

Wesley Knowler

In the top drawer of a unit in the attic of my mother's house lies a ziplocked bag of my own hair. Some eight inches of it, tangled and braided, packed tight, are stuffed lightlessly at the back. I sucked the air out myself in one whooping gulp before zipping it closed. I've long exhaled the air that was in that bag but maybe some of the breath from my gulping remains inside.

By now there must surely have been some decay: a dimming of colour, a fragility to the fraying ends, an encroaching musty smell. But whenever I visit my mother I forget about this once-part of me—cramped between spewing envelopes of old photos and spooled charging cables bereft of their devices. I always intended to donate it, but in having not donated it the intention means nothing. What is the language of intent without the act of carrying a thought through? Our hair continues to grow in the days and weeks following the moment of death. I cut my hair in a thick August two years ago after lying sick, sweltering, for a week and a half. After swimming wild and ingesting something unnameable.

Forgetting about the hair in proximity, and remembering it at distance. Airlocked. Inert. I moved house twice with this bag intact, sat in a passenger seat for a hundred and eighty miles with it in my back pocket before throwing it nowhere in particular and moving on again. Any purpose it could have served in donation has been replaced by the relative and selfish purposelessness of channelling a set of memories particular to myself. So the bag persists only as a referencing tool—an index for a secondary archive. Our hair is dead from the moment it leaves the

follicle. Next time I go back to that house I will stand on a chair and pull myself into the attic with my shoulders knocking the hatch, and I will open the bag and I will take the hair out and I will notice that it lies there just as it did before. Almost black-brown, bedraggled, a little eerie. Dimly embered by the light.

At the polar opposite of intention: a close friend wears a small metallic capsule in a chain around his neck which contains a few hairs of his deceased brother's. The capsule is a long, thin pill with a subtle engraving. I have never seen him without it, and I have never seen inside. Another friend rides a bike their father gave them—their own—before what was 'theirs' expanded to fill a whole family home, and started with a set of stolen keys. Since their father's passing they have been riding it into disrepair, red-flecked steel frame shaking, while I've tried to fix it for them. There are infinitely small shards of glass buried, gleaming, in the inside of the tyre. Like gems.

Hair is already materially represented in this collection. But what is not forward-facing, what skirts behind the taxonomic lens, enfolded in breast pockets or dangling from the neck—the practice of warding? Talisman-making?

A small scale of bark cased in a medicine box. Though preserved, and hallowed by its preservation, this humble object and its unassuming cage suggest only recognition and the reflexive desire to preserve. Seeing a tree as emitting a dead man. Imagine the hand of the person who removed it, their finger and fingernail prying a single flake out from the skin of the tree itself. Searching around the edges, testing for give—and when give was found—dragging back with force until it dislodged. Then, how to store it? Pat down pockets, rummage in trouser leg, fingers clasp the only container on board—frustratingly full so

pills out rattling

snuff spilling

amber motes in the

dusk

The surface is burnished. A black lustre of wear about the ridges of embossed text, its apothecary seals and paper stickers worried and torn—signatures of habit. Gripped tight / patted reassuringly in a breast pocket / thoughtlessly caressed / buried unheeding. In miniature portability it can always be found close to the heart of the carrier: furtively burrowing towards the faithful, into the gatherings of their coats and jostled by daily rhythms. To place a container in such close proximity to your own—a body that houses a spirit—speaks of something from the outside being repelled, and something from within being bolstered. Both ward and ballast. A tiny anchor for spiritual teachings, or an amulet to grief.

This motion, again and again, testing and prying. Around the edges, searching for weakness, worrying and picking. Like a scab.

3

Found

FRAGMENT OF BARK FROM A POPLAR TREE IN EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S GARDEN (N/11)

Harald Smart

*so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster¹*

What is something before it's found? The answer to this question isn't always 'lost'.

An almost-empty cigarette packet passed on by the right person's hand, a small chunk of bark from exactly the right place, the right tree, made into quick talismans. Thrust into a new ad hoc existence they sit close, gently emitting memory for as long as they are needed. Conduits, they transport the two momentarily back, to the source of an overwhelming devotion.

*

I once was lost, but now am found.²

Nudged gently awake by church bells, we find our limbs. Their formation hasn't changed since we closed our eyes eight hours ago. *This is rare*, I think. An embracing pair, like the Pompeii lovers (who might have been men, too). We clutch, breathe deep, anticipate the shattering.

*

Any object can become a sponge, absorbing memory instead of moisture, quietly retaining the essence of a place, a person, of histories lived. There's mysticism at play, in the notion that ancient touch or breath can be held for years, centuries—

as long as the imagination dictates—in the material components of a space. In seeing this, a romantic, tenuous logic takes place: *He sat under this tree to think > this tree held him > still holds him*. A fragment is taken, transformed. It's driven by urgency and uncertainty: *He held these > now I hold them > so he holds me?* All surfaces become bruisable through this lens, vulnerable to the impact of words spoken, the stain of action.

*

I ask for a cigarette, hoping we might share it together. He doesn't want one, but hands me the pack: two left. The room has no windows, but it's big, and grey light floods in from above. I put one in my mouth, light it, and slide the pack into my left breast pocket. As we leave the room, stained and bruised, I decide I'll keep it there until the next time we meet and he gives me another to replace it. Tethering me to this moment, and to some imagined future, the cord falls silently behind me from my left breast.

NOTES

- ¹ Elizabeth Bishop, 'One Art' (1976), at <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47536/one-art>>, accessed 18 March 2020.
- ² John Newton, 'Amazing Grace' (1779), at <https://hymnary.org/text/amazing_grace_how_sweet_the_sound>, accessed 18 March 2020.

4

A Little Imagination

COLLECTION OF SPIRIT PHOTOS / BY VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS (K/126)

Louise Camu

My hand is uplifted so as to touch the garments of a tall, majestic female with a lovely face of the Jewish type; there is a peculiar stateliness about her, as if she might have been one of the prophetesses of old; and I am told that she is the daughter of Jäirus.¹

There's this image I want to write about. Date it by holding it between your fingers. You'll see. Thick cardboard, matte and uneven, crumbled: the card cabinet type. It belongs to a small collection of photographs, twelve or so, within the archive at the Swedenborg Society in London. It was taken by Frederick Hudson, sometime in the late nineteenth century. The woman to the left has been identified as Georgiana Houghton, a famous medium and a less-famous pioneer of the Surrealist movement. Hair braided in Victorian loops, she appears to be kneeling down, hand raised, facing a spirit.

—'Spirits aren't *real*', you scoff. 'That stuff's all superstitious nonsense'.

There's this image I want to write about. Two women are engaged in conversation but I cannot hear, or 'perhaps they are saying nothing and everything is being said by the way they are looking at each other'.²

—‘Nothing is being *said*’, you mutter. ‘There’s no such thing as communication between the living and the dead’.

There’s this image I want to write about. And yet, I seem unable to compose this story with the tools that you have given me. And so, I write to you in the hope that you will adapt, so that I may begin to unpack the complexities and write the fuller, richer, more complete version of this picture’s history.

There’s this image I want to write about. So, it is here that I must ask you momentarily to part with your ‘rational’ and your ‘reason’—faithful sentinels. They have no remit within the world I am about to take you to, no place within this phantom correspondence. So I beg of you: leave them there, howling at the door.

There’s this image I want to write about. To do so means to engage with the lived-in reality of the nineteenth century, when a sheet thrown over a figure was not instantly recognized as an attempt to invoke a spectre, simply something spiritual. Where, he tells us, everything physical was believed to be informed by the spiritual. What we see is affected by what we ‘know’ or ‘believe’ to be true and ‘every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth’.³ There are other worlds waiting to be seen if only you would look, out of the corner of your eye; think about it, there, in the corner of your mind.

There’s this image I want to write about, so let me. Let me paint this portrait in the knowledge that there are other ways of *seeing* and other ways of *being*. Let’s not only think around but think through. Let’s not only look ‘at’ but look sideways, look with and look beyond.

Let me take what’s left of your imagination for a slip and a slide, and leave aside claims of scientific reason, double exposures and darkroom trickery. There are limits to your reason but no limits to imagination, so isn’t it perhaps just *a little more fun?*

Let me take you with me. Float weightless between worlds with no distinction between the real and surreal, physical or spiritual. There’s a pitching towards the uncanny, a craving for the otherworldly. Don’t let cold, hard, empirical *fact* hold you back.

There's this image I want to write about. Write back to me when you feel your 'reality' slipping and expanding, your mind bending, and I shall set about composing this ghost story.

NOTES

- ¹ Elizabeth Georgiana Houghton, *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings* (London: E V Allen, 1882), p. 23.
- ² John Berger and Jean Mohr, *Another Way of Telling* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), p. 102.
- ³ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 151.

5

Spirit Cards

COLLECTION OF SPIRIT PHOTOS / BY VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS (K/126)

Molly Coldicott

Ghosts, spirits, time-lapses
the past plays havoc with the present:
is this a dream; or an unconscious moment—
mistaken amidst the shutter.

Wet, decimated negatives where
alternate worlds appear
as though they are still blood, flesh—
bones.

Materials cloaked in chemicals,
where past realities are all but lost amidst the evidence,
other worlds communicate here:
bathed amongst one another
with a metal and sandarac varnish:
That bite, rasp and claw onto the tongue of
each photograph.

Morphing, splitting, haunting—
as carcasses of the past bond
mere mortals of the present,
an inclination to communicate with the living.

Those discarnate humans, complex divinities,
progressing though higher planes,
gathering speed
as though a broken record
without a needle
to silence the inaudible scrape.

A ghastly feeling once crawled across my skin,
needles pin-pricked on the arch of my spine
I was sure of a stranger's presence
only to find a sacred sanctuary—
the assured dreamlike indifference, you tell yourself:
no one was there.

As I trace my fingers along the evidence:
each shutter projects
another immortal
another illusion onto the unruly mind.

6

Lady Divinity

COLLECTION OF SPIRIT PHOTOS / BY VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS (K/126)

Sarah Roselle Khan

Lady Divinity lost the moon
when its magnetic pull
led her astray

to a road paved in pearls and chrome
set with a laser-red light
from the dawn of a future Eden

1800 BC to infinity
the march of time came to a standstill

she had been here before
the in-between
she had lived here pre-morality
and post Windows 0.1 PC

pure electricity sustains this city
electric cartwheels of the sanguine asterisk
only now could she afford to make mistakes
though she made none—
no longer was that possible

on blossom-topped hills stood saintly sound speakers
the birds of paradise could sing like Whitney
Lady Divinity wanted to dance with somebody
and feel the heat from the sun's terrain

through the conflict of a one-sided war
deep-rooted storms still struck from within
a hellish love from oppressive soldiers who fetishize hearts not of kin

the same ones who stripped Lady Dignity
and threw her in the Thames

though outsider trauma still played
in the out-of-bounds grounds
of Lady Divinity's brain

here the weight of the world began wearing thin
and soon she could remove its suffocating cloak
so heavy with colonial sins

now she was free to fly
Lady Divinity had grown her wings

7

When the Veil is Lifted, No One Shall Giggle in Front of the Spirit

COLLECTION OF SPIRIT PHOTOS / BY VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS (K/126)

Binyao Liu

Before William H Mumler captured the first spirit guest with his camera in Boston in 1861, a whole series of earlier journalistic accounts of spirit photography had already been made.¹ The ‘spiritual appearance’ played a crucial role in leading the viewers ‘into the regions of the supernatural’ in the 1860s and the following decades, from the record of a picture taken near Paris in 1860 showing ‘spirits coming to leave their photographic impression on . . . paper’ to Frederick A Hudson establishing his position in 1872 as the first British spirit photographer.² This was reported by the London medium Miss Georgiana Houghton, writing that ‘for the first time a spirit photograph had been obtained in London’; photography had been seen as the perfect medium to hold communion with the occult and a demonstration of the possible unity of the living and the spirit worlds.³

Are you ready, Sir?

Straighten the collar and tidy the hair.

Good.

Move a little bit to your right.

Good.

Among the objects from the Swedenborg Collection, a portrait of a well-dressed gentleman with two mysterious female figures printed on a *carte de visite* is quietly lying inside a set of spirit photographs owned by James John Garth

Wilkinson, who was famous during the nineteenth century as a doctor, activist and translator of Emanuel Swedenborg. The photograph is taken by Frederick A Hudson. This spirit photograph, along with all other selected photos owned by Wilkinson, throws light on a very particular aspect of discovering the spirit world and communion with invisible entities. The assumption was that these picture-capturing machines would always be honest, the plates would not get condemned as false or exaggerated fantasies, and photographing a ghost was a reliable and popular way to re-encounter lost loves following Mumler's great discovery.⁴

Lean closer and examine the photograph carefully. Like many other ghosts captured by Hudson, the spirits here are not translucent but have a material density, and similar to many of them, one spirit's face is half-veiled.⁵ A serious expression marks the face of the man. Putting his right hand in his suit pocket and the left on his thigh, he seems to sit in an uncomfortable manner. *Are you nervous?* He keeps silent and looks at me through the lens of Mr Hudson, through the yellowed greeting card. *Do you sense their presence?* A lady in a black robe crouches in front of him with her face down, and a white-garbed lady stands away from them with a white veil half-covering her emotionless face. *Who are they?* His right leg stretches far away from the square wooden stool with toes up. *Do you want them to join you?* The long black robe of the lady getting down on her knee covers his right calf and left thigh, but I can see the wrinkles in his trousers through its outlines. *Can you see the person, lost to you, that you long for?*

Spirits do not always show up as expected, even if a medium says they are around, but sometimes the spirits give advice on how to get the best photographic results, and some of them even direct sitters to particular photographers in order to get a portrait with the living.⁶ There needs to be cooperation and dedication for the deceased to expose themselves under the gaze of the photographers and their camera lenses. Yet arrangements are sometimes made to satisfy different clients, dressing up as spirits and using double exposure to create spirit photographs; these were the falsities that Hudson was charged with.

Is the photograph 'a cage of ghosts'?⁷ Or merely a trick played for public amusement and curiosity of the afterlife? As mentioned by Houghton, if only one

genuine photograph is obtained then it carries the whole principle of spiritualism and overturns the fabric of materialism.⁸ Suspicion might arise, doubts would be expressed, but in the meantime there would also be a place for sympathy and empathy due to the desire to meet with the dead loved ones, for the desire to sense the departed once more.

The man sits still in Hudson's studio looking at the camera with lips pressed together. Behind this piece of paper, there are untold secrets, but hopefully dreams coming true as well. What keeps ringing in my ears are the words of the Revd John Page Hopps:

A future life means persistence of life, means that the spirit self remains a conscious living self when it sheds the muddy vesture of clay . . . Such a being, acting from the unseen upon the sphere of what is to us the seen, might, under certain conditions, be able to work what we call miracles.⁹

Look at the camera.
No giggles, please.
Just smile, if you want.
1, 2, 3
[CLICK SOUND]

NOTES

- ¹ Clément Chéroux et al., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (Yale University Press, 2005), p. 29.
- ² David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: Its History, Theory, and Construction with Its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education* (London: John Murray, 1856), pp. 204-10; *Revue Spiritualiste*, vol. 3, no. 9 (1860), pp. 239-42.
- ³ Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: British Library Publishing Division, 2006), p. 24.
- ⁴ John Traill Taylor, *The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments of Spirit Photography* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1894), pp. 74-5.
- ⁵ Chéroux et al., *The Perfect Medium*, p. 29.

- ⁶ See, for example, the case of a man named 'Edina' in Glasgow, in Jas. Robinson, 'Spirit Photography', in Taylor, *The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments of Spirit Photography*, pp. 93 ff. and the case of Moses Dow, in Alexander N Aksákow, *Animismus and Spiritismus*, tr. Gregor Constantin Wittig (Leipzig: Oswald Mutze, 1890), vol. 1, pp. 94 ff.
- ⁷ Léon Wulff, 'Chronique', in *Le Progrès Photographique*, no. 4 (April 1891), p. 63, quoted in Clément Chéroux, 'Ghost Dialectics: Spirit photography in entertainment and belief', in Chéroux et al., *The Perfect Medium*, p. 45.
- ⁸ Extract from a letter signed 'T.S.', quoted in Georgiana Houghton, *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena* (London: E W Allen, 1882), pp. 42-3.
- ⁹ Quoted in Jas. Robinson, 'Spirit Photography', p. 92.

8

A Child of the Left Eye

COLLECTION OF SPIRIT PHOTOS / BY VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS (K/126)

Sicity Scarlet

You can tell by the eyes. I was a sensitive child. I felt like a guest in my parents' house. I wouldn't pull my socks up when I was told; they rumbled down disobediently around my ankles. My hands were always captured by movement, clutching suddenly at the cotton white of my pinafore. On the mahogany chair I could levitate. My little feet not able yet to touch the floor, button-bound in their soft leather boots. I was always glancing, as if I had seen something moving in a corner, behind the dresser, behind the curtain. I was less in curiosity than in annoyance with the world. I stared out blankly, I peeled wallpaper damply. I blinked slowly, one eye at a time. Children are inclined one way or the other. I was a child of the left eye.

Children of the right eye are gentler creatures. They are shy, with eyelids of doeskin blue. They finish their oatmeal and say please and thank you. And when their hair is brushed, they do not scream, even if it pulls and it hurts. They worry a lot about the weather, rattling crockery, dropped knitting needles, frisky animals. They stay away from the poison weeds in the garden, belladonna, deadly nightshade, poison ivy, the rose-hip bush. They do not wipe their nose on their sleeve grubbily, they use instead an embroidered handkerchief. And when the cat catches a sparrow, they bury it kindly, and they do not return a week later to unearth it again. A child of the left eye does not think or act so sweetly. They climb trees too high, branches snap beneath their shoes, they break fingers, and buckle and bruise.

Often I fell, dizzy as a dreidel. I was never good as gold, I was no one's little angel. The right eye child is at home in the world. The left eye child has to learn

to be hallowed, but I knew from the day I dropped from the tree that the ground would outlast me. I couldn't tell whether I was very young or very old indeed. Like the whirl of a skipping rope, like rain on chalk, the liquorice chewed and spat out dark. Some children are angels, some children are ghosts, always at play, back and forth behind that curtain. Little girls of the left eye may always be children. Actually, maybe, they are always half-dead. A little closer to where we come from, a little closer to the dark unknown. We only become less and then more dead as we grow, and it becomes harder to tell what is an angel, and what is a ghost, and what is a child.

9

Celestial Influx: Marginalia Redux *or* Coleridge woz 'ere

OECONOMIA REGNI ANIMALIS / AB EMANUEL SWEDENBORG (L/67)

Greer Dale-Foulkes

*On Samuel Taylor Coleridge's marginal notes
in Swedenborg's Oeconomia Regni Animalis*

Picture him like the schoolchild you once were: furrowed brow,
upturned mouth, underscoring your comment with—incredulity,
scorn, laughter?

*Could Swedenborg have / been satisfied with / such barren / verbiage as this /
definition of Ari / stolle's?*

A revision, addition, not to dismantle or dethrone, but poke, press and prod. Come one, come all: curious spirits, anarchic nymphs, avid book-thrashers.

*

Writing begins with breath, just as reading can begin with ghosts and note-taking can begin in the margins. It's an elusive, generative literary economy of which Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a prolific part. Call him a literary omnivore, a compulsive list-maker, a college dropout, a poet, a philosopher, an addicted scribbler or a scribbling addict—born in the year of Swedenborg's death, STC was a master marginalia-maker (there are 450 of his annotated books still extant).

Not anomalous, nor vandalic, but exceptional. Coleridge's notes catch fire for their spontaneity, hilarity, criticality and unpredictability. Sometimes sprawling

and contemplative, his scribbles glide across several pages; other times, the bite comes crackling, frowning and toothy.

Impulsive as the act may be, when we write in the margins, we are paying attention to our own developing thoughts, reasoning and critical practice. We are quarrelling as much as we are writing to absent friends, ministering over private, fantasy dialogues where the dead can only explain themselves so far: how *could* she? It is a practice that ties Edgar Allan Poe, Sylvia Plath, the bedridden Marlene Dietrich, David Foster Wallace and the student who borrowed the book before you, the librarian's taboo, leaving mini missives. By placing your own words beside those you admire—what better way to speak to the dead?

Cui insit Vita, et proinde anima. . .

Coleridge's own influential theology owed much to (or shared much with) Swedenborg: an idealistic philosophy that positioned the mind as an active, free-will life force and the human spirit in a dynamic (collaborative) relationship with the divine.

But ghosts must, sometimes, be summoned and then challenged.

. . . per quod primo vivimus, sentimus, movemur, intelligimus. . .

There is a quiet room in hell, a dank and musty corner, for the undecipherable undead, the misunderstood. Like whispers, etchings can be lost or misplaced: repositioned, stolen or manipulated. Coleridge's writing takes as eager an eye to decipher as a Latin scholar's tongue takes time to tackle declensions. Reading him, reading Swedenborg, is a thick, polyglottal soup, faint cursives floating, masquerading: the original comments section.

In 1820, Charles Lamb ended his essay on book-borrowers ('The Two Races of Men') with an affectionate tribute to his old friend: 'Reader . . . if thy heart overfloweth to lend them, lend thy books; but let it be to such a one as S. T. C.—he will return them (generally anticipating the time appointed) with usury;

enriched with annotations, tripling their value. . . . I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, to S. T. C.’.

Coleridge said: ‘I will not be long here, Charles!—& gone, you will not mind my having spoiled a book in order to leave a Relic’.

We say: Coleridge woz ’ere.

We say: Lend thy books to scribblers all.

We say: what splayed footprints, what marks in the shore, what relics will you leave?

10

Improvisations from the Spirit

LOOSE MISCELLANEOUS POEMS / BY JAMES JOHN GARTH WILKINSON (A/150(a))

Mengyang Fan

*Electrical,
I stand on toe
Of ether's quick
Elastic frame:
I reach—I call—
My horn I blow;
I am love sick
For fairy name.*

—from J J G Wilkinson's automatic poem, 'The Fairies' Welcome'¹

Presented here is a collection of spirit drawings made by James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-99), a physician and high-profile translator of Emanuel Swedenborg, who dedicated much of his life to the expansion of Swedenborgian ideas into the age he lived in. These are likely to be Wilkinson's automatic drawings, a practice that would have been channelled by him as a form of mediumship. The drawings are accompanied by Wilkinson's notes, which depict a particular section of heaven where fairies are meant to live, and they map out from different perspectives how the spiritual correspondence of the 'fairy ring' in heaven informs all other fairy rings in the ethereal world and the physical world.

Fairies took up an important residence in Wilkinson's exploration into spiritualism, in which he took a decade-long interest from the late 1850s and later abandoned after the 1860s. During the Victorian age Wilkinson lived in,

the popular notion of fairies had undergone a shift from the malevolent beings of folklore past to benevolent, angelic do-gooders, filtered through nineteenth-century Romanticism, invading literature and art as a symbol of all that is good and innocent in the world. Fairies, according to Wilkinson, were of the same rank as spirits, which in his fellow spiritualists' belief were another being living on the periphery of physical reality, only contactable through the agency of mediums at seances, a formal session or meeting at which people attempt to receive information from the spirits of the dead. Wilkinson's attempts at these automatic drawings, as well as automatic writing, were also a form of spiritualist mediumship. But unlike most spiritualists in his time, he believed that automatic writing served as a direct conduit to God.

Wilkinson's automatic writing is constructed in the form of poetry. The Swedenborg Society's archive holds many examples of his manuscripts. In the note of a published small volume of his automatic poetry, *Improvisations from the Spirit*, Wilkinson described the process of automatic writing thus:

A theme is chosen, and written down. So soon as this is done, the first impression upon the mind which succeeds the act of writing the title, is the beginning of the evolution of that theme; no matter how strange or alien the word or phrase may seem. That impression is written down: and then another, and another, until the piece is concluded. An Act of Faith is signalized in accepting the first mental movement, the first word that comes, as the response to the mind's desire for the unfolding of the subject.²

In this way, will and reason are restricted, and 'all the known faculties' lend their aid to make way for another commanding power that flows in. Those faculties were, as Wilkinson viewed it, a kind of exalted '*laissez faire*. . . which is another name for Faith'.³

Wilkinson was aware such writing could be difficult to convey to its readers, and even for the man who created it, Wilkinson noted, 'For the most part, the full import of what was written, was not obvious until one or more days had elapsed'.⁴

According to Wilkinson, many of the poems are written by ‘correspondences’, a Swedenborgian notion that objects in the natural world bear relations to abstract emotional counterparts in one’s spiritual life. Therefore, in Wilkinson’s view, it is the readers of Swedenborg who will best understand this class of poems.

Despite the fact that Wilkinson stated that his automatic writing came with no premeditation or preconception, and without hesitation or the correction of one word from beginning to end, these poems do have structures and rhymes, and appear as more concise descriptions of the mindscape than raw outpourings of information. As for the ‘automatic’ imageries in his drawings, traces of representational forms appear less accidental or abstract than other spiritual drawing practitioners such as Hilma af Klint, thus suggesting a twofold process of the unconscious and the conscious mind that inevitably took over the drawing process.

‘Writing from an Influx, which is really out of your Self’, Wilkinson wrote of his automatic writing process, ‘is either a religion, or a madness’.⁵ It’s not a far stretch to wonder whether Wilkinson’s method is a precursor to psychoanalysis, which came about half a century later. In the process of the latter, patients open their minds up to their deepest unconscious instincts, and dreams are interpreted so as to serve as the conduits for unconscious desires. Interestingly, although Wilkinson’s initial intention for automatic activities was for religious and spiritual ends, the therapeutic potential of such method did not pass him by, later on, to cure patients by letting them write out the spiritual ‘blockage’ and draw out the madness. The fundamental difference, however, is that in the Freudian view, the unconscious is more of a biological phenomenon, whereas Wilkinson saw such mental states as a ‘disk’ onto which Divine Wisdom is projected that transcends the individual mind.⁶

NOTES

- ¹ James John Garth Wilkinson, ‘The Fairies’ Welcome’, in *Improvisations from the Spirit* (New York: New Church Publishing Association and London: William White, 1857), p. 103.

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- ² Wilkinson, 'Note', in *Improvisations from the Spirit*, pp. 397-8.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 398-9.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 404.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 400.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 399, 401.

11

Cheekbones and Electricity

POSTER FOR THE *NOW IT IS ALLOWABLE* EVENT AT SWEDENBORG HALL, 1999 / BY JEREMY DELLER AND KARL HOLMQVIST (G/53)

Stephanie Brown

A text towards Jeremy Deller & Karl Holmqvist's 'Now it is Allowable' poster

I think it's the only hit song about telepathy though you can't help but wonder. *Was it destiny? I don't know yet.* Yes, I've heard this one before. Remember it like yesterday, a dream before the scroll I had been carrying under my arm tumbled across the pavement, unfolding itself in prayer. Was it just by chance? Could this be kismet? On the way to put up some posters, I blinked, peeled back the eye to see magic alphabets fizz along the tarmac. Felt the tack rolling between my fingers, imbued with radio static. Rolled into tomorrow, right off the bonnet, ominous, oily and glittering.

Lost again. I was always doing this. The inside of my pocket vibrates with a message that reads, 'Can I have your exact location?' But it's too hard to tell, really, there could be so many. The man behind the counter asks me if I'm looking for anything in particular, and I want to say, *something in my consciousness told me you'd appear*, but sometimes, so I'm told, it's better to say nothing. Better than 'blur-suede-pulp-oasis', better than 'one more forgotten hero and a world that doesn't care'. The living may try to remember the dead but the dead do not forget her. *Now, I'm always touched by your presence, dear.*

Could never mistake that opening A-chord, how it swiftly gives way to a pulsing 4-4 sizzle, and the video! Her blue eye shadow and wispy platinum hair backlit like a halo, a televised angel, all cheekbones and electricity, eclipsing everything. We were mesmerized. I met a man once who went to every show on

her world tour, a real devotee, owned this record shop in the city. I wonder how he got the time off. When the band first started out, they'd shared a flat with a few cockroaches and a poltergeist—they do love the angst of adolescents, he told me.

You know, I'd thought about it, becoming an angel myself. Working on some new material. Fantasies of the day when I might say 'it really is a dream come true' or 'we really couldn't do this without the love and support of our fans!', teary-eyed and glossy-faced as I walk off set. *You can read my hand, I've got no defense*. But today it seems enough to jot down a few things ('Day 1: spent all my money on cigarettes again, no bother'), or add to my lists:

THE ELECTRICIZERS

GHOST PHLEGM

THE CAPITAL DREAMERS

MURRAY AND THE MACHINE

ANGEL SNAKE

HELLISH LOVE AND THE LEFT EYES

DISCO KISSED

DARK PLASMA

OF WATER AND SPIRIT

ARCANA CAELESTIA

NEW JERUSALEMS

BAUDELAIRE'S TEAPOTS

DIVINITY DIVISION

THE COLOSSAL SOULS

Found myself back in that record shop, the one that man surrendered to worship. Fingering through the *A-Z* the lights start to shake. *When you sent your messages whispered loud and clear*. The lyrics remind me of a boyfriend I had before the bonnet made me glisten, before the peeling-back. He'd look at a card and when he touched my arm I could tell him exactly what it was. *When we play at cards you use an extra sense*. We meet in dreams still now. 'Queen of hearts!' he'll say when I cross over (*It's really not cheating*) and melt into light.

Our shared talisman, that record, which we had to sell, minty mint when the work dried up to escape that fate of cockroaches and poltergeists. Too much

angst, they'd have eaten us alive. It's got to be here. *Floating past the evidence of possibilities.* A vibrational breeze breathes down upon my chest pulling me closer into the ring of its halo. *We could navigate together, psychic frequencies.* Pssst. *Coming into contact with outer entities.* Gotcha.

The wind slams the door behind me as I leave, drawing back the rain with a kiss it whistles in my ear, she loves you, *yeah yeah yeah.* Passion rebuilding the world anew. The tides of the river break, white noise, as I spot a peeping dandelion looking up. Clutching the record inside my coat I bend down to whisper, 'Can I tell you a secret?' and it blushes, oh concrete child. The birds quit pecking out worms to conspire with the streetlights, harlequined and strobing. *Stay awake at night and count your REMs when you're talking to your super friends* they proclaim through pulsing flashes of light, as the dance floors of this city extend outward, paved with desire, perfect beauty. A hand on my arm. *I am still in touch with your presence, dear.*

12

Poetry/Unconscious Desire / Faith/Delusion

SWEDENBORG'S SKULL / A POEM BY VERNON WATKINS (G/26)

Chenyuan Liang

Emanuel Swedenborg, who is best known for his mysterious book on the afterlife, *Heaven and Hell*, had a tremendous impact after his death. Not only were many famous writers and philosophers influenced by him—such as Immanuel Kant and Jorge Luis Borges, who held him in high esteem—but his body also became an enigma, attracting many of his followers. Robert Hindmarsh and Gustav Broling, along with an American Rosicrucian who had a strong belief that Swedenborg's body had disappeared to heaven, opened the coffin only to find that Swedenborg's perfectly preserved body was still there. Then the skull of Swedenborg was stolen by some graverobbers; rumours abounded for a long time until the Swedish Church reclaimed the skull with authority. Johan V Hultkrantz, who was the leader of the Swedish Academy's Faculty of Medicine, spent a significant amount of his time finding out whether the skull in the church was authentic. A man named William Rutherford, who had encouraged Hultkrantz to research the skull, claimed that the skull in the church was not the original one.¹

The riddle of the skull was impenetrable and seemed to absorb more and more people. Vernon Watkins conceded in this letter that he wrote the poem 'Swedenborg's Skull' as an act of poetic imagination rather than in response to historical facts. His was a horrified and mysterious skull, rather than one once lost and finally returned. Here we see a poet write with passion, curiosity and respect. In the final section of the poem, Vernon wrote: 'So I see it today, the inscrutable mask of conception / Arrested in death'. A feeling that we all have, after everything has gone. When there are no gravediggers or faithful followers on the one

side, and no detectives on the other. But in the last verse he wrote, 'yields but a surface deception/ Still guarding the peace it defends'. And it is this resonance of Swedenborg and his mysterious concepts that still persists.

NOTES

- ¹ For more, see Colin Dickey, *Cranioklepty: Grave Robbing and the Search for Genius* (Lakewood, CO: Unbridled Books, 2009).

13

Zen and Haiku towards Swedenborg

天界と地獄 / [BY EMANUEL SWEDENBORG. TRANSLATED INTO JAPANESE BY D T SUZUKI]

(B/90)

Yuzu Ono

やがて死ぬけしきは見えず蟬の声 芭蕉

*Of an early death,
Showing no signs,
The cicada's voice.*

—Bashō

Daisetsu T Suzuki (1870-1966) is famous for his introduction of Zen Buddhism to Western culture. Zen originated in ancient India and then has developed in China and in Japan as well for centuries ('Zen' in Japanese is called 'Chan' in Chinese). Suzuki's thought about Zen widely influenced modern Western thinkers and artists, such as Carl Jung, Erich Fromm, Allen Ginsberg, Jackson Pollock and John Cage. Based on his achievements, Suzuki was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1963.

Although he devoted his studies to the Eastern tradition of Zen Buddhism, his thought was also strongly influenced by this mysterious Westerner, Emanuel Swedenborg. Suzuki translated four books written by Swedenborg, including *Heaven and Hell*. He repeatedly wrote about Swedenborg and, as a result, he published a book called *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North*. In that book, he considered Swedenborg as Buddha for Westerners. He wrote, 'Swedenborg's theological doctrines greatly resemble those of Buddhism'.

*

In this translation manuscript of *Heaven and Hell*, it is easy to see how Suzuki struggled with his translation. After publishing the translated book, he confessed he experienced difficulty in the process of his translation, and he mentioned his translation would possibly be revised again after he had studied more about Swedenborg.

For instance, it seems that at first, he translated the expression 'the God of heaven' in Swedenborg's text (the second chapter) as 'the *higher emperor* of heaven'. However, finally, he replaced the term *higher emperor* with another word, *kami* (which means 'god' in Japanese). In this way, he revised many parts of his draft after he had written it. Sometimes he coined new words that must have been unfamiliar to the Japanese people at the time. By doing so, he wrestled with the text of, and the thought of, Swedenborg. When you look through this manuscript from the beginning to the end, it can be seen that there is no page without any revision.

Interestingly, many of the revised words were related to how humans think and how humans rejoice. It might mean that Suzuki strived to capture the subtle ideas by Swedenborg, especially in fields regarding humans' ideas and pleasure.

*

He wrote this translation manuscript of *Heaven and Hell* in the traditional Asian way of writing: a brush on soft Japanese paper. His brushstrokes were exquisite and aesthetic, as the calligraphy in the East always pursues. Moreover, at times, his translation looks even poetic. But given the fact that he once mentioned that the world of Zen is not philosophical but poetic, it is not surprising that even his translation was poetic.

While Suzuki widely introduced Zen to Western culture, at the same time he introduced Swedenborg to Japanese culture. Suzuki found a similarity between Swedenborg and Zen Buddhism, and his thought had been shaped under the influence of Swedenborg. If both are similar, it means the ideas of Swedenborg must be poetic as well.

*

Regarding poetry in general, it is a well-known fact that Daisetsu emphasized the similarity between haiku and Zen. Haiku is said to be the shortest form of poetry in the world, which has only three lines with five, seven and five syllables, respectively. Despite its extreme simplicity, some say haiku can represent the whole universe— thanks, in fact, to this simplicity. Interestingly, the name ‘Daisetsu’, which was given to him by his Zen master, means ‘great simplicity’ or ‘great clumsiness’.

*

The haiku above is made by the legendary haiku poet Bashō Matsuo (1644-94).

Buddhists have the notion of reincarnation. In this view of the world, humans have to reincarnate again and again as a practice to approach enlightenment. One individual has a multitude of past lives and, what is more, these past lives were not necessarily those of humans. They could have been animals or even insects. Haiku is often said to be the literature of nature, and its view on nature is closely related to this view of Buddhist reincarnation. All things in this world have an invisible relationship with each other.

Thus, the essence of haiku is very classically Eastern. Nevertheless, it does not mean haiku has developed in a closed Eastern culture. On the contrary, haiku was hugely modernized by the influence of the realist movement in Western culture at the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the thought of Daisetsu about Zen had been shaped by the influence of Swedenborg at the beginning of the twentieth century. For both haiku and Zen, Western ideas were vital in helping them reach the kernel of Eastern values.

*

Thus, Daisetsu learned a lot about ‘spirituality’ from Swedenborg and established his thought on Zen, which is the thought of being poetic. Given that Zen and haiku are similar, is there any similarity between Swedenborg and haiku?

Haiku is an artistic technique that allows (or obliges) writers to focus at the level of objects alone. Due to its shortness, haiku is regarded as insufficient space

to depict personal feelings or more profound thoughts. Novice haiku writers are taught to avoid doing so. Simple objects must suggest every emotion or thought. Haiku never tries to depart from material things and never tries to generate a structured philosophy. It stays at the level of things, but might simultaneously represent the whole cosmos. Daisetsu emphasized that works of haiku were generated from the intuition of the poet, and because of that, haiku represents the 'Cosmic Unconscious'. In this sense, the essence of Zen is similar to that of haiku.

Also, Swedenborg emphasized the notion of 'correspondences', in which everything on earth corresponds to another thing in heaven or hell. If so, this notion might be another form of Zen or haiku for Swedenborg.

14

Carl Bernhard Wadström to Fredrik Nordenskiöld, 14 February 1792 ☽

LETTER FROM CARL BERNHARD WADSTRÖM TO CARL FREDERIK NORDENSKJÖLD (K/155)

Maximilian Schuch

When I touched the letter, thoughts opened up to me as though it was a portal to some kind of knowledge still surrounding us.

Strangely, the handwritten version contained symbols of the Sun ☉ and the Moon ☽ that are omitted in the transcribed edition. Perhaps this is because these symbols went out of fashion, presumably because alchemy has mostly been regarded as an embarrassing oddity since the Age of Enlightenment. Numbers, facts and measurements have enjoyed much more attention than the spiritual experiments of the alchemists who as psychoanalysts *avant la lettre* fathomed the secrets of the elixirs of the self. These prepared them for great things and great success in many different areas. These two open, lively and gregarious men, through the creation of The Stockholm Exegetic and Philanthropic Society, considerably contributed to the development of medicine at the time.

Sun and Moon: such a pretty couple. A bouquet of energetic counterparts (or counterpoints). While the one fulfils its purpose during the daytime the other repurposes all in the night—a strategy from which social media could learn much. Popular music has been trying, artificially, and for a long time, to integrate this encounter with these semi-mystical symbols of the self.

To the alchemist, there was no domain of life where the planets were not involved. The Greeks had a personified view of the planets. Like friends, each was a being in their own right, and played a part in every level relating to (wo)man and nature.

More intriguing than gender is the means by which the Moon wields its force and influence. They are considered a luminary, but they produce no light of their own accord. They are reliant upon the Sun's light to reflect (mirror) them/their image to our earth. This method of projecting light makes the Moon a symbol of subtlety. Clarity, reflection and indirect deduction are gained by *passive means* (emotionally, intuitively and progressively) like the lyrics of a song. A perfect match, I would say—turn lead into gold, baby!

How is this otherwise reflected in pop music? The frontman is more than a Moon-performer. He is the messenger of a larger organization: their image; a mirror of the conceptualized Sun-organization, the public face that is needed in order to gather support for a larger organization's goals. Alchemy is all about hardening ideas into the material sphere. It is about recreating the world according to your design.

Paracelsus once said: 'Just as the sun shines through a glass . . . the sun and the moon and all planets, as well as all the stars and the whole chaos, are in man'. Pop is an encounter with this universe, a chaotic yet deeply orderly engagement with the Dionysian-unbound mediated by Apollonian tunes. That is why we are all attracted to good music. When the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and lyric come together we can literally be moved by it. We know what we like, but at the same time it is often difficult to put a finger on the exact reasons why certain songs speak to us so intensely. Popular music often has this effect. We love it, but we don't know why.

When we simply dismiss popular music as pointless, we choose to ignore any messages that may be inherent within it. Actors, after all, read scripts, and this is often the case in music too.

It is a prerequisite that anyone tasked with writing lyrics to popular music be well versed in the signs and symbols of the Ancient Mysteries, and that they be able to weave these into incredibly catchy songs. The effect of this alchemical process is powerful, and we are all familiar with it. Now we just have to consciously realize what has been staring us right in the face for so long.

I think the (re)purpose of alchemy is the changing scale of ingredients; the content-material is ever changing and yet remains the same. Rock 'n' roll



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has been linked with rebellion since its inception. Rebellion is the alchemical ingredient. Punk is anti-capitalist adolescence. Hip hop is the balance between power structures and empowerment and pop a complete dissolution into a dream world.

15

A Primitive Conviction

SAMPLES OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S HAIR (N/4 and N/5)

Lydia Granger

To first be taken, hair must hold something worth possessing.

*Slender, threadlike outgrowths of the epidermis.*¹ In sickness, the pillow is thief—grabbing at strands that amass upon linen. In captivity, heads are shaved by slick steel, rubbing out the final markings of autonomy. In myth and legend, a golden stair cascading from a tower window, or a vessel for strength and magical powers, shorn from the heads of the living. And even when the body is lifeless, locks are still cut, bound by thread—kept by friends and family in boxes pillowed by tissue, or arranged beneath sheets of thick glass by the archivist or museum.

*Numerous fine keratinous filaments, growing from the skin of humans and animals.*² A lock of hair was donated to the Swedenborg Society in 1907. It was given by Caroline S Harrison, possessed by her family for more than a century, first collected very shortly after Swedenborg's death by Dr Messiter. In 1945, a second donation sent by the Reverend E R Goldsack—a sample originally obtained by Charles Augustus Tulk, during the first opening of Swedenborg's coffin.

*A mass of thin thread-like structures.*³ Life is sustained in threads of hair, immortalized by our most delicate feature. Long after death it still cascades, catching light and movement, holding the essence of a being who is otherwise out of reach: an invocation, a last vestige.

Symbolism, ritual, memento mori, magic, *hair*—a primitive conviction compelling Messiter and Tulk to reach inside a coffin, and the Harrison family to preserve it for over a hundred years. In *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg wrote of three distinct heavens and their descending order. He corresponds this with the structure of the body, from the highest part of a being to the lowest: ‘In similar order is the divinity which emanates and comes down from the Lord’.⁴

Our hair must then be our first contact with divinity.

NOTES

- ¹ <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hair>>, accessed 3 March 2020.
- ² <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hair>>, accessed 3 March 2020.
- ³ <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hair>>, accessed 3 March 2020.
- ⁴ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §29.

16

Swedenborg's Ear Bones

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S EAR BONES (N/6)

Malvina Janasik

THE EAR

It listens. Can you hear it? Drumming, gurgling, hissing, crackling, grumbling, creaking, rattling, tapping, shrieking, howling, humming, echoing, roaring, *whispering. Speaking.* The ear is a social creature, it's built of parts that are in continuous dialogue with each other: they converse, pass on sounds and vibrations between each other and further on, into the very core of your soul. *You are suspended in a wave of a steady, constant sound.* Parts of your ear talk between each other, but they also allow you to talk, to connect with other people and the surrounding world. And you respond, resonate and speak in sound waves. The ear puts you in context and it puts you in space: the sound, the balance, the harmony. Equilibrium: oh, *thank the ear.*

THE BOX

The shade of green is that of *ficus elastica*, smelling of juniper and pine. Round-shaped, I imagine it would snap gently at my fingers, as if the golden fastening were magnetized: just like a box of cheek blush does (Bourjois Little Round Pot blusher, shade: *rose frisson*. A quiet *pop* is the sound it makes). Inside: velvety black, with a worn-out spot right in the middle (faerie circle? full moon behind clouds? *toothpaste?*). It's light, unassuming. The small inscription is difficult to read, as if the confident hand that handled these sprawling letters was rushed, perhaps unaware of its importance (scratching sound of a quill on paper). It

reads: 'Small bones incus & malleus of Swedenborg's ear'.

THE BONES

Three bones of the middle ear: malleus (hammer), incus (anvil) and stapes are the smallest bones in the human body. Hammer and anvil rest in the green box, disassociated from the body: like cut-off nails, or hair separated from skin. Reminiscent of a strange ritual mothers perform when they keep their children's teeth in a jar: as if to remember that moment in the past, the moment when their offspring were young enough to still have baby teeth, but just old enough to lose them.

Listen:

Clink, clink, clink, clink.

Like hammer hitting anvil, sound resonates, vibrates and enters deeper *into your soul.*

Test for Negative

PLASTER CAST OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG'S SKULL (N/7)

John Vaughan

TEST FOR EYES NEGATIVE. That's negative eyes. It's heavy, isn't it? They say the brain of a genius weighs—but never mind that. Take a seat, won't you. No, not there. That's my seat. I'm joking. You look so pale. How was your journey? On your way here? It's a funny one. The best directions I can give are: don't look back. Any diversions? Wrong turns? A few wrong turns? To be expected. Who can blame you, then, for looking so pale, so lost? I can see that you are lost.

TEST FOR SAFETY NEGATIVE. Is it true, the stories I've heard? His body was quite intact when they opened the coffin? Oh the worms, the maggots must have stamped their little feet in protest! They must have revolted and writhed for the injustice! What do maggots sound like when they have been betrayed? I imagine they sound very much like us. I imagine a lot of pitiful creatures sound more like us than we care to think. Have you revolted? Writhed? In the grip of rage, ecstasy? Oh but then the air set to work on the body, didn't it, chewing away at him, until just the bones remained. You were quick to grab his skull, weren't you? What else have you taken? How much do you want for it?

TEST FOR FOG POSITIVE. Fog enters the mind. Fog drags lights and faces with it. The fog tonight was heavy. Are you a heavy sleeper? You dropped like a weight through the fog. I can see that. You passed quietly from there to here. Here. See these marks, these scratches on the cranium? Not etchings. Not handled with care. Lines like these are produced by hours staring out the same snowy window, listening to the same sheet snapping in the wind; lines like these are learned. This skull held winter. Winter breathes in blades.

TEST FOR ELECTRICITY NEGATIVE. That's funny. Inconclusive? Is that so? Oh now. That can't be right. Surely there's been someone. Someone who passed like a current through—no. Someone—no. Now. I can see it. Just once, at night, distant lightning.

TEST FOR TEETH NEGATIVE. There are no teeth. They are gone. They have been sold, I assume? There should be one tooth left. But that doesn't matter. I can imagine. Yes I can. No, I'm not expecting anyone, that's just the wind. The wind here knocks. Come in! I'm only joking. You're trembling. Where is your jacket? Your belongings? In a room somewhere, no doubt. I imagine there are plenty of things in rooms that assume the folded forlorn quality of the forgotten, the abandoned.

TEST FOR DOORS NEGATIVE. Door to fields, door to the sea, door to old clothes, door to her smile, door to busy streets, door to sleep, all closed. Tomorrow's door is painted. And there are more tests.

TEST FOR DAMAGE POSITIVE. Thank you for your tooth. The blood is a nice touch.

TEST FOR TEARS POSITIVE. On your knees. Down. Stay. Try to writhe. Try to revolt.

TEST FOR EYES NEGATIVE. Did you ever use them? And what did you see? Flowers? Faces? That's nothing. If you really looked you would have been blinded. There is so much to see. You should have knocked your eyes out onto a plate and offered them to the worms and you should have said 'I am conquered'.

TEST FOR TAIL POSITIVE. How does it feel? Give it a swish! Go bananas. I won't watch. Have a little wiggle.

TEST FOR SKIN NEGATIVE. Too many things happened to your skin. There were so many hands. So many nights in the open, cold air striking your wrists, your neck, and you thought: Now. Now. I am ready now.

TEST FOR FUR NEGATIVE.

TEST FOR SCALES POSITIVE. Rain will slide glistening off you. Wind won't bother you. Teeth will break against you. Leaves will protect you. Hands won't come near you. Did you hear what I said? Hands won't come near you.

TEST FOR TEETH LONG. Sharp. How strange. I don't. Stop smiling.

TEST FOR SAFETY INCONCLUSIVE. Let go. Let go.

TEST FOR TONGUE BITTEN; torn.

TEST FOR SAFETY NEGATIVE.

TEST FOR KNEES BROKEN.

TEST FOR DOORS OPEN. All of them.

TEST FOR FOG: IT enters.

FOG ENTERS.

Royal College of Arts
MA Writing programme
School of Arts & Humanities
Kensington Gore
South Kensington
London SW7 2EU
+44 (0)20 7590 4415
www.rca.ac.uk
email: soah@rca.ac.uk
Twitter: @RCA_Writing

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The Swedenborg Society
Swedenborg House
20-21 Bloomsbury Way
London
WC1A 2TH
+44 (020) 74057986 ext 4
www.swedenborg.org.uk

Charity registration number: 209172
Company registration number: 00209822