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**SWEDENBORG
REVIEW**

S U M M E R 2 0 2 1



SUMMER 2021

Front and back cover: film stills of David Niven and Kim Hunter from *A Matter of Life and Death* by Eric Gray (1946).
Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.

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Introducing Swedenborg

A preview extract taken from the beginning of a forthcoming short life of Swedenborg
by the acclaimed biographer Peter Ackroyd.

PETER ACKROYD

How is it possible that a Swedish gentleman who became an Assessor in the Royal Board of Mines, and whose early essays were concerned among other subjects with metallurgy, hearing aids and longitude, could become a renowned visionary who conversed with angels and spirits?

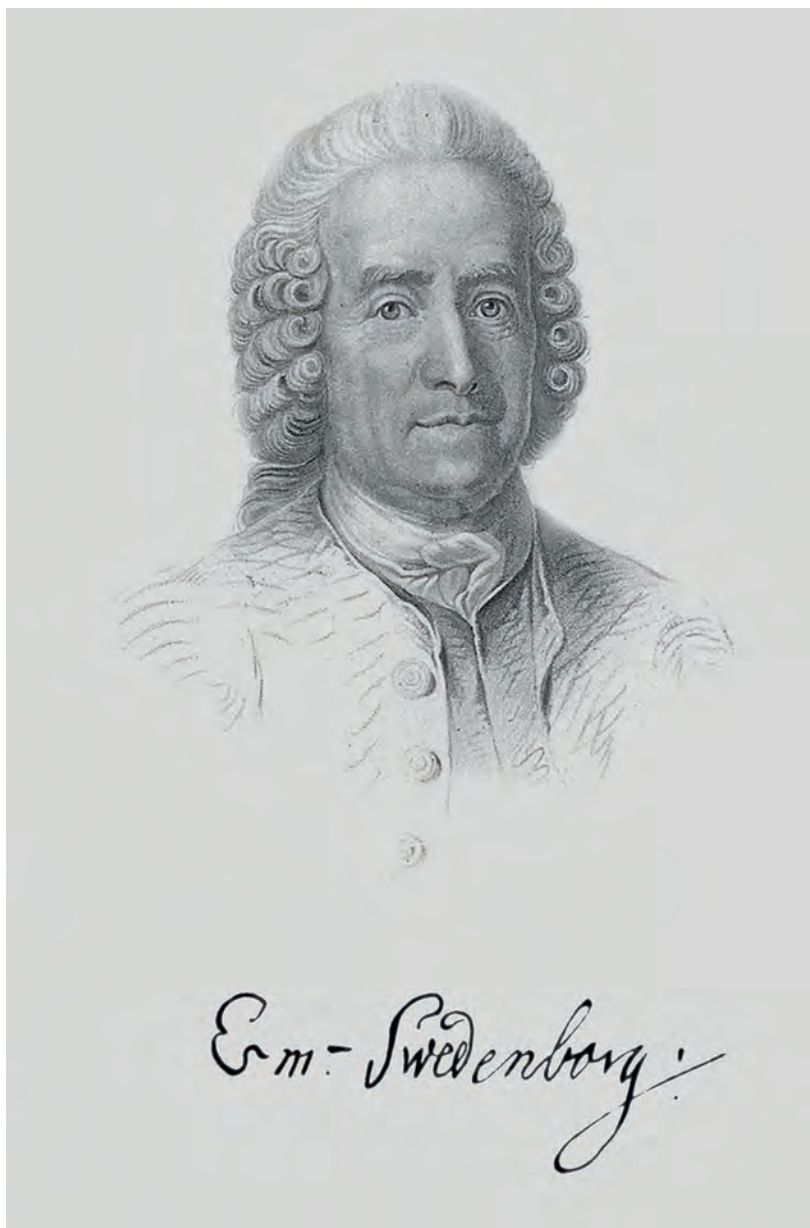
Emanuel Swedenborg was born in the St James parish of Stockholm on 29 January 1688, a date which according to the modern calendar became 9 February. His father, Jesper Swedberg, was a pastor before becoming a professor at Uppsala University and then bishop of Skara, which has its own cathedral and is one of the oldest cities in the country. Like his son he was a prolific and versatile writer. He noted that 'I would be able to fill a wheelbarrow with the books I have written';¹ the most accurate account suggests that he composed more than fifty, among them a Latin-Swedish dictionary and a Swedish grammar. The father was also susceptible to dreams and visions. Of Swedenborg's mother, Sara, much less is known; she seems to have been rich and noted for her composure despite the fact that she gave birth to nine children before her own death in 1696 at the age of thirty. Swedenborg was eight years old when she died, but there is no record of his reaction to her early demise. His older brother, Albrecht, died a few weeks later. The young Emanuel was much acquainted with death.

His father married again in the following year to Sara Bergia, the daughter of a priest and wealthy widow of a judge. According to Jesper she favoured Emanuel among her stepchildren, and Swedenborg himself had happy memories of his childhood. In one of his later works he wrote of the delights of childhood in a manner that suggests memories of his own. Children, he writes:

have no worries about food and clothing, or about the future. They do not look to the

world or want a lot from it. They love their parents, their nurses, their child companions with whom they engage in innocent play. They allow themselves to be guided, they listen and obey.²

But his young life was not all play. He already



experienced visions of children who remained invisible to others; they told him of matters which, when he repeated them to his parents, suggested that he had been allowed glimpses into the spiritual world. He wrote to a friend that:

From my 4th to my 10th year, I was constantly in thought about God, salvation, and man's spiritual suffering. Several times I disclosed things that amazed my father and mother,

who thought that angels must be speaking through me.³

But he was also engaged in more practical matters. He realized that by breathing slowly he was able better to concentrate and understand; it was an insight into physiology which

he remembered all his life.

There was much to learn.

From the age of seven or eight he began studying Greek and Latin in order to prepare himself for university. He did not have to wait for long; he was admitted to Uppsala University in 1699, at the age of eleven, where he was introduced to Hebrew as well as consolidating his mastery of the classical languages. The lectures on philosophy included Plato and Aristotle and extended to mathematics, astronomy, medicine, history and law. His understanding was assisted by his brother-in-law, Eric Benzelius, with whom he lodged after his parents had moved to the diocese of Skara. Benzelius was the librarian of the university, and a devotee of Descartes, with a passion for education; it was he who fired Swedenborg's passion for mathematics and physics. At this stage of his life he was ambitious and purposeful, but he felt constrained in the student debating societies by a stammer or stutter. In 1709, however, he attained the recognition of his learning with a sixty-two page dissertation on the *Selected Sentences from Publius Syrus the Mime*, a sequence of aphorisms on moral and psychological themes

copiously annotated by Swedenborg.

At the end of his university career it was time to move on and to explore the discoveries and conclusions of others in foreign lands. This was, after all, to become known as the Age of Reason or, in less ponderous terms, the Enlightenment. For him, the first port of call was England, the home of the Royal Society and, among others, of Locke and of Newton.

At the end of July 1710 he found berth on a >

¹ Lars Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2005), p. 4.

² Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugal Love*, tr. John Chadwick (London: Swedenborg Society, 1996), §395, p. 376.

³ Swedenborg, letter to Gabriel Beyer, 14 November 1769, quoted in Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, p. 294.

⁴ Swedenborg, letter to Eric Benzelius, 9 August 1715, quoted in Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, p. 57.

⁵ Swedenborg, *The Principia*, tr. Augustus Clissold, 2 vols. (London: W Newbery, 1845-6), vol. I, p. 50.

⁶ Swedenborg, *Arcana Caelestia*, tr. John Elliott, 12 vols. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1983-99), vol. 1, §775.2, p. 289.

⁷ Bergquist, *Swedenborg's Secret*, p. 117; cf. David Dunér, 'Swedenborg's Spiral', in *Studia Swedenborgiana*, vol. 12, no. 4 (October 2002), p. 7.

⁸ Swedenborg, *The Principia*, vol. I, p. 35.

merchant ship and sailed across the North Sea. London became in a sense his spiritual home; he visited, and stayed in, the city on seven different occasions and it was the London hermeticists like William Blake who most warmly embraced him. It is not known if Blake and Swedenborg ever met in the little world of London dissent, but it is possible.

On this first occasion the city was the first stop in a Grand Tour which lasted for four years. He has an immoderate thirst for learning combined with an equally assiduous pursuit of fame. He read Newton and attended lectures at the Royal Society in Crane Court. And he worked with the great English astronomers of the time, Edmond Halley and John Flamsteed, and visited the Royal Greenwich Observatory. He met celebrated mathematicians, geologists, physicians and theologians as well as the famous botanist, Hans Sloane; no doubt they conversed in Latin.

He stayed in London for two and a half years before making his way to Holland and then travelling on to Paris where he grew sick, the first of only two occasions when his body failed him.

On his return to Sweden in the spring or summer of 1715 he was filled with ideas, no doubt inspired by the new acquaintances whom he had met.

He informed his brother-in-law of his proposed inventions for a water pump, a machine for lifting heavy objects, a machine gun, a submarine, a mechanical carriage, a flying carriage, 'together with several kinds of air guns, which once loaded could shoot 60 to 70 shots in succession'.⁴ At this stage of his life he was eager for acclaim, a weakness he did not

disown for some years. In the meantime he began to edit a journal, *Daedalus Hyperboreus*, filled with mechanical and scientific matter. The king of Sweden, Charles XII, was so impressed that he enlisted Swedenborg as Assessor of Mines; he remained on the Royal Board of Mines for thirty-one years. It was the only professional job he ever had. But in the course of his work he helped to build a series of locks that linked Stockholm to the North Sea, contemplated a saltworks and transported the Swedish navy some fifteen miles across land. He was not a visionary recluse. Partly as a result the new queen ennobled the Swedberg family and in 1719 Emanuel took his place in the House of Nobles. This was the year after the death of Charles XII, and the demise of *Daedalus Hyperboreus*.

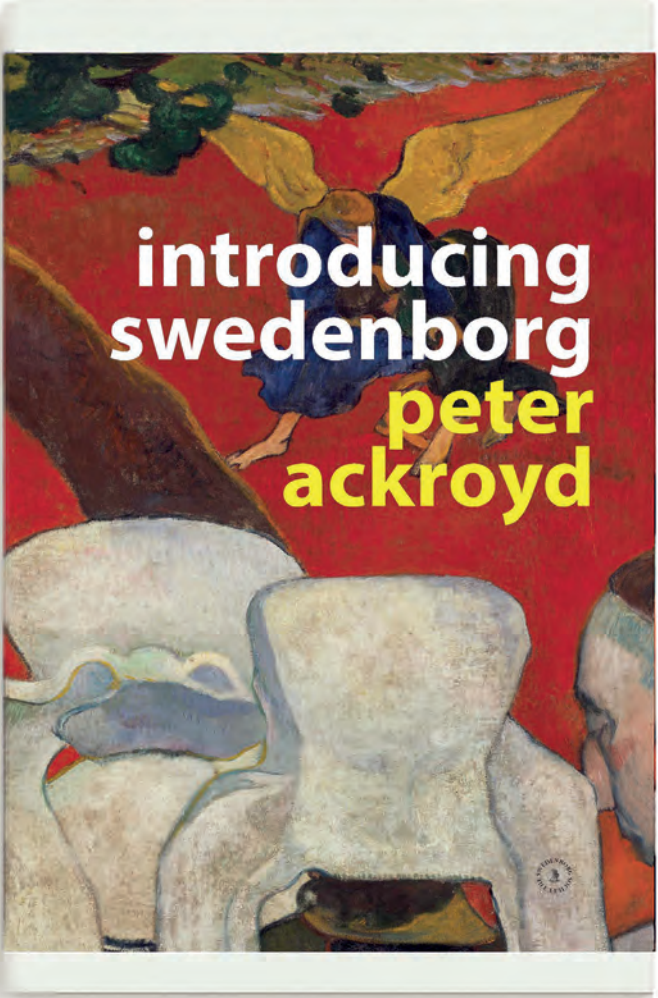
Yet even as he continued his active life in the world he became preoccupied with the spiritual world from which he knew he derived his insights and his writing. From 1724 to 1734 he ceased to publish, largely because he was engaged in a three-volume work entitled *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia*. The last two volumes were treatises on the properties of tin and copper, but the first of them came as a surprise or, for some, a revelation.

How did the infinite which is not material, and is not defined by time or space, give rise to the finite? He posits the existence of a number of points without dimension which emerge from the infinite and which are the cause of matter. Every point is in turn filled with infinite energy. He added that:


we are at the same time bound to suppose, that in the producing cause there was something of a will that it should be produced; something of an active quality, which produced it; and something of an intelligent nature, determining that it should be produced in such a manner...in a word, something infinitely intelligent, infinitely provident, infinitely active, and infinitely productive.⁵

How do these points manifest themselves? They are constantly in the state of becoming since 'being kept in being is constant coming into being'.⁶ They take the perfect form of the spiral, 'continual, eternal circles from the centre to the periphery, without limit, end, or angle'.⁷ The nebulae form spirals, and the planets spiral around the sun, tokens of the ineffable beginnings of matter. So there was a moment when the planet on which we live, and the solar system of which we are a part, were a manifestation of the infinite. For Swedenborg the infinite was an aspect of the deity, 'For without the utmost devotion to the Supreme Being, no one can be a complete and truly learned philosopher'.⁸ It should be remembered also that in this period science was considered to be part of philosophy since 'the love of wisdom', the meaning of philosophy, covered all aspects of human knowledge. This first volume of *Opera Philosophica et Mineralia* marks Swedenborg's first attempt to understand the spiritual world. But he had come to realize that philosophy without spiritual understanding is hollow. ■

● PETER ACKROYD is a broadcaster, essayist and one of the UK's foremost biographers and novelists. He has written nearly 40 works of non-fiction, and nearly 20 works of fiction. Among his many awards and honours are the Guardian Fiction Prize (1985), the Whitbread Biography Award (1984) and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (1998). He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1984 and was awarded a CBE in 2003.



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On The Conjugal Angel or Spirited Communications

Following the publication of A S Byatt's *On the Conjugal Angel* (Swedenborg Society, 2020) in the Swedenborg Archive series, Avery Curran explores the struggles with communication and ghostly echoes in both the book and its nineteenth-century setting.

AVERY CURRAN

In A S Byatt's *On The Conjugal Angel*, the veil between worlds is, as the phrase goes, thin. Ghosts appear, flitting into view and then slipping away again, intangible as motes of dust. Some of these ghosts are literal, like the spirit of Arthur Henry Hallam, who appears to the medium Sophie Sheekhy in Byatt's novella 'The Conjugal Angel'. Others are less so: the ghostly traces of Swedenborg on the world of literature, materializing clearly in the work of Baudelaire and Balzac and reappearing with a spectral echo in the writing of Henry James. The otherworldly presence, invoked by a painted teapot and the leaves brewing inside it, of people continents away gathering tea, kilns full of clay and sable-hair brushes painting the china. The strangeness, when you consider it, of these imagined conversations between real people—Mrs Jesse, Hallam—and fictional characters, creating an unexpected afterlife for them.

The novella that forms the backbone of *On The Conjugal Angel*, 'The Conjugal Angel', was paired with 'Angels and Insects' in a collection of the same name published in 1992. The extracts of it reproduced here function as a sort of seance, allowing the likes of Hallam and Mrs Jesse, Alfred Tennyson's sister Emilia (or Emily), to communicate once more with the living. Hallam, of course, appears only as a spirit, speaking with great effort—'You see', he says, 'I am a dead man, you see'. He 'moved his heavy tongue in his mouth, unaccustomed now' to speaking.

Victorian spirits often experienced difficulties in communication. In one Colorado seance, a female spirit appeared but was only 'imperfectly formed', and 'attempted to talk, but we could only hear inarticulate sounds'. In fact, the founding moment of nineteenth-century spiritualism was characterized by the struggle toward communication. This occurred in 1848, when two young girls claimed to hear knocking sounds in their home in Hydesville, New York. Over a few days the girls, Maggie and Kate Fox, developed a code that allowed what they believed to be a spirit to 'speak' with them. A great deal of early spirit communication followed in this form, through what was referred to as 'table rapping'. Automatic writing was another popular technique, in which a medium would allow a spirit to write

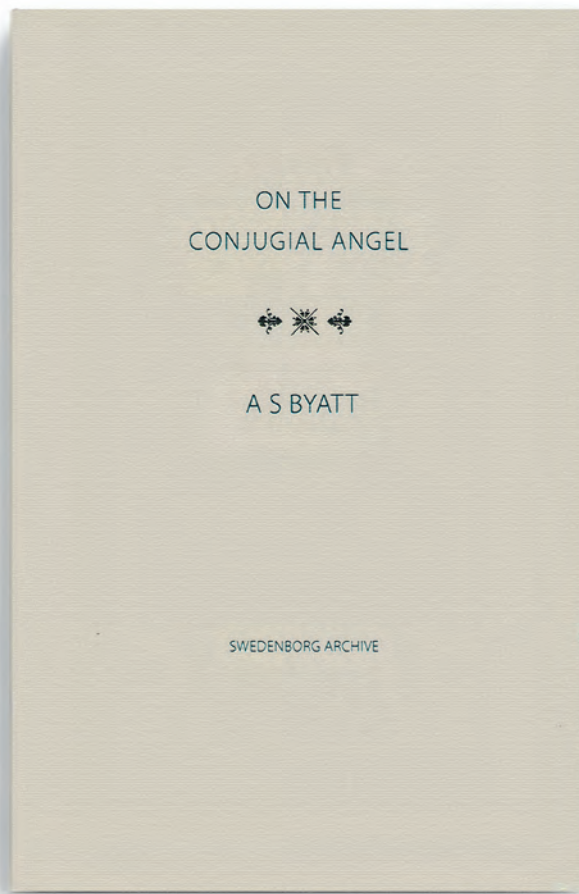
'through' her, using her physical strength and tangibility to do what the spirit couldn't alone. Later in the century the spirits—or the mediums—became bolder, and began to speak aloud and even materialize, but what remained, even when this failed, as it did in Colorado, was the attempt at shared language. In *On The Conjugal Angel*, Byatt muses on the role and power of language: she notes that Balzac thought that 'the novel was the divine human [...] he thought that language was a way in which that world interpenetrated

non: 'Nature is a temple in which living pillars / Sometimes give voice to confused words; / Man passes there through forests of symbols / Which look at him with understanding eyes'. In *On The Conjugal Angel*, Byatt says that 'poems are ghosts', that ' "The Eve of St. Agnes" is the ghost of Keats', calling to mind a picture of the spirit of the poet attempting to speak across time.

Language is inescapable, even as it is garbled or difficult to communicate; the 'living pillars' that 'give voice to confused words' evoke an image of Hallam's spirit, 'struggling, it seemed to her, to keep his appearance, his sort-of-substance, together' as he speaks to the medium Sophie Sheekhy. The spirit speaks easier through automatic writing, the pen playing with words, *liking* them, and then through Sophie Sheekhy herself, whom he/it asks to deliver messages to the assembled seance participants. The spirit of Oscar Wilde reportedly wrote an entire play posthumously, through the medium Hester Dowden; Arthur Conan Doyle wrote that 'one could in a pinch imitate style, but we could not imitate the great mind behind the style', believing the play to be legitimate. So language, and written language in particular, is sometimes able to bring the spirits of the dead closer to those left behind—or at least, some of the left behind perceive it that way.

A S Byatt's *On The Conjugal Angel* contains within it a rich world in which spirits struggle to speak with the living, poems send a ghostly message across centuries and language stretches across the seemingly insurmountable gap between worlds. It acts not only as a seance for the Emily Jesses and Arthur Henry Hallams of this world, but also revives the atmosphere and energy of an evening ten years ago when Dame Byatt's original talk at the Swedenborg Society's bicentenary took place. ■

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our world, and he thought language was both material and spiritual'.

This idea is reflected in Swedenborg's theory of correspondences, in which everything in the natural world corresponds to something in the spiritual world. Language is key here; as Byatt says, it is both material and spiritual, and can bridge the gap between those worlds. We apply words to make both the natural concept—light, trees, lambs—and the spiritual value—wisdom, love, innocence—legible to us. Baudelaire's influential poem 'Correspondances' (from *Fleurs du Mal*, 1857) describes some of this phenome-

The Hippish Spectrality of Food: Swedenborg and Green Tea

Roger Clarke looks at some of the dietary links to hallucination and mystical experience, through the prism of Swedenborg and two of the famous authors of supernatural fiction he has subsequently influenced, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu and M R James.

ROGER CLARKE

'There is with every man at least two evil spirits'

—JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU, *'Green Tea'*, from *In a Glass Darkly* (1872)

I first came across the name of Emanuel Swedenborg when I was about 15 years old.

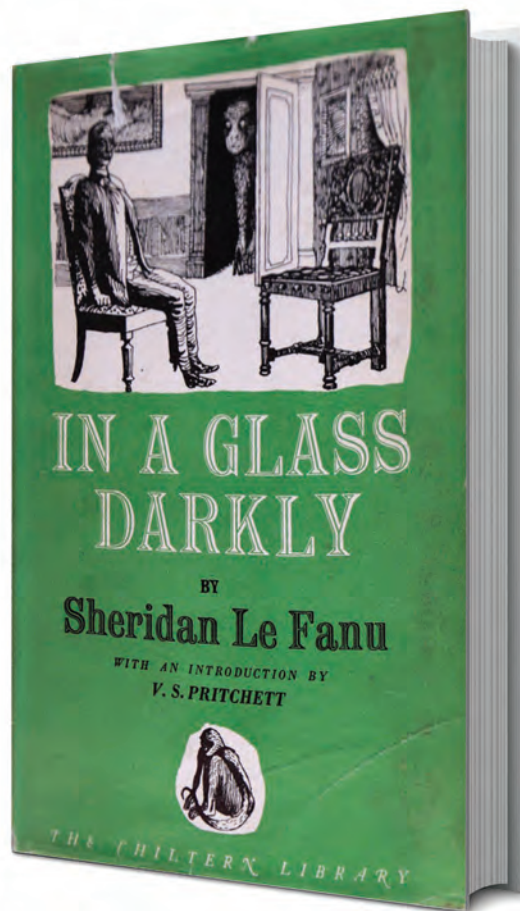
I couldn't eat at the time and was sick as a dog, in a process of acute gastric collapse that was going to affect the rest of my life. A teacher gave me a book to read. A story within that book was 'Green Tea' and it was written by Sheridan Le Fanu, and so, and consequently, Swedenborg became, for a while, a frightening figure caught up in my inability to eat and my imminent hospitalization. The man was a witch and the very act of reading his books, combined with a mild refreshing stimulant, could tune the mind towards an occult experience. When many years later as—unlikely trajectory—a food journalist writing for the Zagat guides, I was researching the history of Chinatown in London, at its old site at Limehouse, Swedenborg materialized again, buried there too, disinterred and returned to his native Sweden in the same year that the first Chinese restaurant is recorded in London.

Swedenborg, whose diet latterly consisted mainly of bread and milk, is also of interest to the food historian since he had his famous London vision in the cellar of a restaurant in Clerkenwell. It was his Damascene moment when the idea of a well-spread and groaning table vanished into his past. That solitary single meal, and its aftermath, has extraordinary cultural reach: a great menu opened up of mental states and spookery and redemption we feast from still. Swedenborg's influence on artists and thinkers is known; yet his influence on the ghost story—not so much.

And yet. His nervous system was for Le Fanu and M R James a profound tree of synaptic generosity (and for Walter de la Mare and Robert Aickman in stories such as 'The Hospice' where disgusting amounts of rich food are part of the haunted experience).

Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-73) was a writer of Protestant Huguenot ancestry who lived in Dublin. The son of the Dean of Emly and married to the daughter of a leading Irish QC, he had residence in the same square as Oscar Wilde's

parents and Bram Stoker. Le Fanu's life has a little of the tragic Edgar Allan Poe about it, and a little of the magazine-editing worth ethic of his friend Charles Dickens. I don't know how much Le Fanu was in faith influenced by the writings of Swedenborg, at least, but we know from his fiction that he found Swedenborg useful as a tuning fork



for the uncanny.

Swedenborg has proven novel and useful to writers of ghost stories in two ways. One was that the dead didn't necessarily know that they were dead, an idea now commonplace in American ghost-hunting shows but quite radical in the eighteenth century. The other was the idea of the afterlife being in some ways indistinguishable from an ordinary life up to the point of death, apart from the fact that there was, in train, a metaphysical engine designed to prepare the soul for either heaven or hell. The little giveaways of

this process are glitches in the Matrix, things that don't quite make sense. Swedenborg's literary spell has dovetailed into the movies. As part of a 2021 film awards season process, I only recently watched three new releases absolutely crackling on the griddle of a Swedenborgian flame. More on that later.

Last week, for the first time in years, I reread Le Fanu's 'Green Tea'.

'Green Tea' presents itself as a narrative in a casebook of a German MD named Dr Hesselius—a name borrowed by Le Fanu from the Swedenborgian aether (they were Swedenborg's first cousins and emigrated to North America).

The Revd Mr Jennings is tall and thin and lives in a tall and thin house off Piccadilly. Jennings knows who Hesselius is and knows of his writings on the occult, and straight away, our narrator intuits what is going on—that the vicar is the subject of psychic attack. His frets and syncopes are of the hippish variety—hippish as in sickly, physiologically adrift on a froth of bile, a piece of gentrified slang from Dublin.

In Jennings's library Hesselius discovers a folio copy of Swedenborg's *Arcana Caelestia*. Jennings has annotated it. Here is a version of Swedenborg's theology: the existence of a kind of supercharged purgatory where evil spirits transit directly from hell to torment mankind, in a synthesis of Roman Catholic and Calvinistic theology expressing the worst horrors of both.

Hesselius discovers that the vicar is being haunted by an ape. Not just any ape, but an Elemental, a demonic imp. The haunting had begun a few years earlier and seems to have started when Jennings became dangerously habituated to drinking large amounts of green tea, with a little kettle on his desk, late into the night. In a horse-drawn public omnibus he first sees the fiend, eyes as two red discs 'about the size of those small brass buttons that yachting men wear upon their jackets'.

The unholy visitant becomes more and more unpleasant and aggressive and interrupts the vicar in church. The thing urges suicidal ideation. 'It used to spring on a table, on the back of a chair,



The Jerusalem Tavern on Britton Street, Clerkenwell.

on the chimney-piece, and slowly to swing itself from side to side, looking at me all the time’.

And—the most awful detail, this—he could still see it even *when he closed his eyes*.

There is a singing voice, another M R Jamesian pre-detail tokening devilish business. It insists over the sermon with blasphemies, an enjoyable detail, since Swedenborg in real life didn’t much care for sermons himself—owing to the ghosts in the congregation loudly disagreeing with the priest *Pro manibus contra sacerdotem*.

As it happens, there is no monkey mentioned in Swedenborg’s *Arcana*, but there are several ‘simiae’ in Swedenborg’s 1748 *Spiritual Diary*; Aaron Worth proposes that the “Trinity-educated classicist Le Fanu might have read the entry “De simiae facie” in *Diarum Spiritualis, Pars Secunda*, published in London in 1843’.

“There appeared to me the face of a monkey. . . In the other life spirits can impersonate anyone, and present only the idea of the man, but also images and representatives of his speech and other things’

—Swedenborg, *Spiritual Diary*, §4126, entry for 11 December 1748.

Apes. Simiae. In my 20s I researched my adoptive and biological families and found a double input of Swedenborg in the eighteenth century—Frederick Tatham (William Blake’s controversial executor) on my adoptive side and by blood Richard Cosway, macaroni, madman, court painter and mystagogue, whose short physique and mischievous face saw him dubbed by a fellow Royal Academician ‘a little monkey’. But that is a story for another time.

Green tea itself. The act of drinking it. By the time Le Fanu was writing ‘Green Tea’ the beverage of green tea had faded from fashion and was being replaced by the ‘bohea’ oolongs, versions of which we drink to this day in England. But historically green tea was dominant up to Victorian times—for example, the dish of tea sampled by Pepys at a coffee house was almost certainly green tea. It was unbelievably expensive and only the wealthy drank it.

That dinner. It was 1745. Swedenborg was seated,

alone, perhaps in a private dining room, candles guttering, the meal over. Maybe there was a cup of green tea at hand (between 1750-1800 it was an aristocratic 30% with a preference for the green).

Quietness. A muffled feeling. Perhaps the background noise dialled back, like a time slip. Perhaps the illuminations, lights and candles flared blue. On the floor around his feet and table legs writhed a river, a blanket, of snakes and frogs. I wonder if the noise wasn’t a dry rustling like leaves and holes and distempered nests. He hallucinates snakes and frogs on the floor and then becomes aware of a ‘man sitting in one corner of the chamber’ who says in Swedish ‘do not eat so much’.

‘Ät icke så mycket’

An admonition perhaps for my favourite food blogger @Clerkenwell_Boy.

Swedenborg took the advice. He became thin and spiritual and wandered heaven uncluttered by the taste and rot of material things. Food is not generally associated with ghosts in the Western world. Usually, the rejection of food is part of a spiritual >

journey. The food element of his great Clerkenwell vision usually passes unremarked on. What had he been eating? A lamb chop perhaps with a fashionable squeeze of expensive lemon? A glass of ‘Coti Roti’ as they called it in the eighteenth century?

Stephen McNeilly has written recently in this journal about the 1745 vision taking place in a chophouse called the Red Lion; there are several candidates. One was near Cold Bath Fields. Swedenborg had lodged nearby with Mrs Carr in Warner Street. Another of those was at the end of what is now Britton Street in Farringdon, but it was demolished in a road-widening scheme. It began life as a coffee house and by 1753 it was taken over by a wine merchant from Crutched Friars. Before it was demolished in 1877 it was renamed the Jerusalem Tavern, a name now adopted by the pub at 55 Britton St., where you can sit and still get some flavour of Swedenborg’s London.

It’s all cellars round there. The subterranea of the former dance club Trade at Turnmills where I used to dance away the small hours in 1991, and they took all the tops off the taps to force people to buy water from the bar: *Don’t drink so much.*

Scratching Fanny once pitched her tent in the crypt nearby at St James in Clerkenwell Green where Dr Johnson famously went to find out whether the Cock Lane ghost would knock on her coffin lid. The *Most Haunted* (Season 2, Episode 6) cellars of the Clerkenwell House of Detention are mere yards away from the crypt. Swedenborg died in Clerkenwell while lodging with a wigmaker named Shearsmith. He predicted the date of his own death.

There are elements of ‘Green Tea’ in both M R James’s ‘The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral’ and ‘Casting the Runes’, which has in turn influenced dozens of movies including, for example, David Robert Mitchell’s *It Follows* (2014). Surveillance hauntings are very big these days. Without intending to, the Swedish seer helped the eighteenth-century cultural move of the ghost away from the religious signifier to a packaged domestic incursion.

The three recent films with Swedenborg I mentioned earlier are *Dick Johnson is Dead*, *I’m Thinking of Ending Things* and *French Exit*. Swedenborg is baked into them in the way that oyster nacre is baked onto grit. All simulated reality films come from him, and more.

I’m Thinking of Ending Things is a modern horror film very much in the engineered spirit of vastation. *French Exit* is like a gnostic *Igby Goes Down*. In *French Exit* Michelle Pfeiffer stars in a film about a woman who has a kind of afterlife experience in Paris, and Le Fanu, with all his haunted fauna, and familiars, would recognize the black cat who is important to the story. In *Dick Johnson is Dead* director Kirsten Johnson brings her father from Seattle to New York to live his last days with her, during which time he performs a number of versions of his own death, and witnesses his own funeral. Both films involve post-death machination and a new-but-the-same life after travelling far from the point where they lived. Dick Johnson is



Inside the Jerusalem Tavern.

invited to eat the same chocolate cake made by the same woman that brought on a near-death heart attack 30 years earlier. Rather oddly she dies, and he doesn’t. Such is the divinity of *pâtisseries*.

A final word on food and M R James. From his own writing we know James became a ghost story writer in part from a hallucination he had as a boy *after reading Le Fanu in his father’s house*. ‘The Plantation Gate Incident’ where he saw an evil pink face peeping at him through a gate is famous as his supernatural genesis. But I have another one. In his first days at Eton he ate some tinned frankfurters popular with the Victorians who hadn’t quite mastered the canning process. A mere few days after his arrival he became so sick from food poisoning—‘The sausage illness’ as his family called it—he was sent home and spends the Christmas recovering, not returning to Eton till the following February. Perhaps this was the time he read the Le Fanu and saw that bloated shiny face. ‘Ptomaine’ poisoning flips up in ‘Casting the Runes’, strategically, when one of the key characters Mr Dunning is isolated. I like

to think that the poisoned food in his room in college was another epiphany, which like green tea, and the Red Lion tavern meal, opened the doors of perception, a gastric threshold and a brew, with all the cilia of the stomach lining absorbing the supernatural. Are ghosts really just a piece of undigested potato, as Scrooge would have us believe? We ghost story writers are all diners at the Red Lion banquet and suffering the Sausage Illness of M R James. ■

Tasting note: I drank green Sencha Fuji tea (brew time 3 mins, water temp. 70 degrees) while I wrote this piece. It’s mild and naturally sweet.

‘If you find this world bad you should see some of the others’ —Philip K Dick

● ROGER CLARKE is the author of *A Natural History of Ghosts* (Penguin, 2013), and was the film critic at *The Independent* for 12 years. He has also worked at *Sight & Sound* and *Screen International*, and written for *Variety*.

The Unity of a Life: Knausgaard on Swedenborg

Swedenborg's presence in *Summer* (Harvill Secker, 2018), the concluding volume in Karl Ove Knausgaard's *Seasons Quartet* series of books, provokes Joel Smith's consideration of the relationship between autobiography, fiction and philosophy.

JOEL SMITH

How is a life unified? How do the various events, relationships, beliefs, hopes and fears come together to form a single, coherent life of an individual? Nietzsche wrote, in *The Gay Science*, that we 'want to be the poets of our lives', thereby concisely expressing an idea that has been central to much subsequent thought on the self. On his conception, the unity of a life is that characteristic of a work of art. To live a coherent and unified life is to live a life that, in some sense, resembles a poem. But in what sense? The artist strives to achieve a certain kind of coherence and unity in a work, each part related to each other, nothing extraneous. Thereby is each part rendered meaningful, its significance determined by the role it plays in the whole. It seems likely that, for many of us, the various elements of our lives do not hang together in this way. But perhaps they could be made to. Thus we can think of Nietzsche's thought as an injunction: become the poet of your life! Organize your life in such a way as an artist organizes their work. To lead a life of such coherence and unity—in which each event, relationship, belief, hope and fear has its meaning and part to play—that is perhaps something worth striving for.

But how is one to achieve such a feat? Nietzsche's thought tells us *how* a life is unified by way of telling us what such a unity might consist in. But it does not yet tell us *how* that might be accomplished. So, once more, but in a different, practical sense: How is a life unified? We might gain a clue from thinking about literal attempts to create a work of art out of the elements of one's own life. We might look, that is, at autobiographical fiction. Such a work renders a life, being autobiographical, yet at the same time attempts art, being fiction. Surely the most ambitious such project so far this century is constituted by the six volumes of *My Struggle* and the four of *Seasons*, by Karl Ove Knausgaard. Over thousands of pages Knausgaard charts a life, his life, in its painful and painstaking detail. In laying out the thoughts, both elevated and base, the hopes, the failures, the loves and the betrayals of his life,

Knausgaard essays a work of art in which each part, each brute contingency of his life, gains its meaning in relation to the whole.

Early in *Summer*, the fourth of the *Seasons* series, Knausgaard picks up a copy of Swedenborg's dream journal. One thing that strikes him is the way in which Swedenborg occupies two worlds: the everyday, mundane world, and the world of his nightly visions. The outer and inner worlds. How, one might ask, is it possible to unify such a radically discontinuous life, one in a world



populated with eighteenth-century Europeans, the other with spirits and angels. How can such a divergence be brought together into a single, meaningful whole? As Knausgaard describes the experience of reading the journal, 'The shift from the outer to the inner world is so abrupt, and the inner world so chaotic and heavy with meaning that at first it is nearly impossible to orient oneself in it'.

The problem of unifying the inner and outer worlds is one that Knausgaard sees as applying to

Swedenborg in a particular extreme fashion, but it is in fact one with which he has been struggling throughout his own literary endeavour. For a writer likewise occupies two worlds: the mundane world of housework, family and bills to pay, and the world of thought, mind or spirit which shapes and is shaped by their writing. The struggle of Knausgaard's title is, then, threefold. It refers to the struggles involved in literary creation, in living one's everyday life, and, perhaps most significantly, in the task of combining the two. How

can one exist in both the world of literary theory, Heidegger's philosophy, the history of fascism, or Swedenborg's dreams—all subjects of Knausgaard's writing—and also the familiar world of family life? The demands of family life and, in particular, of childcare seem inimical to the life of the author to which Knausgaard aspires throughout *My Struggle*. But this is not merely a matter of the 'work/life balance' of self-help books. It is also a matter of finding a way to tell oneself a coherent story about who one is, and what one's life is about. This can seem particularly pressing when the two worlds collide in such an obvious fashion: 'I was sitting in the living room next to your brother, who was watching a cartoon version of *Star Wars* while I read a book about Swedenborg's view of science'.

Philosophers are sometimes criticized, usually by other philosophers, for forgetting that they are people of flesh and blood, occupying a particular historical, geographical and social perspective; of supposing that they embody a view from nowhere. But, of course, none of us occupy the point of view of eternity. Each of us has a life to live, bills to pay. So how, when the writer's life is divided between these two worlds, are they to write themselves a single, coherent life narrative? Knausgaard's solution, of course, is to turn that everyday life into writing, to write it into a work of art. The autobiographical novel is an attempt to bring these two worlds together in a unified whole. The mundane life becomes the object of the project of artistic creation. Indeed, to find poetry and meaning in the everyday is, as Knausgaard sees it, a central task of the artist. At the same time as minding the children and



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Edvard Munch, *Summer Night by the Beach* (1902-03).

During his Berlin years Munch learnt of Swedenborg through his friendship with August Strindberg.

browsing Swedenborg, Knausgaard is writing the short essay on cynicism that appears much later in the book. Describing the cynic as one dominated by 'programmatically mistrust' and 'awareness of meaninglessness', the paradigm of which, at least in Knausgaard's mind, is Dostoevsky, he conceives of their art 'as a battle against their cynical selves, as mighty attempts to plant meaning and life in their cynical inner wastelands'. It is not difficult to see a Knausgaard describing himself here. Indeed, as he goes on 'perhaps all art is really an expression of that struggle'.

Not only does the autobiographical novel bring the outer, mundane world into the domain of the writer's inner life, it also externalizes that inner world. For the result of such an act of creation is an artefact, in this case a book. A public object, something that one can buy in a shop, hold in one's hand, or use as a paperweight. At times, this act of externalizing his inner life, the production of this detailed document itemizing and analysing his inner turmoil, leaves Knausgaard empty. Empty of the urge to define himself to himself, 'it is as if that whole rigging has come undone and the life-determining parts are merely parts that exist within me'. As he expresses it, 'I am merely a place which thoughts and feelings pass through'. The books, and their public telling of his version of his story, make for an almost pathologically detached perspective, if only in flashes.

Such considerations on the meaning of Knausgaard's own project are woven in with his thoughts on Swedenborg. For he clearly sees a connection here, conceiving of the dream journal as just such an externalization of inner turmoil and thereby as way of finding meaning in the mundane. Swedenborg was, considers Knausgaard, 'at the mercy of his inner visions' until the point at which they are 'somehow torn loose from him and become something that comes to him from outside'. In this way, the inner becomes outer

and a meaningful world is constituted. In this connection, Knausgaard considers certain psychotics who 'project their own conflicts and inner images outwards into a world which they then communicate with'. Knausgaard is officially speaking about Swedenborg. But, once again, as in another context, he himself says about Swedenborg, 'it isn't hard to see that he is writing about himself here'.

Of course, insofar as Swedenborg's externalization of inner turmoil creates meaning it does so by way of correspondence between the mundane world and the world of spirit. For Knausgaard's distinctively modern sensibility, on the other hand, the goal is to find meaning not in such correspondence but rather in the everyday itself, the distinctive task of the artist being to 'plant meaning'. And, indeed, he writes that

what truly interests him about Swedenborg's life is not the world of spirits revealed in the visions, but rather his previous work on the relation between the mind and the body, 'the materiality of the soul, the physical origin of dreams, their foothold in the flesh'. This challenge is, once again, albeit in a different context, that of integrating two worlds, of finding a place for meaning in nature.

But perhaps Knausgaard's twentieth-century perspective is not so far removed from that of Swedenborg, more than two and a half centuries earlier. Towards the end of *Summer*, Knausgaard dips randomly into a book of Ekelöf's poetry and chances upon a text called 'Apropos of Swedenborg'. He is struck by the idea that God is an ever-present yet unrealized possibility, to be found throughout the everyday world. This is the idea that 'God is in the combine harvesters and the spewed-out grain, in the shadows of the trees and the windings of the roads, in the roofs of the houses and the frames of the doors, in the children's movements and in their hearts, and yet is not'. This simultaneous immanence and absence of God or, more prosaically, of meaning, in the everyday can perhaps be seen as a model of the task that Knausgaard sets himself in his novel. In bringing the inner world into outer being as a work of art, in endowing the various aspects of his mundane existence with meaning in relation to the whole, he is able to take a perspective on it and thereby give his life the sort of unity characteristic of the work of art. Despite the difficulties that Knausgaard repeatedly tells us he has in understanding poetry, he is thereby able to become the poet of his life. ■

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A Piece of Swedenborg's Poplar Tree Bark

2020 saw the Swedenborg Society collaborate with the RCA Writing MA programme, inviting the students to investigate and respond to the Society's archive, resulting in an exhibition, *Hellish Love*, and an online screening of film works and live readings. Gertrude Gibbons's contribution, reproduced here, spirals out from a fragment of bark from a tree in Swedenborg's garden in Stockholm into a contemplation of how his theory of correspondences influenced nineteenth-century French poets and their perception of the natural world.

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 bidden God; / And
like a nascent eye masked by its lid, Beneath the stones' skin grows a pure spirit!)*

—GÉRARD DE NERVAL

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'. 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'. 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. Humankind walks across these 'forests of symbols' which look back at him. 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'. 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. ■

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Touring with Angels, Great European Spirits & Some Darker Sides

The resonances of Iain Sinclair, Emanuel Swedenborg, William Blake and Jacob Boehme are pursued, and pursued, in Jürgen Ghebregziabier's contemplative and poetic account of his own journeys around London and Germany over the years.

JÜRGEN GHEBREZGIABIHER

LONDON

Walking around London, before the coronavirus made travelling to the banks of the Thames a rather uncomfortable trip, has always been more like a travel through time than a race against time for me. And looking back, my encounters with Emanuel Swedenborg on my journeys around town now feel like a series of epiphanies, as well as an initiation into hitherto undiscovered worlds of poetic discourse and spiritual insight.

Roughly at the turn of the millennium, Swedenborg first came to my attention as a daring youth in the writings of Iain Sinclair, defying a six-week quarantine on the ship that brought him to London. Swedenborg snuck off and schlepped ashore onto the northern bank of the Thames. He was arrested and found himself within a whisker of being hanged, if it had not been for the life-saving intervention of family friends. A couple of months later, I too found myself washed up on a small grassy area—Swedenborg Gardens as I later would find out—while retracing one of Sinclair's East End walks looking for a ghostly

music hall off Cable Street on translation research. I also remember passing the unlit windows of the bookshop on Barter Street after one of my weekend repair stints for London's first cargo bike courier, Zero, in the car park under Bloomsbury Square. It took me a while to realize that the bookshop was part of the headquarters of a society with 'the primary aim of translating Emanuel Swedenborg's works into English'. But one day I stopped and had a look at the display in the shop window where a book, shimmering in the relative darkness, caught my attention: *Conversations with Angels*.

However, it was not that book but the last sequence of the 1978 documentary *The Man Who Had to Know* by the Swedenborg Foundation that transformed my sketchy curiosity into a much more meaningful interest. The oddly blurred online video told the story of an incredibly kind man with a mind as scientific as his soul was poetic. Greta, a young girl with endearingly quizzical eyes who was the daughter of Swedenborg's neighbour in Stockholm, frequently implored him to show her one of the angels he communicated with. One day Emanuel consented. He led her to

a chair in front of a curtained wall and asked her to cover her eyes with her hands. When he told her to remove her hands and open her eyes again, he pulled back the curtain with the words: 'Now at last, you're going to see an angel'. The curtain revealed a mirror.

Swedenborg's faith in the spiritual universe within each of us obviously perceived the angel in man, woman and child. One can imagine a winged quality in Greta's smile in front of that mirror as well as in Swedenborg's angelic pleasure, at least, I did. And it reminded me of the quote on that shimmering book cover: 'People are born to become angels'.

'Angels and evil spirits (one-time inhabitants of this world) are with us here and now, but we are normally unconscious of them, and they of us, because of different *wavelengths*; but in Swedenborg's case he was able to slip over into the other field of consciousness, almost whenever he held his breath', as Brian Kingslake, an ordained minister of the Swedenborgian Church, has it in his introduction to Signe Toksvig's book about the Swedish sage.¹ The torrent of Swedenborg's

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Iain Sinclair at the gravestone of William and Catherine Blake in Bunhill Fields. Still from the British Library film *Blake's Spiritual Visions* (2014).

IMAGE: THE BRITISH LIBRARY

published work and words, however, seemed hardly negotiable to me at that time.

IN-BETWEENS

In 2006, I returned to Germany and half a dozen years went by without any of this resurfacing. If it had not been for my translation work in connection with a book published by the Swedenborg Society, I undoubtedly would have lost touch with those heavenly messengers and London visionaries.

I saw William Blake large and bright like ambition, / Absolute, glittering, actual and gold / I saw he had worlds and worlds in his abdomen, / And his bosom innumerably enpeopled with all birds. / I saw his soul like a cinema in each of his eyes, / And Swedenborg labouring like a dream in his stomach.

Iain Sinclair is quoting from George Barker's *Calamitererror* and 'fusing Blake and Swedenborg, [...] Blake and a genealogy of visionary English poets. A fusion associated with sacred places [...] offering posthumous visions to future supplicants, a potent ingredient in London's dreaming'.²

Working on the German version of *Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime*,³ I began to wonder why poets and their poetry felt like some present-day missing link to a long-forgotten mysticism, interconnecting words, wonders and worlds with their quaint tinge of otherworldliness and, by that same token, poetry struck me as a last and latter-day resort of a magic and poetic language which mystics, visionaries and philosophers would once have employed with the greatest ease. Moreover, I noticed that a synchronicity between mystic and philosopher, visionary and poet felt much more natural to me in an English personality such as Blake. Or a person who had become that potent 'dream ingredient' of London like Swedenborg. Perhaps it was down to a spiritual and social compromise I nowhere else had experienced as being—beyond its oddity—accepted at large, if not regarded with national fondness: that of eccentricity. Ordinary and extraordinary, erudite and odd, mad and wise, knowledgeable and nonconformist, one person was enough to house it all. A human equivalent to an absurd folly adorning a formal English garden.

Such visions are an untimely intrusion in our age of reason. Their language and imagery seem outdated. And yet, their words are like blossom on a dying bush. They grapple with mysteries that have, to this date, not been solved but sacrificed to our modern belief systems, our aspiration to deity, marginalized, self-servingly categorized and broken down into spurious scientific fairy tales. Minstrelsy sung by number crunchers and hymned by elected public servants and officials. Conformity rules whilst tired but dogged systems still somehow survive.

Eccentricity as a last haven? Poetry as a last refuge?

On Bunhill Fields a warden had approached me

'Language is the point of entry for his perception. He is not just some sorcerer's apprentice pronouncing lines from a book of spells that he will never understand. He proclaims his own multiverse, gives voice to and from a conceptual cosmos.'

during one of my London rambles. Orbiting his warden's hut, where the eternal kettle was boiling, he stopped and watched me from a respectful distance while I was mumbling an imagined poem of tribute right in front of William and Catherine Blake's tombstone, which rears up from the York paving of the cemetery. This scholar in a boiler suit later informed me that most of the pennies, instead of being placed on the cenotaph, were thumbed into the ground at the edge of the lawn just a few steps northward. He was, to say the least, a man with a deep passion for his subject and an authority on the living memory of this nonconformist burial ground.

In a documentary by the British Library, Iain talks about William Blake's spiritual visions in front of the same 'stone postcard in the shade of a fig tree' which marks the poet's absence. 'He is involved with the alchemists and magicians of Europe. He reads Paracelsus and Boehme. And he loves them because they were working men who'd suddenly been overcome by a sense of vision'.⁴

Now this was going beyond the remit of my louchely acquired knowledge about these visionary savants. It was a wake-up call of sorts: Discover your own visionaries! Boehme in particular would turn out to be a singular thinker with an extraordinary ability to marry the mystery of existence with the poetry of imagining in a universe of his own devising. More importantly though, it was the first time I had heard of Jacob Boehme. A German thinker, an intellectual rabble-rouser, an apologist for the human condition and a belief system bordering on intellectual and spiritual freedom. I would later find out that none other than Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel used to call him the first 'Philosophus Teutonicus'.

DRESDEN

Several more years passed until, in 2017, I travelled east. Quite by chance I had heard a broadcast about an exhibition at Dresden's Palace Chapel.

Life is continual birth.
Heaven is in hell,
hell is in heaven,
All kept in balance.⁵

It felt like a benevolent summons. Jacob Boehme's cosmos, the universe of the cobbler/philosopher making his way into the political

realms of literate, religious powermongers, and certainly not sticking to his last. An unchastely eloquent presence in the class-conscious town of Görlitz. A definite dead ringer for Jesus. A visionary cerebral powerhouse taking on the materialist world from the banks of the Lusatian Neiße. Everything is connected. *All in All*. A credo as powerful as a magic spell. Language is the point of entry for his perception. He is not just some sorcerer's apprentice pronouncing lines from a book of spells that he will never understand. He proclaims his own multiverse, gives voice to and from a conceptual cosmos.

Heaven and hell, life and dream are no longer opposites. They converge, are concurrent, parts of a whole. Kept in balance by daring insights, the magic of acceptance, understanding the duality of opposing forces. 'Boehme maintained that all life is born of this tension between light and dark, yes and no, male and female. He sees opposites everywhere, and says they are necessary to the dynamic'.⁶

Of the Two Qualities in One.

In this Consideration are found, *Two Qualities*, a *Good* one and an *Evil* one, which are in one another as One thing, in this world, in all Powers, in the Stars and the Elements, as also in all the Creatures: and no Creature in the Flesh, in the Natural Life, can subsist, unlesse it hath the Two Qualities.⁷

We are just a couple of sentences into the first chapter of Boehme's *Aurora*. Dualities are qualities. Inseparable. Necessary. Essential. In every one of us and in everything. And though the Görlitz philosopher, as far as I know, never uses the term 'marry', his system of unification has echoes in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which again references Swedenborg's 'marriage', one of the key concepts 'writ large' throughout the whole of creation for this Swedish sage.⁸

There was *Light in Darkness*, as the English version of the Dresden exhibition catalogue had it, or the metaphysical *All in All* of the German title. Yet then, and in the enforced twilight of the exhibition, I felt like a purblind, groping novice whichever direction I set off in.

Whether black or white, good or bad, both inner and outer world had, for once, neither censored nor praised, used nor abused, but been turned into an astounding and all-encompassing unity. For >

¹ Signe Toksvig, *Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1983), pp. xi-xii.

² Iain Sinclair, *Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2011), pp. 11-12.

³ Iain Sinclair, *Blakes London*, tr. S Koch and J Ghebrezgiabihier (Berlin: Friedenauer Presse, 2020).

⁴ *Blake's Spiritual Visions* (2014), dir. Anna Lobbenberg, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ_jPIZA>, accessed 21 January 2021.

⁵ *All in All: The Conceptual World of the Mystic Philosopher Jacob Böhme* (2017), film by the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, at <<https://youtu.be/r610Bp-H36E>>, accessed 21 January 2021.

⁶ Lucinda Martin, University of Erfurt, curator at Dresden's Palace Chapel, speaking on *All in All*.

⁷ Jacob Boehme, *Aurora. That is, the Day-Spring. Or Dawning of the Day in the Orient Or Morning Rednesse in the Rising of the Sun*, tr. John Sparrow (London: John Streater, 1656), ch. 1, §3, p. 34.

⁸ U.S.E. (pseud. William Spear), *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Spiritual Columbus* (London: New Church Press, 1917), p. 139.

⁹ Quoted in C G Jung, 'Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon' (1942), in *The Collected Works*, ed. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (Hove: Routledge, 2014), p. 6180.

¹⁰ Claudia Brink (ed.), *Light in Darkness: The Mystical Philosophy of Jacob Böhme* (Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2019), p. 65.

¹¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Earths in the Universe*, §9, in *Miscellaneous Theological Works*, tr. John Whitehead (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), p. 387.

¹² Brink (ed.), *Light in*



Boehme's first house in Görlitz.

Boehme, love and hate, light and darkness were as much part and parcel of man's as God's disposition. The breathtaking promenade of prints at the Palace Chapel celebrated an approach both mystical and humane through the prism of a very particular but accessible view of the world, chaperoned throughout by the sibilant whisper of the air con.

A reproduction of Robert Fludd's title page of *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia (The Metaphysical, Physical, and, Technical History of the Two Worlds, Namely the Greater and the Lesser)* pulled me into a communion of microcosm and macrocosm and Leonardo's Vitruvian man. A goat-legged angel pins the end of the rope wrapped around Fludd's cosmoi to a rocky heaven in the top right corner, though one cannot be sure whether this angel might not turn round, grab that rope with both hands and, with a jolt, set it unravelling, spiralling into nothingness, releasing stars and mankind into the cumuli heaped around it.

In front of that image not only Boehme's but many other voices resonated. For Paracelsus, primordial man was identical with *astral* man: 'The true man is the star in us. The star desires to drive man towards great wisdom'. In his *Paragranum* he elaborates on this: 'For heaven is man and man is heaven, and all men are one heaven, and heaven is only one man'.⁹ For Boehme nature is the 'Leib Gottes': *the body of God*,¹⁰ who has never abandoned his creation but inhabits it still. And Swedenborg confirms:

That the whole heaven resembles one man, which is therefore called the greatest man, and that each and all things with man, both his exteriors and interiors, correspond to that man or heaven, is an arcanum not yet known in the world; but that it is so, has been abundantly shown.¹¹

Heaven and nature on a par with 'man'. As much as this was grand and uplifting, it was disturbing. All the world over, many countries, but in particular Germany, had mapped out visions of a 'Führer' who could hold a 'völkisch' entirety together and keep unwelcome aliens at bay. This marriage of man and cosmos, this bogus desire for a mythic homogeneity resonated with the demonstrations of 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West' occupying the streets in

Dresden's ersatz old town every Monday. 'The true meaning of quality', for Boehme, 'is signalled by the sound of the word, because a *Qualität* [...] performs the actions of *quellen/quallen* (billowing/jellying), and, most importantly, the origin of its mobility is an internal friction, indicated by the presence of the word *Qual* (agony) within *Qual-ität*'.¹²

Pondering on the *Portrait of Jacob Böhme in an Allegorical Framework* after delighting in a series of Blake's shining watercolours for Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, I perceived a soothing absence of national conceit, an emblematic representation of something more universal than arranged around the 'Teutonicus Philosophus'. Nicolaus Häublin's 1677 portrait, held in equilibrium by two angels, creates a walk-through heaven & hell for eyes and minds, powerfully throbbing in chorus with Blake's *Epitome of James Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs'* and ultimately Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* fresco at the Sistine Chapel. Görlitz and London merged, a time capsule, voiced over. Blake:

I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.¹³

And Boehme in agreement:

And thus that of which I teach, write, and speake, is nothing else, but the same which hath beene wrought in me; otherwise I could know nothing of it, I have not scrap'd it together out of histories, and so made opinions [...]. I have by Gods grace obtained eyes of my owne [...].¹⁴

GÖRLITZ

Spring 2020. The D4-size 0.02 issue of the *Swedenborg Review* stuck out from my letter box. A preview extract from the upcoming book on Swedenborg's famous summerhouse (or *lusthus* in Swedish) by Iain Sinclair featured a photograph of its second replica. It was crammed into what looked like a narrow backyard, hemmed in by more important roofs and lofty walls on the site of the Swedish New Church in Stockholm. And it had resonant echoes of Boehme's house, with the same distinctly claustrophobic feeling throbbing at the heart of these shuttered buildings.

Six months earlier, I had made up my mind to look for the mystic philosopher amongst the memories hidden in the streets and buildings of his home town. After my excursion to

'I believe that poetry is the prime mover in language, the advocate for its darkest and its brightest side. It is the only way we have left to ground us in our natural world while evoking a world which lies beyond our reach.'

Boehme's awesomely European conceptual world at Dresden Palace Chapel, curiosity had driven me even further east. At the exhibition I had taken a photograph of a photograph of a golden Görlitz basilica, to all appearances directly connected with its former eastern suburb on the Polish bankside by a small but reassuringly modern bridge. The new 'most staromiejski'—a reminder of the town's partition, its predecessor, having spanned the Neiße between Görlitz old town and its eastern boroughs and been blown up in 1945, had not been replaced since 2004. It is now reserved for pedestrians and cyclists, a smooth transition into a territory bearing the unfamiliar names of a former united whole.

A larger-than-life wolf, made from a geodesic mesh of ghostly white triangles, stopped me in my tracks. It kept guard at Boehme's front door. The house itself is wedged in between two more substantial buildings with the whir of a satellite dish to the right and the buzz of people chatting and drinking and dining under the marquee on a restaurant's front terrace to the left. The museum was closed, the wolf forbidding. I took a photograph. The connection to whatever I was looking for had been abruptly cut off.

At about that time, Sven, my friend and tandem translation partner in Sinclairian matters, had sent me Huxley's 'attempt to present this Highest Common Factor of all theologies by assembling passages from the writings of those saints and prophets who have approached a direct spiritual knowledge of the Divine'.¹⁵ That was eerily evocative of Boehme's *Ungrund*:

the abyss of eternity that is absolutely indeterminate subjectivity. For Boehme, like Hegel, the unground, as the groundless ground, behaves as a desiring subject that grounds itself within its own determinations through its burgeoning process of becoming.¹⁶

Yet, Huxley's take on poets lacking in 'direct spiritual knowledge' and his suggestion that 'about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand'¹⁷ stirred half-formed objections on my part, and probably became one of the reasons that made me write this essay. 'After all', I remembered my friend Martin saying, with Rilke's *Elegies* clutched in his hand, 'who but a poet at heart would be able to converse with angels, see spirits as well as have the language at their fingertips to express such miraculous happenings in words that come naturally to them?'

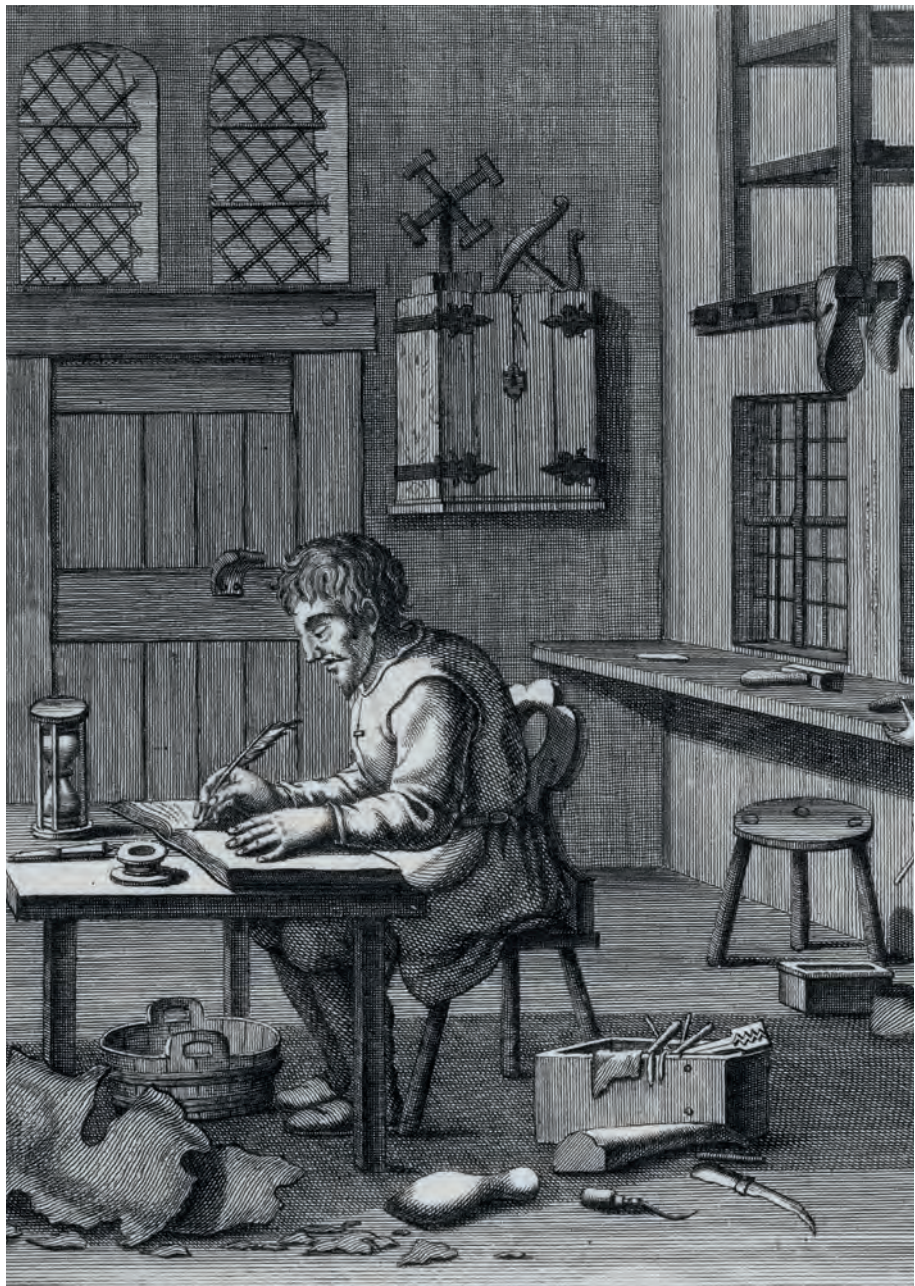
Was poetry some kind of Jacob's ladder into a realm of living myths and visionary thought? Or was it all about the pictorial, graphic and metaphorical energy in the language employed by both mystics and poets, uniting them both in the process?

Blake's lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* read like an update across time on Cowper Powys's *In Defence of Sensuality*. In addition, these English writers had become my 'groundless ground' for musing on what so far had been a rather European school of visionaries, wired beyond time and space, and buzzing with poetic language.

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity;

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their



objects: thus began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.¹⁸

Poetry and the Gods 'reside in the human breast'. Language. Images. Evocations. *Light in Darkness*. Possibly 'the astrolabe of the mysteries of God', which for the Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Rumi is love. Ungaretti's 'M'illumino d'immenso'. Or it might be experienced in a rather Jandlian way: 'i love concrete/ i love pottery/ but I'm not/ a concrete pot'.

I believe that poetry is the prime mover in language, the advocate for its darkest and its brightest side. It is the only way we have left to ground us in our natural world while evoking a world which lies beyond our reach. A 'Signature of Nature' as Boehme calls it, 'the Receptacle, Container, or Cabinet of the Spirit, wherein it lieth'. Boehme compares the signature or form to a 'dumb Essence', 'a Lute that lieth still, and is indeed a dumb thing, that is neither heard or understood; but if it be played upon, then its Form is understood in what form and tune it standeth, and according to what note it is set'.¹⁹

In brief, the whole Work which men do speak so wonderful much of, consists in two things, in an Heavenly and in an Earthly; the Heavenly must make the Earthly in it to a Heavenly: the Eternity must make

Boehme the cobbler. Print of engraving by Joseph Mulder after Jan Luyken, published in Jacob Boehme, *Alle de Theosoophsche of Godwijze* (Amsterdam: Fredrik Vorster, 1686).

Darkness, p. 67.

¹³ William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion*, Plate 10, ll. 20-1, in *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: OUP, 1972), p. 629.

¹⁴ Boehme, *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen aliter, Teutonicus Philosophus*, tr. John Ellistone (London: Matthew Simmons, 1649), 5th epistle, §50, p. 76.

¹⁵ Quoted from the dust jacket of Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946).

¹⁶ Jon Mills, *The Unconscious Abyss: Hegel's Anticipation of Psychoanalysis* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), p. 25.

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Triad Grafton, 1985), p. 12.

¹⁸ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 11, in *Complete Writings*, p. 153.

¹⁹ Boehme, *Signaturum Rerum: or the Signature of all Things*, tr. John Ellistone (London: John Macock, 1651), ch. 1, §4, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. 7, §68, p. 61.

²¹ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plates 7 and 9, in *Complete Writings*, pp. 150, 152.

²² Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, tr. Emanuel F Goerwitz (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1900), pt II, ch. 2, p. 104.

²³ Boehme, *Aurora*, Preface, §1, p.1.

²⁴ Boehme, *The High and Deep Searching out of The Threefold Life of Man through (or according to) The Three Principles*, tr. John Sparrow (London: M S for H Blunden, 1650; repr. London: John M Watkins, 1909), ch. 2, §2, pp. 23-4.

²⁵ Brink (ed.), *Light in Darkness*, p. 125.

²⁶ Publisher's description, at <<https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Aurora/0qV6jwEACAAJ?hl=en>>, accessed 21 January 2021.

Time in it to Eternity: the Artist seeketh Paradise; if he finds it, he hath the great Treasure upon the Earth: but one dead man doth not raise another; the Artist must be living, if he will say to the Mountain, Arise, and cast thy self into the Sea.²⁰

AND BEYOND

Now, this was all too disparate, with too many loose ends, and marooned way out in spiritual sticks, I know. I was caught, trapped as ever between a microcosm, the reality of my own limited powers of expression, and the macrocosm of these newly discovered worlds revealed to me by this band of mystic philosopher/poets, bewildering in their scale. Procrastination temptingly beckoned. Another project shelved, but the world as we perceive it will always begin again at the break of each new day. We cannot imagine it or see it through to its (or perhaps our) end. So we need to rehearse our imaginations. We will and should always try to be more than we are, try to do more than we can pull off. 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom [...] You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough'.²¹

And procrastination was finally seen off by external factors. I was now batted down in an apparently ever extendable quarantine. The country I live in felt like some kind of gigantic lifeboat because of the prevailing national panacea to fight the pandemic with the reintroduction of bygone closed-border policies all across Europe. So I could no longer sidestep the draft-heavy digital mass I had accumulated over time on this subject, which was now demanding to be reread and, of course, rewritten.

Stirred by a feeling of unrest, I was foraging through some older notes and had stumbled across two original thinkers and prolific writers who had always intrigued me. 'With most men, unbelief in one thing springs from blind belief in another'. The quote from the *Miscellanies* of the German physicist, satirist and Anglophile Georg Christoph Lichtenberg stared back at me, as well as 'I'm not a poet, just a menial mosaic worker', the wry, all too pertinent words of Arno Schmidt, once a Görlitz schoolboy, later dubbed 'the German James Joyce', who might have allowed a mocking smile to play upon his lips if he had known about the task I had set myself. Both writers, disparate as they were, shared with Swedenborg and Boehme a manic, visionary output, compiling thousands of pages in what seems to me no time at all. The making of poetry and the alchemy of words was not an option but the most natural thing in the world.

Scientific explanations were not enough. Image and its imaginations had to be rooted in a visceral feeling for language. Signs of nature, versed universes that celebrated a Deity who united nature and man rather than dividing them with a supremacist hierarchy.

All men, according to [Swedenborg's] testimony, are in equally close conjunction with the spirit-world; most men, however, do not perceive it, the difference between himself and others consisting only in the fact that *his interiors are opened*, a gift of which he always speaks with reverence (datum mihi est ex divina Domini misericordia). It may be seen from the context that this gift is supposed to consist in the faculty of becoming conscious of the obscure ideas which one's soul receives by its continual connection with the spirit-world. He distinguishes therefore in man the outer and the inner memory. The former he has as a person belonging to the visible world. On this fact also the distinction between

the outer and inner man is founded; his own privilege consists in seeing himself already in this life as a person in the company of spirits, and in being recognised by them as man. In this inner memory everything is preserved which has disappeared out of the outer,— nothing of all the perceptions of a man is ever lost. After death the remembrance of everything that ever entered his soul, also of what was formerly hidden to himself, forms the complete book of his life.²²

This is the voice of one of Emanuel Swedenborg's fiercest critics: the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. A scathing title. But it also reminds me of *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. That dark stream of consciousness flowing uphill in Goya's *Los caprichos* bears heavily down on our angelic disposition and yet with a fondness of exploring, of wanting to know, of expressing a love of telling an 'unground' from the 'ground'.

Twelve years after his life-changing vision in 1600, Jacob Boehme began to write his first, never to be completed book.

Courteous Reader, I compare the whole *Philosophie Astrologie* and *Theologie*, together with their Mother; to a goodly Tree, which groweth in a fair Garden of pleasure.²³

Görlitz, with its cosmopolitan hybrid of Lusatian, Silesian as well as German and Sorbian culture was as much of a global hotspot for daring conceptual worlds of thought as any other great city like London or Stockholm. And a world such as Görlitz's chief pastor Gregor Richter, Boehme's fiercest adversary, envisaged, would never do for Boehme.

And let not the dissemblers and hypocrites mislead you, who are mere book-learned in the history, and boast and vapour with strange languages, and would be respected for it, whereas they understand them *not* in the least: they understand not *their* mother tongue; if they understood *that* rightly (together with the spirits of the letters) then they would know *nature* therein.²⁴

Swedenborg was printed in Leipzig, Boehme in Amsterdam. Europe was their universe. 'A triangle of exchange and influence developed between Amsterdam, London and German centers such as Frankfurt and Magdeburg. Böhme's ideas saturated German Pietism but also appealed to French and Scandinavian reformers'.²⁵

According to one recent publisher of Boehme's *Aurora*, this Lusatian 'son of peasant farmers, a shoemaker by trade, [...] had only a rudimentary education. One morning, watching the sunlight play on a pewter bowl, he experienced an extraordinary spiritual illumination, and started writing [from that moment]'.²⁶ And he continued to write. Words which bore fruit. Like his own 'goodly tree'. Like Swedenborg run aground in London. He sat down to write. Write it all down. ■

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● JURGEN GHEBREZGIABIHER is a poet, translator, lensman and bicycle mechanic, currently based in a former settlement 'where the linden trees stand'. He likes to work on projects that enthuse and move him, and has a natural bent for playing most things by ear.

Gardens of Heaven and Earth: An Interview with Kristin King

Dr Kristin King, author of *Gardens of Heaven and Earth* (London: Swedenborg Society, 2011) and Professor of English and Communication at Bryn Athyn College, discusses the role of gardens in Swedenborg's life and writing, gender and the importance of the digital humanities, in a wide-ranging and reflective interview with Avery Curran.

KRISTIN KING IN CONVERSATION WITH AVERY CURRAN

What brought you to write your book *Gardens of Heaven and Earth*?

The beauty and grace of the natural world inspired me. As I approached middle age, I was increasingly struck by the calm generosity of nature, tirelessly putting forth colour, scent, pattern and texture in endless forms and cycles. From the silhouette of bare trees against a crimson sky to humble bluebells leaning against each other in woodland shade, the canvas of nature seemed to me the brush strokes of divine energy constantly creating a gorgeous display, for everyone, and for no one in particular. Underneath this miraculous, visible natural world lies an equally splendid microscopic world, and under that, greater energy still. I wondered how to respond to such abundance. Do Swedenborgian teachings about correspondences provide a key? Is there a 'book' of Nature that reveals spiritual truth to those who know how to read it? Is the story age-old, or constantly evolving? What about wilderness versus cultivated land? When I knelt down to garden, I experienced the miracle of soil, this unassuming, silent stuff that takes in seeds and gives back flower and fruit. From a Swedenborgian perspective, I wondered what planting and tending gardens teach us about the world and about deeper realities within ourselves? What have people and cultures thought about gardening through the ages? I began my research hoping for specific answers about hidden meanings. I ended with new appreciation, more questions, and less impatience about answers.

In *Gardens of Heaven and Earth*, you speak about the ability of poets to express the 'living experience' of correspondences—for example, Blake's 'World in a Grain of Sand And a Heaven in a Wild Flower'. Can you speak further on the relationship of poetry to Swedenborgian thought?

Swedenborgian teachings cover many areas, and

readers of Swedenborg hold varied perspectives, but at the core lies belief in a spiritual reality that infuses and enables natural life. One world depends on another. Correspondences transport us from one plane to another, from something external to something internal, or from something lower to something higher. Effective poetry can do something similar, putting images in front of us that engage our senses and simultaneously resonate with deeper meanings. The



most powerful poetry, for me, is both opaque and translucent. Only these exact words in this precise arrangement can call forth this one image, but this same image can then trigger imagination and unleash the heart. The hawk hanging overhead, ten storeys in the air, draws our attention to its physical body. But when we look closer, the rocking of jagged wings reveals that the bird is riding *something*. A rolling ocean of air enables flight. The poem, or the hawk, or own heartfelt attention to anything beautiful or true, reveals hidden forces that sustain us.

You've touched on the varying sensibilities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in your work, including a widespread interest in the eighteenth century in reason, or, as you put it, the 'cerebral inheritance of the Enlightenment', and the Romantic and Victorian interests in imagination and emotion. How do you think this shift affected readings of Swedenborg? Did his nineteenth-century readers have a different relationship to his work than his contemporaries did?

Science and reason were certainly highly valued in the eighteenth century. At the same time, state religion—in Sweden, the Lutheran Church—maintained a firm hold on society and many aspects of intellectual life. As a highly educated scientist who eventually turned to theology and other worlds, Swedenborg embodied extremes. He wrote in Neo-Latin for an audience comprising mainly academics, theologians and educated classes. True, he wrote *about* all levels of society, calling out the church and noble classes for selfish behaviour and disregard for the poor, but his initial readers were primarily educated men who could read Neo-Latin. His outspoken criticism of the church, especially the faith-alone teachings of Protestant denominations, no doubt complicated his reception. His books were banned in Sweden for a time. A handful of contemporaries embraced his work, but for the most part, Swedenborg in his lifetime did not find the readership

nor see the impact he desired. After his death, toward the end of the eighteenth century, readers and circles began to emerge, and these expanded widely in the nineteenth century.

Swedenborg's work engaged a variety of readers in the nineteenth century partly because vernacular translations became available but also because society (in England and the United States) came increasingly to question older religious views. As scientific discoveries and higher criticism of the Bible began to undercut the church's claims and authority, many turned to social movements and

reform to find meaning. Abolition, women's rights, child welfare, labour unions, ecology, homoeopathy and other movements provided new ground for Swedenborg's teachings. Individual readers became circles of readers and then denominations that have waxed and waned and reconstituted themselves over time. I would like to understand more about the *tension* that sometimes develops between individual readers and organized churches, especially over social issues. It is one thing to discover and be moved by some inspiring teachings in an extensive canon and another thing to sign on to a church that identifies with the entire body of theology and adopts a particular way of reading it. Group identity achieves powerful things but often comes at the expense of breadth of readings and applications. Some prominent nineteenth-century figures (e.g., Lydia Maria Child and Henry James, Sr) read Swedenborg avidly but *distanced* themselves from organized denominations of Swedenborgians due to frustration with perceived complacency or calcification. To return to the question of changing reception and readerships over time, the nineteenth century ushered in new engagement with social issues and encouraged independent thinking to a greater extent than did the eighteenth century. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries seem to be continuing the trend. As membership in organized churches loses ground, perhaps individual readers and readings of Swedenborg—facilitated by an online world—will fill in for some of the loss.

You've written very insightfully on gender in Swedenborg's writing—a particularly interesting example is your discussion of the difficulty of expressing the feminine in language in your article 'The Power and Limitations of Language in Swedenborg, Shakespeare, and Frost'. Are there any other areas of Swedenborg's work that you think would benefit from further discussion of gender?

I grow increasingly careful about pronouns like 'the' feminine and 'the' masculine, wanting always to know what good end we seek in using such terms. The *existence* of an essential nature or inner being does not mean that we can (or should) decide what capacities an individual has or what role or work they should be limited to. A few centuries ago, society decided women should not engage in intellectual

work for fear of compromising their childbearing capacities. That view has gone out of style not because women's essential nature has changed but because the socially constructed view of the time did not, appropriately, survive a changing society. Given the human tendency to be simultaneously categorical and fallible, it is healthy for us to read texts and history and social worlds in ways that ask who has been silenced or marginalized or too narrowly defined. Where there has been imbalance, as with the exclusion of groups or genders, it is good to question that exclusion or at least to point out the absences. Swedenborg lived in a patriarchal era and his work necessarily carries these markings. We can account for these by recalling context as we read. I assume that written texts, like people themselves, are products of their age. What impresses me, however, is when a work also *transcends* its context. Swedenborg strikes me as quite centrist, even love-leaning. He not only writes against domination and privileges love and goodness but took concrete steps to affirm the intellectual capacities of women. He wrote dedicatory prefaces for learned women, which prefaces were included in published volumes of women's writing. He helped at least one woman publish her own multi-volume theological work, and he employed female publishers for 50% of his theological volumes published in London. I do not feel the need to liberate Swedenborg's writing and actions so much as to question narrow readings that have been construed as Swedenborg's teachings about women's nature, capacities and roles.

You have worked on areas related to the digital humanities—is this an area where you think Swedenborgian ideas can be fruitful?

Swedenborgian ideas can be fruitful in every field. Digital Humanities—the application of computational tools and methods to humanities disciplines—is no exception. What interests me most about digital humanities is what scholars will do with our ever-developing access to ever-expanding stores of data. If we can search *whatever* we want, and if there is too much to take in, then the quality of the search questions themselves become the essential focus. What is worth asking? Swedenborg's hierarchies can help us with the sorting. As we ask questions that look to some good end,

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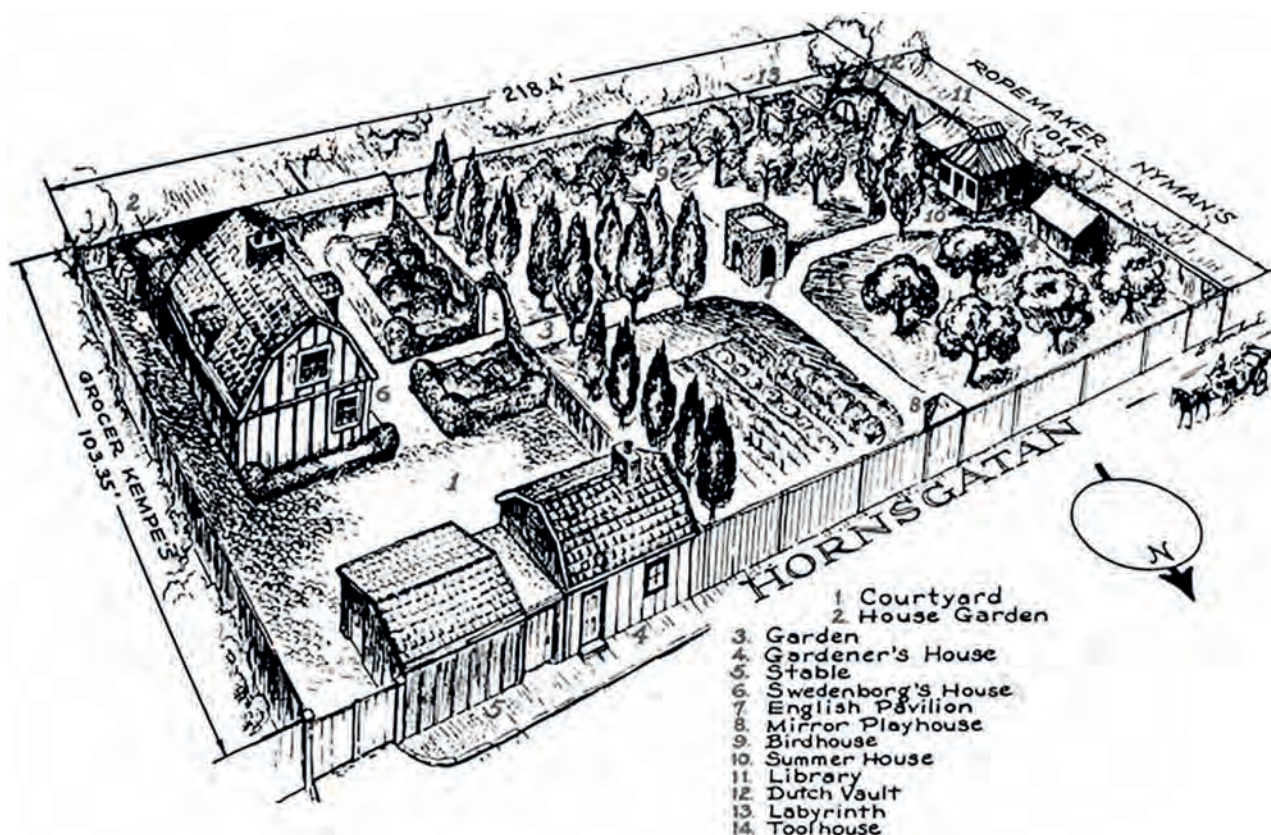


IMAGE: SWEDENBORG SCIENTIFIC ASSOCIATION DRAWING OF SWEDENBORG'S GARDEN BY DONALD MOORHEAD, 1953

as we try to apply research to life, we can transform data into knowledge, then understanding, and finally wisdom. Swedenborg says that wisdom is the application of truth to life. That would be a good mission statement for digital humanities, and all our work.

And vice versa—what do you think the digital world can bring to the study of Swedenborg?

The digital world is already enriching Swedenborg studies through open access to online sites and organizations, such as the Swedenborg Society, New Christian Bible Study, Swedenborg Foundation, offTheLeftEye, and online churches and discussion groups, to name a few. I am delighted to see the work being done online and the new audiences being blessed by these efforts.

And finally, do you think our relationship to gardens and the natural world has changed since the Covid-19 pandemic began?

Many people are finding greater appreciation for the natural world immediately around them. They are gardening and taking care of their properties and relishing a daily walk around their neighbourhood. People now know more about their own streets, I would venture. Fewer things are taken for granted, including the humble natural beauty that often goes unnoticed. In some areas people are seeing stars and the good effect on smog-ridden cities of human beings' staying home. It is a sad message in some ways, but perhaps we can learn to have a stay-at-home attitude once we leave quarantine. Perhaps we can tread more gently on the earth as we go about our business. I hope we can remember to be struck by the beauty of the smallest things and view ourselves, humbly, as fellow creatures in the natural world.

I was recently at a park, walking along a path bordered on one side by the Potomac river rushing headlong over massive boulders. On the other side of the path sat a dense and silent wood. As I walked with crashing water on one side and dark woods on the other, I came upon a stand of people fastened to telephoto lenses pointed at the trees. All backs were to the river. All faces masked and fixed on the woods. I learned later that a painted bunting had been spotted earlier in the morning, a rare bird that never comes this far north, never in December. People arrived all day long, from all walks of life, to stand quietly together, six feet apart, joined in one common breath of excitement over a flash of colour and a moment of grace. I did not see the bird myself but will remember the posture of those who did, the sense of shared passion, the humble standing by, the eagerness to bear witness. If a hoped-for glimpse of beauty on a frozen winter morning can call us out of isolation and quarantine and back into relationship with one another, what else might Nature do for tired but opened hearts? ■



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expression, to explorations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels and the ancient concept of wisdom-through-suffering. She explores digital literacies in higher education and is fascinated by the ways—both fruitful and unsettling—that an online world affects the ways we read and the stories we tell.

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Swedenborg's influence on Rimbaud

Oliver Hancock provides an introduction to and the first-ever English translation of Joë Bousquet's curious essay on Swedenborg's influence on Rimbaud, originally published in *Critique*, the influential journal founded by Georges Bataille.

INTRODUCTION: OLIVER HANCOCK MAIN TEXT: JOË BOUSQUET

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

¹ Joë Bousquet, 'Rimbaud et Swedenborg', in *Critique*, no. 5 (April 1949), pp. 307-16.

² Arthur Rimbaud, letters to Georges Izambard and Paul Demeny, dated 13 May and 15 May 1871, respectively, in *Rimbaud Complete*, tr. and ed. Wyatt Mason (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2003), pp. 364-70 (quotations from pp. 365, 366). All translations of Rimbaud, both here and in my translation of Bousquet's essay, follow Wyatt Mason's translations unless stated otherwise.

³ Interestingly, the word *תרועה* has been translated from the original Hebrew as both 'trumpet' and 'bugle', but there is little sense that Bousquet is delving into the complex history of scriptural translation.

Tuba is also the word used in the Latin translation of the Bible that Swedenborg favoured by Sebastian Schmidt.

⁴ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

⁵ Rimbaud, 'Night in Hell', in *A Season in Hell*, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 203.

In a hallowed tradition of writers' obscure and fleeting mentions of Emanuel Swedenborg, 'Rimbaud and Swedenborg' was published only once, in French, in a 1949 issue of the famous literary journal *Critique*.¹ Its author, Joë Bousquet, is a fascinating figure in his own right; after being wounded in the First World War, he was mostly paralysed, and lived with chronic pain up until his death in 1950. He was first and foremost a poet, often associated with 1920s Surrealism, and 'Rimbaud and Swedenborg' betrays both a poet's flair and the Surrealists' dissatisfaction with the limits and demarcations of the 'real'. The 4,000-word article is ostensibly a review of Enid Starkie's *Arthur Rimbaud: A Biography*, but Bousquet jumps about wildly: we see brash assertions about the historical Rimbaud, gripes with Starkie's methodology and 'English' biases (despite the fact that she was an Irish critic), and finally, a long and quite beautiful tract upon the nature of reality. My own translation can hardly do justice to some of his flowing and impassioned rhetoric, which owes much to contemporary existentialist thought:

even order is a kind of a poet; it, too, has the gift of materializing what only ever existed in a virtual sense. Yet that which is materialized, against all reason, turns against man, locks him up in an entrenched camp where his daily bread is the stone of servitude, where truth thickens his walls, where the sun and the stars are his jailers.

Suffice to say, parts of the article are as strangely affecting as either Rimbaud or Swedenborg, and it is perhaps best understood as further proof of the imaginative fervour that Swedenborg's writing could inspire in his readers, especially if those readers were French poets.

Those looking for a real analysis of either Rimbaud or Swedenborg might find themselves disappointed. Bousquet's premise is admittedly thin; he avers that a minor alteration between two similar letters written by Rimbaud, dated two days apart (the metaphor of 'the wood that becomes a violin' becomes 'the brass awakes as horn') is evidence that, in the space of 48 hours, the poet discovered and studied Swedenborg 'thoroughly'.² In truth, it seems that Bousquet may well have done this himself. He hastily snatches upon the significance of the word 'horn' as being Swedenborgian code for a revealed 'divine truth', citing Le Boys des Guays's translation of *Heaven and Hell* without appreciating the difficulties of translation. Swedenborg's Latin word *tuba* is usually translated as 'trumpet' in English, whereas Rimbaud's French word *clairon* is better translated into English as 'horn' or 'bugle'. Compounding this confusion, Swedenborg is referring to the word as used in Matthew 24:31 and *tuba* in the Latin Vulgate

itself is almost always translated as 'trumpet' in English language Bibles and as *trompette* in French language ones.³ From this problematic reasoning, then, and resting upon a word that falls conspicuously near the beginning of *Heaven and Hell*, Bousquet launches into a feverish exploration of other points of intersection, most notably from Rimbaud's famous 'Voyelles' (or 'Vowels'). To be fair, the conceit of Rimbaud's sonnet is decidedly Swedenborgian: the poet assigns each vowel a colour, before extrapolating their various attributes. It is not impossible to think that, like Baudelaire before him, Rimbaud had been seduced by the idea of Swedenborg's direct 'correspondences', so that the sound 'E' might indeed be directly related to the idea of 'white', as 'proud / Glacial peaks' and 'shivering Queen Anne's lace'. Bousquet is right here to place emphasis both on Swedenborg's depiction of vowels as the sounds of angels, and on Rimbaud's depiction of 'O' as 'that last Trumpet, overflowing with strange discord, / Silences bridged by Worlds and Angels'. Again we see the difficulty of translating *clairon*, but Rimbaud's use of blue/O to represent the sounds of angels and the 'violet beam from [God's] eyes' touches both Swedenborg's understanding of vowels, and the Swedenborgian idea of God as a 'spiritual sun' that radiates light and heat across the heavens.⁴

In such places, Bousquet does hint at where a reading of Swedenborg as a source or antecedent for Rimbaud's poetry might be fertile ground for critical study. There is certainly something peculiarly Swedenborgian about Rimbaud's idea of 'objective poetry', with which one might step out of one's own narrow perspective on the world, and describe the exterior through concrete symbolism rather than personal wonderment or enrapture. For one who toured worlds beyond our own, Swedenborg was certainly no *flâneur*, and his descriptions of spirits and angels are communicated with a detached eye befitting his scientific and philosophic contemporaries. His depictions of hell in *Heaven and Hell* also seem implicit in Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell* (1873), albeit communicated in a frenzied style that is decidedly far from objective. Both texts borrow imagery from Dante and Milton, but conjure a vision of hell that is more explicitly *human*, as much a condition of living as a bounded space:

Unquestionably, we are beyond the world. Not a single sound. My sense of touch is gone. My château, my Saxony, my willow grove. Evenings, mornings, nights, days. . . How weary I am!

There should be a hell for my anger, a hell for my pride—and a hell for every caress: a satanic symphony.⁵

Here, Rimbaud wryly evokes Baudelaire's wish to be 'anywhere out of the world', from the 1869 poem of the same

name.⁶ Yet even when Rimbaud is not in this world, his hell feels more like a burden that would follow him anywhere. We are reminded not only of the multiform societies of hell in *Heaven and Hell* (in which we might well find one hell for the angry, and one for the prideful) but of Swedenborg's insistence that 'hell' is simply a manifestation of man's inner state. See for instance, his insistence in *Heaven and Hell*, §547 that the 'Evil with man is hell with him', or the even more pithy aphorism in *Arcana Caelestia*, §1049: 'Man's proprium is his hell itself'.⁷ For Rimbaud, suffering the hangover of a debauched lifestyle and tumultuous relationship with Paul Verlaine, such a view of one's own personal hell may have seemed all too familiar.

In the end, it remains unclear whether Rimbaud read Swedenborg, or how much he did read. Bousquet's article, for all of its strange rhetorical charm, doesn't take us a whole lot closer to the truth. His suggestion that Rimbaud

would have been receptive to Swedenborg is certainly lucid; the young French poet thought of himself as a seer and visionary, and elsewhere in his canon betrays his broader interest in mysticism. That this interest, combined with his reading of Baudelaire, would have led him to Swedenborg in some capacity is perhaps more likely than Bousquet's suggestion that his friend Charles Bretagne lent him a copy of *Heaven and Hell* (presumably, in the two days between the letters mentioned above). Regardless, we can appreciate Bousquet's article for what it is: a quite wonderful meditation on the genius of Rimbaud, accompanied by an appreciation for the ways in which Swedenborg's writings have provoked fascinating artistic responses. Swedenborg's insistence that we can see in the world manifestations of those beyond—at its heart, that a tree is not only a column of wood but something more important—has inspired countless poets in the past, and will doubtless continue to inspire those in the future. ■

⁶ See Charles Baudelaire, 'Anywhere out of the World', in *Paris Spleen*, tr. Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 98.

⁷ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, tr. Doris Harley (London: Swedenborg Society, 1989), §547, p. 422 and *Arcana Caelestia*, §1049, quoted in Michael Stanley (ed.), *Emanuel Swedenborg: Essential Readings* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1988), p. 56.

⁸ Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud* (London: Faber & Faber, 1938), published in a new and revised edn. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947).

⁹ Rimbaud, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Rolland de Renéville and Jules Mouquet (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).

¹⁰ Despite Bousquet's repeated references to Starkie as English, the critic is actually an Irishwoman born in Killiney.

¹¹ Enid Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud* (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 80. All subsequent references to Starkie's text are given in the original English and taken from this edition.

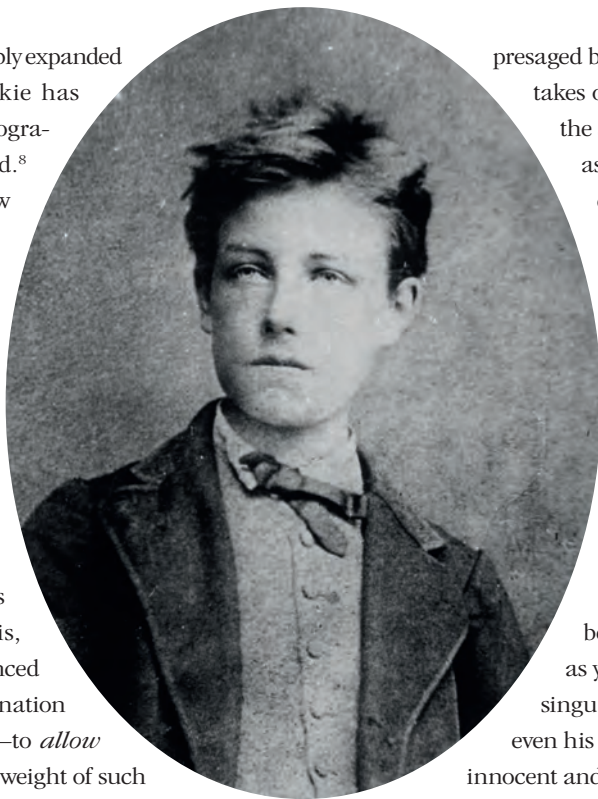
Rimbaud and Swedenborg

JOË BOUSQUET

In a revised and considerably expanded edition, Mrs Enid Starkie has republished her 1938 biography of Arthur Rimbaud.⁸ This brings together much new material, often aligned with the notes of Jules Mouquet and Rolland de Renéville to the *Œuvres Complètes*, and adds much to what was known about Rimbaud's time in Abyssinia.⁹ However, a more important addition caught my attention.

All the important events of Rimbaud's life, especially his time in Charleville and Paris, appear in a much more nuanced light because a female imagination has striven to include them—to *allow* them, even. Since she feels the weight of such a work less than the French, the Englishwoman [*sic*] dares to learn the lessons of common sense.¹⁰ Thus her criticism is freer. However, she allows herself to be moved to a kind of tenderness in her understanding of children; she guesses things unknown even to Arthur's mother. Captivated by these brilliant spots of light, she is often rendered blind: her focus on the adolescent adventurer sometimes conceals the dramatic historical circumstances in which he grew up.

These critical tendencies give us a Rimbaud that is easier to grasp. Imagined by a woman, his character is more present to us, and his genius seems more human, but his ambition is rendered more disproportionate: the gap is increased between mystical purpose and literary skill. Escape and rebellion are explained as necessities inscribed in the nature of man,



presaged by his atavism. Arthur Rimbaud takes on the scale and composition of the Shakespearean hero, not in fact as the French imagine him, but as contemporary English criticism tends to see him (albeit with a lucidity I do admire).

'It is true that like all imaginative children', writes Enid Starkie:

[Rimbaud] had thought much about love and passion, but only in a literary manner. It is quite obvious from the poems he had written before April 1871 that he had as yet no sexual experience and singularly little sexual curiosity; even his imagination had remained innocent and child-like. [...] At sixteen, when he went to Paris, he still looked like a girl, with his small stature, his fresh complexion, and his reddish-gold wavy hair. It is probable that he then received his first initiation into sex and in so brutal and unexpected a manner that he was startled and outraged, and that his whole nature recoiled from it with fascinated disgust. But though this experience brought him shock and revulsion so great that he fled from Paris to hide his wound at home, there was more in it than mere recoil [...] it was [an experience] that did not leave him indifferent, nor his senses untouched. It was a sudden and blinding revelation of what sex really was, of what it could do to him, and it showed him how false had been all his imagined emotions.¹¹

¹² Starkie, p. 81.

¹³ Rimbaud, 'Stolen Heart', ll. 1-5, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 55. 'Stolen Heart' ('Le Coeur volé') was titled in earlier versions as 'Le Coeur du pitre' and, as first sent to Izambard on 13 May 1871, 'Le Coeur supplicié' ('The Tortured Heart').

¹⁴ Rimbaud, letter to Georges Izambard, 13 May 1871, in *Rimbaud Complete*, pp. 364-5.



The New Jerusalem Church at Argyle Square, King's Cross, London. In July 1874, Rimbaud found rooms for his mother and sister at 12 Argyle Square and the poet may well have visited the church around this time.

'It is only after this experience', the English author continues, 'that we find in him a disgust of life, an inability to accept it as it is, coupled with the desire to escape from reality—either into the past of his childhood, when he had been innocent and pure; or into the beyond where there was neither vice nor sin; or else into a world of his own creating, where there was nothing but beauty'.¹²

This interpretation was suggested by [Ernest] Delahaye and, according to Enid Starkie, confirmed by the original title of the poem sent to Izambard at that time, 'The Tortured Heart':

My sad heart drools on deck,
A heart splattered with chaw:
A target for bowls of soup,
My sad heart drools on deck:
Soldiers jeer and guffaw.¹³

Let us insist, after the English author, on the following interpretation: Rimbaud was indeed aware of the change

that had taken place in him. He took stock of his earlier poems, the works he had admired. He began to understand that certain successes, valid from an aesthetic point of view, only rewarded an imagination that was fundamentally or voluntarily cloistered.

In sending the poem to Izambard, Rimbaud clearly tried to offend him. He defies him to ever reach the level of 'objective poetry', of which Rimbaud himself conceives rather loosely. A letter to Demeny, dated two days later, gives a more complete (if still somewhat clumsy) description. [In the earlier letter to Izambard, Rimbaud writes:]

Fundamentally, you see your principles as an argument for subjective poetry... One day, I hope—as do countless others—I'll see the possibility for objective poetry in your principles, said with more sincerity than you can imagine! I will be a worker...¹⁴

As Enid Starkie points out, Izambard had little understanding of this letter. To the confessional poem, he felt obliged to reply with a parody; thereafter the friends no longer exchanged

personal correspondence. Yet the remainder of [Rimbaud's] letter provides us with an important element to make use of further on:

It's wrong to say *I think*: one should say *I am thought*.
Forgive the pun.

I is someone else. Tough luck to the wood that becomes a violin, and to hell with the unaware who *quibble* over what they're completely missing anyway!¹⁵

Two days later the same words found their way into the letter to Paul Demeny, but in a freer, more impetuous tone, marked by a major revision:

For I is someone else. If the brass awakes as horn, it can't be to blame. This much is clear: I'm around for the hatching of my thought: I watch it, I listen to it. . . .¹⁶

And further on:

The universal intelligence has, of course, always shed ideas; man harvests a portion of these mental fruits: they measured themselves against them, wrote books about them: so things progressed, man not working to develop himself, not yet awake, or not yet enveloped in the fullness of the dream. Functionaries, writers: author, creator, poet—such a man never existed.¹⁷

And so, on 13 May 1871, the poet wrote: 'tough luck to the wood that becomes a violin', and two days later, on 15 May, 'if the brass awakes as horn, it can't be to blame'. We shall see in the sonnet on vowels what 'horn' meant for Rimbaud. For Swedenborg the word signifies: 'Divine truth in Heaven, and revealed out of heaven'.¹⁸ And what is heaven? 'The angels taken collectively are called heaven, because they constitute heaven, but yet it is the Divine proceeding from the Lord which inflows with the angels and is received by them, that makes heaven in general and in part'. And the Divine? '[T]he good of love and the truth of faith', according to Swedenborg. 'To the extent, therefore, that [the angels] receive good and truth from the Lord, in that measure they are angels and in that measure they are heaven'.¹⁹

Did Rimbaud discover this text *at the very moment at which he was conceiving objective poetry*? Should we believe that he read it by chance, with, so to speak, an idle pleasure; or was it within the framework, and under the moderating influence, of a studious and thoughtful initiation?²⁰ Has he yielded to the temptation of materializing the Swedenborgian message, casting himself in the role of angel in order to lay upon the poetic word the significance given by the divine Word? Was this a spiritual attachment gradual enough to be internalized in consecutive years; or was it a sudden and stealthy exercise in 'sacriligious' appropriation?

The poet would have had only two months to read the works of [Ramon] Llull, which could be borrowed from the public library at Charleville.²¹ Enid Starkie proves that he devoured the works of contemporary writers: Éliphas Lévi, [Adolphe] Franck, [Pierre-Simon] Ballanche (and I would add [José de] Strada).²² He could only have skimmed through the masters, of course. But none of the old philosophers could be consulted as easily as Ramon Llull. Contrary to academic assertions, a great deal of the Catalan thinker's philosophy was taught, and his treatises were collected in the easiest format for study. If Rimbaud did indeed take hold of one of these 'breviaries', he would have naturally been exposed to the chapter *De rhetorica*, and, doubtlessly, to the formulation

'We can appreciate Bousquet's article for what it is: a quite wonderful meditation on the genius of Rimbaud, accompanied by an appreciation for the ways in which Swedenborg's writings have provoked fascinating artistic responses'.

'In illa scientia abuti est uti', or, as I understand it: 'The technician of language inevitably forgets that his affirmations go beyond him'.

On the condition, of course, that we attribute to the word 'horn' the meanings that Swedenborg gives in *Heaven and Hell*, and that Rimbaud gives in his sonnet on vowels, the sentences written to Izambard and to Demeny contain a similar insight: 'If the brass awakes as horn, it can't be to blame [. . .] I'm around for the hatching of my thought' and 'Tough luck to the wood that becomes a violin'—this last sentence, written two days before the other, presenting a less specific meaning.²³ My bold belief is that, in between the Demeny and Izambard letters, the poet studied Swedenborg thoroughly. Leaning on the research gathered by the English author [Starkie], I would suggest that the mystical text [Swedenborg] was entrusted to Rimbaud by his occultist friend, Charles Bretagne. It is not beyond bounds to consider that this book had once more come to light in a time of national turmoil, like so many quasi-prophetic works exhumed in 1914, in 1940, in 1871.²⁴ Through the descriptions of the twofold *spiritual and celestial* kingdom, the poet would have not only seen but *stolen* that which Swedenborg called 'fire': the high and the low, the profane and the sacred, love in both senses.

It would have been helpful to have guessed so years ago. This idea would have rid us of the more ambiguous interpretation that has misled some of Rimbaud's disciples towards a renunciation of the will and theoretical negation of the person. Man should not have to be adjudged as nothing: the poets refuse to take this bait. They teach us that true moral values only appear when one seeks reasons for life. Man must bear them and answer for them; he cannot articulate reasons without revealing moral values. This certainty brings us back to Rimbaud, hinting at what he found in the mystical text: not an idea, of course, but an antinomy—a creative antinomy showing him that poetry was the only path to salvation.

What, then, is this antinomy? One that destroys, in the same action, the idealism of the ego and the idealism that >

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 365.

¹⁶ Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 366.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 367.

¹⁸ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §1, n.7, p. 3. Bousquet himself was using Le Boys de Guays's nineteenth-century French translation, *Du Ciel et de ses merveilles et de l'enfer*, of which there were editions published in 1850, 1872 and 1899.

¹⁹ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §7, p. 8.

²⁰ [Bousquet's note] The English author has no responsibility for my hypothesis here, but she did gather all the elements that would lead me to Swedenborg's text.

²¹ This quite sudden jump seems to rest upon Starkie, *Arthur Rimbaud*, pp. 100–4, in which she notes Rimbaud's interest in 'occult and illuminist philosophy' and lists the thinkers Bousquet subsequently names (though not Llull, which he sees as an oversight). Interestingly, Starkie does note a 'second wave of Swedenborgianism' in the 1820s as a possible source of Rimbaud's interest in the occult, but she stops short of asserting that Rimbaud read any Swedenborg himself (p. 102).

²² The Strada to whom Bousquet refers here is slightly cryptic; the most likely candidate seems the French writer Gabriel Jules Delarue, who published several works under the pen-name José de Strada in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

²³ Rimbaud, letters to Paul Demeny and Georges Izambard, dated 15 May and 13 May 1871, respectively, in *Rimbaud Complete*, pp. 366 and 365.

²⁴ Bousquet is alluding to the invasions of France in the First World War, Second World War and Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1.

²⁵ Georges Bataille, *Méthode de Méditation* (Paris: Fontaine, 1947), p. 61 (translation mine).

²⁶ [Bousquet's note] Here, our investigation should draw from the theories of Jean Paulhan.

²⁷ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', l. 1, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

²⁸ [Bousquet's note] This alphabet of colours is only half of the educational process.

You must also teach the child a song that associates the sound of the vowel with its corresponding colour.

Afterward, he alone will discover that most difficult and inexplicable lesson—the construction of letters.

²⁹ Lucien Sausy, 'Du nouveau sur Rimbaud', in *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 2 September 1933.

³⁰ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', l. 2, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

³¹ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §241, p. 155. [Bousquet's note] Have these texts already been highlighted?

Ten years ago I read a published article by Robert Kanters who, if I remember correctly, came very close to these same connections.

³² Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §236.1, p. 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, §241, p. 155.

[Bousquet's note] All of Swedenborg's theories here rest upon an analogy with Hebrew, which is a language without vowels—or, without clear vowels, we should say.

³⁴ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §21, p. 16 and §241, p. 155.

³⁵ [Bousquet's note] Trumpet/Horn: divine truth revealed by Heaven, etc. (See above.)

³⁶ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', ll. 12-13, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

³⁷ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', ll. 9-11, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

³⁸ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §145 n.1, p. 99 and §145, p. 99.

³⁹ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', l. 14, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

⁴⁰ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §21, p. 16.

⁴¹ Rimbaud, 'Vowels', l. 6, in *Rimbaud Complete*, p. 104.

⁴² Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, §226 n.1, p. 146 and §226, p. 146.

denies the ego. Each generation of poets or rebels approaches it in a different way, bearing it with a heavy heart—or an even heavier heart than the last. For instance De Quincey, with a slightly heavy-handed irony, and Bataille: 'I made no distinction between laughing at a thing and having the truth of it...I could not imagine seeing an object at which I did not laugh'.²⁵ Since I must necessarily try to paraphrase it, I will demonstrate by a strong (though imperfect) argument the way in which this antinomy cuts into language and produces poetry; for although it is forbidden for man to formulate a universal affirmation, it is no less prohibited to affirm this prohibition. It is better to dream of a golden age than to wait for a time when all conventions would be accepted as conventional.²⁶

For now, let us be satisfied in calling them imbeciles and dogmatists, those who flatter themselves that they have exhausted the meaning of words, and believe themselves to own language as if they gave words their authority. It remains for us to elaborate our evidence—we will, I hope, collect it by passing through the material evidence that Rimbaud made use of *Heaven and Hell*.

Language is the most important reality, but from these sovereign words we can only make a conventional usage. In flashes, we become aware of these barriers by recognizing those 'poetic materializations' that were achieved extraordinarily—and always by those of genius, who discover a drama in every word.

The poet sings in the dark: he hums at night that words lavish him, and if every word is clothed in colours, it is because it is born in the night that it has such an aura. *Vowels are hidden in the structure of the word*: they are born and changed with the accent offered by the heart. By what aberration has it been misunderstood that, in the sonnet on vowels, the appearance of colours was a *secondary* phenomenon? When Rimbaud, in his first verse, attached to them a luminous vibration, he did not yet see them; the word 'red' for him was not yet red. Writing 'Black A, White E, Red I, Green U',²⁷ he did not see a rainbow; he would have said of it that he saw nothing, but that his lips remembered. They spelled clearly in his memory the pattern that he and his little classmates had picked up to learn to recognize the vowels in a colour alphabet, a mnemonic method doubtlessly used in the infants' class in Charleville.²⁸ We should be pleased that the Pléiade edition of the *Œuvres Complètes*, complete in so many ways, still passes rather negligently over the interpretation of the sonnet by direct reference to the coloured characters. The suggestions of Lucien Sausy, reproduced in their entirety in this same work,²⁹ seem to me to be more justified, and, despite appearances, do not contradict my own interpretation. I accept them because they re-establish the importance of these key words, generally neglected by commentators: 'I'll explain your burgeoning births'.³⁰ Burgeoning births? Why this irritating phrase?

According to Swedenborg, vowels do not belong to language, 'but serve by means of tones to elevate the words to the various affections according to each one's state'.³¹ He adds: 'The tones of [the angels'] speech correspond to their affection, and the vocal articulations which are words correspond to the ideas of thought that spring from the affection'.³² On the preceding [*sic*] page, Swedenborg had written: 'The speech of celestial angels has much of the tones of the vowels *u* and *o*; while the speech of spiritual angels has much of the tones of [the vowels] *e* and *i*'.³³

Celestials? Spirituals? 'Those who receive [the Divine that

proceeds from the Lord] more interiorly are called celestial angels', says Swedenborg, and their speech 'has much of the tones of the vowels *u* and *o*'.³⁴ And in Rimbaud:

O, that last Trumpet,³⁵ overflowing with strange discord,
Silences bridged by Worlds and Angels³⁶

We know the previous tercet:

U, cycles, divine vibrations of viridian seas;
Peace of pastures sown with beasts, wrinkles
Stamped on studious brows as if by alchemy;³⁷

[And in Swedenborg, one reads] 'The forehead [or "brow"] corresponds to celestial love [and] in the Word the "forehead" signifies that love' and 'The angels see the Lord through their eyes, but the Lord looks at the angels in the forehead'.³⁸ Compare [in Rimbaud]: 'O the Omega, the violet beam from His Eyes!'.³⁹

'[The angels] who receive [the Divine] less interiorly', Swedenborg has distinguished, 'are called spiritual angels'.⁴⁰ These are the 'white kings' of Rimbaud.⁴¹ For, in Swedenborg, 'A "king" in the Word signifies those who are in Divine Truth' and 'royalty of heaven [. . .] is the spiritual kingdom'.⁴² I could include numerous other relevant quotations here. 'So far as colours partake of red [in the Word] they signify good; so far as they partake of white they signify truth'.⁴³ Let others pursue this! They will find in the book indicated: the hungry, the quarters, rocks, coals, iron, etc.⁴⁴

Is this an argument against Enid Starkie, who continually insists on the Luciferian ambitions of Arthur Rimbaud?

Not at all; I admire her book, but I don't believe that the poet gave in to the illusion of which she speaks. Never has the adolescent [Rimbaud]'s reading been raised with such coolness and judgment: [Jules] Michelet, Edgar Quinet, Ballanche, Éliphas Lévi. But this list lacks the book which most certainly stimulated the imagination of the poet, and the theory that such a book tempted his tempestuous spirit, which seemed to conjure magic on some days, on others madness—above all, that this book unleashed Rimbaud's terrible faculties of materialization. Rimbaud wanted to master and communicate the only spiritual message, admired by his friend Bretagne, which seemed acceptable to him.

Rimbaud escaped from reality because he discovered that it was just scenery. But it shouldn't be said that he wanted to explore the infinite. [Rimbaud's] methodology is that of those who come to an understanding through their fear of existence, yet who persist in remaining the *gods of their own actions*, living in 'reality' as if on holiday. Thanks to this revolution, poetry acknowledges this poet as its child. I will give some clarification here.

Order is a collective agreement that imposes itself once it is understood and experienced. It must endure by its own means: for this, it must reconcile material interests with a recognizable sense of moral duty. In this delicate balance it must exclude every spring of passion, shore itself with lies and propaganda, and of course, forbid any exchanges with which we might know each other outside of what is taught and decreed.

As long as it is impossible to see beyond it, man submits himself to this philosophy of existence. The philosophy does not accomplish the submission, but it suits it nonetheless. Indeed, it even makes man fear what could be accomplished,

‘Has he yielded to the temptation of materializing the Swedenborgian message, casting himself in the role of angel?’

pandering to *the horror he has of answering to himself alone for his person and his being*. All the behaviours that make a man greater than his instinct of self-preservation are expelled and doomed to a clandestine satisfaction.

The man held captive by order is exposed as soon as he crosses its limits. He no longer sees himself in the most passionate and ingenuous manifestations of his nature. He searches in vain for his rights, violated and lost; he has missed the poetic opportunity. If he longs for peace when men kill each other, he feels rejected not only by society, but by nature and truth. Even in trying to break free from social chains he cannot destroy this philosophy of order, which he consecrates from the moment he thinks and names the act of transgression. We do not act differently when we measure a man’s progress from the tables he has broken. We call him superman, archangel, and thief of fire; he must be so.

But what of freeing oneself? Can one so easily imitate that which cost the genius the sacrifice of a life? The enlisted man had at his disposal a grace that no one uses twice. He sealed his condition by alienating his language. All his inclinations to escape underlie the upheaval of his rhetoric, unconsciously calling for a *real* social revolution, not one that will merely change the staff but keep the institutions.⁴⁵

In this sense, even order is a kind of a poet; it, too, has the gift of materializing what only ever existed in a virtual sense. Yet that which is materialized, against all reason, turns against man, locks him up in an entrenched camp where his daily bread is the stone of servitude, where truth thickens his walls, where the sun and the stars are his jailers. An inordinate effort is then required of the vanquished who are still alive enough to dream of freedom, but who can only dream of what they see and will have to value it with an enormous symbolic charge. It rests upon them to predict, or else hope. Revolutions pay for the faults of poetic instinct. It is obvious. Must one come this far, only to find what everyone else already knew?

Rimbaud’s main quality is common sense. From childhood, he understood that the passion for living could, in a falsified time, only be satisfied outside the real and the apparent. He said it at Charleville, fuelled by glasses of beer and ‘filles’ (a ‘fille’ is, in the Ardennes, a small glass of white wine). He knew that every solitary revolt is doomed to failure, but he believed that this fall, if a life is the price to pay for it, materializes and becomes the efficacy of the most dissolute acts.

And so one day, the riot flared up. It sufficed for Rimbaud that everything sank away and the hour struck of which poetry heard only the first chime, never to stop hearing and echoing it. For a long time, reality had fixed him in the eyes, which were unable to see anything else, then suddenly this perspective lost its arrogance. *Order was not to be found anymore*. He constructed his laws on this collapse of nature. His eyes opened onto a light gently pouring into a world returned to him. Clarity materializes in the surprise of a man who wants to describe himself one more time, but suddenly affirms only his hope, making it his life. Time becomes little more than a turn of phrase. It is the dawning of an objectivity which has becoming as a condition—the advent of matter

that creates new space and rejects the image of reality, a kind of matter always outside of itself...

It was the end of that young man who, terrified by the visible world, retreated behind his eyes, and opposed his body to nature, without perceiving that he himself was part of nature.

‘Anywhere out of the world’, cried Baudelaire in agony.⁴⁶ This was a world made and demarcated by our fears, through which we walk backwards, prisoners of a collective myth. We have cut ourselves off from the reality that we define, and pretend that all intuition, all thought, were only the reverse side of this privileged object, our person.

The life of the world has become one with this image, which has been suffused with absurd privileges in exchange for authentic springs of energy: among others, the privilege of uttering universal affirmations.

Rimbaud escaped the reality whose events had helped him feel non-existence. It was in order to reach an objectivity defined by the condition of becoming. ‘O happiness, o reason: I finally chased the blue from the sky, this blue that’s really black; and I lived, a golden spark, forged from *natural light*’.⁴⁷ Is there a poetic phrase more sensible, more positive, more complete?

Let us know our consciousness: it consults and verifies itself in a deceptive field of perception, all patched up with virtualities. Words come to us to help climb this slope, to pay this tithe. Even the most generous morality that spares consciousness from instinct exhales lies and death from out of its shadowy mouth, because consciousness knowing itself as morality has no other objective sense. Consciousness will never take the measure of what it had to virtualize in order that it might comprehend itself. It conceives itself in a present that is three-quarters imaginary, to which it pretends to connect those possibilities that seem most real and unavoidable in the future.

The same faultiness is found in those who see in Rimbaud’s work an effort to equate human hope with the Divine will. My argument here is with some French critics, not against the author of this excellent book [Starkie’s biography], which had the immense merit of highlighting the poet’s sources, and of making his poetics accessible to us.

Those who maintain that Rimbaud wanted to force open the gates of Paradise end up looking like one of those vagrants, inveterate clients of soup kitchens, who brags to one of his neighbours in misery: ‘In the past, I used to daily be a guest at tables so rich that the crockery was attached to them with chains of gold’. ■

● JOË BOUSQUET (1897-1950) was a French poet and critic who was associated with the Surrealist movement, contributing regularly to the influential literary journals *Les Cahiers du Sud* and *Critique*.

● OLIVER J HANCOCK is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Liverpool researching depictions of children in recent American fiction. His other research interests include children’s literature, postmodernist fiction, science fiction, French literature, and the early twentieth-century avant-garde.

⁴³ Ibid., §179 .3, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid., §420, p. 309 (the

hungry); §143 n.1, p. 98

(quarters), note that here

Bousquet, following Le Boys

des Guays, uses the French

word **plage** (‘beach’) to

translate Swedenborg’s Latin

word **plaga** (although this is

the only instance in which Le

Boys des Guays translates **plaga**

this way—elsewhere he uses

the more expected **régions**

or **directions**); §188, pp. 123-4

(rocks); §584, p. 452 (coals); §115,

p. 77 (iron).

⁴⁵ [Bousquet’s note] Here I

recommend reading the scene

in which Caliban, ready to

slaughter Prospero, turns to the

conspirators he had foolishly

hidden in the wardrobe—his

only disciples are magistrates

and generals. His cries of fury

are like a death knell; the end

of *The Tempest* could not come

about any other way.

⁴⁶ See Baudelaire, ‘Anywhere

out of the World’.

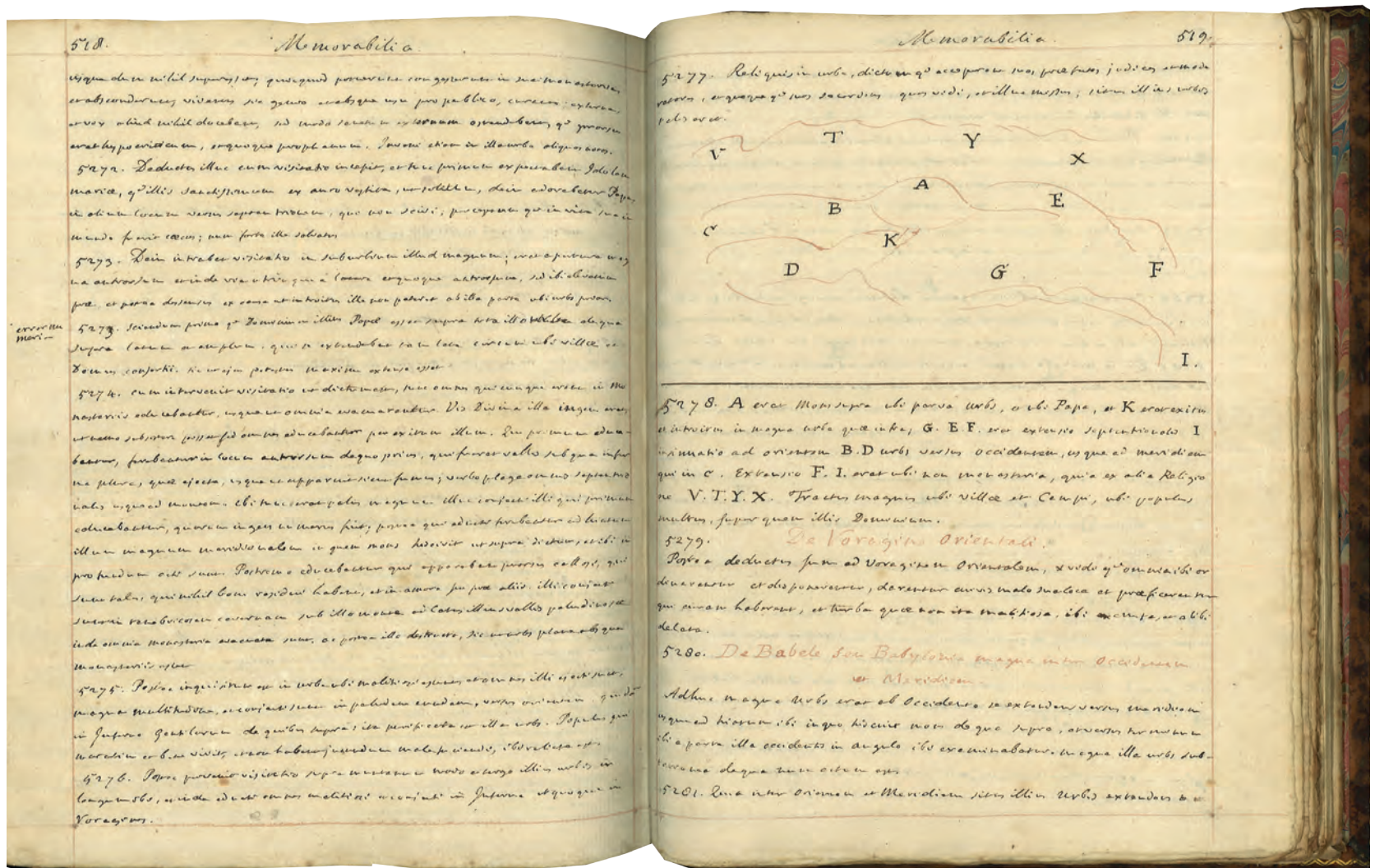
⁴⁷ Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, in

Rimbaud Complete, p. 212.

Peter Bénédict Chastanier (1739-1818): ‘An Easy Victim for the Heresy-Hunter’

Susan Mitchell Sommers discusses the facts and myths in the complex life of a late-eighteenth-century Swedenborgian and Freemason, in an essay adapted from a talk first given online as part of the Open Lectures on Freemasonry series.

SUSAN MITCHELL SOMMERS



Chastanier's manuscript transcription of Swedenborg's *Spiritual Diary*. Swedenborg Society Archive, A/29.

Reconstructing even the broad outlines of Chastanier's life is complicated by his personal poverty, devotion to translating and publicizing Emanuel Swedenborg's prophecies, and that over time his name became a magnet for contradictory fabricated histories.¹ He was, as James Hyde noted, 'an easy victim for the heresy-hunter', whether that hunter wished to condemn or celebrate deviations from what was commonly accepted.² And deviate Chastanier did. While I cast considerable doubt on the details of his involvement with Freemasonry, there seems no reason to question he was initiated at some point, and there is good evidence he never totally renounced the fraternity. He did, however, abandon several of his other enthusiasms, including alchemical searches for the philosopher's stone, reading 'mystical writers', mesmeric healing and engagement with the Illuminés of Avignon.

Chastanier provides most of we know about his early life

and religion in a 1795 pamphlet, *A Word of Advice to a Benighted World*.³ Chastanier claims he was born around 1739 in France to a Protestant family, and was educated by Catholics at the Collège Sainte-Barbe in Paris in the hope of sparing him the persecution often experienced by French Protestants.⁴ Chastanier says he left school in 1757, and afterward trained at l'Hôtel-Dieu as a surgeon.⁵ Some of this account is corroborated by Pierre-Jean Grosley, who met Chastanier while travelling to London in 1765.⁶ I have been unable to verify any of this independently of Chastanier's word, but Grosley's account fits with official records of Chastanier's life in England, where he arrived in October 1763. By December Chastanier married a widow, Marianne Vincent Chastanier.⁷ Her previous husband, François-Marie Chastanier died in May 1762, leaving her with five living children: Jane Elizabeth, Marie Bénédicte, Peter Bénédict, Michael Bénédict and Catherine. Given the uncommon

occurrence of the surname 'Chastanier', and the repetition of Bénédict as a second name it is possible the two men were relatives, and that François' death prompted Bénédict's arrival in London.⁸ Over time Bénédict and Marianne had two additional children, Maria Anne and John Theophilus. If one wanted a clue to Chastanier's continued affection for Freemasonry, one need look no further.⁹

Establishing himself as a husband, father and apothecary in London left little time or money for other pursuits. However, Chastanier *did* do other things, and there are competing narratives about what he did, and where. When I first encountered Chastanier, I was researching a book on Ebenezer and Manoah Sibly, London brothers and contemporaries of Chastanier.¹⁰ Ebenezer was a Freemason, so most references I saw to Chastanier were in Masonic works, and their narrative goes something like this: Chastanier was a surgeon in Paris who joined Loge Socrate before 1766, and then he developed a Masonic society based on Swedenborgian theosophy, which he successfully planted in London in 1767. At the same time, his efforts to cultivate the Swedenborgian rite in French Freemasonry were a failure. Further, he was elected Secretary for the Provinces of the Grand Lodge of France in December 1765. This information is contained in the Fichier Bossu, and Jean Bossu cites Alain Le Bihan, François-Timoléon Bègue-Clavel and Gustave Bord, as well as Grand Lodge records. Bossu also notes a Bro. Bourgeois founded Loge Socrate in 1766. Others have embellished the story, asserting that Chastanier was the master of Loge Socrate, and that he was initiated into Freemasonry by Charles de Beauchesne.¹¹ However, at the time Chastanier would have been in Paris to be initiated, no later than mid-summer 1763, Beauchesne was operating through

'Chastanier recognized the author of the book he had read before, and the rest became the early history of the Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem'

the Loge de la Constance (et de l'Amitié). Beauchesne was involved in high degrees, and later claimed his lodge was authorized by Charles III, the 'legitimate' king of England.¹²

You can see the difficulties immediately, but there are more. Chastanier was only twenty-four years old in late 1763, without an established career, and had just come into a young family. As Chastanier arrived in London and married immediately, are we to believe he nonetheless travelled back and forth between London and Paris to manage a Masonic career? Were there no lodges in London? Yes, indeed there were, but I have found no evidence that Chastanier ever participated in English Masonry. If he had been initiated into an esoteric lodge by Beauchesne, that scarcely left time for Loge Socrate, which seems *not* to have been founded before Chastanier left for England. And then there is the business

about Chastanier being elected Secretary for the Provinces of the Grand Lodge of France in December 1765.¹³ Grosley lends weight to this account, telling us he met Chastanier in Rochester, England in 1765, as both travelled from Paris to London. Still, one wonders how much time or money Chastanier had to devote to being a Masonic grand officer?¹⁴

Curiously, this is the best documented of the assertions about Chastanier's involvement in French Freemasonry. In his paper on Freemasonry in Paris until 1773, Alain Bernheim reports that the 1760s were a highly factionalized decade in Parisian Freemasonry, as reflected in Brest de la Chaussée's *Mémoire Justificatif*.¹⁵ In his description of the election at which Chastanier was reportedly chosen as Secretary for the Provinces of the Grand Lodge, Bernheim reveals a contest for 'Substitute to the Secretary of the Provinces', suggesting that if Chastanier had been elected the Secretary, then he was expected to be *in absentia*!¹⁶ The situation is curious, because Bernheim explains that having an official substitute was a convention used by aristocratic grand officers—which Chastanier was not, but never mind. There is enough doubt here, and sufficient evidence later, to accept that he was probably initiated in a Parisian lodge between 1760-3.

Adding intrigue to the Masonic narrative is that while Chastanier tells us a fair amount about this time in his life, he does

¹ Even before his death: see Claude-Antoine Thory, *Acta Latomorum*, 2 vols. (Paris: Dufart, 1815), vol. I, p. 89.

² James Hyde, 'Bénédict Chastanier and the Illuminati of Avignon', in *The New-Church Review* (Boston: Massachusetts New-Church Union), vol. 14 (April 1907), p. 205.

³ Bénédict Chastanier, *A Word of Advice to a Benighted World: Or some of Bénédict Chastanier's Spiritual Experiences Relative to the Lord's Second Advent, His New Church, and It's Anti-Type The Avignon Society* (London, 1795).

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 19.

⁵ *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal* (London: R Griffiths), vol. 36 (1768), p. 492.

⁶ Pierre-Jean Grosley, *A Tour to London; or, New Observations on England and its Inhabitants*, tr. Thomas Nugent, 2 vols. (London: Lockyer Davis, 1772), vol. 1, pp. 21-2.

⁷ See parish records.

⁸ Ed Pope, 'Chastanier, Bénédict', in *Ed Pope History* (2014), at <<https://edpopehistory.co.uk/entries/chastanier-benedict/1000-01-01-000000>>, accessed 5 March 2021.

⁹ After John Theophilus Desaguliers, of course!

¹⁰ Susan Mitchell Sommers, *The Sibyls of London: A Family on the Esoteric Fringes of Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹¹ Charles Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1996), p. 503.

¹² Michèle Herzig, 'Beauchesne, Charles François Radet de', in Cecile Révauger and Charles Porset (eds.), *Le Monde Maçonnique des Lumières* (Europe-Amériques & Colonies), 3 vols. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013), vol. I, pp. 282-6.

¹³ Bibliothèque nationale de France, FM Fichier Bossu, collection Jean Baylot, citing the 'tableau des élections du Grand Orient de France'.

¹⁴ Grosley, vol. 1, pp. 21-2.

¹⁵ Alain Bernheim, 'The *Mémoire Justificatif* of La Chaussée and Freemasonry in Paris Until

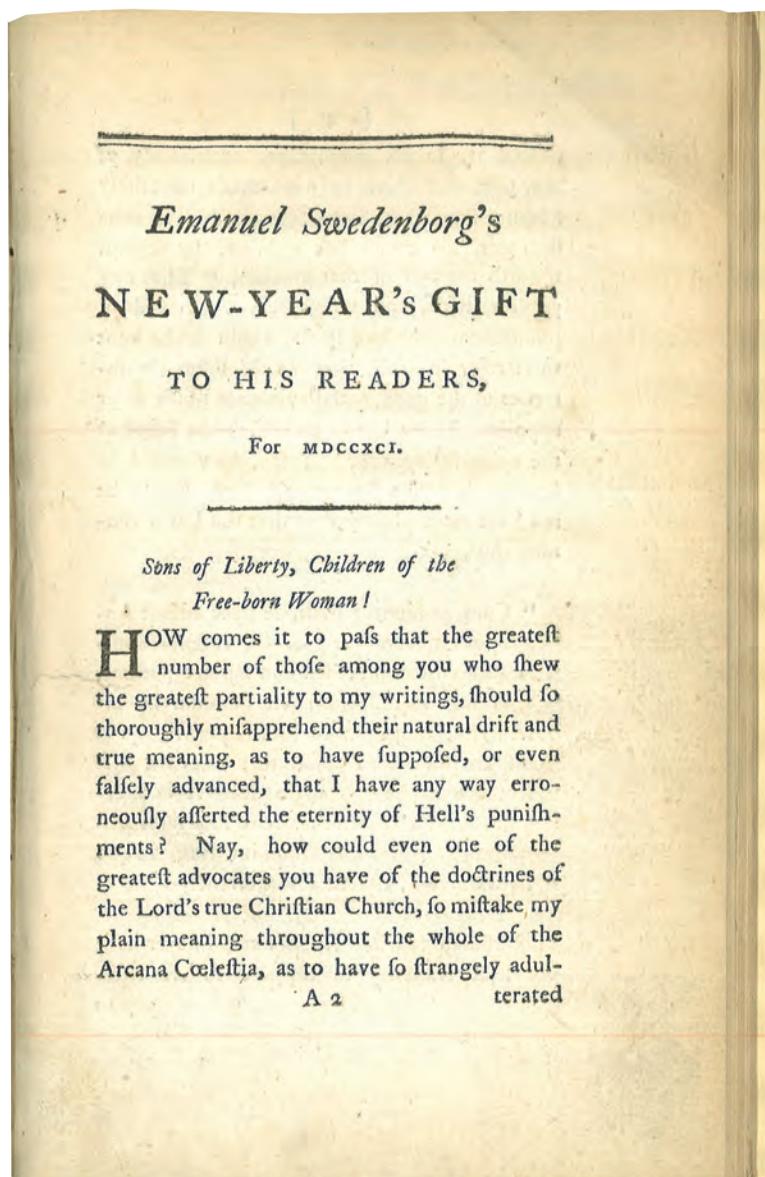


IMAGE: SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, FIRST PAGE OF CHASTANIER'S NEW YEAR'S GIFT

1773', in *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, at <www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/bernheim25.html>, accessed 5

March 2021.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Chastanier, *Advice*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

²¹ Ibid., p. 18.

²² Ibid., p. 21. The text says 'Bulman', but I strongly suspect this is a printing error. He mentions 'Baehmean', *De*

Signatura Rerum on p. 23.

²³ Chastanier, *Advice*, p. 22.

²⁴ *L'Avantcoureur* (Paris), June 1767, p. 359; *Gazette du Commerce* (Paris), June 1767, p. 516.

²⁵ Peter John Wallis, R V Wallis and T D Whittet, *Eighteenth Century Medics: Subscriptions, Licenses, Apprenticeships*

(Newcastle: Project for Historical Biobibliography, 1985), p. 344; Chastanier,

Observations on a new practical Method of curing the several Disorders which Human

Nature is liable to (London: for the author, 1767).

²⁶ Chastanier, *Advice*, p. 24.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Chastanier, *Plan Général d'une Société Universelle*

(London: R Hawes, 1782).

²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁰ Chastanier, *Annonce d'un journal Novi-Jérusalémite*

(London, 1787), pp. vii-viii.

³¹ Hyde, p. 188.

³² *General Evening Post* (London), 21-24 February 1784.

³³ Chastanier, *Advice*, title page and pp. 25-38.

³⁴ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 14 June 1786; Chastanier, *Advice*, p. 30.

'Chastanier was powerfully motivated to share Swedenborg's message with flesh-and-blood people, and not just anonymous book-buyers'.

not mention involvement in Freemasonry at all. Before we smile or shake our heads at the triumph of careful scholarship over another Masonic myth, we must note that neither does he mention any of his children or his four wives: Marianne Vincent, Anne Yates, Sarah Trinder and Maria Meggot. He outlived them all.

The other narrative that accounts for Chastanier in the 1760s is largely in his own voice, which I encountered while researching Manoah Sibly, a minister in the fledgling Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem, which Chastanier joined in 1789. To listen, let us return to *A Word of Advice*, in which Chastanier tells us that in 1763 he was disgusted with both Catholicism and French Protestantism.¹⁷ Chastanier writes 'I had then begun to think. . . there was nothing truly essential in religion, and that it was a mere tie of human contrivances, to fetter and to lead by it the multitude'.¹⁸ He had other concerns. Family obligations pressed, and Chastanier writes he failed to 'form a permanent establishment' with which to support them. He was about to abandon London when he had his first vision, in February 1765, in which an old man, who reveals himself to be Christ, ferried Chastanier across a tumultuous river.¹⁹

Reassured, Chastanier reports he set aside religious matters for three years, until January 1768, when he had another vision. This one involved his old Catholic college and a beautiful woman, who sent him to find her 'nephew', whom Chastanier later recognized to be Swedenborg.²⁰ This vision marks his turn toward esotericism. Chastanier learned German, so he could read Welling's *Mago-Cabbalisticum*.²¹ He also read Boehme and Law and 'other mystic writers'.²² At the same time Chastanier kept company with a group of aspiring alchemists, including George Peacock, Michael Arne, Peter Woulfe and John Brian.²³ Chastanier attempted to apply his alchemical knowledge in a profitable way, advertising in French journals that he had developed a superior method of refining iron, which he would demonstrate to anyone who would pay his expenses.²⁴ There were no takers, and through at least 1793 he plodded on as an apothecary, advertising an array of patent medicines, including Daran's Medicated Bougies for problems particular to gentlemen with venereal diseases.²⁵

Chastanier reports that through this alchemical connection he discovered Swedenborg's writings, by picking up a copy of *Arcana Coelestia* in Peacock's rooms. The book was missing a title page, and it was not until 1776 that Chastanier happened upon an early translation of Swedenborg's *De Commercio Animæ & Corporis*.²⁶ Chastanier recognized the author of the book he had read before, and the rest became the early history of the Swedenborgian Church of the New Jerusalem. Though he was still not having any financial

success, Chastanier tells us he 'saw it was my duty to make it known unto all my fellow-sinners, all over the face of the world, *The Heavenly Doctrine*, which I published in French in 1782'.²⁷ This put an end to any idea he might have had about Freemasonry, alchemy, or of any mystical writer but Swedenborg.

Chastanier began transcribing and translating those works of Swedenborg he could acquire—they all appeared originally in Latin, which Chastanier knew was too restrictive for his purposes—eventually turning out an impressive array of translations, mostly in French, which was his special mission. By 1782 Chastanier envisioned a worldwide network of societies promoting Swedenborg's writings and assisting in bringing about the New Jerusalem. His plan, which failed to result in much but mythology about a Masonic Swedenborg Rite which did not exist, was published as a pamphlet titled *Plan Général d'une Société Universelle*.²⁸ In it, Chastanier called on 'the elite of the alchemists, the cabbalists, the freemasons, in a word, all of the occult scholars', to contribute whatever was appropriate to their special interests.²⁹ He followed up on this plea in 1787, with the publication of *Plan d'un Journal Novi-Jérusalémite*, advertising the journal he hoped to use as a venue for his translations. As a preamble, he describes his ultimate goals, and introduces the first installment of his French translation of *De Commercio Animæ & Corporis*.³⁰

Chastanier was powerfully motivated to share Swedenborg's message with flesh-and-blood people, and not just anonymous book buyers. Sadly, the historical record is garbled: there were many small groups studying Swedenborg in London and the English provinces between 1772 and the early 1780s. Chastanier sought out the fellowship of their members when he could, but putting together a reliable chronology has proven elusive.³¹ In 1778 Chastanier made contact with Thomas Hartley, who had translated the version of Swedenborg's *De Commercio Animæ & Corporis* found by Chastanier in 1776. Early in the 1780s he advertised for fellow-readers to join him in a study group.³² When the Swedenborgian 'Theosophical Society' formed in London in 1783, Chastanier was a founding reader.

Then Chastanier's heart turned inward. He had found his spiritual home and was less tempted to look for outside connections. He was invited but did not attend the Congrès du Philalèthes in 1784. And though Chastanier was initially charmed by Count Grabianka when he came to visit the Theosophical Society in 1785, he eventually rejected the Avignon Society over their interpretation of Swedenborg's message and a turn toward Catholic observances. This was the motivation behind Chastanier's pamphlet *A Word of Advice*, in which he calls the Avignon Society the 'very anti-type' to the Swedenborgian New Church.³³ Likewise, Chastanier studied mesmeric healing under Jean Bonoit de Mainauduc, but when he was unable to make it profitable, he rejected Mesmerism as a false and dangerous science.³⁴ When the Theosophical Society divided over whether or not to establish a separate church, Chastanier cast his lot with the separatists and accepted baptism in the Church of the New Jerusalem. ■

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Ulrika Eleonora Swedish Church

The Ulrika Eleonora Church in Wapping plays a central role in the story of Swedenborg's time in London. In this third instalment of casebook notes, Stephen McNeilly locates the spot where Swedenborg's body was interred and explores plans for a permanent monument.

STEPHEN MCNEILLY



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Fig. 1. Engraving of the Ulrika Eleanora Church from the south by Benjamin Cole, c. 1750. For reasons that are unclear, this engraving depicts the church without the vestry at the back. It is possible that this part of the church was a later addition. The plot of land on which the church was built measured around 31 x 21 metres, with the church positioned at the centre, inside a railed burial enclosure with high gates. The church was completed in 1729 in a style mirroring the Danish Church in nearby Wellclose Square.

Swedenborg died peacefully in London on 29 March 1772, aged 84. His body was interred at the Ulrika Eleonora Swedish Church one week later on 5 April sometime after 4pm, encased in three coffins, one of which was made of lead and lowered into a vault under the altar. As noted in the previous issue of the *Swedenborg Review*, the Swedish Church in Wapping was Swedenborg's resting place for 136 years.¹

From the testimony of the Revd Arvid Ferelius, the pastor who officiated the funeral service, we know that Swedenborg's body was transported from the house of Richard

Shearsmith in Cold Bath Fields to an undertaker called Robinson on the Ratcliffe Highway where it lay in state before being moved to the nearby home of Mr Burkhard, the clerk of the Church. The funeral cost just over £7 and as part payment for his role in the ceremony, Ferelius was given Swedenborg's leather-bound Bible.² Those from the congregation in attendance at the funeral were Charles Lindegren (who served as Swedenborg's bookkeeper and financial advisor), Consul Christopher Springer (Swedenborg's friend) and Erik Bergström (Innkeeper of the King's Arms

Tavern in nearby Wellclose Square). It was in fact Lindegren who settled Swedenborg's final bills and arranged for his possessions to be returned to Sweden, sealing his remaining papers in a brown paper parcel with Swedenborg's signet ring. In a letter to Swedenborg's Stockholm agents, Lindegren also makes mention of clothes and linen which, although without commercial value, might be of interest to Swedenborg's family as 'something that the worthy man had worn'.³ It was at this time that another bundle of items, containing personal letters—with missives from Voltaire, Rousseau and perhaps

➤



(Copyright).
 INTERIOR OF LONDON SWEDISH CHURCH.
 The Resting Place of
 —EMANUEL SWEDENBORG—

Figs. 2 (above) and 3 (below) Church interior, c. 1908. This view shows the altar under which Swedenborg was interred and the font, a replica of which is now located elsewhere in Swedenborg Gardens. The altar, pulpit and chandeliers are now housed at the Swedish Church in London in Marylebone. The reverse of the postcard below has details of how to view Swedenborg's tomb.

030

Immanuel Kant—were said to have been used as kindling by Swedenborg's landlord, Richard Shearsmith.⁴

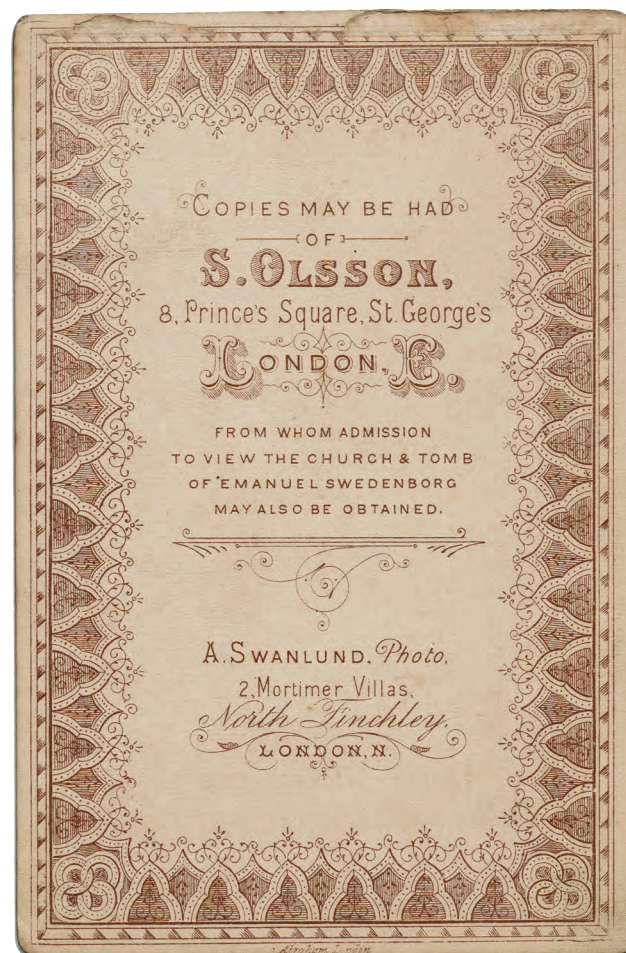
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¹ See James Wilson, 'Swedenborg Gardens'. *0.02 Swedenborg Review* (London: Swedenborg Society, Spring 2020), p. 25.
² R L Tafel (tr., ed. and comp.), *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, 3 vols. (London: Swedenborg Society, 1875-7), vol. II:1, p. 563.
³ Cyriel Odhner Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic* (London: Swedenborg Society, 1981), p. 435.
⁴ *Ibid.*
⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 434.
⁶ Tafel, vol. II:1, p. 538.
⁷ Tafel, vol. II:2, p. 1204.

From Shearsmith we also have an account of a gathering of a small group of friends and members of the congregation at the house of Mr Burkhard's after the church service. Shearsmith speaks of a debate between Swedenborg's close friend Dr Messiter and the Revd Mathesius, Ferelius' assistant. Shearsmith described the conversation as dividing the meeting into 'two parties, one for, the other against the seer whose burial they had just witnessed'. With Messiter were Lindegren, Springer and Bergström who had a positive view. The group with Mathesius however saw him as a dangerous menace to the established church.⁵ This dispute was to rage for another 12 years until Mathesius, in the middle of a church service, appears to have suffered from a mental breakdown.⁶

In the following years, as Swedenborg's reputation as a seer increased, so also did interest in his interred body at Princes Square. In 1790, events were to take a strange turn when rumours were circulated by a 'foreign gentleman, who professed the Rosicrucian tenets', that Swedenborg's body was not in the vault because he had found the elixir of life. As a consequence, Swedenborg's coffin was opened twice, in quick succession.⁷

The date is of particular interest. The previous year had seen the first Conference of the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church in Great East Cheap (attended by William Blake and numerous others), which generated much interest in Swedenborg. Similarly, in 1790, access



to the coffin would have been possible. The entrance to the vault had been reopened to receive the deceased body of the incumbent minister, Andreas Leufvenius, and was most likely left unsealed. One of the founding members of the New Jerusalem Church, Robert Hindmarsh, in his *Rise and Progress*, writes that the first visit was by 'two or three

persons' whilst 'the second was made a few days afterwards by five or six persons, members of the New Church, who were desirous of seeing the body, and of witnessing the state of preservation which it maintained after an interval of seventeen or eighteen years since it was first deposited in the vault'. Hindmarsh was himself one of those New Church persons, and of this second visit he writes:

On removing the lid, and the upper part of the leaden coffin within, which had been sawed through at the time of the first visit, to enable the beholder to see the face of the deceased, we all stood for a few minutes in silent astonishment to observe the physiognomy of that material frame, now prostrate in the hands of death [...] The features were still perfect, the flesh firm, and the whole countenance, as the only remaining criterion whereby to judge of the fidelity of the painter who had taken his portrait while living, yielded the most satisfactory proof, that the artist had been particularly successful in handing down to posterity the true likeness of [this] man [...] After surveying him a while, I placed my hand on his forehead; and I then observed, that the lower part of the nose gave indication of approaching decomposition: but whether this was the effect of air admitted to the body since the first visit, when the leaden coffin was opened, or whether the slow ravages of time, independent of such adventitious cause, had previously begun the work of pulverization,

to which all material bodies are subject, I was not able to determine. This, however, is certain, because it was afterwards found to be true, that the whole frame was speedily reduced to ashes, leaving only the bones to testify to future inspectors of the coffin, that a Man had once lived and died.⁸

Another Swedenborgian, Dr Spurgin, and one time Chair of the Swedenborg Society, later came into possession of 'the cartilage of an ear' that was 'carried off'.⁹ It also seems that fragments of Swedenborg's hair were taken at this time which, along with the ear cartilage, eventually found their way into the Collection at Swedenborg House.

In 1816 the coffin was disrupted once more by the phrenologist John Didrik Holm who made away with Swedenborg's skull. Urged to return it, Holm replaced it with a ringer, which in turn was stolen from the vault the following year by a Captain Ludvig Granholm, who hoped to sell it to a Swedenborgian. Finding no buyers, and unaware that he had in fact stolen a ringer it was placed back into the coffin, alongside the real remains of Swedenborg in 1823 and there it lay until 1908, when Swedenborg's remains, including the wrong skull, were then returned to Sweden with state ceremony. The church closed in 1911, after the congregation decided to move to new premises in Marylebone, and was finally demolished in 1921.

⁸ Robert Hindmarsh, *Rise and Progress of the New Jerusalem Church*, ed. Edward Madeley (London: Hodson & Son, 1861), pp. 400-1.

⁹ William White, *Emanuel Swedenborg: His Life and Writings* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Company, 1868), p. 675.

Fig 4. Swedenborg Gardens. The picture here shows the placing of the Swedish Church in relation to the current layout of Swedenborg Gardens. The white rectangle inside the church marks the place where the altar was located, and under which Swedenborg was known to have been interred. The white circle shows where the font would have stood.

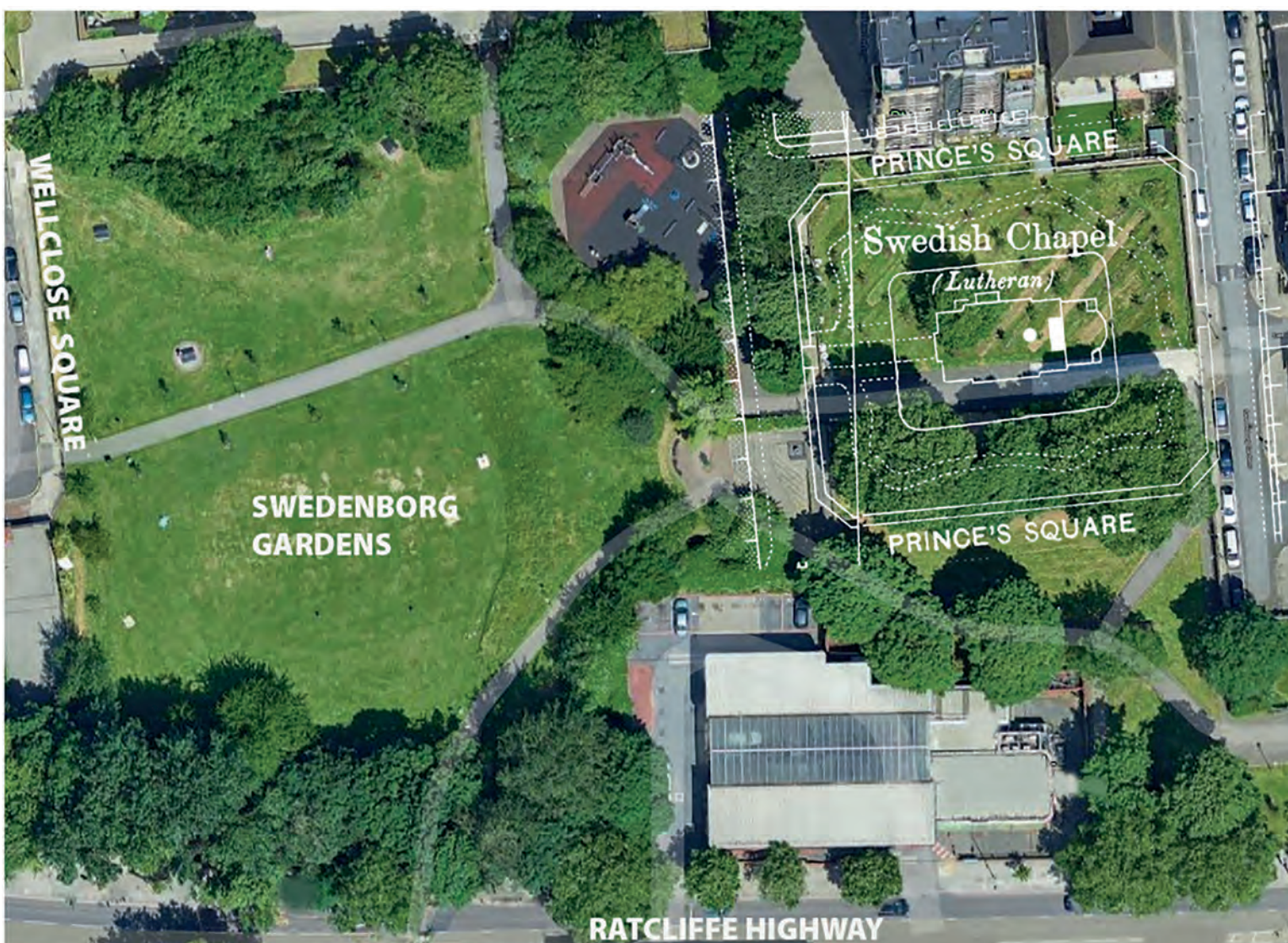


IMAGE: STEPHEN MCNEILLY

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Today, visitors to the plot of land where the church once stood encounter a community garden and pedestrian walkway within a larger area called Swedenborg Gardens. Surrounded by high-rise tenement blocks, the eighteenth century layout has now disappeared. Gone are the period terraced houses that once surrounded the square, and the land between Princes Square and Wellclose Square is now a park and children's play area. During the early part of the twentieth century, after the Church was pulled down, the square was a vacant lot.

The illustration on the previous page (fig. 4) shows the placing of the Swedish Church in relation to the current layout of Swedenborg Gardens. This is arrived at by overlaying the first London Ordnance Survey Map of 1896 over current aerial views. The white rectangle inside the church marks the place where the altar was located, and under which Swedenborg was known to have been interred. It is uncertain where the entrance to the vault was, although G A Walker, in his *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1839), writes that the vault was sealed by a very heavy stone slab and cemented down, and was never opened unless for burial.

With the exception of a granite font—moved some distance from its original placing—there is little else to indicate where the church once stood. The white circle on the map shows where the original placement of the font would have been. Regarding the space within the old railing enclosure, local residents and support groups

have done much positive work in planting apple trees and preparing signage around bedding planks.

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets are also currently preparing information and heritage boards giving detail to the unique history of the garden and its relation to Swedenborg. A draft design of the Swedenborg board is shown below. (See Fig. 5) It is hoped that discussions might evolve regarding a permanent monument to Swedenborg, either as a public artwork or some other form of ongoing engagement. My personal preference would be a full-size replica of Swedenborg's summer-house, which might serve as an event space or even a tea-room. Alternatively, perhaps, a sunken area might be excavated in the place of the crypt where Swedenborg was interred, and which might also operate as a place for a rolling programme of artistic or community interventions. More orthodox approaches would include a marble or bronze bust of the great man, or the planting of a tree? Perhaps inspired readers might send suggestions to the editorial team at Swedenborg House for inclusion in the next edition of the *Swedenborg Review*. ■

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

Emanuel Swedenborg

Philosopher, theologian, visionary and scientist

Prince's Square and the Swedish Church

In the 17th century, an increased demand for Scandinavian timber led to a growth in the Swedish population in London. Much of East London was still farmland, but the location of the docks made this an ideal site for Swedish settlers. In 1710 a congregation of the Swedish Lutheran Church was created in East London under Jesper Swedenberg, the Bishop of Skara and father of Emanuel Swedenborg.



The Ulrika Eleonora Church c. 1808

In 1728, a church was built in Prince's Square under the supervision of pastor Jacob Serenius. The church was named after the reigning Swedish monarch, Ulrika Eleonora, and the square became central to Swedish life in London. The congregation moved to Marylebone in 1911 and the old church was demolished in 1921.



Interior of the church c. 1911

Emanuel Swedenborg

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish philosopher, theologian, visionary, scientist, inventor and statesman. He founded and edited Sweden's first scientific journal, *Daedalus Hyperboreus*, which included designs of an early flying machine. Swedenborg was a leading mineralogist who advanced new theories in geology. He was also the originator of the scientific model for understanding how our solar system was formed. During attempts to locate the soul within the body, Swedenborg anticipated future developments in neuroscience, including the role of a substance in the brain for sensory, motor and cognitive functions.

In 1743, Swedenborg began having visionary experiences which led him to theology. He describes meetings with angels and journeys through the afterlife. His book *Heaven and Hell* (1758) influenced poet William Blake and the wider Romantic movement. His idea of a connection between the natural and spiritual worlds was influential on Symbolist writers including Charles Baudelaire and artists such as August Strindberg. Swedenborg published his later works anonymously whilst continuing to serve as a member of the Swedish House of Nobles, then a chamber of the Swedish Parliament.



Emanuel Swedenborg, Oil portrait by Per Krafft, 1766

Swedenborg came to London to study and publish his books. He worshipped at the Ulrika Eleonora Church, which his father had helped to set up. He sometimes lodged at the King's Arms tavern in Wellclose Square, where the Ensign Youth Club stands today.



Swedenborg's design for a flying machine, 1716

Swedenborg died in Clerkenwell, London, in March 1772. He was buried in the crypt of the Ulrika Eleonora Church. In 1908, his body was moved to Sweden with great ceremony. He was laid to rest in the cathedral in his hometown of Uppsala.

Swedenborg Square and Gardens

In 1938, Prince's Square was renamed Swedenborg Square after Emanuel Swedenborg. Between 1965-1972, Swedenborg Square was levelled, and St George's housing estate was built over it. An adjoining road and this park are both called Swedenborg Gardens. Buildings and courtyards in the surrounding area are named after people and places with Swedenborgian connections, including Stockholm House, Hindmarsh Close, Shearsmith House, Brockmer House, Hatton House and Noble Court.

This information panel has been produced by the Swedenborg Society in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council.

Photo of font © Barry Carter. All other images the Swedenborg Society Archive.



www.swedenborg.org.uk

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/parks




Fig 5. Information Board. Here is a draft design of the information board currently being prepared for Swedenborg Gardens. It has been produced by the Swedenborg Society in partnership with Tower Hamlets Council and the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. In preparing the board, special mention must go to Alison Philcock, Parks Information Officer, London Borough of Tower Hamlets; Michelle Lindson, Community Development Coordinator, Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park; and Adam Renvoize, Chief Designer, Communications Team Tower Hamlets Council who undertook the design.

Living in Two Worlds: *A Matter of Life & Death* and Swedenborg

A look at the metaphysical and neurological parallels between Powell and Pressburger's iconic film and the life and writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, in an essay extracted from James Wilson's book on Swedenborg and film, *Images of the Afterlife in Cinema* (London: Duchy of Lambeth, 2016).

JAMES WILSON



Descending 'Ethel', the celestial staircase designed by Alfred Junge. Film still from *A Matter of Life and Death* by Eric Gray (1946). Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.

'I've been taking tips on the Other World [...] its laws, system, architecture. Here's the interesting thing. He never steps outside the limits of his own imagination'
—ROGER LIVESEY, as Dr Frank Reeves, in *A Matter of Life & Death*¹

A *Matter of Life & Death* (*AMOLAD*) wasn't the first film to portray images of an afterlife—Reginald Barker and Thomas H Ince's *Civilization* (1916), Victor Sjöström's *The Phantom Carriage* (1921), Frank Borzage's *Liliom* (1930), and many others besides, had done this in a wide and creative range of visions. Neither was *AMOLAD* the most original vision of the afterlife, it following in the footsteps of Alexander Hill's *Here Comes Mr Jordan* (1941)

in depicting an afterlife where the administration can be found capable of making mistakes and oversights. Indeed, the whole bureaucratic infrastructure to the afterlife in *AMOLAD* seems to owe a debt to *Here Comes Mr Jordan*, both films sharing a common language of registrars' offices, official records, collections and invoices, and numbered messengers;² and the 'heavenly' workers in both films bearing aviation insignia and referring to their charges as 'cases'.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *A Matter of Life & Death* is, however, one of the most enduring and influential visions of the afterlife in cinema. If indeed it is an afterlife that *AMOLAD* portrays, for it opens with the proviso that:

This is a story of two Worlds: the one we know and another which exists only in the mind of a young airman whose life & imagination have been violently shaped by war. *Any* >

¹ Roger Livesey as Dr Frank Reeves, in *A Matter of Life & Death*, written and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (Rank, 1946).

² Messenger 7013 (played by Edward Everett Horton) in *Here Comes Mr Jordan*; Conductor 71 (Marius Goring) in *AMOLAD*.

³ Opening prologue of *A Matter of Life & Death* (Rank, 1946).

⁴ *AMOLAD* was the penultimate film of six in the *Images of the Afterlife in Cinema* film season screened at Swedenborg Hall in the Swedenborg Society's bicentenary year of 2010, for which this essay was first written.

⁵ Peter Hewitt, director of *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*, placed statues of *AMOLAD*'s director Michael Powell and actor David Niven on his staircase.

⁶ Junge had help bringing 'Ethel' to life from Denham Studios' head of special effects, W Percy 'Poppa' Day, and the chief electrician, Bill Wall: Ian Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, BFI Film Classics series (London: British Film Institute, 2008), pp. 48-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁸ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies* (London: Heinemann, 1986), p. 487.

⁹ New York lawyers Arthur Krim and Bob Benjamin came up with *Stairway to Heaven*, fearful that having the word 'death' in the title would negatively impact on box office returns. The title was dismissed by Powell as 'soapy': Powell, *A Life in Movies*, pp. 486-7.

¹⁰ The view is circularly framed from above and the circular reading room of the old British Library (still extant in the Great Court of the British Museum), used by Emeric Pressburger during his research for the film, may have been an influence.

¹¹ Swedenborg, *Divine Providence*, tr. George Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003), §217.4, p. 203.

¹² Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, tr. George F Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2000), §493, p. 378.

¹³ Eric Warman, *A Matter of Life and Death: The Book of the Film* (London: World Film Publications Ltd, 1946), p. 15.

¹⁴ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §§162-9, pp. 172-5; §§116-33, pp.

*resemblance to any other world known or unknown is purely coincidental.*³

Any objective reality to the afterlife is left to the individual to deliberate and decide upon, just as it is in life. This two-worlds scenario, with one being contained in the mind of the hero, has already shown its influence on three of the films featured in this *Images of the Afterlife in Cinema* film season⁴—*Jacob's Ladder*, *Stay*, and *Wristcutters: A Love Story*—whilst the disc-like vision of heaven in *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey* was also greatly influenced by *AMOLAD* and paid due homage with its own version of 'Ethel' the celestial staircase.⁵ This staircase, designed by production designer Alfred Junge⁶ to match Powell's description in the screenplay that 'It looks like a mixture of Piccadilly Circus escalator and St Paul's Cathedral',⁷ has become one of *AMOLAD*'s iconic images and lent itself to the American title for the film, *Stairway to Heaven*.

For me, the American title detracts from the drama and narrative drive—the bald statement that it is heaven unne-

cessarily removing an ambiguity that has been carefully and deliberately woven into the fabric of the film. The decision to re-title for the US market also rankled with Powell: 'there was a stairway in our film, a moving stairway, and it did lead to another world, even if it were not Heaven. Throughout the film, we were careful not to use that mighty word'.⁸ Whether the visions of Squadron Leader Peter Carter (played by David Niven) are of heaven or not should be left up to the audience and the other characters, rather than be determined for them in advance by a pair of lawyers making their first foray into film distribution.⁹

Junge's other sets for the other world are just as memorable. Fading in from the white surf of the endlessly turning tides on the sands of The Burrows, where Peter has been washed up, we enter another eternity, the sea's waves merging into wave after wave of angels' wings in a cloakroom of breathtaking immensity—the order and volume of wings echoing the patterns of plain white crosses that, from an earlier war, fill so many cemeteries across Flanders. From the cloakroom



Looking down at the Living Records Office. Film still from *A Matter of Life and Death* by Eric Gray (1946). Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.



A cloakroom of angel wings stretching into the infinite. Film still from *A Matter of Life and Death* by Eric Gray (1946). Courtesy of the BFI National Archive.

we move into the reception area of the Airmen's Section, influenced by Futurist architecture and featuring sliding glass doors, escalators and walkways bordered by floor-to-ceiling windows. The angles of the escalators cutting diagonally across the oblong doorways remind me of the art deco posters for transatlantic ocean liners and high-speed trains by artists such as Adolphe Mouron Cassandre and Willem Ten Broek. This afterlife is a modern-looking place that exudes speed and efficiency. Not only the speed and efficiency of a modern transport hub with a high turnover of people, but also the speed and efficiency of a finely tuned information centre. We are given a view from the Airmen's Section of the Living Records Office below and it looks like a cross between a computer circuit board and an impossibly vast library reading room.¹⁰ Very rare indeed is it that something impedes the continual processing of this place: 'There hasn't been a mistake here in a thousand years', the Officer Angel (Kathleen Byron) tells us. The case of Peter Carter is just such an anomaly and the ergonomics get interesting.

This strictly regimented bureaucratic structure to the afterlife has a precursor in Swedenborg, who said that 'heaven has governments and therefore areas of responsibility and offices'.¹¹ And there are other parallels between Swedenborg and views of the afterlife exposed in *AMOLAD*. Peter, speculating about the next world, says, 'I think it starts where this one leaves off', in much the same way that Swedenborg says, 'Our first state after death is like our state in this world [...] one life carries on into the other, and death

is only a passage'.¹² In the afterlife in *AMOLAD* 'There are not really any arbitrary divisions of time there, and it is always daylight'.¹³ In Swedenborg's afterlife there is also no division in time—things are rather measured in changes in state—and it is also daylight in heaven.¹⁴ In *AMOLAD* there is an illusory quality to space in the other world. At the Court scene, the Judge (Raymond Massey) announces, 'Owing to the interest aroused by the case, there is an unusually large audience. We can, of course, seat everyone who wishes to be present, but the front rows have been reserved for those who have a special interest in the case'. Later in the scene, as the Court adjourns to move to earth, the camera pans back to reveal its full magnitude: tier upon tier of seats stretching back to form a galaxy-sized amphitheatre. Distance doesn't affect presence. In Swedenborg too, space is illusory, being replaced instead by variation in state: 'motion is nothing but change of state [...] This is how all angels move about, which means they do not have distances; and if they do not have distances, they do not have space'. Swedenborg goes on to say that, 'people who are nearby are the ones in a similar state and the ones who are far away are in dissimilar states'.¹⁵ Swedenborg's proximity in state is echoed in *AMOLAD*'s proximity of interest.

The plethora of different nationalities and languages present in the other world in *AMOLAD* doesn't prevent successful communication (e.g., the Anglo-French conversation between two airmen entering the Airmen's Section; or, the multinational jury's understanding of the trial in the Court

148-58. Swedenborg says that 'heaven's light is divine truth, that light is also divine wisdom and intelligence' (ibid., §131, p. 157), therefore whenever angels and spirits are in these qualities they will be in light. He goes on to tell us that 'there is no correspondence of night with the states of life of people in heaven, but rather a correspondence of the half-light that comes before dawn. The correspondence of night is with the people who are in hell' (ibid., §155, p. 169).

¹⁵ Ibid., §§192-3, pp. 184-5.

¹⁶ Ibid., §236, p. 205.

¹⁷ Swedenborg writes about meetings with many different historical figures in his *Spiritual Diary*, such as Augustus (§4418), Cicero (§§4415-17) and Charles XII (§6013).

¹⁸ Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 44.

¹⁹ Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §450, p. 340.

²⁰ Swedenborg began to publish his findings on the brain in *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom* (1740-1), but left the majority of his anatomical studies on the brain in unpublished manuscripts.

Some of these were translated into English and published as *The Brain*, tr. R.L. Tafel, 2 vols. (London: James Speirs, 1882-7) and *Three Transactions on the Cerebrum*, tr. Alfred Acton, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1938-40).

²¹ Diane Broadbent Friedman, *A Matter of Life and Death: The Brain revealed by the Mind of Michael Powell* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008).

²² Powell, *A Life in Movies*, p. 502. See also pp. 458-9.

²³ Friedman, *A Matter of Life and Death: The Brain revealed by the Mind of Michael Powell*, p. 65.

²⁴ Swedenborg, *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom...Transaction III...The Fibre*, tr. Alfred Acton (Bryn Athyn, PA: Swedenborg Scientific Association, 1976 repr.), §§349-51, p. 245.

²⁵ Swedenborg, *The Fibre*, §§523-7, pp. 333-5.

²⁶ Henry Maudsley, *The Pathology of Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1879).



²⁷ John Johnson, 'Henry Maudsley on Swedenborg's Messianic Psychosis', in *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (1994), no. 165, pp. 690-1; repr. in *The New Philosophy* (Jan-June 1998), vol. CI, nos. 1-2, pp. 9-13; and Elizabeth Foote-Smith and Timothy J Smith, 'Historical Note: Emanuel Swedenborg', in *Epilepsia* (1996), no. 37, pp. 211-18; repr. in *The New Philosophy* (Jan-June 1998), vol. CI, nos. 1-2, pp. 137-55.

²⁸ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, p. 30. Powell's aunt, Ethel Corbett, also fed his bibliomania with Everyman's editions: *ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, Everyman's Library (London: J M Dent & Co. and New York: E P Dutton & Co., 1909, repr. 1911, 1917, 1920, 1931). Swedenborg's *The Divine Love and Wisdom* (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd and New York: E P Dutton & Co., 1913), *The Divine Providence* (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd and New York: E P Dutton & Co., 1913) and *The True Christian Religion* (London: J M Dent & Sons Ltd and New York: E P Dutton & Co., 1933, repr. 1936) also formed part of the Everyman's Library.

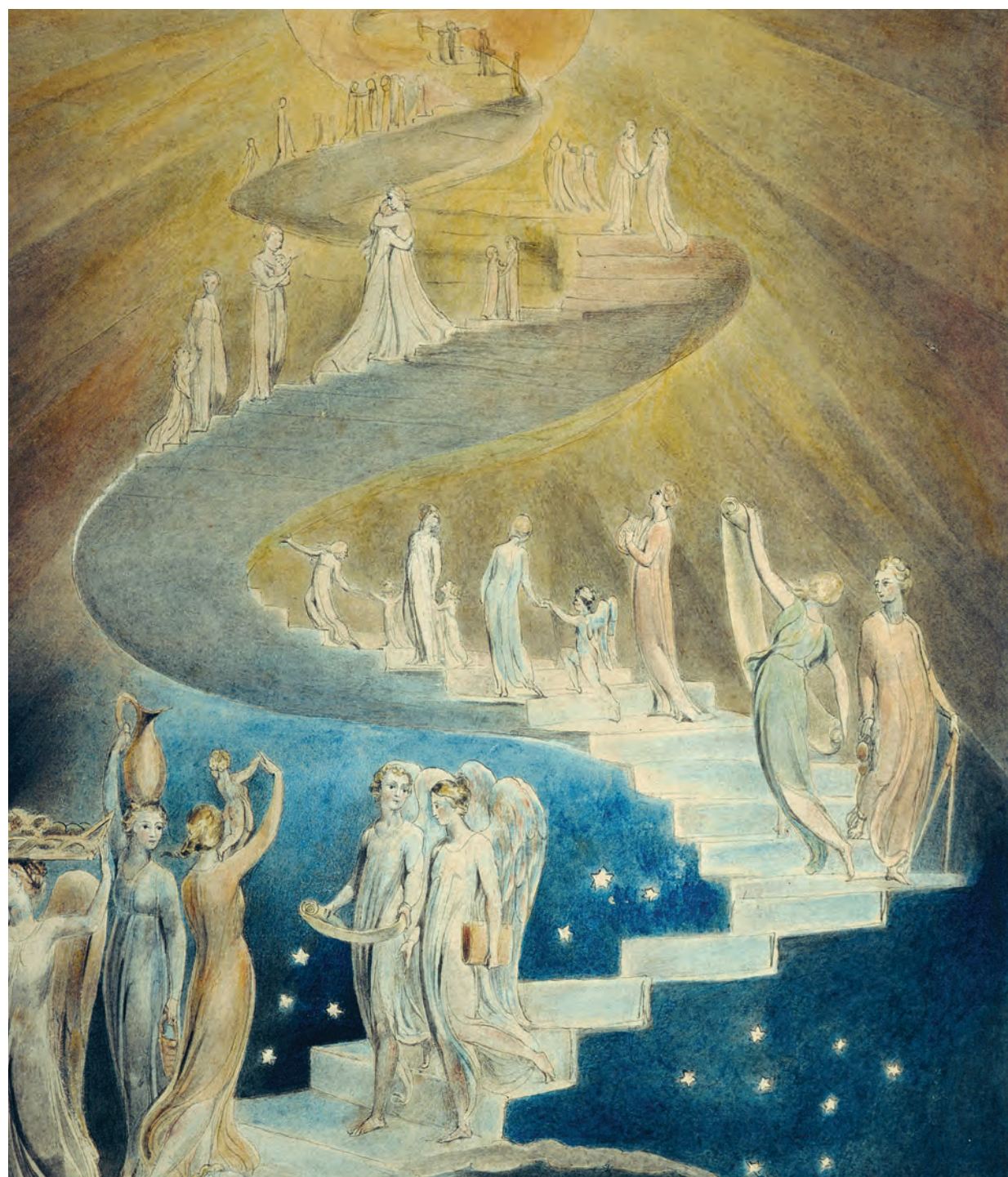
³⁰ Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies*, pp. 71, 136, 104, 117, 141. Coleridge and Tennyson, another poet influenced by Swedenborg, are both mentioned in *AMOLAD* itself, by Dr Reeves in the Court scene.

³¹ Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, p. 26, points out that the title of F W H Myers's book, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans & Co., 1903) may also have been the inspiration for one of Dr Reeves's questions during his first dialogue with Peter: 'Tell me, do you believe in the survival of human personality after death?' Myers's book contains numerous references to Swedenborg.

³² Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, pp. 25 and 38.

³³ A good starting point for exploring the influence of Swedenborg on Blake is Harvey F Bellin and Darrell Ruhl (eds.),

Blake and Swedenborg: opposition is true friendship (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1985).



William Blake, *Jacob's Dream* (c. 1808), a possible inspiration for the celestial stairway in *A Matter of Life & Death*.

scene). So too in Swedenborg's afterlife, where people 'all understand each other, no matter what community they come from'.¹⁶ Famous historical figures are encountered in *AMOLAD*—John Bunyan is the conductor who escorts Dr Frank Reeves into the next world—and Swedenborg too wrote of encountering renowned people from history in his sorties into the spiritual world.¹⁷

In Emeric Pressburger's draft of the script for *AMOLAD*, one of the female officer angels at the Airmen's Section in the other world takes a 'transparent veil-like something cut like a pair of glasses' from one of the new RAF arrivals. 'We have a flash of colours through it as she removes it. ... From here everything is black and white'.¹⁸ The removal of the glasses and transition from colour vision to monochrome is part of the adjustment process from one world to the next. Swedenborg underwent a similar adjustment process when he—imitating the experiences of the newly deceased—was eased into the spiritual world by angels who 'rolled back a covering from my left eye toward the center of my nose so that my eye was opened and able to see'.¹⁹

Swedenborg is probably best remembered for his accounts of his experiences of the afterlife, but one of the other subjects

that dominated his literary output, and that also looms large in *AMOLAD*, is neurology. Swedenborg, in his analytical and synthesizing anatomical studies, wrote a great deal about the workings of the brain as he sought to try and find the place where the soul resided in the body.²⁰ *AMOLAD* too has, in Dr Frank Reeves, an insightful neurologist as one of its principal protagonists, or, as June (Kim Hunter) puts it: 'what you don't know about neurology would fill a peanut'.

Diane Broadbent Friedman has shown the depth and accuracy of the neurological information contained within *AMOLAD*,²¹ largely researched by Michael Powell as he worked on Emeric Pressburger's original script: 'Emeric had done the historical research and written the story and most of the jokes. I had my medical notes'.²²

Friedman, who comes from a background of caring for people with epilepsy, explains that Peter Carter in *AMOLAD* suffers from complex partial seizures which 'represent a condition where a psychiatrically normal man may have hallucinations. This type of seizure suggests a specific brain localization'.²³ The diagnosis for this brain localization is given, in *AMOLAD*, by Dr Reeves when he speaks to the American surgeon, Dr McEwan (Edwin Max), 'Everything points to arachnoid adhesions involving the olfactory nerve

and the brain', and expanded on later when the Court descends on the celestial escalator to the operating theatre, and Reeves comments to Conductor 71, 'My diagnosis was right. Fine avascular meningeal adhesions binding the optic nerve to the brain, the internal carotid and the chiasm. Similar adhesions between the chiasm and the brain'. Friedman explains throughout the course of her book how Reeves's diagnosis is accurately reflected in the symptoms displayed by Peter Carter: his hallucinations; violent headaches; increased appetite; loss of vision in the lower left field; the aura of a wind blowing heavier with each attack; his imagined smell of fried onions every time Conductor 71 visits him.

Swedenborg, meanwhile, in his studies on the brain, over 200 years earlier, also concluded that blockages in the arachnoid tunic, preventing the distribution of arachnoidal lymph, could cause epilepsy.²⁴ And, amazingly, Swedenborg was aware that pressures on the optic nerve could cause complex visual distortions and illusions (the optic chiasm, mentioned above in Dr Reeves's diagnosis, is the place where the two optic nerves cross).²⁵ I say 'amazingly' because not only does Peter Carter in *AMOLAD* seem to suffer from epileptic seizures and hallucinations, but so too, some have claimed, did Swedenborg. Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), the esteemed British psychiatrist, was the first to suggest Swedenborg might suffer from epilepsy,²⁶ and there have been further claims in recent years.²⁷

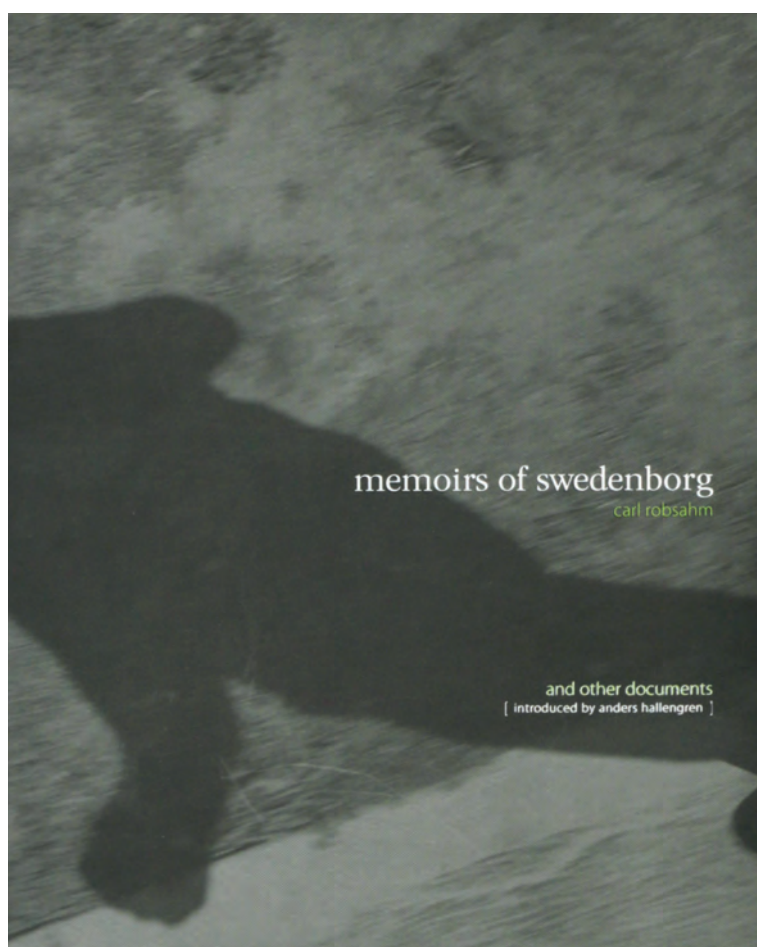
Swedenborg the scientist, with his pioneering (albeit largely unpublished) insights into the workings of the brain, and Swedenborg the visionary seer, with his claims to have travelled into the afterlife and been in daily conversation with angels, spirits and devils for the last thirty years of his life (1743-72), are separated and strangely paralleled in the characters of Dr Frank Reeves and Peter Carter in *AMOLAD*.

I don't know if Michael Powell or Emeric Pressburger had any direct knowledge of Swedenborg, but it is possible. In his autobiography, Michael Powell says that his mother collected the Everyman's Library series, and that he held on to and treasured this collection all his life.²⁸ Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* formed part of this series.²⁹ Powell was a voracious reader and amongst the countless authors that he references in his autobiography, there are a good number of writers who were influenced by and referred to Swedenborg in their own work—Coleridge, Balzac, Le Fanu, Shaw, Aldous Huxley, etc.³⁰—so Powell could also have come across Swedenborg indirectly through them.³¹ Ian Christie has also pointed out the possible influence of William Blake on *AMOLAD*. Blake's engraving of a ladder to the moon, captioned 'I want! I want!', Plate 9 from *The Gates of Paradise* (1793), and his *Jacob's Ladder* (c. 1800) painting may have been inspirations for 'Ethel' the celestial stairway in *AMOLAD*.³² Blake was heavily influenced by Swedenborg and even attended a meeting of the nascent New Church, a religious organization based on Swedenborg's teachings, in 1789.³³ These links may be tenuous at best—'but they're the only real evidence we've got' I might lament in imitation of Dr Reeves!—nevertheless, in its explorations of the fine borderlands between the ephemeral and the eternal, the metaphysical and the neurological, belief and proof, *AMOLAD* is, coincidentally or otherwise, dappled with the faint shadows of the life and thought of Swedenborg. ■

● 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 translated the travel book *To the Sun* by the French writer Guy de Maupassant.



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Interview with Swedenborg Film Festival winner Shirley Snow

Avery Curran catches up with Shirley Snow, winner of the 2020 Swedenborg Film Festival, where her film *A Loud Boom Through the Night* drew glowing praise from the Festival's judges.

SHIRLEY SNOW INTERVIEWED BY AVERY CURRAN

First of all, congratulations on your film winning the 2020 Swedenborg Film Festival! How did the idea for *A Loud Boom Through the Night* come about?

Thank you very much. The idea started with stories my grandma told me. She has an incredibly dramatic voice and the stories are wildly entertaining, due to their truthful nature, often contradicted by misremembering, her own fictional twists and their gothic features. She had always wanted to turn these stories into a book, but I could see them very vividly as images and thought it would be a shame to lose the sound of her storytelling voice. Admittedly it wasn't all down to this; it is essentially the film it is for more practical reasons—lockdown reduced my filming options, so archive footage was the best solution and turned out to give the personal narrative a whole new dimension.

What are your primary influences as a filmmaker?

My thoughts or inspiration often come from indirect sources such as conversations I've had or overheard and objects that exist in my home or other people's. I like to make notes about encounters others or myself have had, and if I can I'll record the things people say in case I want to use it for something. I've always enjoyed 'finding' and 'taking' things this way, perhaps like a magpie does with shiny items. I also, of course, borrow greatly from films and books, which tend to introduce me to new styles and processes and keep my creative stomach well fed. For this film, it was Shirley Jackson's novel *We Have Always Lived In The Castle* that influenced the unsettled female narration I wanted to bring into my work.

What was your experience of the 2020 Swedenborg Film Festival?

Well, 2020 was a strange year and distant year, but as a newcomer to the film festival world I enjoyed the whole thing, from watching all the films, waiting for the public vote results and then the judges' comments. The latter was a pretty big deal for me because it's a kind of validation that you rarely get. When the live streaming of the results took place it was very thrilling, but also surreal, because I was at university and all my flatmates had gone home so I had no one to share the moment with.



Your film considers complex issues including the plasticity of memory, family secrets and mental illness. How does film as a medium help you communicate these ideas?

I think for this film, it was the ability to bring together lots of different component parts, like a patchwork, until certain visual and audio-based associations were created. I made and produced the components separately: the narration was recorded first (it was the foundation that I then restructured over and over again), the visuals were taken from an archive and then the sound

effects I recorded last. Having them all separated made me realize these connections and, as you suggest, brings up implications of secrecy or possible fictionality. The editing process took the longest and was crucial in bringing it all together to create the effect I was after.

The use of archive footage in *A Loud Boom Through the Night* gives the film a sense of playfulness and veracity. How does the past influence your work?

I don't think I've properly thought about it before, so it's interesting to be asked. I think the past is always useful to me, because I understand it as something very distant from myself and I find it much easier to work with something that isn't so immediately or intimately connected with me. Taking this film, for example, the stories are not my own and with this distance I feel able to play with the component parts. Thinking still of distance, the archive footage appealed to me because it felt removed from my grandma and removed from myself, and it came to be about finding symbols to represent parts of the story rather than an exact representation.

What's next for you and your work?

I'm unsure where I'll be taking my work actually. I do have a wish to make another film as a companion piece to this one, but in a completely new style. Beyond things that are as immediate as this, I find it difficult to talk about future possibilities. I'm not a planner and tend to make a film as and when the moment appears, and I'll use whatever tools I have with me at that moment. I also recently heard the filmmaker, Kelly Reichardt, say she thinks her students should enjoy making lots of bad films, and I'm thinking perhaps I should give that a go!

● SHIRLEY SNOW is a young artist, living between London and Edinburgh. She previously completed an art foundation course at Camden Working Men's College, and currently studies Film and TV at Edinburgh College of Art. Her films are often experimental in form, combining text, archive footage, stills and her own moving image work. Her work also extends to short booklets (or chapbooks) which feature images and her writing on the subject of women and the wilderness. She treats Instagram similarly, as a platform for photographic sequences and ambiguous text passages.

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 forty-eight issues between Spring 2000 and 2017



Swedenborg Online

As the coronavirus pandemic saw Swedenborg House remain closed to public visitors for the majority of the past year, Avery Curran takes a look over the recent events programme, held mostly online for the first time in the Society's history.

—
AVERY CURRAN

So suffice to say, the course of 2020 did not run as smoothly as those of us planning events in January of that year expected. There were events that were cancelled, events that were postponed and events that were changed radically before they could happen. However, before long, the team at Swedenborg House put together a programme of digital events that brought together a new set of participants and, we hope, gave those who participated a moment of levity, enjoyment or learning.

Soon after Swedenborg House closed its doors to the public due to the pandemic in March, the team set to learning the ins and outs of Zoom, the now-ubiquitous video conferencing software. The first event was a digital repeat of the *Cartography of the Brain* seminars held at Swedenborg House in 2019 with Dr David Lister. Dr Lister kindly agreed to hold them again via Zoom. These seminars were a great success the first time around, with a lively, enthusiastic audience and a fascinating area of enquiry, and despite the new format it was no different when they were held in May and June of 2020. Dr Lister discussed topics such as map-making, the infundibulum and EMDR therapy.

Another series of online classes, in learning Neo-Latin, the branch of Latin Swedenborg used to write most of his eighteenth-century texts, ran for 10 weeks from April through to July. The classes were specially devised for the Swedenborg Society

by Dr Lucy Nicholas, Classics Teaching Fellow at King's College London, and were aimed for students from beginner level upwards. The experiment in digital events was by all accounts a success, and before long plans were in the works for further events.

These events included the launch of A S Byatt's *On The Conjugal Angel*. On a bright summer evening in July, the Swedenborg House team joined the acclaimed author Julia Armfield for an enchanting reading of a passage from the book. A vibrant Q&A session followed, touching on everything from Armfield's publication plans to the relationship of science and religion in the nineteenth century. We are grateful to Julia Armfield for her presence at the launch and to A S Byatt for giving permission to print her talk that was first given at Swedenborg House over ten years ago.

In August, we were also joined by Alan Walker, who gave a fascinating talk entitled 'New Jerusalem: discovering an (almost) part of England's religious heritage'. He guided the attendees around the history of early nonconformist organizations; and the images of current and former churches and other religious buildings in London that were shown were very enjoyable at a time when exploration of the city was limited.

One of the highlights of the online events programme was William Rowlandson's webinar series *To The Waters And The Wild*. Each week over five weeks, William and the audience convened to dis-

cuss notions of the wild, wilding and rewilding, the human relationship to nature and how all this connected to Emanuel Swedenborg. The talks themselves were extremely engaging, and the Q&A afterward reflected a committed, thoughtful audience.

In November the Society collaborated with the Swedenborg Foundation and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in the US, to broadcast a series of highly informative lectures by the esteemed historian of medical humanities, John S Haller, Jr. John gave three pre-recorded talks: 'My Discovery of Swedenborg and How My Books Came About'; 'The Swedenborgian Influence on Homoeopathy'; and 'America's Reform Tradition: Swedenborg, New Church and the Doctrine of Uses'. The talks were broadcast on Zoom and YouTube, bookended by live introductions with the Society's Denise Prentice and live Q&A sessions with John himself.

The popular children's drawing workshop with Sally Kindberg had a new format when it was brought online in August. Unable to explore Swedenborg House itself, the children drew pictures of towering eighteenth-century wigs, were treated to the dulcet tones of building manager Jacob Cartwright in his *Whispering Gallery* video and generally provided a lovely sense of humour and enthusiasm. It was a delight to see Sally Kindberg's excellent work drawn live via an ingenious use of technology, and it was equally delightful to see the participants' pencil-and-paper drawings, which they held up to the camera for everyone to see.

The year's programme finished with another fun event aimed at both children and adults: an online performance storytelling by Sally Pomme Clayton, a former artist in residence at Swedenborg House in 2012. 'Winter Fairy Tales' took place on the afternoon of 22 December, with Sally enchanting her many viewers from around the world with the festive tale of Snegerotchka, maiden of the snow, and her encounters with many familiar figures from fairy and folk tales drawn from Russia, Germany and Scandinavia. The audience were invited at the end to show their own favourite festive decorations (and share the stories behind them) and it was a warm and wonderful way to end the year.

This selection of the online events held by Swedenborg House in 2020, though incomplete, gives a sense of the variety and depth of knowledge that ran through the events programme. We are very grateful to all those who participated, whether as attendees, technological support or event leaders. In a year that seemed to be defined by distance, these events provided a way to communicate, and allowed those from further afield who had never previously been able to attend events at Swedenborg House to take part. ■

In memoriam: Inge Jonsson (1928-2020)

● We are saddened to report the passing of Inge Jonsson, the renowned Swedish academic and scholar, who died peacefully on 31 January 2020, aged 92. Professor of Literary Studies, Dean, Vice Rector and Rector at Stockholm University, Inge was a long-standing member of the Swedish Academy of Sciences and a former President of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. He was also Chair on the board of directors of one of the major Swedish publishers, Natur och Kultur.

To readers of Swedenborg, he will be best remembered and appreciated as one of the foremost scholars of his generation. He was the author of three seminal studies on Swedenborg, two of which have been translated into English, namely *Swedenborg: A Visionary Scientist* and *A Drama of Creation*. Just as importantly, as part of his membership of the Swedish Academy of Sciences, he was instrumental in having Swedenborg's vast manuscript archive included as part of the United Nation's Memory of the World register: an honour reserved only for the most important historical figures.

Most recently, for the Swedenborg Society, he wrote an introduction to an anthology of essays entitled *Philosophy, Literature, Mysticism* (2013). During work on this book, we also spoke of developing another project, namely an English translation of the third of his Swedenborg studies entitled *Swedenborgs korrespondenslära* (Swedenborg's Correspondences). With the consent and support of his family, it is to be hoped that this project will be realized in the near future, and that it will be able to set into print what would be a fitting tribute to this remarkable and generous man.

There is not enough space here to outline his achievements and nor to give voice to our full appreciation of him and his work, suffice to say that with Inge's passing the Swedenborgian community loses one of its most eminent scholars. We extend our gratefulness for his scholarly contribution and his lifetime of service and we also extend our condolences to his family and loved ones. ■ **STEPHEN McNEILLY**



Madame Tussaud.
Photograph after a
drawing attributed to
Francis Tussaud.

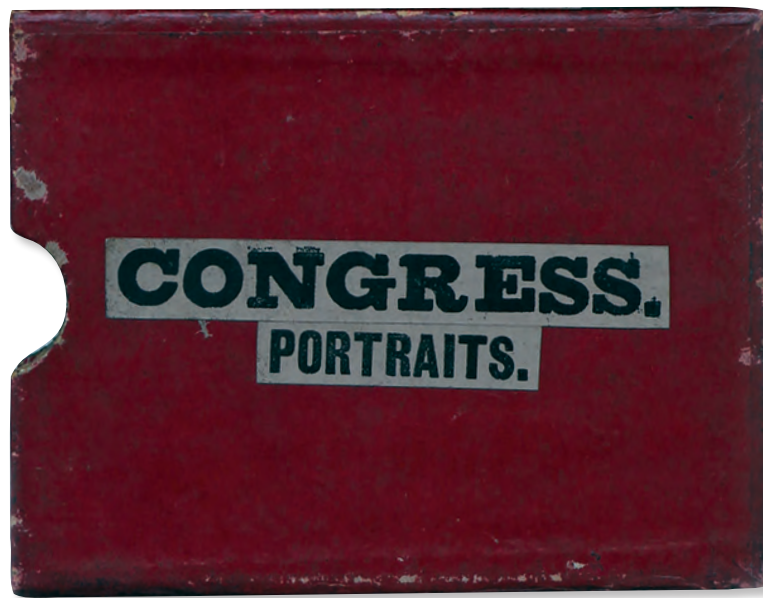
Madame Tussaud

A look at the brief but significant presence in the famous Madame Tussaud's waxworks museum of Emanuel Swedenborg and one of his most important translators, John Clowes.

JAMES WILSON

On 23 March 1835, having toured around the United Kingdom for thirty years, Madame Tussaud's exhibition of waxworks opened in its first permanent home on Baker Street, featuring models of Emanuel Swedenborg, 'In the costume of a Senator of Sweden' and of John Clowes (1743-1831), the first translator of Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* into English, and whose waxwork was taken from life, 'in the dress of a Master of Arts'. Swedenborg's literary fame is described (in the 1823 catalogue) as 'unquestionable, his Philosophical works being read, and their extraordinary merit acknowledged in most of the foreign Universities'. However, 'As a Theological Writer, some have pronounced him insane and visionary; but he has thousands of respectable characters in England, France, America, Sweden, Germany, and Russia, who warmly admire, and affectionately receive his Theological Writings'. The pair were positioned amongst a coterie of European statesmen and royal and religious figures, and stood close by to a waxwork of the collection's founder and principal artist, Marie Tussaud, who had made her own effigy of herself. Both

Swedenborg and Clowes are listed in Madame Tussaud's printed catalogue for 1823 (as numbers 22 and 23, respectively) and they are still there in the printed catalogue for 1842, although, with the collection continuing to expand, they now appear as numbers 89 and 88, respectively, and their biographies are reduced, but with some significant amendments—the allusion to Swedenborg being deemed 'insane' by some has been removed and his works are now known in 'all the Universities of Europe', rather than just some of them. However, by the time of the 1851 printed catalogue, Clowes and Swedenborg had both disappeared from the exhibits. Their whereabouts remain unknown. That Swedenborg and Clowes's disappearance from the collection happened around the time of Marie Tussaud's death in 1850, coupled with their always having been publicly displayed in close proximity to her model of herself before that, give credence to the story that Madame Tussaud herself was said to have worshipped from time to time at the Swedenborgian church in Argyle Square and that the presence of Swedenborg and Clowes in the collection stemmed from her long-held personal affection for Swedenborg and his writings. ■



Hellish Love

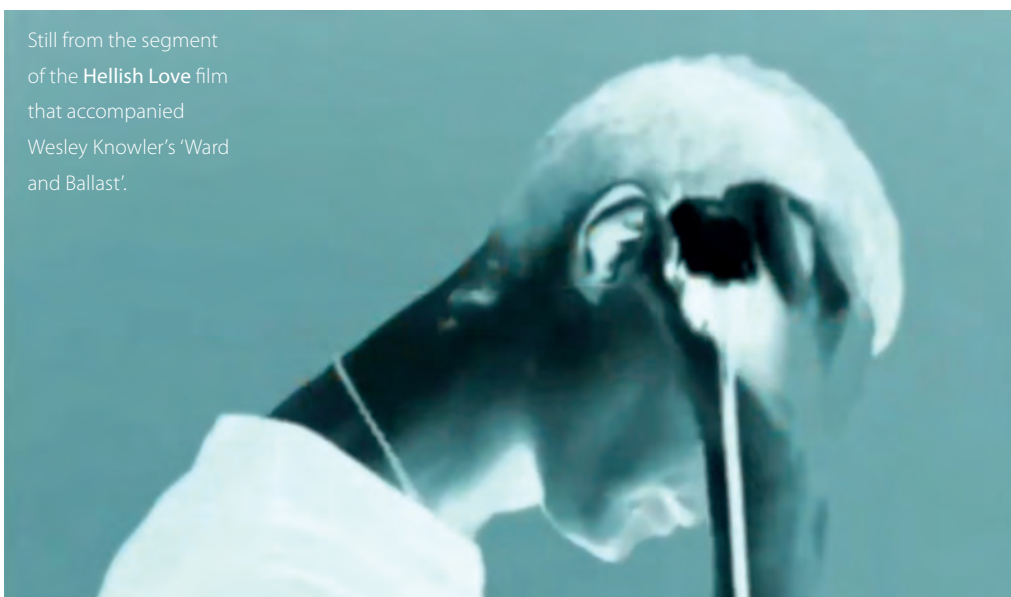
● Early in 2020, before the world seemed to turn on its head, Swedenborg House hosted a group of students from the Royal College of Art's Writing MA programme. One afternoon, seventeen RCA students arrived in the Hall to begin exploring the remarkable variety of objects held in the Swedenborg Collection. The aim of this collaboration was for each student to choose an object and write a short text about or inspired by it. The objects and their accompanying texts would then be displayed in an exhibition, to be held in March 2020. Alex Murray, the Society's archivist, provided his in-depth knowledge of the extensive collection of manuscripts, photographs and other strange and intriguing objects held deep within Swedenborg House.

The students, who were in close communication with one another throughout the process, clustered around certain objects and themes. Some wrote about the collection of spirit photographs, a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon consisting of cartes de visite that depicted sitters accompanied by floating, translucent spirits. Others were drawn to a piece of tree bark taken from the poplar tree in Swedenborg's garden. Several looked to items in the collection produced by the many people influenced by Swedenborg in the centuries following his death: Coleridge, J J G Wilkinson, D T Suzuki and more. Another group focused on Swedenborg's body itself, from a lock of his hair to the 'ringer' skull to his ear bones, kept in a tiny, velvet-lined case.

These clusters produced a general sense of the students approaching Swedenborg and the Swedenborg Collection at an angle. They found their way in to a complex life and body of work through marginalia, scraps and remnants, using the objects as a jumping-off point to explore invented realities, the limitations and elisions of the archive and the rich palimpsest of the past.

Of course, the exhibition could not proceed as originally planned in mid-March. It was held instead in the brief window of time in the autumn when such things were possible, with small numbers of attendees visiting the exhibition in

Still from the segment of the *Hellish Love* film that accompanied Wesley Knowler's 'Ward and Ballast'.



(Top) Two boxes of glass slides from the Swedenborg Society's Archive, used as the image for the *Hellish Love* exhibition poster. (Below) Two stills from the *Hellish Love* film made by the RCA students.

person, and a virtual event on Friday 23 October, with readings and films from the students. This hybrid event allowed for these unique objects to be viewed in person by those who were able to attend, as well as opening up to a wider, international audience. For those who were unable to join the event, one of the students' pieces, 'A Piece of Swedenborg's Poplar Tree Bark' by Gertrude Gibbons, is printed in this edition of the *Swedenborg Review*.

We are very grateful to the students, who dealt

gracefully with the complications that arose due to the pandemic, and who produced thoughtful pieces of work in response to the Swedenborg Collection. We also thank Sally O'Reilly and the RCA for their encouragement and organizing efforts, as well as Alex Murray, who aided immeasurably with research.

You can read all of the texts on the Swedenborg Society's website, at swedenborg.org.uk/museum-archive/the-swedenborg-collection/exhibition-guides. ■ **AVERY CURRAN**

Swedenborg Film Festival 2020

● The 2020 iteration of the Swedenborg Film Festival, taking place 10 years after the first ever festival, took on a very different form, being held solely online for the first time in its history, and also offering the viewing public a chance to vote for their favourite of the shortlisted entries. It proved to be a phenomenally successful format, with the Festival's growing international audience and contributors being able to participate to a far greater extent than in previous years. The 21 shortlisted films were posted up on the Swedenborg House Vimeo site for two weeks ahead of the Festival and extensive coverage on social media helped to see the selection accumulate in excess of 118,000 views from around the world. Winston Wheeler Dixon's film *The Apocalyptic Now*, in which a series of elemental forces and currents are seen in perpetual animation against otherwise largely serene and still images, received the most views.

Some traditional features of the Festival remained in place, albeit taking place from people's homes rather than the atmospheric Swedenborg Hall, as a result of Covid-19 restrictions. A specially sequenced screening of the shortlisted films, ably overseen by the Swedenborg Society's archivist-cum-projectionist, Alex Murray, took place on the evening of Saturday 5 December on the Swedenborg House YouTube channel, introduced by the Swedenborg Film Festival's co-curators, Gareth Evans (Whitechapel Gallery) and Nora Foster (Frieze), who announced the result of the public vote. Well over 500 votes had been submitted and the public's choice of winning film was *Salt*, a lockdown collaboration between two artists who had not previously met: musician and songwriter Sami Fitz and filmmaker Matt Hulse. *Salt* paired a haunting original composition by Fitz with Hulse's carefully tailored arrangement of archive footage.

The sequenced screening of the shortlist was followed by comments from the Festival's guest judges, the artists and filmmakers Melanie Manchot and John Smith, who noted how the themes of artificial intelligence and the post-human, and the use of documentary and found footage, recurred amongst many of this year's entries. The judges reserved special mentions for two of the shortlist's films that looked at these themes.

Roland Denning's *Everything is Under Control* was congratulated on being an 'action-packed collage of found footage' (John Smith) and 'a powerful and disturbing story that questions the very existence of the real world...the work produces a sense of sci-fi nostalgia confounding of times, eras, utopian dystopias. It seems knowledgeable but never illustrative of recent post-humanist writing and it also speaks to this current pandemic moment where many of us may experience various degrees of loss of control, a loss of our agency to make and enact decisions' (Melanie Manchot). ■ **JAMES WILSON**



Vitrine from the exhibition to accompany Open House 2020 displaying some of the leases of early tenants of Swedenborg House.

The Swedenborg Society's First Tenants at Swedenborg House

The Swedenborg Society has had many tenants over the years, including publishers, architects, solicitors and healthcare service providers. Currently parts of the building fall under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as it hosts the Haitian Embassy.

JAMES WILSON

When the Swedenborg Society purchased the freehold of the building at 20-21 Hart Street (now renamed Bloomsbury Way) at auction on 20 November 1924 it not only secured a home and a future for the institution, but also added another dimension to its operations. In addition to being a publisher, bookseller, library, reading room and organizer of talks and conferences, the Swedenborg Society became a landlord.

The first tenant at the newly refurbished Swedenborg House, formally opened in 1926, was a solicitor, taking the first floor office. This solicitor was Samuel Hopgood Hart (1865-1958), who alongside his legal work was a significant contributor to social reform movements such as vegetarianism and antivivisectionism, and who was heavily involved in the publication of spiritualist literature. Indeed, Hopgood Hart is perhaps best known today for being a friend of the spiritualist writer Edward Maitland (1824-97), editing many posthumous editions of the works of Maitland and his collaborator Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-88). Maitland and Kingsford certainly read Swedenborg; and the vegetarian and antivivisection movements both overlap with Swedenborgianism: the founding of the Vegetarian Society can trace its roots back to former Swedenborgian minister William Cowherd (1763-1816), whilst the Swedenborg translator and man of letters (and former librarian of the Swedenborg Society) James John Garth Wilkinson (1812-99) was a leading

advocate in the antivivisection cause. It certainly seems that Hopgood Hart found an amenable environment when he took a seven-year lease on his office at Swedenborg House.

Taking up the other suites of offices soon after were, on the second floor, on a twenty-one-year lease, Lewis Solomon & Son, an architectural practice. Digby Lewis Solomon (1884-1962) was the architect commissioned by the Society to refurbish and extend 20-21 Hart Street, designing the custom-built lecture hall. He was also the architect of the former Kensington Society of the New Church, at Pembridge Villas, which was also built in 1925-6, and features the same mosaic tiled flooring to that found in the vestibule at Swedenborg House. On the third floor, taking a seven-year lease, was the firm of quantity surveyors H Gritten & Son. The eponymous Henry Frederick Gritten was once described in *The Builder* magazine as being 'regarded by many as the father, almost, of quantity surveying' and worked on the construction of the buildings for the prestigious 1862 International Exhibition held in Kensington on the land now occupied by the Natural History Museum and the Science Museum. The last of the initial set of tenants to take residence at Swedenborg House, moving into the ground floor offices, was the long-standing scientific publishers, Adlard & Son, Ltd, who had been run by the same family since their founding by William Adlard in 1766, when they set up premises at Salisbury Court, off Fleet Street, where, coincidentally, Emanuel Swedenborg once resided in 1744. ■



Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead

By **OLGA TOKARCZUK**

FITZCARRALDO EDITIONS, 2019
272 PP; £8.99
ISBN: 978-1-913097-25-7

Olga Tokarczuk, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2018, explores astrology, small-town violence, Blake, Swedenborg and animal rights in her landmark work *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. In this novel, Janina Duszejko, is devoted to animals and has set herself the task of translating the poetry of William Blake into Polish. A series of shocking murders interrupt her routine, and before long the violence threatens to engulf her life. Janina's narration is strange, reminiscent of eighteenth-century writing, and provides a passionate yet humorous view of the world. ■

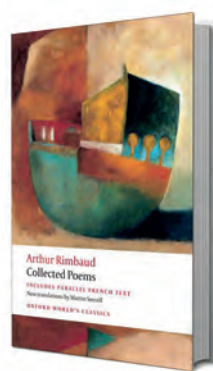


Images of the Afterlife in Cinema

By **JAMES WILSON**

DUCHY OF LAMBETH, 2016
130 PP; £6.95
ISBN: 978-1-535144-15-5

For readers who have enjoyed the film features by James Wilson in this and previous issues of the *Review*, these essays and more are collected in *Images of the Afterlife in Cinema* presenting a lyrical and often moving examination of the Swedenborgian parallels that can be found in seven films' depictions of life after death. This engaging and often unexpected collection provides an ideal backdrop for expert discussions of how Swedenborg's ideas about vastation, memory and neurology have been interpreted—consciously or unconsciously—by filmmakers. ■

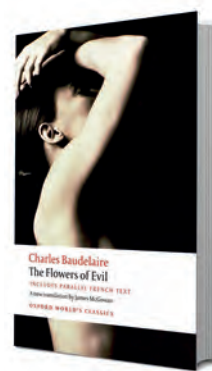


Collected Poems

BY **ARTHUR RIMBAUD**

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2010
384 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-0-199538-95-9

Oxford World's Classics's *Collected Poems* of Rimbaud is an excellent introduction to the short life and remarkable work of the French poet often described as the 'enfant terrible' of the nineteenth-century literary scene. Inspired by Balzac and Baudelaire, Rimbaud's poetry is both inventive and ambitious, and in his poem 'Voyelles', or 'Vowels', Rimbaud demonstrates a clear interest in Swedenborg's system of correspondences. Edited by Martin Sorrell, this edition contains all of the poems Rimbaud wrote excepting some Latin verses and fragments. ■



The Flowers of Evil

By **CHARLES BAUDELAIRE**

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2008
406 PP; £8.99
ISBN: 978-0-19-953558-3

In his classic 1857 volume of poetry *The Flowers of Evil*, Charles Baudelaire shocked the Second Empire, presented a new aesthetic metaphysics and created, according to Victor Hugo, 'un nouveau frisson'. *The Flowers of Evil* is a wide-ranging masterpiece that was deeply controversial on publication. Swedenborg's influence is visible throughout the volume, particularly via his theory of correspondences. In fact, *The Flowers of Evil* includes a sonnet titled 'Correspondances', in which 'Man passes [...] through forests of symbols / Which look at him with understanding eyes'. ■



Oneiron: A Fantasy About the Seconds After Death

By **LAURA LINDSTEDT**

ONEWORLD PUBLICATIONS, 2019
368 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-1-78607-511-6

Oneiron by Laura Lindstedt is a new addition to the corpus of novels that consider Swedenborg's ideas with clarity and curiosity. In *Oneiron*, seven women meet seconds after they die in a mysterious white space. They have no idea who they are, what happened to them, or where they are. They are united in their new circumstances, though their circumstances in life were all wildly different. The women seek to understand their environment, working through Swedenborg's theories of heaven, Jewish philosophy, and their memories of their time on earth. ■

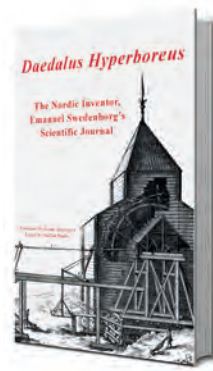


Songs of Innocence and Experience

By **WILLIAM BLAKE**

TATE PUBLISHING
AND THE BLAKE TRUST, 2006
64 PP; £9.99
ISBN: 978-1-85437-729-6

William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are here collected in a beautiful, pocket-sized volume with full-colour illustrations. Reminiscent of the illuminated, hand-printed books that comprised the original edition, this version is both elegant and unpretentious. Swedenborg's influence is discernible throughout; around the same time as the publication of *Songs of Innocence*, Blake briefly joined the New Jerusalem Church and was fervently interested in Swedenborg's ideas. ■

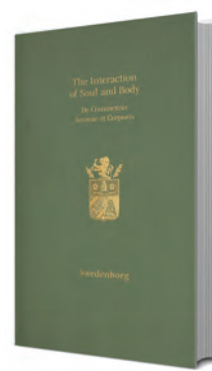


Daedalus Hyperboreus

By **EMANUEL SWEDENBORG**

SWEDENBORG SCIENTIFIC
ASSOCIATION, 2020
222 PP; £49.95
ISBN: 978-0-915221-55-4

Between 1716 and 1718, Swedenborg edited a six-issue run of *Daedalus Hyperboreus*, Sweden's first scientific journal, set up primarily as a means to publish some of the inventions and papers of Swedenborg's mentor, Christopher Polhem, the so-called 'Archimedes of the North'. The journal also includes a good many articles authored by Swedenborg himself, including his only published description of his famous flying machine. Lavishly printed with foldout illustrations and facsimile pages from the original issues, this book is the first ever complete English translation. ■



The Interaction of Soul and Body

By **EMANUEL SWEDENBORG**

SWEDENBORG SOCIETY, 2012
69 PP; £12.95
ISBN: 978-0-85448-172-9

Swedenborg was interested in the relation between soul and body throughout his life—writing on the subject from the angles of metaphysics, psychology, anatomy and theology—presenting his final view in this late and accessible book. A short work of just twenty numbered sections, *The Interaction* explores the ideas of spiritual influx and correspondences, and outlines where Swedenborg's position differs from that of his contemporaries. This elegant dual-language edition features a new English translation by John Elliott alongside a Latin text with full critical apparatus. ■



SWEDENBORG REVIEW

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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 and A S Byatt, 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 adjacent.

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