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The Battle Against Materialism:
Spiritualism, Civic Engagement, and Religious Polemics in Early Twentieth-Century Finland

Juuso Järvenpää

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Abstract

This article studies the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland in the early twentieth century. The main visionary of the short-lived project was former labour activist Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi. He founded the first Finnish Spiritualist journal *Spiritisti* in 1909 and headed the Spiritist Society in Finland, which soon followed. The article examines Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activities as a form of religious civic engagement at the intersection of Finnish civil society and the religious field. It is argued that the main motivation behind these activities was the felt need to battle the spread of materialism, which Spiritualists – along with members of various other social and religious movements and institutions – considered a serious moral and societal threat. Jalo-Kivi's attempt to organize a specifically Spiritualist battlefront against materialism exemplifies how this widely shared opposition to materialism could encourage both religious cooperation and polemics. Methodologically, the article draws from biographical microhistory.

Keywords: Spiritualism; anti-materialism; Spiritist Society in Finland; religious civic engagement; religious polemics; Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi

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Introduction

In January 1909, a small journal was founded in Helsinki, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland.[1] The newcomer was titled *Spiritisti: Spiritualistinen aikakauskirja spiritismiä ja sitä lähellä olevien psykillisten kysymysten käsittelyä varten* (*The Spiritist: Spiritualist Journal for Spiritism and Related Psychic Questions*). In the February issue, readers were informed about recent discussions concerning the upcoming foundation of a Spiritualist society in Helsinki, one that would welcome members from all parts of the country. The plan materialized later in the spring as the Spiritist Society in Finland (fin. Suomen Spiritistinen Seura). It was founded with two local divisions — the first in Helsinki and the second in Tampere, the major inland industrial city in Finland. These undertakings were led by former labour activist Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi (1878–1937, until 1906 Jaakko Hjalmar Stén), who was the editor of *Spiritisti* and the chair of the Spiritist Society.[2]

These undertakings were the first of their kind in Finland. Spiritualism/Spiritism[3] had already attracted some positive attention in the Grand Duchy in the late nineteenth century as part of the growing interest in esoteric movements and ideas. However, for the most part Spiritualism had been confined to private and informal circles, which had done little to propagate the movement in

1. Finland, as a nation-state, formed gradually as an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire, to which this formerly eastern part of Sweden was annexed in 1809. Finland was declared independent in 1917.

2. This article is mostly based on my dissertation *Kansan henkinen kehitys: Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kiven eletty kansalaisuus 1900-luvun alussa* (2024, *The Inner Development of the People: Lived Citizenship of Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi in Early Twentieth Century*).

3. In Finland, Spiritualism was initially known as "Spiritism." This was due to the well-known French Spiritualist/Spiritist Allan Kardec (Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, 1805–1869), who preferred the latter term to separate the movement based on the practice of spirit communication from the broader philosophical meanings of "Spiritualism" (Kardec, *Henkien kirja*, 31–32). In Finland, "Spiritism" stayed the main term for the movement well into the twentieth century, but eventually it was replaced by "Spiritualism" to demarcate the religious movement from popular dabbling with the Ouija board and the like (Krohn, *Mitä on spiritualismi*, 3). In this article I follow the customary practice in the historical study of the movement and refer to it as "Spiritualism," even though the research subjects themselves used the term "Spiritism."

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public.[4] Unlike in the neighbouring countries of Sweden and Denmark, which had already witnessed public and organized Spiritualist activity during the latter part of the nineteenth century,[5] there were no Spiritualist journals or societies in Finland prior to *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society. Thus, the year 1909 marked the beginning of a new and important phase in the history of Finnish Spiritualism: the first attempt to form an organized Spiritualist movement. However, the attempt was short-lived. In 1913, *Spiritisti* was discontinued due to financial troubles, and the Spiritist Society faded into the shadows at the same time.[6] The second, more viable organization of Finnish Spiritualism was founded in 1946 as the Spiritualist Society in Finland (fin. Suomen Spiritualistinen Seura) and still exists today.[7]

Until the twenty-first century, Spiritualism was a virtually unresearched subject in Finnish historiography.[8] Recently, it has drawn an increasing amount of scholarly attention, mainly due to the growing field of (Western) esotericism.[9] However, the focus has mostly been on either the private circles of the late nineteenth century or the second organization of Spiritualism after the World War II, while *Spiritisti*

4. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 61–63; Kaartinen, *Spiritistinen istunto*; Holm, *Spiritualismin muotoutuminen Suomessa*, 75–87; Sohlberg, "Spiritualism in Finland," 500; Harmainen, "'Kaikki voin kestää, voin elää, jos tiedän että hänet kerran vielä tapaan'"; Boguslawski, "Teosofinen ja antroposofinen liike Viipurissa," 151–54.

5. Carleson & Levander, "Spiritualism in Sweden"; Faxneld, *Det Ockulta Sekelskiftet*, passim; Kragh, "History of Spiritualism in Denmark"; Kragh, "Spiritualism in Denmark."

6. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys,* 254–347.

7. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 64–68; Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualisti Helmi Krohn ja automaattikirjoittamisen mysteeri"; Sohlberg, "Spiritualism in Finland," 501–2.

8. However, see Juva, *Valtiokirkosta kansankirkoksi*, 291–93.

9. See the literature in footnotes 4 and 7. "Western esotericism" refers to various religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas, practices, and movements in Western culture, from — for example — Hermeticism in antiquity to modern occultism, Spiritualism, and New Age spirituality. However, it is a tricky and contested concept in scholarly use. It has been approached variously as a "form of thought" (Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 10–15), a discursive element in Western religious history dealing with the possibility of "higher knowledge" (Stuckrad, *A Brief History of Western Esotericism*, 9–11), or a historiographical category for "rejected knowledge" (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*). It has also been suggested that "esotericism" should be distanced from its usual prefix "Western" and brought into the wider context of global religious history (see, for example, the discussion in Asprem & Strube, *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*).

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and the Spiritist Society have gained little attention. Moreover, the subject has been studied mainly from the point of view of cultural history, while the political and societal aspects of Spiritualism have been left in the margins.

In this article, I seek to tackle both shortcomings by interpreting the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism as a form of *religious civic engagement*. The article is guided by two interlinked questions: *how* and *why* did Finnish Spiritualists seek to organize their activities in the early twentieth century? My aim is to understand both the form of their action and the motives of this action in the wider context of modernizing Finnish society. I approach these questions through a biographical lens by focusing on Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi's development as an active citizen and a Spiritualist protagonist.

On a broader level, my article takes part in discussions about the societal and political aspects of esotericism. A growing body of research has shown that modern esoteric movements such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Anthroposophy have had a strong impact on the formation of modern culture and society, both internationally and in Finland.[10] It has also been observed that they often have strong connections to various social and political movements. For example, historian Ann Braude has shown the close relationship between early American Spiritualism and the suffragette, temperance, and abolitionist movements. Historians Matthew Beaumont and Julian Strube, for their part, have pointed out the connections between nineteenth-century occultism and socialism. In Finland, historian Mikko Kemppainen has studied the intersection of Theosophical ideas and the Finnish Social Democratic Party in the early twentieth century.[11]

I follow these initiatives in the study of esotericism by situating the first organization of Spiritualism in Finland amid the societal, political and moral

10. In Finland, see especially Leskelä-Kärki & Harmainen, *Uuden etsijät*; Mahlamäki & Kokkinen, *Moderni esoteerisuus ja okkultismi Suomessa.*

11. Braude, *Radical Spirits*; Beaumont, "Socialism and Occultism at the Fin de Siècle"; Strube, "Socialist Religion and the Emergence of Occultism"; Strube, "Socialism and Esotericism in July Monarchy France"; Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuolen dynamiikkaa*; Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland." See also Harmainen, "Esoteerisuus ja politiikka."

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concerns and practices of early twentieth-century Finnish *civil society*. By this term, I refer to a sphere of active citizenship and practices of cooperation that are situated in a social space between the state, economy, and intimate personal life.[12] I suggest that it is useful to view modern esoteric movements as constitutive parts of this emerging sphere of civic engagement.

Methodologically, my article draws from biographical microhistory, which has emerged at the intersection of the microhistorical tradition and the new historical biography.[13] Beginning with Carlo Ginzburg and other pioneers in the 1970s, microhistorians have emphasized the fruitfulness of studying "small" and seemingly insignificant or strange phenomena in order to open new and perhaps unexpected pathways for historical research.[14] The empirically and contextually rigid new historical biography, which emerged by the turn of the millennia, has brought legitimation to the study of marginalized or less-known individuals and groups as well.[15] My focus on Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi, seemingly quite a strange man as well as a practical stranger in Finnish historiography,[16] follows these methodological impulses. Jalo-Kivi's fruitfulness as a subject for historiography lies in many ways in his "strangeness," which enables a new perspective not just on Finnish Spiritualism but also on the wider religious and societal circumstances of early twentieth-century Finland.

While I examine Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activities as a form of religious civic engagement, I pay close attention to the changing characteristics of the Finnish *religious field*. This Bourdieuan concept is used here to capture the entirety of agents,

12. For a brief overview of the various uses of the concept see Dekker, "Citizenship and Civil Society."

13. Of this intersection see Magnússon, "The Life Is Never Over"; Renders & Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*; Annola, *Säädyttömät*, 302–4.

14. See, for example, Magnússon, "The Life Is Never Over."

15. See, for example, Renders, Haan & Harmsma, *The Biographical Turn*; Renders & Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*; Caine, *Biography and History*.

16. Before I embarked on my long adventure with Jalo-Kivi, he was mentioned in only a handful of scholarly texts, none of which made any attempt to unveil him as a historical subject with multiple social roles and projects.

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discourses, practices, material settings, and power relations that are constitutive of the ways in which people practice and experience religion in their everyday lives.[17] The established Lutheran Church has traditionally been the towering figure in the Finnish religious field. However, during modernization, the field became increasingly pluralized and intertwined with the practices, milieus, and concerns of emerging civil society. These processes were accompanied with increasing *religious polemics* as different religious sects and movements rivalled with each other and the Church in their pursuit to define and secure their position in the religious field.[18] Among the important factors in these polemical dynamics were transnational liberal and social theologies, which influenced the religious life of the growing middle and working classes from the late nineteenth century onwards. Spiritualism and other esoteric movements were intricately connected to these currents of religious thought, which nurtured critical attitudes towards the Church, often seen as a conservative and oppressive power.[19]

The First Organization of Finnish Spiritualism

The modern Spiritualist movement was born in the mid-nineteenth-century United States. The core of Spiritualist beliefs and practices was rooted in the presumed possibility of communicating with the spirits of the dead. The content of the communications varied from reassuring messages from departed loved ones to broad religious, philosophical, and political teachings and revelations. Spiritualists believed in the constant moral evolution of individual spirits and the whole of humanity, and thus they were usually progressive in their religious

17. For a more in-depth application of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work in the study of lived religion, see the work of Helena Kupari, for example "Lived Religion and the Religious Field."

18. Of religious polemics, see, for example, Hettema & Kooi, *Religious Polemics in Context*. In the context of esotericism, see Hammer & Stuckrad, *Polemical Encounters*.

19. See, for example, Harmainen, "The One and Only True and Salvational Faith." However, the relationship between the esoteric movements and the Lutheran Church was not straightforwardly oppositionary. There were a variety of nuances, which require more research. Cf. Harmainen, Kemppainen & Järvenpää, "Moderni länsimainen esoteria 1900-luvun taitteen Tampereella."

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and political outlook. Furthermore, many of them took part in progressive social causes such as abolitionism and feminism. Spiritualism quickly evolved into a popular transnational movement, best known for various paranormal phenomena and sensational public séances of celebrity mediums. However, at least for those Spiritualists who took its philosophical side to heart, the progressive and critical attitude towards religious and social authorities remained an important aspect of the movement.[20]

Novel Spiritualist phenomena were discussed in the Finnish press briefly in the 1850s, but the subject gained increasing attention only towards the end of the century.[21] Many people were drawn to Spiritualism out of curiosity, but there were also more serious motives: historian Antti Harmainen has demonstrated how Spiritualist beliefs and practices offered a rationally and emotionally satisfying way of coping with grief and loss among members of the emerging Finnish middle class.[22] Séances were held in small private circles during this period — for example at the house of writer and social activist Minna Canth (1844–1897) in Kuopio in the early 1890s.[23] There were no publicly working mediums in Finland, and foreign mediums rarely visited the Grand Duchy. An exceptionally famous occasion was the internationally discussed case of Elizabeth d'Espérance (1855–1918), a well-known medium specializing in the materialisation of spirits, who visited Helsinki in 1893 and held séances for a chosen few members of the local high society.[24]

These examples suffice to demonstrate that Spiritualism was already a well-

20. Of Spiritualism in general, see, for example, Guttierez, *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channelling*; Kontou & Willburn, *The Ashgate Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*. The progressive outlook of early American Spiritualism is demonstrated by Ann Braude in her *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. It should be noted, however, that the political outlook of Spiritualism varied according to the current social circumstances. For example, Robert S. Cox has also brought into discussion the conservative tones of Spiritualism in his *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*.

21. Boguslawski, "Teosofinen ja antroposofinen liike Viipurissa," 151–54.

22. Harmainen, "Kaikki voin kestää, voin elää, jos tiedän että hänet kerran vielä tapaan."

23. Kaartinen & Leskelä-Kärki, "Spiritualismi," 61–62.

24. Kaartinen, *Spiritistinen istunto*.

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known subject in Finland in the late nineteenth century, at least among the more educated people. However, it seems that few, if any, Finns were seriously interested in the Spiritualist movement as such at the time: there were no attempts to organize Spiritualist activities formally, nor were there specifically Spiritualist publications. Rather, I would argue, Spiritualist phenomena and practices were approached as elements in the wider *fin-de-siècle* "occulture," which was fascinated with everything occult, mystical, and exotic — that is, "esoteric."[25]

Moreover, Spiritualism was not the strongest esoteric current that arrived in Finland at this time. Far more noteworthy was the spread of the Theosophical movement, which had arrived in Finland quickly after the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Finnish Theosophists took their first steps towards formal organization in the 1890s, and the Theosophical Society in Finland was founded in 1907.[26] At the turn of the century, Finnish Spiritualism was overshadowed by Theosophy. Spiritualist beliefs and practices were usually approached and evaluated from a Theosophical — and thus often critical — point of view (this will become important later in the article when I inspect the polemical relationship of the movements).

The Finnish Theosophical movement also began to gain followers among the labour movement in the very first years of the new century. This is a crucial context for my article, since it is among these circles of working-class Theosophists that the first scattered signs of interest in Spiritualism in the lower social classes are to be found.[27] Moreover, the first explicit call to advance a Finnish Spiritualist movement as such was heard from within these circles. The call was made by Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi in his 1906 article "Spiritism," which appeared in *Elämä* (*The Life)*, a recently-founded organ for the Theosophical socialists. The article introduced Spiritualism

25. "Occulture" as a scholarly concept derives from Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West I–II*. Art historian Nina Kokkinen has developed it further in the context of the *fin-de-siècle* Finland: see, for example, Kokkinen, "Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art."

26. Granholm, "Theosophy in Finland"; Harmainen, "Teosofia"; Ahlbäck, *Uppkomsten av Theosofiska Samfundet i Finland*.

27. Järvenpää, "Uskonnollinen liberalismi ja työväenliike 1900-luvun ensivuosien Helsingissä."

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as a significant, but in Finland still almost unknown, movement (which as we have seen, was a bit of an exaggeration), and announced that there would soon appear a specifically Spiritualist journal in Helsinki.[28] The idea was most likely inspired by the founding of the first Finnish Theosophical journal *Omatunto* (*The Conscience*, from 1907 onwards *Tietäjä* [*The Sage*]) the previous year. However, due to unknown reasons, the plan was not executed until three years later.

The founding of *Spiritisti* and the formation of the Spiritist Society in Helsinki and Tampere in the spring of 1909 marked the beginning of the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland. At this time, Jalo-Kivi also published a small book titled *Ääniä haudan takaa eli näkymätön mailma* (*Voices from Beyond the Grave, or the Invisible World*), which was the first book-length exposition of Spiritualism in Finnish. In his introduction, Jalo-Kivi touched upon the poor state of Spiritualism in Finland. According to him, there had been some prior interest in Spiritualism — the case of d'Esperance was especially mentioned — but the scattered Spiritualist circles had worked in isolation from each other and "without consciousness." He wished the situation would improve now that *Spiritisti* had been founded to unite the Finnish Spiritualists.[29] It is clear that Jalo-Kivi envisioned a self-conscious and organized Spiritualist movement, with *Spiritisti* as its organ and the Spiritist Society as its body.

As the editor of *Spiritisti* and the chair of the Spiritist Society, Jalo-Kivi was the main visionary and protagonist of the organized Spiritualist enterprise. His leading position is illustrated by the fact that when he moved from Helsinki to Tampere at the turn of the year 1910, *Spiritisti* and the operational nucleus of the Spiritist Society moved with him. Throughout the remaining years of these undertakings, the living centre of the Finnish Spiritualist network dwelled in Tampere. However, the network remained small in scale. The Spiritist Society never gained any other local divisions beyond Tampere and Helsinki, and even the latter

28. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906. Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi signed his Spiritualist and Theosophical writings with a sort of pseudonym "Jalo Kivi."
29. Jalo Kivi, *Ääniä haudan takaa*, 14–15.

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seems to have withered away soon after Jalo-Kivi moved to Tampere. The narrow scope of the organized Spiritualist movement is also clear from the fact that *Spiritisti* gained only between two and three hundred subscribers at best and battled with constant financial troubles, which eventually brought an end to it in 1913. The Spiritist Society seems to have been disbanded at the same time.[30]

Religion and Civil Society

As such, the first attempt to organize Finnish Spiritualism was a marginal phenomenon. However, it stemmed from and was — in its small part — constitutive of the emerging civil society and the modernizing religious field in Finland. To understand the practical and motivational characteristics of the undertaking, it is therefore helpful to briefly outline the historical formation of these larger societal structures.

The emergence of civil society in Finland was strongly connected to the process of nation-state building.[31] In the course of the nineteenth century, and especially from the 1860s onwards, the Swedish-speaking upper class of the Grand Duchy, inspired by nationalism and liberalism, sought to "elevate" the Finnish-speaking masses into the state of active citizenship.[32] The school system was developed, increasing numbers of newspapers, journals, and literature were put into circulation, and mass social movements such as temperance and youth association movements encouraged beneficial civic engagement and

30. For more detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 257–347. It has been tricky to study the Spiritist Society and *Spiritisti* as they left no archival documents. My main source has been *Spiritisti* itself, which is disappointingly silent about the inner workings of the Spiritist Society. Other contemporary journals and newspapers have provided scattered information. It should also be noted that the organized Spiritualist movement led by Jalo-Kivi is not the whole picture of Finnish Spiritualism at the time, since there were people — how many is an open question — who were interested in Spiritualism but chose not to join the Spiritist Society.

31. Alapuro et al., *Kansa liikkeessä*. Of the relationship between citizenship and nation-state building in general, see Kettunen, "Modern Citizenship and Nation-State Building."

32. Due to its long history under the rule of Sweden, Finland is a bilingual nation with a large Finnish-speaking majority and a small Swedish-speaking minority. Traditionally Swedish was the language of education and high society and Finnish the language of "the people," but the spread of nationalism elevated Finnish to the position of official and foremost language in the modernizing nation.

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self-cultivation.[33] Towards the end of the century, the sphere of civil society also began to spark more transgressive social and political projects of civic engagement. The major example is the labour movement. The first workers' associations in Finland were founded in the 1880s in the spirit of moderate social reformism to prevent the spread of Marxist socialism, but they ended up offering the basis for more radical socialist organization. The Labour Party was founded in 1899 and renamed the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1903.[34]

The emergence of civil society was saturated with religious concerns and polemics from the start. Historian Irma Sulkunen has suggested that lay piety movements, which spread in Finland from the late eighteenth century onwards, helped to introduce the idea of active and independent citizenship to the masses by challenging the authority of Church officials and emphasizing individuals' own religious experience.[35] Religious sentiments were important in the formation of early social movements, such as the temperance movement, which sought to elevate the social and moral standing of the people.[36] This mixture of social and religious concerns was strengthened by the influx of new religious groups and movements in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, new evangelical movements such as the Free Church and the Salvation Army spurred especially upper-class women in projects of religious moral reformism.[37] On the other hand, movements such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Tolstoyism offered religious ingredients for a more progressive — and sometimes transgressive — social, political, and moral imagination.[38]

33. Alapuro et al., *Kansa liikkeessä*; Haapala et al., "Poliittiset voimat"; Karonen et al., "Vuorovaikutus ja poliittinen kulttuuri"; Stenius, *Frivilligt jämligt samfällt*.

34. A classical study of this development is Soikkanen, *Sosialismin tulo Suomeen*.

35. Sulkunen, "Paimentytön liikutus."

36. Sulkunen, *Raittius kansalaisuskontona*. Similarly, Michael Young's *Bearing Witness Against Sin* has demonstrated the significance of evangelical Christianity to early social movements in the United States.

37. Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*.

38. Tolstoyism was a social and religious movement based on the philosophical and religious writings of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910). Tolstoyism, which has been characterized as "Christian anarchism," was highly anticlerical and critical towards

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Religious practice and social engagement were also mixed on the level of civic organization. As religious movements and groups — whether affiliated with the Church or not — sought to reach and engage the public, they adopted the same principles of operation as social movements, organizing as associations and societies and founding publications.[39] They also competed for the limited free time of urban workers by organizing public lectures and other evening and weekend activities.[40] The same people often attended a variety of groups and events, which facilitated the intermingling of religious, social, and political dispositions.[41] With these developments, religion was increasingly lived in the midst of and according to the social principles of civil society.

The most important singular event in the early history of the Finnish civil society is the General Strike in autumn 1905. The strike was part of the First Russian Revolution that had begun earlier the same year. It ended the so-called "first period of oppression" (1899–1905), during which the Russian government had tightened its control of the Grand Duchy, and resulted in the founding of the Parliament of Finland. The strike was followed by a brief period of unforeseen civic activity. For example, the labour movement and the SDP grew rapidly, and other political parties organized quickly in anticipation of the first parliamentary elections in 1907. Although political activity cooled down during the "second period of oppression," which began hampering the work of

industrialized society. Tolstoyism was very influential in Finland at the turn of the twentieth century: Turtiainen & Wahlroos, *Maaemon lapset*.

39. See, for example, Heikkilä, *Kirkollisen yhdistysaktiivisuuden leviäminen Suomessa*. For the most religious movements and groups, association/society was also the only possible form of organization. At the turn of the twentieth century the Finnish religious field was restricted by The Dissenters Act of 1887, which legalized dissenting Protestant congregations. However, the Act was so strict that only Methodists and Baptists left the Lutheran Church. Everyone else in Finland — excluding small minorities of Orthodox and Catholic Christians, Jews, and Muslim Tatars — remained officially members of the Church, since it was not possible to leave the Church without simultaneously joining some other congregation until the Freedom of Religion Act of 1923.

40. Markkola, "Working-Class Women Living Religion in Finland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century."

41. For this point in the context of esoteric movements see Harmainen, Kemppainen & Järvenpää, "Moderni länsimainen esoteria 1900-luvun taitteen Tampereella."

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the Parliament in 1908, civil society had gained a more lasting momentum.[42] These years were also a time of lively religious polemics. The established Church was challenged with vocal criticism, freedom of (and for some from) religion was demanded, and all sorts of religious questions were widely debated in the public.[43] Also, as I already mentioned, Finnish Theosophists organized their movement properly during these years.

The first organization of Spiritualism in Finland took place in this milieu of mixed sociopolitical and religious concerns, activities, and polemics. The networks of *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society make clear that many of those who joined the new Spiritualist undertaking were — or at least had been — active in a variety of social and political movements and projects.[44] Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi himself is a case in point, as he had been active in the labour movement throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. Although his career as a labour activist was not a success story — as we will see — and he was not politically active during the years of the Spiritualist organization, the "civic skills" he needed as the editor of *Spiritisti* and chair of the Spiritist Society, and the motivational dispositions that pushed him in these Spiritualist activities, had all been constructed during his earlier civic engagement in the labour movement. In the following two sections, I seek to demonstrate that at the heart of Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualism lay an intensive experience of the need to resist the — as he saw it — morally detrimental influence of materialism, and that this experience was also central for his sociopolitical views.

Materialism as a Societal Menace

In her study on German occultism at the turn of the twentieth century, historian

42. Anttila et al., *Kuriton kansa*; Haapala et al., *Kansa kaikkivaltias*; Kujala, *Vastakkainasettelun yhteiskunnan synty*; Tikka, *Kun kansa leikki kuningasta*.

43. See, for example, Murtorinne, *Taistelu uskonnonvapaudesta suurlakon jälkeisinä vuosina*.

44. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 261–84.

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Corinna Treitel has pointed out that "[o]ccultists saw themselves as part of a counterculture, locked in battle against a dominant materialist tendency of the age, and this self-understanding gave their movement its dynamism and appeal."[45] This is true also for the first organization of Spiritualism in Finland. Jalo-Kivi made it repeatedly clear that *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society were founded to confront materialism, which was rampant in Finland and especially – an important specification, as we will see – among the lower socioeconomic levels of the Finnish society. It was this *experience of an ongoing battle against materialism* that gave Jalo-Kivi and other organized Finnish Spiritualists a sense of purpose and identity.[46]

This experience was widely shared at the turn of the century, both in Finland and abroad. It was often accompanied by pleas for spiritual cooperation against the common enemy. An illustrating example is a small news piece published in 1910 in *Helsingin Sanomat,* one of the major newspapers in Finland, and republished in *Spiritisti*. The piece, suitably titled "The Battle Against Materialism," reported a recent occurrence in Paris. A variety of religious groups had gathered to form an alliance to combat materialism in all areas of culture and society. The miscellaneous party included – or so it was told – well-known French adherents of Spiritualism and Theosophy, accompanied by esoteric Christians, Swedenborgians, "all the Christian sects," Muslims, Jews, and Hindus. It was further remarked that Parisian newspapers regarded the enterprise as "a significant societal phenomenon."[47]

But what was "materialism" and what made it so opposable? Jalo-Kivi gave his analysis of the matter in *Spiritisti*. According to him, there were two main forms of materialism. The first was "scientific materialism," which claimed that "everything is matter, explainable through matter, and the human being

45. Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 16.

46. See, for example, Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906; J. K., "Valoa levittämään!" *Spiritisti* 6/1909; J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912. See also "Uusi spiritualistinen aikakauslehti," *Tietäjä* 1/1909.

47. *Helsingin Sanomat* 6.4.1910, "Taistelu materialismia vastaan"; *Spiritisti* 16/1910, "Taistelu materialismia vastaan."

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is merely a highly developed animal in a 'technical' sense, a 'social animal'."[48] Here, Jalo-Kivi was attacking a rationalist and secularist worldview that naturalist/materialist/positivist scientists and popularisers of science had been propagating from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Historian Egil Asprem has argued that although this intellectual movement formed a minority in the scientific community, it created a popular conception of mainstream (natural) science as an anti-religious enterprise. This conception of "scientific materialism" was further nourished by Spiritualists, occultists, and psychical researchers/parapsychologists in their polemical pursuit to push the boundaries of science to include the study of the paranormal and spiritual.[49]

However, for Jalo-Kivi, scientific materialism was not the primary threat posed by the "dominant materialist tendency of the age." He was convinced that materialist science had been disproven by the study of Spiritualist and paranormal phenomena, and that the baseless scientific doctrines would fade away in time. For him, it was the second form of materialism that was of more concern:

> In addition to scientific materialism, which, however, now seems to be retreating, there exists an even coarcer form of materialism, one that lies unconsciously within people. For many here, all their actions are guided solely by selfish desires, money is their God, they believe in nothing but themselves, whom they also love above all else; they expect nothing beyond the grave, because for them, the sensual pleasures of this material life are everything. This kind of materialism is the most dangerous to faith, and it spreads quite easily, since it requires no scientific foundation, but instead finds support in human passions and in both of humanity's 'original sins', pride and selfishness.[50]

48. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909: "kaikki on ainetta, aineen kautta selitettävissä, ja ihminen ainoastaan 'teknillisessä' suhteessa korkealle kehittynyt eläin, 'seurusteleva eläin'."

49. Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment*, 68–73, 86–89.

50. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909: "Paitsi tieteellistä materialismia, joka nyttemmin kuitenkin näyttää olevan peräytymässä, löytyy vielä karkeampaakin materialismia, sellaista, joka piilee ihmisissä tiedottomasti. Täällä on useammalle kaikessa toiminnassaan määrääjänä ainoastaan itsekkäät pyyteet, sillen on raha Jumalana, hän ei usko mihinkään muuhun kuin itseensä, jota myöskin rakastaa ylinnä kaiken; hän ei odota haudan tuolla puolen mitään, koska hänelle ovat tämän aineellisen elämän aistilliset ilot kaikki

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As the various participants at the Paris gathering show, these concerns were not restricted only to the "esoteric" circles of Spiritualists and occultists. The egoistic materialism Jalo-Kivi described was widely seen as a consequence of the individualistic and competitive lifestyle of urban, commercialized societies. In Finland, the clergy had lamented "the materialist spirit of the era" from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and by the turn of the century the purportedly demoralizing tendencies of modern life were criticised by a multitude of evangelical societies.[51] As already noted, these religious and moral concerns were an important factor in early social movements.

However, the perceived threat of materialism resulted in a variety of responses. In the labour movement, the situation was especially complicated due to the increasing impact of Marxism, which suggested that perhaps materialism — at least in some sense of the term — was not that bad after all. The relationship of materialism and socialism was debated in the Finnish labour movement, especially in the early years of the twentieth century, and it was in this context that Jalo-Kivi first began to formulate his own ideas of anti-materialism in public.

Battling Materialism in the Labour Movement

The anti-religious sentiments of the early Social Democratic Party were polemically exaggerated by those who disliked the spread of socialism in Finland. This view has been reiterated in historiography, which has emphasized the rationalist and secularist worldview of the early party leaders.[52] The party certainly included self-proclaimed Marxist materialists, who regarded religion as "the opium of the people." However, not all Finnish socialists were ready to

kaikessa. Tällainen materialismi on kaikkien vaarallisinta uskolle ja leviää varsin helposti kun ei siihen tarvita mitään tieteellistä pohjaa, vaan saa se kannatusta ihmisen omilta himoilta ja ihmisen molemmista 'perussynneistä' ylpeydestä ja itsekkäisyydestä."

51. Juva, *Suomen sivistyneistö uskonnollisen vapaamielisyyden murroksessa 1848–1869*, passim; Markkola, *Synti ja siveys*.

52. For a brief critical overview see Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland," 2–4.

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give up religion, even if they were usually highly critical towards the established Church. Moreover, there were many of those who viewed socialism itself from a religious perspective. Many were inspired by Tolstoyism and Theosophy and drew inspiration from pre-Marxist "utopian socialism" — or "romantic socialism," to use historian Jonathan Beecher's term.[53]

Those who sought to lead the Social Democratic Party according to Marxist doctrines of class struggle and historical materialism regarded the spread of Theosophy in the labour movement a nuisance. Most adamant on this point was Edvard Valpas (1873–1937), editor-in-chief of the leading labour newspaper *Työmies* (*The Working Man*) and one of the main theorists of Marxism in Finland in the early twentieth century. In turn, the most vocal Theosophical socialist was Matti Kurikka (1863–1915), a predecessor of Valpas as editor-in-chief of *Työmies*. Kurikka had left Finland in 1899 to build a utopian colony, first in Australia and then in British Columbia. He returned to Finland just before the General Strike in 1905 and assumed a leading position in the SPD's Theosophical opposition. As already mentioned, Kurikka founded *Elämä* to counter *Työmies*, and — after he was kicked out of SDP in 1906 — founded the Socialist Reform Party (fin. Sosialistinen Reformipuolue). However, none of the reform candidates were elected in the first parliamentary elections in 1907, while the SDP formed the majority in the first parliament. The Socialist Reform Party was disbanded soon after, and *Elämä* was discontinued in 1908. Kurikka left Finland again in spring 1909 and never returned.[54]

Jalo-Kivi participated in these polemics over the ideological orientation of the Finnish labour movement. He was an assistant reporter for *Työmies* in the early years of the twentieth century but was kicked out of the paper and

53. Kemppainen, *Sosialismin, uskonnon ja sukupuolen dynamiikkaa*; Kemppainen, "Hilja Pärssinen and the Religious Grounds for Socialist Welfare in Early Twentieth-Century Finland"; Beecher, *Victor Considerant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism*.

54. Pollari, "Vihan ja sovun sosialistit"; Pollari, "Kirjoittamaton luku."

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the inner circles of the Social Democratic Party in 1905.[55] Embittered from this exclusion, he began to assist *Elämä* and became an active supporter of the Socialist Reform Party. Echoing Kurikka, he claimed that the SDP's leaders had led the Finnish labour movement onto a dangerous path in the turbulent atmosphere of the First Russian Revolution.

In these emotionally heated circumstances, Jalo-Kivi urged all "Theosophically minded workers" to join together in "the battle against the anarchic darkness born of the materialistic worldview."[56] However, he himself left the minor party — which was troubled by constant inner conflicts — already before the elections of 1907 and joined the nationalist and social reformist Finnish Party (fin. Suomalainen Puolue) instead. For some time, he was active in the Finnish Labour Union, which was founded primarily to lure workers into the Finnish Party. However, he was kicked out of the union in 1908 due to unknown reasons.[57]

After these hardships, Jalo-Kivi left politics for a long time. *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society, which kept him busy during the next few years, took no part in day-to-day political discourse and were surprisingly silent about the political contexts of materialism. However, Jalo-Kivi's experiences in the labour movement were still very much in his mind during these years of Spiritualist activism. This is especially clear from the already-mentioned conviction he often repeated in *Spiritisti*, namely that materialism was especially rampant in the lower socioeconomic levels of the Finnish society. The main reason for his silence about Marxist materialism during these years — apart from his overall disappointment in "politics" — was that *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society sought

55. The stated reason for Jalo-Kivi's falling out of grace was his alleged activity as a police informant — an accusation which he strongly denied — but the more serious reasons were related to political disagreements and power struggles in the party. For detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 60–103.

56. Jalo [Kivi], "Käänteessä — uudelle uralle": "taisteluun materialistisen maailmankuvan synnyttämää anarkillista pimeyttä vastaan." See also *Elämä* 28.7.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Meidän tehtävämme," *Elämä* 23.8.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Veljeys, vapaus ja tasa-arvoisuus," *Elämä* 8.9.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Vapaus, suvaitsevaisuus," *Elämä* 16.10.1906.

57. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 205–53.

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to battle materialism on a level beyond quarrelsome party politics.[58] Jalo-Kivi now confronted head-on the institution which he considered the root cause for the spread of materialism in Finland: the established Church.

The Materialist Church

The adherents of Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Tolstoyism usually viewed the battle against materialism as a progressive enterprise, which was intimately connected to battles against oppressive institutions—among them the Church. For example, Santeri Alkio (1862–1930), a follower of Tolstoyism and a leading figure in the Finnish youth associations movement in the early years of the twentieth century, reproached materialism, capitalism, and the Church all at once.[59] The same critical combination was present in Matti Kurikka's Theosophical socialism. Kurikka had already been widely known for his fierce anti-clerical writings in the late nineteenth century. He continued his crusade against the Church in *Elämä*, and in 1908 published a compilation of his anti-clerical writings under the illustrating title *The Godless Church* (fin. *Jumalaton kirkko*).[60]

Jalo-Kivi shared Kurikka's strongly negative attitude towards the Church, which he saw as a repressive power allergic to anything new and progressive. Already in his first Spiritualist article in *Elämä* in 1906, Jalo-Kivi claimed that the reason for the poor state of Spiritualism in Finland was the clerical "orthodoxy," which influenced the press and prevented all public discussion about Spiritualism.[61] Strongly felt — but evidently exaggerated — clerical suppression also fuelled the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism three years later. The issues of *Spiritisti* were full of fierce attacks against the Church, which was represented as the main obstruction not only for Spiritualism but

58. See, for example, "Spiritistisen seuran," *Spiritisti* 4/1909. For more detail, see Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 258–60, 290–303.

59. S. A. [Santeri Alkio], "Materialismista toistamiseen," *Pyrkijä* 9/1905.

60. Suodenjoki, "Irti kirkosta luonnon salaisuuksien lähteille."

61. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906.

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for any spiritual development of the Finnish people.

Jalo-Kivi lamented that the Church demanded blind faith in dusty doctrines, such as original sin and eternal punishment, which not only insulted enlightened reason and morality, but were also contrary to the original teachings of Jesus. Like so many reformers before him, Jalo-Kivi claimed that the Church had lost the living truth of Christianity and turned into a dead institution led by greed for power and wealth.[62] Spiritualism, on the other hand, constituted a progressive continuation of the Judeo-Christian chain of revelations. In his 1909 book *Ääniä haudan takaa*, Jalo-Kivi described Spiritualism as a God-sent "revelation of the spirits" on a mission to purify and complete the teachings of Jesus.[63]

According to Jalo-Kivi, the Church was also responsible for the spread of materialism. As people grew disillusioned with old doctrines but — due to the Church's resistance to religious reforms — had nothing better to turn to, they ended up in materialism. For example, in 1912 he analyzed the dire situation:

> It is quite disheartening to see the materialistic worldview that has taken hold of a large portion of the lower classes in our country. They are thorough, self-assured materialists, even though they have received nothing but crumbs of materialism, which have fallen from the tables of the 'scientifically educated,' without the slightest understanding of the theories upon which scientific materialism has ridden. But it has been easy to adopt, as it has freed them from humanity and the sense of responsibility. And the reason for the spread of this materialism has been our Church, which has had nothing to offer but entrenched dogmas that dull the human spirit.[64]

62. See, for example, "Lukijoille," *Spiritisti* 1/1909; J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912; J. K., "Ovatko spiritistit kristittyjä?" *Spiritisti* 47/1912.

63. Jalo Kivi, *Ääniä haudan takaa*, 1–5.

64. J. K., "Spiritismin leviäminen," *Spiritisti* 37/1912: "Varsin ikävää on katsella sitä materialistista katsantokantaa mikä on vallannut meillä suuren osan kansan pohjakerroksesta, he ovat täysiä, itsetietoisia materialisteja, vaikka eivät ole saaneet kuin murusia materialismista, joka on putoellut »tieteellisesti sivistyneitten» pöydiltä, ymmärtämättä laisinkaan niistä teorioista edes joilla tieteellinen materialismi on ratsastanut. Mutta se on ollut helppoa omaksua kun se on vapauttanut ihmisyydestä ja edesvastuun tunteesta. Mutta syynä tähän materialismin leviämiseen on ollut kirkkomme, jolla ei ole ollut mitään tarjottavana muuta kuin piintyneitä, ihmishenkeä tylsyttäviä dogmejansa."

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According to Jalo-Kivi, therefore, the battle against materialism needed a battle against its root-cause: the hegemonic power of the Church. From this point of view, the Church and materialism were not actually far apart, since being a self-proclaimed materialist was not much worse than being a spiritually-dead Christian. This point was polemically formulated by Jalo-Kivi when he described the Church's view of Christianity as "materialist-theological," and claimed that the Church was not only incapable of battling the rise of materialism but had also itself "almost succumbed to materialism." Spiritualism, on the other hand, Jalo-Kivi claimed, was the perfect opponent to materialism. Unlike the Church, it did not base its claims of the afterlife solely on blind faith and tradition but delivered concrete and scientific proofs derived from practical work in séances.[65]

It should be noted that "the dogmatic Church" and its hegemony that Jalo-Kivi attacked were similar polemical constructions as "scientific materialism." Although it was true that the Lutheran Church of the early twentieth century was a conservative institution, it was not a monolith, and liberal theologies were gaining support especially among the younger generations of Finnish theologians.[66] These developments were poorly recognized by anti-clerical critics. A telling example is a debate over the relationship between Spiritualism and Christianity that took place between Jalo-Kivi and a young theologian Antti J. Pietilä (1878–1932) at the turn of 1910 in the comment section of *Aamulehti* (*The Morning Newspaper*), one of the largest newspapers in Tampere. Pietilä surprised Jalo-Kivi with his liberal interpretations of the doctrines of Hell and sin, even to the point that Jalo-Kivi had to deduce ironically that his opponent's views were more in line with Spiritualism than with the Church.[67] However, the encounter did nothing to change Jalo-Kivi's opinion of the Church as a major threat to the spiritual development of the Finnish people.

65. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906; Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi (kansantajuinen esitelmä)," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909.

66. Veikkola, *Teologinen lauantaiseura*; Veikkola, *Nuorkirkollisen suuntauksen muotoutuminen.*

67. Järvenpää, *Kansan henkinen kehitys*, 313–16.

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The Polemical Relationship of Theosophy and Spiritualism

Jalo-Kivi viewed the Lutheran Church as the archenemy of Finnish Spiritualism. However, it was not the only competitor in the religious field that he attacked. Equally pressing and continued conflict ensued between him and the Theosophical Society. This may be surprising; after all, Jalo-Kivi had familiarized himself with Spiritualism in the Theosophical circles of the early twentieth-century labour movement and had presented himself as a "Theosophically minded worker" in *Elämä*. However, his opinion of Theosophy changed dramatically during the early phase of the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism. After a short attempt at cooperation in the battle against the dual threat of materialism and religious dogmatism, *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society suddenly cut all ties with Theosophists.

The difficult relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy had its roots at the very beginning of the Theosophical movement. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), the main founder and ideologist of the Theosophical Society, began her public career in the 1870s as a Spiritualist medium, but quickly grew critical towards Spiritualism. The identity of the early Theosophical movement was built on polemical attacks against Spiritualist practices and beliefs. Blavatsky claimed that passive mediumship exposed the credulous Spiritualists to the dangers of the unseen world and denied that the entities whom they thought to be in contact with were the actual spirits of the dead. Blavatsky herself propagated a more sophisticated and active approach towards the invisible realms. In her books *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), she also constructed complex cosmological and historical narratives to reveal some of the secret truths she claimed to lay behind all religious, philosophical, and scientific systems. She claimed this esoteric knowledge was guarded by a secret brotherhood of superhuman "Mahatmas" with whom she was in direct spiritual contact.[68]

The polemical construction of the Theosophical Society guaranteed the further relationship of Theosophy and Spiritualism was to be awkward.

68. The polemical relationship of the early Theosophical Society and Spiritualism has been meticulously surveyed in Jeffrey Lavoie's *The Theosophical Society*.

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However, the movements never drifted entirely apart. On the one hand, many well-known Spiritualists — some of which were active in the early Theosophical Society — agreed with at least some of Blavatsky's criticism and sought to distance "serious" Spiritualism from the light-minded dabbling of séances and the scandals of exposed charlatan-mediums.[69] On the other hand, Annie Besant (1847–1933), the successor of Blavatsky as the spiritual head of the Theosophical Society, took a much friendlier approach towards Spiritualism and applauded its achievements in the battle against materialism.[70] However, despite these endeavours the relationship of Spiritualism and Theosophy remained tense.

These international polemics also influenced the relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy in Finland. It is clear that there was some interest towards Spiritualism among Finnish Theosophists, especially in the years surrounding the General Strike, and this interest led to experiments with séances. However, the usual tone in which the topic was discussed by Theosophists was condescending at best. A major example is Pekka Ervast (1875–1934), the leading figure of the early Finnish Theosophical movement and the first chief secretary of the Theosophical Society in Finland. Ervast was open about his interest in Spiritualism and mediumship but emphasized that these subjects should always be approached cautiously and from the "higher" viewpoint of Theosophy, which was the only path to true spiritual knowledge.[71]

Jalo-Kivi's 1906 article on Spiritualism, which introduced the movement, made clear that he took the subject much more seriously than most Finnish Theosophists. In the article, he touched on the relationship between Spiritualism and Theosophy only briefly, but his opinion was clearly that the former was at least equal to the latter as a path of spiritual development. For him, the

69. Deveney, "Man is a Spirit Here and Now."

70. See, for example, Besant, *Australian Lectures 1908*.

71. "Kysymyksiä ja vastauksia," *Omatunto* 18/1906. This approach to Spiritualism was common in Ervast's books and presentations during this period. See especially *Mitä on kuolema?* (1904, *What is Death?*) and *Salatieteilijän sanakirja* (1905, *The Occultist's Dictionary*).

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main difference between the movements was their pedagogical methodology: Theosophy taught spiritual truths on a theoretical level, whereas Spiritualism used practical means.[72] It is important to note that this remark was made in the Theosophically-oriented *Elämä,*[73] and in an article that — as mentioned earlier — disclosed the plan to found a Spiritualist journal in Helsinki. Jalo-Kivi clearly meant the difference in method as a basis for friendly coexistence and cooperation. He wanted to present Spiritualism in a more positive and independent light than was common in Theosophical circles, but he also wanted to signal that the new and explicitly Spiritualist journal would not challenge Theosophy, which had a much more prominent position in Finland.

This friendly approach was put to the test three years later with the first organization of Finnish Spiritualism. The start was promising: some well-known members of the Theosophical Society took part in the founding of the Spiritist Society and assisted with the early issues of *Spiritisti*.[74] However, it was also evident from the beginning that there were serious underlying tensions. For example, Spiritualist endeavours were mostly ignored in the Theosophical journal *Tietäjä*, which was a telling sign of the Theosophists' precautions. It did not take long for these tensions to crumble the basis for cooperation. Jalo-Kivi lost his temper at the end of the first year of the Spiritualist organization. In late 1909, he made the conflict public with a long article in *Spiritisti,* in which he recalled the polemical history of the movement since Blavatsky and claimed that Finnish Theosophists continued to depreciate Spiritualism.[75] Theosophists denied the accusation in *Tietäjä*, but in a condescending manner that only

72. Jalo Kivi, "Spiritismi," *Elämä* 14.2.1906.

73. Besides Jalo-Kivi's article, there are only a few mentions of Spiritualism in *Elämä* (and not all of them positive), while Theosophy was explicitly present in practically every issue.

74. For example, Veikko Palomaa (1865–1933), a widely known Theosophical speaker and co-editor of the Theosophical journal *Omatunto/Tietäjä*, was chosen as the vice president of the Spiritist Society ("Spiritistisen Seuran," *Spiritisti* 4/1909). He also gave Spiritualist lectures in Helsinki during the first half of the year 1909.

75. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 12B/1909.

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increased Jalo-Kivi's anger.[76] During the next few years he attacked Theosophists repeatedly in *Spiritisti,* claiming that Theosophists were actively hindering the work of Finnish Spiritualists:

> Ever since 'Spiritisti' was founded and spiritualist activity began in Finland, we have also been subjected to covert opposition from the Theosophists, which has manifested itself in various forms, and to constant 'sneaking' around us. This has been painful to experience, but we have tried to endure it quietly, thinking only of the best interests of the cause. As unpleasant as it is to say, we must nevertheless point out that this opposition has been directed from the very headquarters of the Theosophical Society's General Secretary [Pekka Ervast].[77]

Although Ervast and other Theosophists were often critical towards Spiritualism, there is little evidence of an active opposition. Also, Theosophists usually ignored Jalo-Kivi's continued attacks, at least in public. Even if there was some truth in Jalo-Kivi's accusations, they were also heavily glazed with his predisposition to polemical exaggeration.

Theory and Practice in the Battle against Materialism

As was the case with the Church, the relationship between Spiritualism and the Theosophical Society in Finland was evaluated by Jalo-Kivi in the context of the battle against materialism. The cornerstone of this evaluation was the already-noted interpretation of Theosophy as theoretical and Spiritualism as practical in spiritual matters. Jalo-Kivi developed this view further in *Spiritisti*. Already in the

76. V. H. V., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Tietäjä* 1/1910; J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 14/1910.

77. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 43–44/1912: "Jo siitä asti kun 'Spiritisti' perustettiin ja spiritistinen toiminta alkoi Suomessa, niin olemme myöskin saaneet osaksemme teosofien taholta salaista vastustustyötä, joka on ilmennyt yhdessä ja toisessa muodossa[,] ja alituista 'hiipimistä' ympärillämme. Tämä on ollut tuskallista kokea, mutta olemme koittaneet hiljaisina kärsiä ajatellen ainoastaan asian parasta. Niin ikävää kun onkin sanoa, niin täydymme kuitenkin huomauttaa, että vastustustyötä on johdettu juuri teosofisen seuran ylisihteerin päämajasta käsin." See also "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 15/1910; "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 22/1910; "Toimituksen työpöydältä," *Spiritisti* 28–30/1911; J. K., "'Toisten härillä' kyntämistä," *Spiritisti* 37/1912; J. K., "Teosofit ja me," *Spiritisti* 40/1912.

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first issue of the journal — when there was still hope for cooperation — he stated that Theosophy had encouraged the study of spiritual topics among the educated classes but had not influenced the masses, among which the spread of materialism "in its crudest form" (fin. "raaimmassa muodossaan") was most rampant. This was because the uneducated folk could not understand Theosophical theories. Instead, they needed "more practical, concrete teaching about immortality and spiritual planes." According to Jalo-Kivi, Spiritualism alone could provide this kind of teaching.[78] Thus, he claimed that Theosophy had its own, educated audience — which was fine — but only Spiritualism could battle materialism where it mattered the most: among the uneducated working class.

After the rift at the end of the year 1909, Jalo-Kivi reiterated this thesis many times in much more polemical terms. For example, in one of his most fierce articles against Theosophy, published in 1912, he wrote:

> Spiritism and Theosophy have entirely different pursuits. The former works, acts, and investigates, supporting its words with evidence — the latter builds theories from the comfort of the chamber, and in times of need uses the former as a hobbyhorse, otherwise mercilessly whipping it. For the softened chamberlains and ladies of the 'upper class,' Theosophy is a typical form of 'free-thinking,' and apparently from this — from a habit — comes the harsh treatment of those who are active and engaged — that, after all, is nowadays the fate of the 'common folk' at the hands of the upper class, whose interests Theosophy primarily serves.[79]

It is surprising that Jalo-Kivi presented Theosophy as an upper-class enterprise, which had no influence on the lower classes. After all, he had been active in the circles of Theosophical socialists and was well aware of the wide following Theosophy had gained among workers — a phenomenon which Finnish

78. "Lukijoille," *Spiritisti* 1/1909.

79. J. K., "Spiritismi ja teosofia," *Spiritisti* 43–44/1912: "Spiritismillä ja teosofialla on vallan erilaiset harrastukset. Edellinen tekee työtä, toimii ja tutkii, todistaen sanojansa — jälkimmäinen rakentaa teorioita kamarista käsin käyttäen hädän tullessa edellistä keppihevoisenaan, muulloin sitä armottomasti ruoskien. Veltostuneille 'yläluokan' kamariherroille ja naisille on teosofia ominaista 'vapaa-ajattelua' ja siitä kait — totutusta tavasta — johtuu tyly kohtelu toiminnan väkeä kohtaan — sehän se on nykyään 'syvien rivien' kohtalo yläluokan puolelta, jolla teosofiakin etupäässä ajaa."

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Theosophists proudly regarded as exceptional in the whole Theosophical movement.[80] Again, the picture Jalo-Kivi painted of his contestant was essentially a polemical construction crafted for his situated purposes. By presenting Theosophy as an upper-class movement and emphasizing its speculative nature, he tried to make room for a Spiritualist movement which would appeal to the workers' class-consciousness.

It is noteworthy that although *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society took no part in political discussions, and although the class sympathies of the Spiritualist enterprise were rarely explicitly stated, at least for Jalo-Kivi, the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland was intimately connected to his earlier civic activities in the labour movement and party politics. As had been the case in these endeavours, his Spiritualist activism was also primarily concerned with the social and spiritual development of the Finnish working class.

Conclusions

In this article, I have studied the first attempt to organize Finnish Spiritualism through Jaakko Jalmari Jalo-Kivi's religious civic engagement. For Jalo-Kivi, leading the Spiritualist organization was both religious practice and civic engagement with the social, moral, and political concerns of the era. From his point of view, the Spiritualist enterprise had deep societal significance as part of the God-sent modern Spiritualist movement: the spread of Spiritualism in Finland via *Spiritisti* and the Spiritist Society would hasten the moral development of the Finnish people and save them from the religious and societal threats of materialism and religious dogmatism.

I have also emphasized that practicing Spiritualism as religious civic engagement was — at least for Jalo-Kivi — highly polemical activity. Jalo-Kivi was adamant that only Spiritualism had the power of evidence and the practical means to conquer materialism, especially among the uneducated working people. Other actors in the

80. See, for example, "Toimittajalta," *Tietäjä* 10/1910.

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religious field were sceptical of his claims, and religious polemics inevitably ensued. The Spiritist Society and *Spiritisti* became locked in various battlefronts, most notably against the Lutheran Church and the Theosophical Society in Finland. In these struggles, Jalo-Kivi often resorted to polemical exaggeration, presenting his opponents in a conveniently simplistic and negative light.

The main argument in my article is that the forms and motives of Jalo-Kivi's Spiritualist activism as the editor of *Spiritisti* and the head of the Spiritist Society were in important ways connected to his earlier civic activities and experiences in the labour movement. More broadly, I suggest that the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland followed the social practices, opportunities, and sensibilities of the emerging civil society, which had evolved in close interaction with the modernizing religious field. I hope this article is helpful in further emphasizing the importance of studying Spiritualism and other modern esoteric movements in close contact with the changing landscapes of civic engagement in modern societies.

Lastly, it should be noted that the biographical focus of the article has restricted the scope of analysis, as Jalo-Kivi's polemical Spiritualist activism is not exemplary of the multiple ways Spiritualism could be part of peoples' lives in early twentieth-century Finland. However, studying his unique case is crucial for understanding the specific way in which the first attempt to organize Spiritualism in Finland occurred. In addition, in the article the intertwined formation of Jalo-Kivi's active citizenship and Spiritualist worldview has been analysed in relation to the larger societal contexts of the socio-politically turbulent civil society and the polemically constructed religious field in early twentieth-century Finland. This combination of close attention both to individual, unique lived realities and to their situated social and cultural contexts is what makes biographical microhistory methodologically fruitful. This viewpoint is also useful in the historical study of esotericism, as it makes visible the concrete, multiple ways in which esoteric movements have been part of the situated lived realities of the past.

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Heretical Kabbalah and Contemporary Esotericism:
Frankism in the Order of the Asiatic Brethren

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Abstract

The Order of the Asiatic Brethren plays a unique role in the history of Freemasonry and the development of modern esotericism, yet the extent to which Frankism influenced the teachings of the order, as well as those of later occult groups, is not well understood or appreciated. While scholars of Judaism have researched these connections, the nature of esoteric transfers from Frankism to the Asiatic Brethren — whether they were alchemical, antinomian, or Kabbalistic — remains unclear. Scholars of modern esotericism seem especially unfamiliar with this history, although the Asiatic Brethren were an important source of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century occultism (e.g., the Hermetic Order of the Dawn). Heretical Kabbalah and aspects of Frankism undoubtedly shaped the order's teachings, and there are important similarities between the Frankists' project to create a universal religion and the aims of Freemasonry and contemporary esotericism. By revisiting the history of Frankism and the Asiatic Brethren and demonstrating how this connection lives on in contemporary occult groups, this article contributes to scholarship on "constructed tradition" in esotericism and situates Frankism within the history of modern occultism.

Keywords: Frankism; Judaism; Freemasonry; Kabbalism; contemporary esotericism

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"The gods of the freemasons will have to do
what those two have done."
– Jacob Frank
Collection of the Words of the Lord (*Zbiór Słów Pańskich*),
Dictum 678[1]

Introduction

This article explores the influence of Jacob Joseph Frank (1726–1791) and his followers on Masonic circles via the Order of the Asiatic Brethren. It recontextualizes Frankism in light of the study of esotericism, demonstrating its importance for the construction of tradition in Masonic-inspired occultism, which accesses a form of Kabbalah outside of normative Judaism, referred to as "Hermetic Qabalah." Though underappreciated, the Frankist project to syncretize Jewish mysticism, Freemasonry, and what Gershom Scholem called "heretical Kabbalah" played an important role in the development of modern esotericism.[2] By tracing the heretical Kabbalah of Sabbateanism and the heterodoxy of Frankism through Freemasonry and the Asiatic Brethren to contemporary esotericism, we can see how tradition is constructed out of the rich context in which occult groups incubate.

This study details how certain historical esoteric groups (the Asiatic Brethren, the Frankists, the Freemasons in Frankfurt) were later enrolled in the constructed traditions of contemporary occultists, either consciously, for the sake of legitimacy, or unconsciously, due to structural similarities in occult

1. The word in the manuscript is "framassońscy"; however, as Jay Michaelson suggests, this is likely an error that crept in during the transcription process. The two scholars who worked on *The Collection of the Words of the Lord*, Jan Doktór and Harris Lenowitz, both agree that the word refers to Freemasons. Michaelson interprets the phrase "what those two have done" in this dictum as referring to Sabbatai Zevi and Baruchiah Russo. Frank is thus signaling a shift away from their movements toward the "gods of Freemasonry" to fulfill the mission of Sabbateanism. See Jay Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 174; Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 230; Harris Lenowitz, ed., *The Collection of the Words of the Lord [Jacob Frank]*, 198n933.

2. Capitalization practices for the word "Freemasonry" can vary, but for the sake of evenness and consistency I have chosen to capitalize it in this article. However, in Masonic studies Freemasonry is often written in lowercase to de-emphasize its use as an essentializing category by British regular Freemasonry. The plural "freemasonries" is used instead. See Andreas Önnerfors, *Freemasonry*, 1.

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beliefs and practices. This is interesting because even when concrete historical connections are absent — at least in terms of forensic evidence — structural similarities nevertheless persist. This is due to a variety of factors. For example, in contrast to the more clearly defined boundaries of traditional religions, the religiosity of Frankism, Freemasonry, and modern occultism is porous, an eclecticism that is the hallmark of esoteric movements.

Scholars of Frankism, such as Scholem and Jacob Katz, have described how Kabbalah and Frankism found their way into the Asiatic Brethren, and more recent studies by Pawel Maciejko and Jay Michaelson also devote several pages to this influence from the perspective of Jewish studies. Both Maciejko and Michaelson approach the question of esotericism, the former focusing on Frank's similarities to other well-known "charlatans," such as Casanova, while the latter offers a novel analysis of Frankism within the context of esotericism. Despite Michaelson's groundbreaking approach, his focus is not on esotericism as such, but rather on reinterpreting Frankism within Jewish theology. Following Michaelson, Frankism is here situated within the context of modern esotericism to analyze the parallel belief structures and constructed lineages of certain contemporary occult groups, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley's Thelema, and the magical order of the A.∴A.∴ (Argenteum Astrum or "Silver Star").[3]

Those Frankists who helped create the teachings of the Asiatic Brethren practiced a form of Kabbalah common to high-degree Freemasonry, yet they infused it with elements of Frankist esotericism. Crucially, no author writing on this subject has pointed out the similarities between Frankist-Asiatic Brethren Freemasonry and Golden Dawn-style Kabbalism, or how this lineage (Freemasonry — Frankism — Asiatic Brethren — Golden Dawn) has been reimagined in the contemporary occult scene.[4] This article therefore revisits the elements of Frankism found within the Asiatic Brethren, providing a brief review of how they got there and

3. Michaelson only briefly touches on these esoteric currents.

4. On the function of constructed traditions in the history of esotericism, see Andreas Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*.

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demonstrating how this convoluted nexus impacted modern esotericism, was reimagined, and later incorporated into constructed lineages of continuation.

Judaism and the Order of the Asiatic Brethren[5]

The Asiatic Brethren represent the first attempt to integrate Jews and Christians in a Masonic context in Central Europe.[6] According to Masonic historian Robert Freke Gould, following the creation of the *Asiatische Brüder* (Asiatic Brethren), or *Brüder Sankt Johannes des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa* (Brethren of Saint John the Evangelist from Asia in Europe)—and the schisms and fractures that precipitated the order's dissolution—the majority of Jewish brethren migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" (*Loge zur aufgehenden Morgenröthe*), chartered by the *Grand Orient de France* in Frankfurt in 1807 in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars.[7] While it is difficult to assess the concrete historical connections between this lodge and the Asiatic Brethren, it is certain that some Asiatic Brethren migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn," it being their only option.[8]

Furthermore, Franz Joseph Molitor (1779–1860) was a foundational figure in both organizations, and Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld (originally Hirschel,

5. Scholem and Katz originally uncovered this history for the study of esotericism, at a time when this field did not yet exist. This article thus makes use of the source materials they consulted while emphasizing specific doctrinal aspects such as alphanumeric esotericism (gematria), moderate dualism, and eroticism, as well as antinomianism and reversals. These sources include ritual instruction texts of the Asiatic Brethren held in the Masonic archive at The Hague, the extensive cache of Asiatic Brethren documents held in the Masonic archives of the Danish Order of Freemasons in Copenhagen, and the lodge records of the Frankfurt and Schleswig lodges, which help to sketch the history of Jews in German Masonic circles and the background of the Asiatic Brethren.

6. In London and Holland in the 1730s, '40s, and '50s, a limited number of Jews were admitted into Freemasonry.

7. The *Grand Orient de France* founded a number of such lodges in the German-speaking region between 1806 and 1813, which formally accepted Jewish members. This included *L'Étoile anséatique* (The Hanseatic Star) in Osnabrück (Lower Saxony), to which Heinrich Marx/Heschel Levi (father of Karl Marx) belonged. These lodges were closed once the French forces withdrew, and the Jewish Masons were again denied membership in regular lodges. See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 312–13n99. See also Nikolaus Sandmann, "Französische Freimaurerlogen in Osnabrück während der napoleonischen Annexion."

8. Earlier attempts to establish "tolerance" lodges were made in Hamburg and Berlin in the 1790s, but they were largely unsuccessful.

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1758–1820) contributed actively to both orders. Many prominent Jewish figures belonged to the Frankfurt lodge, including Salomon Mayer von Rothschild (1774–1855), Jacob Baruch (1763–1827), Amschel Wolf Schnapper (1764–1838), Bernhard Juda Sichel (1780–1862), and Dr. med. Jacob (Jakob) Emden (1796–1860), most of whom likely joined to expand their social networks and business connections.[9] When further quarreling caused the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" to split on Christian/Jewish lines, the Christian brethren organized themselves under the Masonic Rite of Strict Observance, while the Jewish brethren received another charter from London in 1817 to found the "Lodge of the Nascent Dawn, No. 684 (*Zur aufgehenden Morgenröthe*)."[10]

The edict of March 11, 1812 "emancipated" Jews living in the Prussian Empire, granting them certain mobility rights and tax freedoms, while continuing to restrict them in other ways.[11] The majority of German-speaking lodges had strict bylaws prohibiting Jews, and so-called tolerance lodges had been established (though not officially recognized) as an alternative based on the regular Masonic model. These carried a stigma, and they ultimately failed.[12] The "Jewish question" surfaced again in 1836 when *Die Loge zum goldenen Schwert* in Wesel submitted a request to the three mother lodges in Berlin to remove all restrictions against Jewish participation; this was rejected, causing further debates in grand lodges across Europe.[13] From the 1840s, full Masonic rights and privileges began to be granted to Jewish initiates in German-speaking lands, but it had been a long and complicated process, which was never fully realized during the nineteenth century.[14]

9. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F. 22, Nr. 18. See also Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939*, 60–61.

10. Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry*, Vol. VI, 269–70. *Zum Frankfurter Adler*, another Jewish lodge, was founded in Frankfurt in 1832.

11. Christopher Clark, "The Limits of the Confessional State."

12. Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 56.

13. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 96–97.

14. "In reality, even at the height of German liberalism, the Jews had never had truly free access to lodges." See Jean-Philippe Schreiber, "Jews and Freemasonry in the Nineteenth Century: An Overview of Current Knowledge," i–xx, vi; Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability*, 59–60.

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The importance of the Asiatic Brethren in this context cannot be overstated. Despite its short-lived existence from 1781–1785, its reach was extensive. A "compendious library" on Freemasonry published in Göttingen at the end of the 18th century — which took a critical perspective — states that the Asiatic Brethren extended from Italy to Russia, organized itself in lodges named after Melchizedek, promulgated Kabbalah, accepted Jews, Turks, Persians, and Armenians into its ranks, and had been fruitful for Jews gaining a foothold in society.[15] According to Katz, a historian who worked on this subject from the perspective of Jewish history (as opposed to the history of esotericism), the Asiatic Brethren served as a means for Jews to enter non-Jewish society and secure a place, ultimately assisting in emancipation. At the same time, the Asiatic Brethren served as a way of introducing certain forms of heretical Kabbalah into modern esotericism via the convoluted infrastructure of Freemasonry.

The Frankists' project of establishing a universal religion put them at odds with traditional established religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity), and while on paper Freemasonry claims not to be a religion, rather a fraternity drawing on religious symbolism, its universalist and syncretistic tendencies clashed with institutional religions (for example, the 1738 papal bull issued by Pope Clement XII, which forbade Catholics from becoming Freemasons). The Frankists thus found themselves on the religious margins — whether intentionally or through ostracization — and this is the space many esoteric movements inhabit, including Freemasonry and its esoteric offshoots, a space that is both hidden and publicly known.

This helps to explain why Frank became involved in Freemasonry and alchemy, as esotericism offered a potential field of operations and a shared religious ethos. For example, one of Frank's leading followers, Moses Dobruschka (1753–1794) — alias Franz Thomas Edler von Schönfeld; alias Junius Frey — was involved

15. Christian Karl André, ed., *Der Freymaurer, oder Compendiöse Bibliothek alles Wissenswürdigen über geheime Gesellschaften. Heft IV und V*, 86–88.

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in covert arms running between the Habsburgs and French revolutionaries via his Masonic connections. Frank himself was a master of harnessing the outsider profile, flaunting his status as a Polish "baron" in foreign lands or masquerading as a Russian noble and garbing himself in Ottoman attire, taking up residence at the end of his life in a castle in Offenbach on loan to him from a Rosicrucian and Masonic friend, where he performed alchemical experiments and strange Masonic rites until his death.[16]

For Jews joining German-speaking Masonic lodges, a key issue was that of Jewish conversion and assimilation.[17] As Maciejko points out, this was a traumatic history for Jews, often marked by coercion, secrecy, and shame.[18] "Each soul that Judaism lost was mourned," Maciejko writes.[19] However, the Frankists were unique in that they reveal the active agency of mass conversions and their reappropriation — namely, through the syncretization of multiple doctrines and religious belief systems into universalist and quasi-secular forms of esotericism (not unlike certain currents of Freemasonry).

According to Maciejko, in contrast to usual feelings of sadness and betrayal associated with conversion, the Frankists' mass embrace of Catholicism in 1759 in Lwów was celebrated by many as a victory. Nor was this mass conversion (of potentially thousands) performed under coercion, but rather, it seemed, voluntarily. Only Israel Ben Eliezer, the founder of Hasidism known as the Baal Shem Tov or "Master of the Good Name" (the BeSchT, c. 1700–1760), decried

16. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 233.

17. Hoffmann notes that often the "conservative Christian" Masons of the time, as opposed to the "liberal humanitarian" Masons, were in fact more suspicious of *assimilated* Jews seeking membership, doubting their sincerity due to an ostensible lack of devotion toward their own religion. For example, according to a Masonic pamphlet from 1838 related to voting on the admission of Jews, one such conservative Christian Mason laments that any "Jew who approaches his faith with seriousness and zeal deserves our respect; having this faith, however, he will feel more disinclination than inclination for our lodges. It is rather those who have already cast off their Judaism like an old garment and therefore stand naked and bereft of all religion who, I fear, will be most likely to come knocking on our doors." Quoted in *The Politics of Sociability*, 57–58.

18. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 1.

19. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 1.

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it as an act of apostasy, blaming it on the shortcomings of the local rabbis, who were relieved to rid themselves of the Frankists and their antinomian beliefs and practices, seeing their presence as parasitic. To the Baal Shem Tov, on the other hand, all Jews were members of Israel, connected by the *Shekinah*, and once one was lost, he or she was lost forever, with no hope of rehabilitation.[20]

Frank's ideas presented an "in-between" problematic: they were attractive to some, but hostile to traditional Torah-following believers, that is, the Jewish establishment. Michaelson describes Frank's life as one of liminality, constant shapeshifting, a permanent state of in-betweenness.[21] This resembles Freemasonry, which, following the Protestant Reformation, and on the eve of the French and Industrial Revolutions, somehow filled the gap between the secularism of the future and the religiosity of Europe's Christian past. The Frankists — again, not unlike the Freemasons — were critical of traditional religions (even while claiming memberships), and they were both rational and mystical, spiritual and scientific, universal yet esoteric, secret and simultaneously visible.[22] In the Order of the Asiatic Brethren, Frankism and Freemasonry converged.

Heretical Kabbalah and the Asiatic Brethren

Gershom Scholem focused the majority of his scholarly work on establishing an academic interest in Kabbalah, which he interpreted as "Jewish mysticism."[23] These activities were supplemented by scholarship highlighting heretical figures in the history of Judaism, such as the Sabbateans and Frankists, including his investigations into the development of Jewish modernization and political

20. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 1–2. The Baal Shem Tov was said to have rescued the soul of Sabbatai Tzvi by diving down into the abyss to rescue it from the forces of evil. See Rabbi Dov Baer of Linits, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov*, 86–87.

21. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 6, 14.

22. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 6.

23. Boaz Huss has argued that the term "Jewish mysticism" is not accurate for studying the history of Kabbalah, as it is connected to a host of historical and contextual assumptions that originate primarily with Scholem's earlier formulations. See Boaz Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 87, 158–59.

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radicalism.[24] Scholem linked these topics with his study of Kabbalah; for example, he refers to the Ottoman Jewish mystic, rabbi, and would-be Jewish messiah, Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676), as the "Kabbalistic Messiah." Indeed, the Sabbatean movement was largely a Kabbalistic religiosity in Scholem's eyes.[25] Similarly, he argued that Frankism, one of the main inheritors to Sabbateanism, represented a "dialectic of mysticism and Enlightenment" and was founded on esoteric Kabbalism and secular humanism.[26] In other words, Kabbalah, Sabbateanism, and Frankism were connected in a specific way; and, moreover, the appearance of these movements was linked to the spread of Kabbalah.

Nevertheless, Scholem was suspicious of the esotericists he studied, tending to privilege the position of the scholarly Kabbalist and the scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) study of Kabbalah. As Boaz Huss points out, Scholem "regarded the Western esotericists who were interested in Kabbalah as swindlers, charlatans, and pseudo-Kabbalists."[27] This is perhaps not the best position for today's scholars to take, given what the academic study of esotericism has shown: that esotericism, for the most part, has been characterized by its detractors as "deviant" rather than being in some sense essentially "deviant."[28] As Huss suggests, instead of privileging a philological and traditional approach to Kabbalah, the esotericists who were and are involved in this history represent "an innovative adaptation of the Kabbalah," which in fact remains relevant to the study of Kabbalah.[29]

Scholem took an interest in the Asiatic Brethren, highlighting the important figures connected both to this Masonic order and to Frankism, such as Moses

24. On Scholem's intellectual background, see David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Master of the Kabbalah*; David Biale, "Gershom Scholem on Nihilism and Anarchism"; David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*; Amir Engel, *Gershom Scholem: An Intellectual Biography*.

25. Gershom Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 9.

26. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 9–10.

27. Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 116.

28. For an overview of this topic, see Manon Hedenborg White and Tim Rudbøg, eds., *Esotericism and Deviance*.

29. Huss, *Mystifying Kabbalah*, 112, 159.

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Dobruschka/Schönfeld, Ephraim Hirschfeld, and Franz Molitor. Scholem believed that the Sabbateans and Frankists were in fact "a *specifically* Jewish phenomenon to the end," and that the "nihilism" and antinomian character that these movements arrived at was a dialectical response to the messianism of mainstream Judaism and helped usher in the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, as well as the reform movements of the nineteenth century.[30]

Within Masonic studies, the primary interest in Kabbalah among Masons is largely seen as developing in the nineteenth century and limited to a Kabbalah that was primarily Christian or Hermetic.[31] Christian Masonic occultists and esotericists, such as Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875), postulated that Freemasonry belonged to an ancient esoteric tradition that had Kabbalah at its root.[32] However, some Jewish Kabbalistic thinkers in the nineteenth century also took an interest in Freemasonry, such as the Italian Kabbalist Elijah Benamozegh (1823–1900), who declared in his *Israël et l'humanité* (Israel and Humanity) that "the theology of Freemasonry is quite similar to that of the Kabbalah," and furthermore, that "the Aggadah [essentially the corpus of non-legalistic content of rabbinic literature] was the popular form of a secret discipline whose initiation methods bore the most striking resemblances to Freemasonry."[33]

30. Gershom Scholem, "Redemption through Sin," 83–84.

31. See, for example, Jan A. M. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik, für Freimaurer*, 85–102. However, see also the work of Konstantin Burmistrov and Peter Lanchidi on Freemasons and Jewish Kabbalah for exceptions.

32. Lévi remained an "active" Freemason only briefly before moving on to more explicit forms of ceremonial magic. However, Lévi's two-volume *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854–1856) was translated into English by prominent Masonic writer Arthur Edward Waite as *Transcendental Magic, Its Doctrine and Ritual* (1896), and served as a major source for the Supreme Council, Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction, USA) "handbook" *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (1871), compiled by Sovereign Grand Commander Albert Pike (1809–1891). On connections between Freemasonry and the Kabbalah, see Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 3, 19ff.

33. Quoted in Robert Jan van Pelt, "Freemasonry and Judaism," 189. Van Pelt understandably spends the bulk of this chapter distancing Judaism from Freemasonry. Given the history of pernicious conspiracy theories associated with such a connection, this makes sense. However, this comes at the expense of certain contributions by Jews interested in the Kabbalah who were members of the order, as well as the influence of Kabbalistic ideas in general, especially in the so-called "higher" degrees of

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As Katz points out, the Jewish Freemasons belonging to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt believed that the tradition of Freemasonry was the original religion of humanity and the foundation of all religions — a form of perennial philosophy.[34] The lodge archives contain much on how Judaism is based on hope, in distinction to the rationalism of ancient Greek religion: a hope for restoring the Temple, with the Temple of Solomon serving as the *Vorbild,* or paragon, of the Masonic temple.[35] In a lodge speech on the (figurative) inscription above the entrance to their lodge, the lecturer states: "My brother, the great messianic day dwells still beyond the eastern mountains, the eternal light does not yet shine within our souls. But the Golden Dawn is our hope, our reassurance."[36] Elsewhere, in a lodge speech referencing a visit by Persian Freemason Mirza Abolhassan Khan Ilchi (1776–1845), it is declared: "this is the great secret of the Order, that it knows how to find the Higher Unity from the multitude; that it forms a bond around all meritorious individuals of every region, every people, every faith; that it breaks the dividing wall which alienates man from man, uniting in one brotherhood of purest humanity . . . "[37]

Cross-pollination between Jewish esotericism and Freemasonry did, therefore, occur to some extent. Of course, Christianized Kabbalah played a major role.

Freemasonry. In addition, van Pelt fails to mention the Asiatic Brethren or the Frankist connections in Offenbach and gives only a brief secondary reference to the important "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt. The chapter is therefore incomplete. Without diminishing the importance of van Pelt's contribution, the present article hopes to correct these omissions by foregrounding resonances and sympathetic interactions, as opposed to focusing on anti-Masonic texts and individuals who accused Freemasonry and Judaism of being part of a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy.

34. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 82ff. See also Andrea Hopp, *Jüdisches Bürgertum in Frankfurt am Main im 19. Jahrhundert*, 123–34.

35. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 160.

36. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 153. In the context of this lecture, the Masonic secret behind the Golden Dawn symbol (*aufgehende Morgenröthe*) is interpreted as the light of the approaching messiah, for which they must wait and hope: "it is not the scribes of our Order, nor the Rabbis with their book learning who possess it; it [this masonic secret] is revealed in part through the pure simplicity of the believer's heart."

37. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. F 22, Nr. 153.

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Masonic and religious studies scholar Jan Snoek highlights the importance of the Kabbalistic syncretizing efforts of Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), the emergence of Lurianic Kabbalah, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata* (published in the 17th century), and the premier scientific study of Kabbalah, *La kabbale, ou, La philosophie religieuse des Hébreux*, written by Adolphe Franck (1809–1893) and published in 1843.[38] A fascinating example is the Swedish Masonic system reworked by Charles XIII (1748–1818), himself a high-ranking Mason, alchemist, and magician. Snoek describes how Charles designed his own Kabbalistic tree of life to be used in the rites of Freemasonry and even wore personally designed Masonic attire displaying this Masonic tree of life.[39]

In addition to these connections, the influence of the Asiatic Brethren on high-degree Freemasonry represents a form of Kabbalism that is simultaneously Jewish, Christianized, and "heretical" (Sabbatean-Frankist). Scholem was not blind to this, as he himself was influenced by Franz Molitor in his approach to Kabbalah.[40] Molitor — a student of esoteric thinkers such as Franz von Baader and inspired by Jakob Böhme — was a leading member and supporter of the Asiatic Brethren, having written their official history. Molitor was an important member of the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt, as well, and was involved in merging this lodge with another, *Carl zur aufgehenden Sonne*, which was chartered by Karl von Hessen-Kassel (1744–1836), a prominent Freemason and member of the Asiatic Brethren, who worked the high-degree system of the Rectified Scottish Rite.[41] Ephraim Joseph Hirschfeld, discussed below, served as an intermediary between Karl von Hessen-Kassel and Molitor to facilitate this charter. He remained in contact with the prince until his death, and, at one

38. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik*, 92–98.

39. Snoek, *Einführung in die westliche Esoterik*, 230–32.

40. Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 122.

41. The founding members met in Molitor's house to establish this lodge. See Freemason Wiki Editor, "Carl of the Rising Sun," *Freemason Wiki*, https://www.freimaurer-wiki.de/index.php?title=Carl_zur_aufgehenden_Sonne&oldid=89110, accessed on February 19, 2025. See also Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 64.

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point attempted to introduce the heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren into the "Lodge Nascent Dawn."[42]

Molitor was among the few thinkers who took Kabbalah seriously in the early nineteenth century and endeavored to dedicate a comprehensive book to the subject (unfortunately left unfinished). Molitor believed that the Kabbalah represented the inner, living soul of Judaism, and, like some Freemasons and esotericists, he believed Kabbalah was the primordial religion of Adam, which exoteric Judaism had moved away from. Molitor sought to restore Kabbalah for the sake of both Judaism and Christianity.[43] In a similar way, Scholem felt this way about modern Judaism and worked to reintegrate a study of Kabbalah, including its esoteric and heretical forms. Scholem expressed this in a letter dated 1937, in which he essentially agreed with Molitor that Kabbalah was the secret driving tradition of Judaism and hoped to restore it through his historical and philological studies.[44]

For these reasons, Scholem took an interest in the activities of those associated with the Asiatic Brethren, seeing them as a nexus of genuine Kabbalism and the Christian-inspired theosophic esotericism of the late seventeenth century, born "somewhere in the no man's land" between rationalism and mysticism.[45] The order promulgated Kabbalistic concepts in their rites, such as the role of Ein Sof and the four worlds of Kabbalistic cosmology.[46] The sefirot and the tree of life were applied to interpretations of Masonic symbolism — for example, the pillars of King Solomon's Temple and Masonic tracing boards (Masonic visual

42. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 67.

43. Interestingly, it was partly through Molitor's writings in connection with the Asiatic Brethren that Kabbalism entered into Russian currents of Freemasonry. See Konstantin Burmistrov and Maria Endel, "The Place of Kabbalah in the Doctrine of Russian Freemasons."

44. See Klaus S. Davidowicz, *Die Kabbala*,182–84. Davidowicz quotes directly from Gershom Scholem, *Briefe, Band 1, 1914–1947*, 471. See also Huss, "Academic Study of Kabbalah and Occultist Kabbalah," 122–25; Katharina Koch, *Franz Joseph Molitor und die jüdische Tradition*, 8; Moshe Idel, *Old Worlds, New Mirrors*, 81–82, 110–13.

45. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28.

46. For a summary, see Konstantin Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 159.

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aids). Traditional biblical history was recast in an esoteric light with a look toward Egypt (similar to Frankism), and there was a revaluation of the figure of Lucifer, who, in the ritual instructions of the order, is referred to as the *Sohn der Morgenröte* (Son of the Golden Dawn).

Aspects of the Talmud and the Zohar found their way into the degrees, including entire Jewish prayers and blessings, the priestly benedictions of the kohanim, and so forth.[47] The "cabbalist work" of the first degree focuses on an introduction to the different sefirot and the four worlds, familiarizing members with concepts such as *Mocha Stima'ah* (concealed wisdom) and *Klipa* ("shells" created through evil deeds).[48] By the fifth degree of initiation, members are being fully immersed in the practice of gematria, ascribing numerical values to Hebrew letters and words to extract esoteric meanings. There are specific instructions in the practice of *kavana*, or Jewish devotional prayers, as well as guidance for protection against *kishuf,* or ill-intentioned magic (sorcery).[49] The Kabbalistic instructions for the different degrees include long and complex names and concepts from the Hebrew bible reduced to numerical values and aligned to the invocation of different angels, with Metatron as the highest; many of these numerical values are also applied to specific locations on a large tracing board in an elaborate alphanumeric esotericism.[50]

The Order of the Asiatic Brethren was therefore unique in the context of Freemasonry. To better understand its connection to Frankism and the heretical "qabalah" of contemporary occult groups, a brief historical account of this order is necessary. This will introduce it to a broader academic audience, particularly scholars of esotericism. At least two histories of the order are held

47. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 159–60.

48. FXXV, vol. 8a, 96–112 (Copenhagen).

49. 24622, 192 A 4, Kl.MS:XIV.B.10 (Vrijmetselarij Museum).

50. See, for example, 24571, 191 D 41, Kl.MS:XIV.B.4 (Vrijmetselarij Museum); cf. FVII. vols. 19 and 20 in the archives of the Danish Order of Freemasons, where the tracing board of King Solomon's Temple is also held. See also same folder as note 50.

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in Masonic archives, both written by Molitor in 1820 and 1829 (each slightly different).[51] For these histories, Molitor relied on the memories of another principal member of the order, the Jewish specialist in Kabbalah, Hirschfeld, who, in turn, related much of what he had received from Schönfeld.

The order was founded in Vienna by Hans Heinrich von Ecker und Eckhoffen (1750–1790) and his younger brother Hans Karl (1754–1809). Both were of Bavarian descent and active in European Freemasonry. Heinrich was a member of the *Orden des Gold und Rosenkreutz* (Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross), a high-degree system of Freemasonry specializing in alchemy and Christian theosophy, but he left the order under strained conditions, publishing a book denouncing the Rosicrucian Masons.[52] His subsequent creation began as the "Order of the Knights and Brothers of the Light" (*Orden der Ritter und Brüder des Lichts*), sometimes called the *Fratres Lucis*, which he and others founded in 1781 in Vienna. This first instantiation of the order — which plays an important role in contemporary esotericism, as we shall see — was reorganized as the Asiatic Brethren in 1782.

Schönfeld was a key member, who had become a regular Freemason in Austria, where he was initiated into a lodge affiliated with the *Grand Orient de France* along with other Frankists and Jewish nobles.[53] Between 1781 and 1783, he was a member of both the Knights of Light and the Asiatic Brethren and played a considerable part in the founding activities of both orders. Another founding member was a Capuchin monk named Bischoff, aka Ish Zadik in Hebrew or "Pater Justus," who reportedly spent years in the "Orient" learning secrets from Sabbatean Kabbalists.[54] The order included some of the most prominent Jews in Vienna, such as early adherents of Haskalah, but also Jewish bankers

51. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 30.

52. This was a pamphlet entitled *Der Rosenkreuzer in seiner Blöße* published in 1781. See Antoine Faivre, "Asiatic Brethren."

53. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28n3.

54. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28, 32.

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like Nathan Arnstein (1748–1838) and Bernhard Eskeles (1753–1839).[55] Jewish members of the order were not encouraged to convert, nor did they. Other members worth mentioning include the Hönig family (which had close ties to the Dobruschkas), Isaak Daniel Itzig (1750–1806), Baruch Schick of Shklov (1744–1808), and the abovementioned Karl von Hessen-Kassel, who became the Chacham Hackolel (Grand Master) of the order and a point of contact with Charles XIII of Sweden, suggesting a possible connection to the Swedish Rite.

According to the internal lore, Bischoff had returned with rare manuscripts obtained from an enigmatic Jew named "Azaria," who was associated with Sabbateans, and these became the source of the rites and rituals. Scholem confirms that the founding documents of the order were based on Kabbalah and parts of Jewish ritual prayers, yet the influence runs deeper. As Scholem explains:

> with the Knights, and even more so with the Asiatic Brethren, we find Kabbalistic elements, not pseudo-Kabbalistic as in other fraternities of this kind, but rather authentic formulas derived from the book of *Zohar*, reflections on the letters of the Tetragrammaton taken from the *Pardês-Rimmonim* by the Kabbalist Moses Cordovero, and even lengthy speculations on Creation, quoted parallel to the teachings of Christian theosophists.[56]

According to Scholem, although there were Jewish and Kabbalistic elements in the rituals of the Knights of Light, the more strictly Sabbatean elements did not appear until the revised versions, as the order metamorphosed into its second phase as the Asiatic Brethren.[57] Konstantin Burmistrov suggests that Hirschfeld (whose "Kabbalistic name" was Marcus ben Bina) was the creator of the order's "doctrine," and that "the constitution and the basic writings of the Order were compiled by Schönfeld … but [the] Order's instructional manuals and textbooks dealing with 'interpretation of symbols,' letter combinations and

55. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 226. Other Jewish banking families involved in the activities of the order include Guggenheim, Gatz in Hamburg, and several others. See Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 153.

56. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 28.

57. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 33.

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meditations were written by Hirschfeld."[58] Burmistrov cites Scholem's 1962 article on Hirschfeld, and an anonymous booklet appearing in 1790 with the title *Der Asiate in seiner Blöße*, which linked the order's Kabbalism to Hirschfeld.[59]

This is contradicted by Scholem's later lectures of 1979 (published in French and untranslated), which intended to "summarize the conclusions of extensive research," especially in connection with Schönfeld.[60] Here, Scholem argues that Schönfeld was the architect of the Kabbalistic doctrines, owing to his Sabbatean background. Moreover, *Der Asiate in seiner Blöße* is a polemical text "warning" other Masons about the dangers of the Asiatic Brethren, and therefore it cannot be taken seriously (the "compendious library" takes a similar approach).[61] It is likely that Schönfeld's role was kept secret due to his Frankist and Sabbatean connections, even leading to the invention of the figure of Azaria in the order's history to obfuscate Schönfeld's influence. Scholem convincingly demonstrates that Schönfeld, with his direct Sabbatean and Frankist learning, was the main tributary of Kabbalistic teachings in the Asiatic Brethren, and that the story of "Azaria" functioned as a mythical double image.[62]

This does not diminish the importance of Hirschfeld, whose influence was great. Schönfeld personally initiated Hirschfeld into Freemasonry in Brünn, while Frank occupied the city as his main center, the degree of "Master Mason" being a prerequisite for joining the high-degree order of the Asiatic Brethren.[63] Thus, even if Hirschfeld became the main source of the later Kabbalistic

58. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 156, 158.

59. The "compendious library" on Freemasonry also posits Hirschfeld as the source of the Kabbalistic doctrines. See André, ed., *Der Freymaurer*, 95–96.

60. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 10.

61. Toward the end, as the order fell into decline, Hirschfeld was extirpated on the grounds that his activities were having the effect of overly "Judaizing" the order. This, along with the publication of his *Biblisches Organon* (1796), is another reason Hirschfeld is often cited as the lead Kabbalist.

62. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 29. Katz also came to this conclusion. See also Patrick Benjamin Koch, "Adventurer, (Pseudo?)-Kabbalist, and Theosophist," 27.

63. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 34. Schönfeld often took neophytes to "Frank's court" in Brünn to be initiated. See Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 226.

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interpretations, his background — in addition to the fact that his father was a cantor and Talmudist — was largely informed by Schönfeld. Indeed, Hirschfeld would later join Frank in Offenbach after the dissolution of the Asiatic Brethren.[64] These important connections, in which Schönfeld played a leading role, are the focus of the next section.

The Asiatic Brethren and Sabbatean Frankism

It is precisely due to its syncretizing and antinomian features that Scholem labeled Sabbatean-Frankist Kabbalah "heretical." In Scholem's reading, "Sabbatianism had its roots in an extravagant overstressing of certain aspects of Lurianism," extending some things while excluding others.[65] According to David Halperin, Sabbatai Zevi approached Kabbalah in an experimental manner: "He incorporated its fundamental myth, the erotic tension between the Blessed Holy One (male) and Shechinah (female), into his *personal mythology*."[66] Sabbateans practiced this "heretical Kabbalah" outside an established religious framework or lineage, like many esotericists — a partial democratization of the esoteric features of Judaism. "Heretical" thus seems an apt description, as the Sabbateans' engagement with Kabbalah resembles the way in which esotericists modify, reinterpret, and repurpose disparate religious elements — a practice the Frankists took to new heights and attempted to introduce into Freemasonry.

As baptized Catholics, Frankists could participate in the normally Christian-only lodges that had proliferated in Poland-Lithuania after the French Revolution.[67] Conditions were similar in Moravia; for example, in Brünn, a major center of Frankism, where the Masonic lodge "Zur auf gehende Sonne

64. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 226. Hirschfeld's father was Joseph ben Meir Zvi Darmstadt of Karlsruhe, of whom there is no known evidence that he was a Kabbalist. See Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 155.

65. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941), 320.

66. Emphasis added. David Halperin, "Sabbatianism and Kabbalistic Heresy."

67. For example, the Polish Jewish colonel Berek Joselewicz, while not a Frankist, was a member of such a lodge. Abraham G. Duker, "Polish Frankism's Duration," 312.

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im Orient" was founded in 1782. This lodge counted among its members Maximilian Joseph von Lamberg and his brother Leopold, Carl Joseph von Salm-Reifferscheidt, a leader of the Moravian Rosicrucians, and members of the Mittrovsky family, who were patrons of the Dobruschkas (and supporters of Jews who converted to Christianity).[68] In the company of Lamberg, Giacomo Casanova — Masonic extraordinaire and dabbler in Kabbalism — visited Brünn and this Masonic lodge, and likely met Frank while in the city (Casanova maintained contact with Frank's daughter, Eva).[69]

An important figure in Brünn was, of course, Schönfeld, whose family belonged to the city as part of a continuous Sabbatean circle. Moses (Levi) Dobruschka, later Schönfeld, was born in Brünn in 1753. His father, Salomon Zalman (Levy) Dobruschka (1715–1774), was involved in the tobacco industry and was, in fact, the founder of the Jewish community in the city.[70] Salomon married Schöndl Hirschl, the daughter of Löbl Hirschl of Rzeszów and Güttel Jacobi of Prossnitz. Schöndl was the maternal cousin of Jacob Frank, which made Moses Frank's nephew. She was a wealthy woman and the leader of a prominent Sabbatean community in Moravia; Salomon and his business partners in the Hönig family belonged to this community.[71]

Schöndl was also close to Wolf Eybeschütz, another well-known Sabbatean prophet of the time, whose father was the prominent Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschütz. The famous controversy between Rabbi Emden and Jonathan Eybeschütz is relevant here: Emden's *Sefer Hitabbekut* (Book of Struggle) contains passages referring to

68. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 224. Michaelson may in fact misunderstand this lodge as being the Asiatic Brethren, which is not exactly correct; rather, it was a new lodge closely affiliated with both the Asiatic Brethren and Frankism.

69. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 222–25.

70. On the background of the Dobruschka family, see Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 11–19; Pawel Maciejko, "Dobruschka-Schönfeld Family," *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*.

71. Moses's sister, Freidele (Franziska), was married to Wolf Hönig, who was also involved in and supported the Asiatic Brethren, and whose father was married to a member of the Wehle, the main Sabbatean Family in Prague. See Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 13n11.

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Schöndl as the "prostitute of Brünn." Indeed, Schöndl's presence in Brünn was the reason Frank settled there after his imprisonment in Częstochowa.

Moses received a thorough rabbinical household instruction, but at the same time he was initiated into the esotericism and privately circulated texts of the Sabbatean movement. This meant that his interpretation of traditional Jewish teachings would have been largely Sabbatean. The live-in rabbi responsible for his education would later convert to Christianity with a group of Frankists after Frank arrived in Brünn, and Dobruschka also converted to Christianity after Frank's arrival, taking the name Schönfeld.[72] Dobruschka kept all this secret later in life, as Scholem points out.[73]

Molitor, who authored the history of the order, erroneously claims that Schönfeld was the grandson of Jonathan Eybeschütz, which, while technically incorrect, is nevertheless symbolically important. Scholem suggests that Schönfeld was rather the "spiritual grandson" of Eybeschütz.[74] Molitor further states that Schönfeld was a Sabbatean (Scholem corrects this, showing that actually the Frankists are meant, although they were not known as such at the time), and that he inherited Kabbalistic texts from his grandfather (Eybeschütz), which he incorporated into the architecture of the Asiatic Brethren. Again, while not exactly correct, the symbolic content resonates in that the Sabbateans were deeply involved in the (secret) study of the Sabbatean book *Va-Avo ha-Yom el ha-Ayyin* (And I Came this Day unto the Fountain), which, after much debate, appears to have been secretly written by Eybeschütz — though proving conclusively that Eybeschütz was a Sabbatean remains complicated.[75]

72. Scholem suggests that Frank's arrival played a decisive role in the decision of the Dobruschka sons to convert to Christianity, and while this began a new phase in Schönfeld's life and literally career, he retained close ties to Frank and Frank's court, even being offered leadership of the movement following Frank's death. Schönfeld declined the offer and instead adopted the name Junius Frey and went to France to join the Jacobins and participate in the Revolution. He was later guillotined for being a potential spy for Joseph II.

73. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 14.

74. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 32.

75. For the original discussion of this subject, see Moshe Arie Perlmuter, *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz and his Attitude towards Sabbatianism*.

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Va-Avo is essentially a work of Sabbatean Kabbalah, but it is also more than this. As Halperin argues, it should be read as "a charter for the world religion of the future, rooted in Kabbalistic Judaism yet unlike any religion hitherto known."[76] Crucially, as Scholem demonstrated, it was this text — an unmistakably Sabbatean Kabbalistic text by Eybeschütz, which Schönfeld would have studied from an early age — that was incorporated into the foundations of the Asiatic Brethren, with entire passages translated and included (without citation).[77]

Hirschfeld, the other principal Kabbalist of the order, met Schönfeld in 1783 through Heinrich, and Scholem suggests that Schönfeld introduced him to Frank when he came to Brünn to be personally initiated. Hirschfeld's connection to Frankism began here and it would deepen over time, with Hirschfeld joining Frank in Offenbach after the Asiatic Brethren dissolved. He published his *Biblisches Organon* in Offenbach, a compendium of Kabbalistic interpretations of scripture, some of which influenced the Asiatic Brethren and incorporated Frankist stylings. Together, these two figures introduced Kabbalistic elements into the order, primarily in the form of a Frankist interpretation.

In the end, as the Asiatic Brethren became increasingly Christianized and thus more fractured until it eventually disintegrated, Hirschfeld was expelled, and a circular was issued accusing him (ironically) of relying too heavily on Kabbalah to interpret the order's teachings (and thus exerting too much Jewish influence). Hirschfeld replied to the circular by stating that anyone who studies Kabbalah, in fact, transcends their own religion and attains "the only, true, pure and universal religion,"[78] a reply that betrays not only the Frankist underpinnings but the influence of *Va-Avo*, that mysterious text which played an important role in the order. What is meant by this true "religion of the future" remains unclear,

76. David J. Halperin, "Some Themes in the Book *Va'avo*."

77. Such a practice of incorporating unreferenced esoteric texts into Masonic teachings intended for the order is not uncommented. For example, in the late nineteenth century, Albert Pike made extensive use of Éliphas Lévi's work in his handbook for the Scottish Rite in the United States. See Albert Pike and Arturo de Hoyos, *Albert Pike's Morals and Dogma*.

78. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 49.

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but it found its counterpart in the esoteric world of secret societies, which were concerned with creating a similar form of universal religion.

The presence of *Va-Avo* in the instructions of the Asiatic Brethren is worth stressing to demonstrate the Sabbatean-Frankist influence. Connections between the Frankists and the Sabbateans around Eybeschütz have been well documented, for example, by Maciejko, and indeed the "discovery" of the text is linked to Frank's family.[79] However, the text's incorporation into the instructions of the Asiatic Brethren, and how its use relates to the belief structures of some contemporary esoteric groups, has never been explored. *Va-Avo* surfaced in the early eighteenth century in the belongings of a traveling Polish-Lithuanian manuscripts dealer named Moses Meïr Kamanker, who specialized in Sabbatean Kabbalistic texts and whose connections to Sabbateans are well established — and who was the uncle of Jacob Frank.[80] Moses Meïr was detained in Frankfurt in 1725 for disseminating the teachings of the Sabbatean Kabbalists; his manuscripts were confiscated, and it was soon clear that Moses Meïr was an agent of a larger Sabbatean network sent to promulgate their teachings. In response, an anti-Sabbatean ban was issued.[81] Many works of Eybeschütz were confiscated via Moses Meïr, but the most relevant was *Va-Avo*, which created a scandal and initiated the famous controversy with Emden.[82]

What is in this text, and why was it considered so heretical? While much is too convoluted to be rehearsed here, in simplified form it presents a highly eroticized style of Kabbalistic esotericism that is incredibly vivid and pornographic. According to Emden, it contained "many curses and blasphemies against the word of the

79. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 199–203.

80. Paweł Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," i–lii, ii.

81. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," iii–iv.

82. The fact that Eybeschütz responded by issuing his own ban on the Sabbateans using coded language, as well as the discovery of the potentially Sabbatean amulets a few years later and the fact that Eybeschütz's son Wolf turned out to be a prominent Sabbatean, will not be discussed due to space constraints.

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Living God and it turned Kabbalistic mysteries upside down."[83] As Maciejko states, "[I]t is blatantly pornographic (in fact, it is possibly the only truly pornographic text ever written in the rabbinic idiom)."[84] The Sabbateans themselves were likewise captivated. One author wrote that *Va-Avo* included "things that no eye has ever seen and no ear has ever heard," and other Sabbateans praised the text as revealing mysteries that far surpassed the *Zohar* and Lurianic Kabbalah.[85]

There are important connections between Frank's *Words of the Lord* and certain ideas advanced in *Va-Avo*. For example, the idea that the Messiah must convert or pay homage to Christianity, whereas his followers must not, and the feminization of David and Sabbatai Zevi.[86] Incredibly, when portions of the rituals and instructions of the Asiatic Brethren were published in 1803, pages 265–276 contained paraphrases and direct translations of the first eight leaves of *Va-Avo*.[87] These sections draw out the gendered interpretations of the *Va-Avo*, quote Hermes Trismegistus directly, and make use of unique Sabbatean themes of light and darkness and of the gendered duality of cosmic principles.[88]

These translated and published sections of *Va-Avo* include important passages on the concept of Chaos, the abyss of primordial darkness out of which the primal light arises — a doctrine that played a key role for Frankists in *Words of the Lord*. Frank believed that Chaos and *Choshek* (darkness) ruled over this false world, and that Chaos reigned through the power and control of malevolent

83. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," ix.

84. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xix.

85. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xvii.

86. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xlii–xliii. The sefirah Malkuth is female in Lurianic Kabbalah and normally represented by the Shechinah. In *Va-Avo*, David (and consequently the Davidic Messiah) is identified with the female Shechinah. Halperin, "Some Themes in the Book *Va'avo*," 7.

87. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*. See Scholem, "Ein Frankist," 84n23: see also Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 31–32.

88. While the lower grades also included the Christian theosophy of figures such as Georg von Welling (1655–1727) and Martinez de Pasqually (ca. 1727–1774), the higher degrees instructed members in the explicit Sabbatean concepts. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 167.

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entities.[89] Michaelson suggests that Frank's theology might reflect the concept of the *memunim* (deputies or guardians) found in the *Zohar,* to denote specific angels.[90] It is also worth mentioning the use of the *memunim* in Jewish magical practice, for example in the *Sefer Raziel HaMalakh* grimoire text, in relation to invoking angels and protection.[91]

The *unpublished* instructional documents of the order further confirm this emphasis on Chaos and *Choshek* (or *Choschbech*) and the obsession with angelic magic, especially as the initiate climbs the levels to higher knowledge — beginning with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life and the Four Worlds (emanation), and graduating to gematria and more advanced concepts such as *kavana* and *kishuf*.[92] According to Scholem, the nature of the Sabbatean work *Va-Avo* is such that only a true expert in Hebrew and Kabbalah could have translated and interpreted it — in other words, only someone of Schönfeld's caliber.[93]

The Sabbatean creation story related in the order's teachings concerns the point of Chaos within the Ein Sof, which emanates ten lights and then contracts: "In the process of self-contraction (*Zusammenziehung*) of Ein Sof, which is also described as the process of heating (*Erhitzung*), they get together again in a single point."[94] This act of self-contraction (*tzimtzum*) is described in Sabbatean/Frankist fashion through the language of sexual intercourse.[95] The concepts of the Light that Carries Thought (*she yesh bo mahshavah*) and the Thoughtless Light (*she ein bo mahshavah*) are introduced, both of which originally existed together in Ein Sof but have since split into those forces associated with the creative process

89. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 90.

90. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 90.

91. See for example, Robert Gamer, "Jewish Amulets," *Voices on Sefaria*, https://voices.sefaria.org/sheets/20004.14?lang=bi; Joshua Trachtenberg, "Chapter 6," *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 1939, https://sacred-texts.com/jud/jms/jms08.htm.

92. See, for example, F VII vol. 19 b 1-2 (Copenhagen); FXXV vol 8 a 96-112 (Copenhagen); 24622, 192 A 4, Kl.MS:XIV.B.10 (Vrijmetselarij Museum).

93. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 32.

94. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 167.

95. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*, 265–76.

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and those opposed to it, refusing to evolve. After *tzimtzum*, the Thoughtless Light and the Thought-Filled Light remained as part of Creation, though in mixed form. According to this view, the light-structures that emanated from Ein Sof are twofold: containing both that which evolves with the creative process and that which refuses and remains in the same state. As Burmistrov explains:

> the thoughtless light also creates its own structures — the demonic worlds of *klippot*. These forces, called the "snakes, living in the depths of the great abyss," are nothing but the other side of Ein Sof itself. Due to its opposition, the thoughtless light also takes part, even if indirectly, in the creation process. At the same time, the thoughtful light is actively using the negative energy of the thoughtless light for the construction of the Universe and its improvement (*tikkun*). . . . the Sabbateans created an original doctrine of the nature of Messiah, the improvement of the world and its salvation.[96]

Such ideas — introduced by Nathan of Gaza and taken further by Eybeschütz — form the basis of the theology developed in *Va-Avo* and direct the attention to the will of God in the created world as opposed to focusing on His attributes. This emphasis highlights the Manichean dualism of divine will, thus establishing a path to knowledge of the divine that begins from the lowest aspects of the created world.[97] That Freemasonry — a philosophical movement already obsessed with the symbolism of light — became a vehicle for such Sabbatean ideas is significant.

Further connections worth mentioning reveal direct resonances with Frankism, not only with Frank's Sabbatean heritage. For while Schönfeld was trained in Sabbatean theology, it was Frank to whom he owed allegiance, whose teachings he absorbed and embodied. As Scholem described him, Schönfeld "is a man wearing several masks all at once, and denying them all, depending on the circumstances, without it being possible to determine his actual position: it is the position of the true Frankist according to the concept advocated by Jacob Frank."[98]

96. Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Doctrine of the Asiatic Brethren," 169.
97. Maciejko, "Coitus Interruptus," xxii.
98. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 56–57.

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As already mentioned, Frank eventually settled in Offenbach in a castle rented to him by Wolfgang Ernst II of Isenburg and Büdingen (1735–1803), an enthusiastic Freemason and one of Frank's patrons (ostensibly in the name of religious tolerance). Wolfgang Ernst II's sons, Carl Friedrich Ludwig Moritz (1766–1820) and Wolfgang Ernst (1774–1837), were instrumental in establishing and leading the first Masonic lodge in Offenbach in 1812, *Carl & Charlotte zur Treue*.[99] Until the end of his life, Frank officiated in Isenburg Castle — which they called the "house of God" (*Gotteshaus*) — under the title of "Baron von Frank," and his daughter Eva reigned after him. The extent to which the Masonic and Frankist milieus overlapped in Offenbach is difficult to establish, although there was likely significant interaction, as suggested by the instrumental role Wolfgang Ernst II's sons played in establishing Freemasonry in Offenbach.

It was often controversial and unclear for Jews who sought nobility, for example, in the case of Wolf Eybeschütz and Benjamin Hönig, who acted as if they possessed such titles, when often it was not true.[100] Here the question of their secretly remaining Jewish, in spite of an alleged baptism and conversion, was always the issue, and, like Frank, Hönig and Eybeschütz had Sabbatean connections. It is therefore useful to cast Frank in a similar light, and even if his status of minor nobility seemed to go unchallenged — having been attained in Poland in exchange for converting to Catholicism — the question of spurious titles and charlatanism accompanied him throughout his life. Frank was even referred to as a "Jewish Cagliostro."[101]

Frank did not so much "fake" being a noble, for he was one in a certain respect; rather, he (and his followers) tended to over-extend and over-emphasize certain things, such as his status, fetishizing and taking it to dishonest lengths, and donning erroneous princely titles — for example, incessantly dressing in the garb of Polish nobles, constantly wearing sabers, while "Baron" or "Count" von

99. See membership list in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv, FM, 5.2. O. 4, Nr. 3.

100. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 212.

101. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 219.

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Frank was conveyed about in a carriage pulled by six horses, a privilege meant only for the pope or the emperor.[102] They also, on other occasions, donned the Turkish costumes of the Donmeh, which went back to the conversion of Zevi.[103]

Another unexpected parallel with high-degree Freemasonry emerges here, as Masons were — and are — preoccupied (at least in their rites and public ceremonies) with ranks and jewels and regalia, in meetings and rituals assuming the ranks of bishops and cardinals and nobles and kings, though members typically did not hold these ranks in the profane world — although some members, of course, did, and many nobles and dukes did and do belong to Masonic orders. However, many members did not hold such status outside the Masonic framework, with titles such as Grand Master and Grand Standard Bearer, or even as a cardinal or a bishop in ritual dramas.

Possible Frankist influences in the Asiatic Brethren further include the use of the epithet "force of forces" in relation to the Kabbalistic deity, a term used by Frank that is also found in the teachings of the order.[104] The framework of Sabbateanism and Frankism involves secrecy and esoteric reading; that is, words, phrases, and images are used in a certain way that can only be recognized by the initiated. This is true for the way in which scholars can determine that *Va-Avo*, for example, is a Sabbatean text, and that a certain figure in the text is rather an esoteric stand-in for Sabbatai Zevi (Frankism operates in the same way). For this reason, certain terms and phrases used within the order of the Asiatic Brethren are telling. As Scholem points out, the idiosyncratic use of the word *Sie* in the order's texts in relation to the divine feminine, the Maiden — or *Panna* in Polish, regularly used in Frank's teachings — is another case of Frankist influence.[105]

102. Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitudes*, 212.

103. Scholem was convinced that Zevi had close ties with the Bektashi Sufi Order, an unorthodox Sufi group that also had ties to Freemasonry. See Seyed Amir Hossein Asghari, "The Bektashi Order, Sufism, and Shī'īsm," 54.

104. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 38.

105. Scholem, *Du Frankisme au Jacobinisme*, 41.

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Like other Masonic orders, the Asiatic Brethren had a regular festival calendar, although they celebrated Jewish and Christian holidays in which pork had to be consumed.[106] Furthermore, it does not seem to have occurred to Maciejko or Michaelson that Frank's "Big Brother" (*Wielki Brat*) — a title Frank often used for himself, but which also signified a type of higher spiritual self — might be related to Freemasonry. In Polish Freemasonry, *Brat* is a formal greeting for a fellow initiated brother, and *Wielki* is used to refer to the Grand Orient (*Wielki Wschód*), the Grand Lodge (*Wielka Loża*) or the Grand Master (*Wielki Mistrz*).

Finally, the understanding of Kabbalah within the order, especially as articulated by Hirschfeld, emphasizes the "one true religion" and the "one true God" of all humanity — the Great Architect of the Universe in Masonic terminology — which stands over and against the understanding of traditional religions and resembles Frank's concept of *Das*, or "gnosis," a knowledge that must be borne in secret.[107] In *Words of the Lord*, Frank describes *Das* as hidden, signifying special knowledge, and existing somehow outside the *sefirot*.[108] But what is *Das*? According to Michaelson:

> Scholars have debated whether this term refers to knowledge (*da'at* — *daas* in Ashkenazi pronunciation), or religion (*dat* — *das* in Ashkenazi pronunciation), or the quasi-*sefirah* of *Da'at*, or even to *das*, the German word for "this." My view is that Frank intended the term to be polysemous, and that it is a deliberate conflation of gnosis, the new religion into which Frank is to bring the Brethren, and the occulted *sefirah* of *da'at*. Above all, *das* means "gnosis," specifically the gnosis of Western esotericism: the secret knowledge that will enable the Brethren to proceed on their journey toward immortality.[109]

While *da'at* is usually understood as "knowledge" in general, it could also signify something like "consciousness" or "awareness," whereas *dat* signifies

106. Von einem hohen Obern, *Die Brüder St. Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*, 38.
107. Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 244n105; Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 31.
108. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 95.
109. Michaelson, *The Heresy of Jacob Frank*, 95.

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something like "faith." Scholem also indicated "gnosis" in relation to *da'at*.[110] The theology of *Das* or *da'at* thus refers to the universal or gnostic esotericism, the religion above all religions so prevalent in esoteric circles. To illustrate how this heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren contributed to the development of esotericism, we now turn to the contemporary occult milieu.

Heretical Kabbalah and Contemporary Esotericism

By examining the syncretizing efforts of Frank and his followers within the Masonic context, we see how these activities introduced a form of heretical Kabbalah to the Asiatic Brethren. Though these efforts were short-lived, they played an important role in Masonic history and in contemporary occult groups inspired by Freemasonry. For example, Hereward Tilton has argued that the obsession with the Urim and Thummim in the Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross, to which Heinrich and his brother Hans Karl belonged, was the source of this obsession in the Asiatic Brethren and was later carried on in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and, from there, within Aleister Crowley's Thelema.[111] Some occultists today regard the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn as the successor of the Asiatic Brethren and its heretical Kabbalah — a unique "constructed tradition" that has received sparse attention.

In 1997, occultist and Rosicrucian scholar Jean-Pascal Ruggiu — Imperator of the Ahathöor Temple No. 7 in Paris, France, which belongs to the Alpha et Omega version of the Golden Dawn (a successor to the original Golden Dawn) — wrote an article in which he claimed that Sabbatean and Frankist influences are to be found in the Stella Matutina teachings and practices of the Golden Dawn.[112] He states that the origins of the Golden Dawn are connected to the first manifestation of the Asiatic Brethren, namely, the Knights and Brothers

110. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah* (2018), 124.

111. Hereward Tilton, "The Urim and Thummim," 40.

112. Online as part of the Felkin Collection (Robert William Felkin and the Whare Ra). Jean-Pascal Ruggiu, "Rosicrucian Alchemy and the Heretic Order of the Golden Dawn."

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of the Light (*Orden der Ritter und Brüder des Lichts* or *Fratres Lucis*). According to Ruggiu, the famous cipher manuscript that provided the structure and rituals of the Golden Dawn, transmitted to the order's founding members by Freemasons Kenneth Mackenzie (1833–1886) and Frederick Hockley (1809–1885) — who likely authored the mysteriously "found" manuscript[113] — was linked to the Knights and Brothers of the Light and the Asiatic Brethren, whose members migrated to the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt — *L'Aurore Naissante* in French — a "very ancient Rosicrucian Lodge."[114]

This claim represents an intriguing lineage, weaving a compelling narrative from the complex history outlined above. Tomas Stacewicz, another well-known occultist and former Imperator of the Alpha et Omega Golden Dawn temple in Sweden, followed up on Ruggiu's statements in an article focusing on the origins of *Qabala* (i.e., heretical Kabbalah) in the Golden Dawn. Stacewicz points out that the Hebrew name for the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" in Frankfurt was *Chevrah Zerach Bequr Aur* (which, perhaps, means something like Order or Society of the Golden or Rising Dawn), and that this exact phrase in Hebrew is found on the first page of the Golden Dawn cipher manuscript — suggesting, for the author, "a true 'esoteric transmission' from the Frankist Qabalah into the Golden Dawn."[115] As Stacewicz explains, "on one hand we have a clear association between the Sabbatian-Frankist Qabalah and *L'Aurore Naissante*, through the Asiatic Brethren, and on the other a link between *L'Aurore Naissante* and the Golden Dawn through the mysterious Cypher Mss."[116]

113. For this background, see G. J. Wheeler, "The Finding of Hidden Texts in Esoteric and Other Religious Traditions," 342–44.

114. Ruggiu, "Rosicrucian Alchemy and the Heretic Order of the Golden Dawn," 6. The quote is attributed to William Wynn Westcott, a co-founder of the original Golden Dawn. The idea that *L'Aurore Naissante* in Frankfurt was "Rosicrucian" is partly based on the (likely fanciful) account that Edward Bulwer-Lytton, author of the occult novel *Zanoni* (1842), was initiated into the lodge there. On this background, see Julian Strube, *Vril*, 62–64.

115. Tomas Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition of the Golden Dawn," 8. This article is made available online by the Hermetiska Orden av Den Gryende Morgonrodnaden. See also Tomas Stacewicz, "The Sabbatian roots of the Golden Dawn."

116. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 8.

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Stacewicz actually bases this hypothesis on Scholem's remarks about the same words, which appear in Gustav Meyrink's novel *The Golem* when the protagonist experiences a Kabbalistic vision, and which Scholem suggested (to Meyrink) "must be simply a mystical name of a lodge retranslated into Hebrew, something like 'Lodge of Aurora's Seed.'"[117] As Scholem reflected:

> Not until fifty years later did I find out that [this exact phrase] was nothing but a retranslation of the title of the so-called Frankfurt Jewish lodge, famous in the history of freemasonry from the days of Napoleon, namely the "Loge Aurora zur aufgehenden Morgenröte" [Aurora Lodge of the Rising Dawn], as incorrectly transcribed by some ignoramus in an English book in Meyrink's library.[118]

Scholem has in mind the (English) writings of Golden Dawn initiates, Rosicrucian Freemasons, and the "pseudo-Kabbalah" of Theosophy.[119] From the perspective of the constructed occult tradition, however, the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" is heir to the esoteric lineage of the Asiatic Brethren. While this might seem a strange way to do history, for scholars of esotericism such stories of an invented lineage are normal. Andreas Kilcher has pointed out that esoteric groups in fact rely on such stories, that they "not only understand themselves in elaborate mytho-poetical narratives …[but] claim their knowledge to be of a particular origin …[that] has been transmitted by particular (esoteric) means, media and groups."[120]

But who was the link in this chain of transmission from Frankfurt to London (where the Golden Dawn was founded)? In Stacewicz's view, this was MacKenzie, who "received his claimed Rosicrucian esoteric transmission in Austria by the hand of the Hungarian Count Apponyi, in 1850."[121] Vienna was,

117. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133.

118. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133–34. See also Boaz Huss and Jonatan Meir, "'The Light is Burning Pretty Low'," 52–53.

119. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, 133.

120. Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*, ix.

121. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 8. This claim was originally put forward by Westcott. Who and which Apponyi this is remains unclear, as the dates are not clear, but it is likely Anton Apponyi (1782–1852). However, this episode does seem to have been substantiated in some way by Bruce Wilson in the article "The Origin of Our Rosicrucian Society."

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of course, the birthplace and headquarters of the Knights and Brothers of the Light and the Asiatic Brethren. According to another Golden Dawn researcher, Bruce Wilson, MacKenzie used this warrant after returning from Vienna to establish the first manifestation of the Golden Dawn as the "Brothers of Light," a reference to the Knights and Brothers of the Light, which become known as the *Fratres Lucis* or "Society of Eight."[122]

This constructed tradition is popular in contemporary esotericism within the context of a Neo-Sabbatian movement, within which the Asiatic Brethren were revived in 2009 as the "Knights and Companions of St. John the Evangelist of Asia in Europe" by Bro. Asariah, or Olen D. Rush, with lodges in several countries.[123] Through a charter granted by the "Greater Sanhedrin of the Knights and Companions of St. John the Evangelist of Asia in Europe," the lodge "Wittel Matuszewska, the Right Hand Lodge" was established in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2014 by the "Lodge Facilitator Rabbi Moysze." On the "About" page of the website for this lodge, we read from their mytho-poetic history that Bro. Rabbi Moysze is a "contemporary Sabbatian/Frankist Ma'aminim."[124]

It is worth asking what draws contemporary occultists to this particular mytho-poetic lineage. Are there structural similarities and resonances between the heretical Kabbalah of the Asiatic Brethren and Frankism — what Bro. Asariah refers to as "syncretic Kabbalah" — and modern occultism? To offer a final example, the occulted sefirah *da'at*, in relation to *das* or gnosis, may offer a clue. This "occulted" sefirah played a significant role in the structure of the Golden Dawn grades and represented the center of the Rosicrucian cross and the Abyss, which the initiate must traverse to advance on the path to

122. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 9; Wheeler, "The Finding of Hidden Texts," 343.

123. See official lodge website at https://rabbimoysze.wordpress.com/2014/09/12/wittel-matuszewska-the-right-hand-lodge/; Olen D. Rush, "Prof. Dr. Paul Silva, Editor-in-Chief, JAMMO, Talks to Adjunct Prof. Olen D. Rush, on Resonance of Syncretic Kabbalah Today."

124. See the official lodge website at https://rabbimoysze.wordpress.com/2014/09/12/wittel-matuszewska-the-right-hand-lodge/.

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higher knowledge.[125] An emphasis on *da'at* and the "Crossing of the Abyss" was continued in Crowley's Thelema and A.·.A.·. after he broke from the Golden Dawn, where it came to represent the place where the initiate had to encounter malevolent beings taken from John Dee and Edward Kelley's famous magical channelings.[126] As Crowley himself noted, in this type of occult Kabbalah (which, as in Sabbateanism and Frankism, approaches the divine or Ein Sof from the bottom, that is, from the fallen realm), "not only is the Divine Unity destroyed but Daath, instead of being the Child of Chokmah and Binah, becomes the Abyss, and the Qliphoth arise."[127]

Conclusion

This article has revisited the efforts of certain Frankists within the Asiatic Brethren to suggest that the interaction between these groups is more significant for the history of esotericism than is generally recognized. Although scholars of Judaism are familiar with this history, situating it within the context of occultism provides opportunities to compare the structural similarities with esoteric belief systems, as opposed to confining the analysis to fluctuations of heterodoxy and orthodoxy in Judaism. Scholem, Burmistrov, Michaelson, and others have initiated this research program, yet their studies represent the tip of an iceberg.

The para-discipline of Masonic history, written by Masonic historians from the eighteenth century until today, contains countless references to the Asiatic Brethren and their connection to what is often referred to as Sabbateanism, though often Frankism is meant. Revisiting this history from the field of esotericism studies allows us to better determine the extent to which Frankism was connected not only to the Asiatic Brethren but to Freemasonry and modern occult groups, which sheds new light on this entangled history and identifies connections historians of Judaism might miss.

125. Stacewicz, "The Origins of the Qabalistic Tradition," 14.
126. Matt Lee, "To survive da'ath," November 12, 2014, by Actual Virtual Journal, YouTube, 23:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkxPCl398t8.
127. Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 121.

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As this article has endeavored to show, parallels between the belief structures of Sabbatean Frankism and some currents of modern esotericism exist independent of forensic evidence. Concrete historical connections might indeed exist, but it is important to recognize these doctrinal similarities to better understand the factors that led to such a convergence. One way this manifested was through the phenomenon of constructed tradition, which is so prevalent in the history of esotericism, where "concepts of origin and memory as well as techniques and practices of knowledge transmission are central."[128] The continuity from the "Lodge Nascent Dawn" to the Asiatic Brethren to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, whether real or wholly imaginary, exerts a specific influence in the contemporary esoteric milieu; what is more, the construction of tradition is not arbitrary but points to possible connections that evade the normative methods of the academy. Certainly, a form of Christianized Kabbalah with roots in the European Renaissance was incorporated into Freemasonry and modern occultism, but the extent to which "Sabbatean Frankist" Kabbalism — what Scholem called "heretical Kabbalah" — also shaped "Hermetic Qabalah" remains an open question.

What is so intriguing about the associations presented in this article is that they suggest a connection between the legacy of the Asiatic Brethren and modern occultism that is still relevant today, with Sabbatean Frankism at the center. Jacob Frank has seen something of a popular resurgence of late, from acclaimed novels to conspiracy theories.[129] In recovering these difficult figures in the history of Judaism, Scholem scratched the surface of an understudied current of esotericism and its relationship to modernity. Scholars of esotericism are well-equipped to explore this relationship, and the present article represents one step in addressing this lacuna.

128. Kilcher, *Constructing Tradition*, ix.

129. Nobel Prize winning author Wydawnictwo Literackie wrote an epic historical novel based on Frank in 2014, while political commentators and occasional conspiracy theorists such as Candace Owens and Jiang Xueqin have implicated Frankism in an ongoing evil ideology held by the elite.

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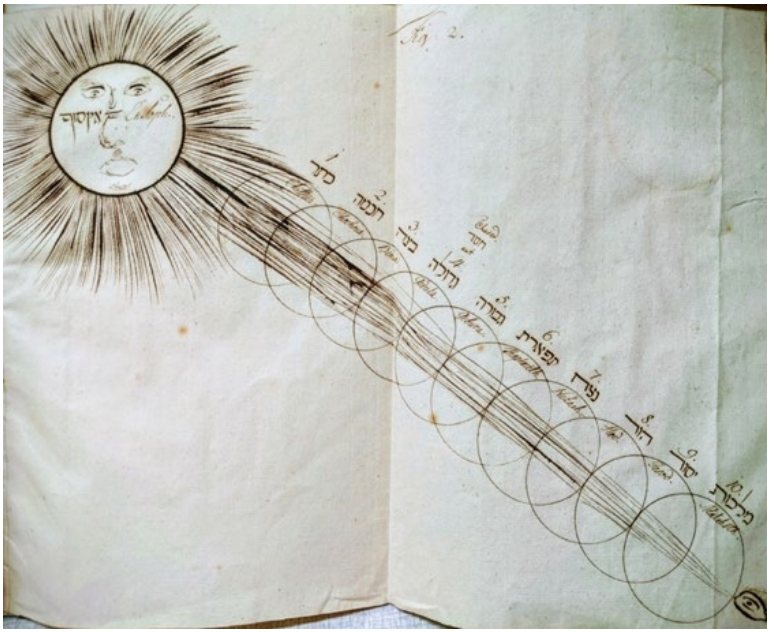

Figure 1. Figure from the first higher degree of the Asiatic Brethren, "The Introduction to the Principles of the Kabbalistic Work through the Sephiroth," which shows the path of ascent from the fallen realm to the realm of light. Author photo, FXXV vol. 8, a 96–112 (Copenhagen), permission granted by the Danish Order of Freemasons.

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New Age Kitsch or Esotericism?
Esoteric Tradition as the Key to Peter Høeg's *The Quiet Girl*

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Abstract

This article examines the Danish reception and esoteric dimensions of Peter Høeg's *The Quiet Girl* (2006), a novel widely criticized in Denmark for its spiritual themes but received more openly abroad. Drawing on Wouter J. Hanegraaff's concept of esotericism as "rejected knowledge," the study argues that the controversy surrounding the novel reveals ongoing epistemic boundaries in Danish literary culture, where secular rationalism continues to frame spiritual or mystical worldviews as illegitimate. The article demonstrates that *The Quiet Girl* is not just an expression of contemporary New Age thinking but participates in the more complex historical esoteric current. Three key esoteric motifs—gnosis, perennialism, and Jungian psychology—structure the novel's exploration of stillness as a spiritual state, synchronicity, and spiritual transformation. The article concludes that is best understood as a contemporary expression of re-enchantment that challenges dominant secular epistemologies and reintroduces esoteric modes of experience into twenty-first century Danish literature.

Keywords: Danish literature; esotericism; rejected knowledge; spirituality; gnosis

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Peter Høeg is one of the most widely read Danish authors of recent times, and his works and the reception of them are a particularly interesting case of esotericism in literature and its reception in literary criticism. Høeg's international reputation culminated in 1992 when he published the thriller *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*. After the publication of the culturally critical *The Woman and the Monkey* in 1996, it would be ten years before Høeg published his next book, *The Quiet Girl* (2006). The public was very expectant due to the long silence, but the mood changed when the reviews came in. The general tenor of the Danish reviews was highly critical: several prominent critics found *The Quiet Girl* overly didactic, accusing Høeg of abandoning his artistic craft in favor of spiritual sermonizing and scholarly treatises.[1] Høeg's connection to the spiritual teacher Jes Bertelsen was also widely discussed and seemed to confirm the critics' suspicion that the author had become a kind of disciple or propagandist for a spiritual worldview.

Such reactions indicate that the controversy surrounding *The Quiet Girl* cannot be reduced to aesthetic criteria alone. To some foreign observers, the vehemence of the Danish criticism reveals a cultural tension between secular rationalism and expressions of spirituality in contemporary literature. The hostility toward Høeg's novel points to a broader phenomenon: the persistent unease, even taboo, surrounding spirituality and esoteric thought within the Nordic literary field. When a work provokes such intense reactions, it is often because it transgresses implicit cultural or epistemological boundaries — what counts as legitimate knowledge and what does not. In that sense, the study of esotericism in Høeg is not only relevant to the specific reception of *The Quiet Girl* but can serve as a case study for the marginalization of esotericism as such.

1. In a review, literary critic Jens Andersen (b. 1955) wrote: "With *The Quiet Girl*, Peter Høeg seems to write himself off as an artist" ("En forfatter på ørkenvandring," my translation). Literary scholar John Christian Jørgensen said that the book was "too much scholarship and revivalist tract — and too little narrative art" ("Høeg skuffer," my translation). And literary critic on the Danish newspaper *Politiken* Bjørn Bredal concluded: "Peter Høeg's gigantic talent is wasted in a collection of sermons disguised as a novel" ("Høegs hørelse," my translation).

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Drawing on Wouter J. Hanegraaff's analysis of esotericism as "rejected knowledge," I argue that the novel's reception exposes the limits of a secular and rationalist aesthetic regime that continues to shape literary evaluation in Denmark. Comparison with the reception, for example, in the United States, indicates that the cultural acceptance of esotericism is higher there. At least in academia. My reading will demonstrate that *The Quiet Girl* not only resonates with the thought of Jes Bertelsen but also participates in the larger esoteric tradition that Hanegraaff, Faivre, and others have reconstructed. The purpose of the article is thus twofold: first, to analyze how Høeg's novel engages with central motifs of esoteric thought, such as gnosis (intuitive or spiritual modes of knowledge), perennialism, and Jungianism; and second, to situate this engagement within the cultural history of esotericism as a marginalized current of knowledge. In doing so, the article seeks to reinterpret Høeg's controversial novel as an instance of modern re-enchantment rather than as New Age kitsch or spiritual eccentricity.

As mentioned, Peter Høeg's involvement with Jes Bertelsen was part of the controversy. Bertelsen began his career as a university lecturer, but in 1982 he founded his own spiritual center, Vækstcenteret (the Growth Center) in Nørre Snede in Jutland, Denmark. Høeg and Bertelsen have worked together on books and other projects, and Høeg explicitly thanks Bertelsen in *The Quiet Girl*. In addition, Høeg has stayed at the Growth Center for periods.

As early as 2003, Peter Høeg's most outspoken critic, Lars Bukdahl, identified the connection between Høeg and Jes Bertelsen. He wanted to review Bertelsen's book *Dzogchenpraksis som bevidsthedsvidde* (*Dzogchen Practice as Width of Consciousness*) and discovered that Bertelsen thanked Høeg for stylistic assistance in the afterword. Since the book is about a specialized form of meditative training (Dzogchen), Bukdahl's criticism of Bertelsen prefigures his criticism of the inherent worldview behind *The Quiet Girl*.

Bukdahl explicitly refers to his own postmodern worldview as the basis for his aversion to Bertelsen's ideal of spiritual perfectibility. Bukdahl uses irony

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to deconstruct the pathos with which Bertelsen presents the spiritual discourse. Whereas Bertelsen, according to Bukdahl, has an ideal of clarity of consciousness and perfectibility, Bukdahl associates his own postmodern self with a literary "dirty" (polyphonic, chaotic, cacophonous, "debasing") consciousness.[2] However, he recognizes the importance of "bright and clear moments" — privileged moments, or states of consciousness described paradoxically and with humor (and without pathos) by his postmodern heroes, the poets Dan Turéll and Peter Laugesen. Bertelsen's attempts to describe higher states are disparaged as advertising-style New Age kitsch. His allegories about progressive learning in the realm of spirituality are interpreted as "salesmanship."[3]

All the elements of Bukdahl's postmodern critique of Bertelsen are echoed in his exceptionally critical review of *The Quiet Girl*. It is accused of being spiritually edifying ("well-groomed and highly gymnastic piety"), encyclopedic, full of calendar-page *bon mots* from old masters, "trivia-action" and literary kitsch (references to high culture, especially J.S. Bach). Like the allegories of progressive learning in *Dzogchen Practice as Width of Consciousness*, the novel is interpreted as a means to sell Bertelsen's teachings. In other words, Bukdahl accuses Høeg of being a mouthpiece for a spiritual guru.[4]

The tone of Danish literary criticism was so sharp that writers from abroad defended Høeg. In the *New Statesman*, Tabish Khair cites the spirituality of the novel as the primary reason for the fierce Danish criticism of Høeg's novel: "Even less to the critics' taste, Høeg's recent novels, and in particular *The Quiet Girl*, resonate with a deep spirituality, even mysticism, that has little to do

2. A literary polyphony he associates with the character Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Bukdahl, "Hø over hø."

3. Sarcastically, Bukdahl writes that he prefers June and Sofia's pink note on the laundromat's bulletin board offering "cleansing of negative energies in your home and clairvoyance for house and pets" (ibid.).

4. "*The Quiet Girl* can be compared with a cinematic analogy to Jes Bertelsen's *Dzogchen Practice as Width of Consciousness* from 2003, filmed by a humorless Tarantino and Spielberg epigone" (ibid., my translation).

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with religion. Nothing is more calculated to disturb some people in a country [Denmark] that allows space only for mechanical religious practice, shorn of spirituality, or mechanical atheism, deprived of philosophy."[5] The Norwegian author Jan Kjærstad also remarked on the strange disgust that the novel aroused in the critics: "Some reviewers are not just strict, they are merciless. They suggest that it is a kind of bankruptcy, an artist who has written himself off, and they are disgusted by the fact that the characters in the novel make so many references."[6]

When a novel elicits such strong reactions in reviews, it is often because there is an underlying conflict that goes beyond the question of aesthetic success or failure. Part of the reason may be that the novel is difficult to categorize in the usual literary contexts (realism, minimalism, and so on). But as the quotes from Khair and Kjærstad show, the reception of *The Quiet Girl* suggests that Høeg's inclusion of spiritual themes is a problem for the critics; indeed, it seems as if spirituality and metaphysics are tabooed.

Because Peter Høeg is one of the few Danish authors to have made an international breakthrough, it is possible to compare the reception of *The Quiet Girl* in Denmark with its reception elsewhere. It is remarkable that the spirituality that is the main stumbling block in the Danish reception of *The Quiet Girl* is not problematized in the American reception of the book. To name one example, the *New York Times* review was quite critical of the book's literary qualities (and the translation), but the reviewer had no objections to the metaphysical elements.[7] It is thus possible to assume that the spiritual ideas enjoy greater cultural acceptance in the US than in Denmark.[8] Here, Egil

5. Khair, "Life on the Edge."

6. Kjærstad, "Opsang: Klovnens metoder."

7. "There's no fair reason to protest an author's decision to mingle the real and the supernatural, the savory and the unsavory, the secular and the religious." Schillinger, "Ear of a Clown," 2007.

8. The German reception of the novel is characterized by the same aversion to its spirituality and esotericism. Cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 March 2007; *Die Tageszeitung*, 17 March 2007; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 February 2007; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 February 2007; *Die Zeit*, 08 February 2007. In her article "'Doing the Secular': Academic Practices in the Study of

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Asprem's analysis of the re-enchantment of science among the educated elites is, indeed, very interesting, since it is based on American Gallup polls, and the reception of Høeg is one example of many of less tolerance towards paranormal knowledge claims in the Nordic countries than in the United States.[9]

After examining the Danish reception of *The Quiet Girl* alongside other recent novels that foreground spiritual or esoteric motifs, Knud Wentzel identified a distinct pattern: mainstream critics tend to reject or pathologize spiritual epistemologies. This tendency aligns closely with what Wouter J. Hanegraaff has described as the entrenched epistemological hierarchy of Western modernity, in which rationalist, secular-realist modes of knowing are privileged, while forms of insight connected to mysticism, intuition, or spiritual experience are systematically downgraded.

Wentzel captures this dynamic through what he calls the "minus-label" mechanism — a set of dismissive markers ("spirituality," "esotericism," "occultism") that function less as descriptive categories than as boundary-policing devices. Such labels do not engage the literary or philosophical substance of a work; rather, they signal that the text has strayed beyond what the literary field regards as a legitimate worldview. As he writes: "Though profoundly different in style and content, these spiritual books share a common feature: they articulate a form of spirituality that transcends the normative worldview upheld by the literary industry... An area that mainstream literary criticism largely dismisses with frowns and negative labels."[10] Wentzel is particularly critical of "the comfortable prejudiced attitude without substantial support with which the leading literary criticism could reject it [*The Quiet Girl*]," noting

Religion at Two Danish Universities," Birgitte Schepelern Johansen confirms the assessment of Danish academia as having a strong secular identity: "In the examples given here, the space in which the teacher and students are located is not surprisingly established as that of 'science,' and not infrequently, the term 'secular' is explicitly used as the overarching term for this space. It is a space presented not only as neutral but also as independent and unrestricted, characterized by choice, by flexibility, by the unselfish search for knowledge and by peer-relations to other researchers — and this is mainly done through its opposition to religion." 289f.

9. Asprem, "Psychic Enchantments of the Educated Classes," 335.

10. Wentzel, "To verdener," 135 (my translation).

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how the mere invocation of the industry's "minus word 'spirituality'" becomes sufficient grounds for dismissal.[11]

What Wentzel brings into focus, then, is not simply a matter of aesthetic preference but an underlying ontological intolerance. He contrasts the reception of spiritually inflected fiction with the overwhelmingly positive critical response to forms of autofiction by writers such as Suzanne Brøgger, Knud Romer, and especially Karl Ove Knausgård. The controversies generated by autofiction tend to concern ethical questions about representing real people. When novels move instead into the domain of spiritual worldviews, the axis of criticism shifts: the work is no longer judged along ethical lines but along ontological ones. Critics implicitly ask not "How responsibly does the text handle reality?" but "Is the author's worldview true or false?" The novels of Lars Muhl — *The Seer*, *The Magdalene*, and *The Grail* — serve as telling examples of works that are not realist in an atheist sense but consistent within a spiritual metaphysics and thus are particularly vulnerable to epistemic disqualification.[12]

From my perspective, Wentzel's analysis reflects a broader Nordic academic skepticism toward non-secular knowledge claims — a cultural pattern that contrasts with the more pluralistic or at least more permissive American context. The rapid resort to negative labels can be understood as a defensive gesture that protects the secular-realist consensus underlying much of Scandinavian literary culture. In this light, Wentzel's conclusion is especially pointed: esoteric and spiritual texts embody "an epistemological and spiritual world of experience that is no less serious and authentic than the literature that is served and emphasized day in and day out by literary criticism."[13] His critique thus challenges not only interpretive habits within the literary field but the deeper epistemic assumptions that shape what kinds of worldviews count as culturally legitimate.

11. Ibid, 134–35.

12. Muhl, *The O Manuscript: The Seer, The Magdalene, The Grail*.

13. Wentzel continues: "If the task of literary criticism is not only to contribute to keeping the cultivated end of the entertainment industry going, but also to deal with genre-transcending descriptions of the hidden and marginalized dimensions of existence, then there is not only a task here, but also an audience." Ibid., 136 (my translation).

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Reviewer and literary scholar Mikkel Bruun Zangenberg was among those who responded to Knud Wentzel's criticism. Although Zangenberg cites historical examples of spirituality and literature of the highest caliber going hand in hand (Meister Eckhart, Goethe, Strindberg, Kafka), he ends up resignedly stating that "that kind of literature" is difficult to understand and is typically "something for the initiated few."[14] By mentioning canonical authors with spiritual and esoteric leanings, Zangenberg undermines his own argument. Literature with a spiritual or esoteric dimension is not per se something for the initiated few.

The fact that there is also a more popular, general esoteric culture has led Christopher Partridge to speak of "occulture," which is a sociological attempt to describe the paradox that "occultural" ideas arise in relatively small environments but spread to mainstream environments.[15] In sociological terms, the esoteric can take on the character of exoticism as a popular "occulture." Another example is magical realism, which began as a South American wave but later developed into a global genre, not least after the success of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). The genre's representatives include literary luminaries from all continents, including Salman Rushdie, Icelandic Einar Már Guðmundsson, Moroccan Tahar Ben Jelloun, Nigerian Ben Okri, American Toni Morrison, Indian Arundhati Roy, Chinese Mo Yan, and Japanese Haruki Murakami, several of whom are Nobel Prize winners and combine high literary quality with a large readership.

In Denmark, the genre has prominent representatives: Ib Michael's *Killroy, Killroy* (1989) and *Prins* (*Prince,* 1997), Hanne-Marie Svendsen's *Guldkuglen* (*The Gold Ball,* 1985) and not least Peter Høeg's debut novel *Forestilling om det 20. århundrede (The History of Danish Dreams,* 1988) are undoubtedly influenced by South American magical realism but also contribute to global magical realism. Prototypically, one can mention Karen Blixen's *Seven Gothic Tales* (1935) which

14. Krasnik, "Da kritikken mistede ånden," (my translation).
15. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West.*

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Høeg was accused of plagiarizing in his *Tales of the Night* (1990). In terms of genre, Høeg makes a shift with *The Quiet Girl* and his later books; although these have features in common with magical realism (they transcend conventional realism by containing so-called paranormal phenomena), they are even more closely tied to esoteric core ideas. Here, Høeg uses the thriller, which does not attempt to create ambivalence between realism and paranormal phenomena but is rather firmly tied to esoteric epistemology. But there is no indication that Høeg would include the esoteric and spiritual for strategic reasons. The daily press's criticism of these spiritual elements is too harsh for that.

According to Zangenberg, the explanation for the taboo towards spiritual and esoteric literature is that the universities — which educate reviewers and literary scholars — marginalize spirituality.[16] However, this is not only the case in Denmark but is part of a general trend in European intellectual history. As Hanegraaff writes in *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, the academic world has defined the esoteric current as "the Other" ever since the polemical critique of Protestantism and the Enlightenment.[17] The academic world represented a disenchanted perception of reality based on an academic identity as a rational counterpart to esoteric (and other) forms of re-enchantment, a perception that was continued by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School.[18]

As far as writers such as Goethe, Novalis, Balzac, Strindberg, Rilke, Kafka and Yeats may be from Høeg stylistically, they participate to different degrees in

16. Krasnik, "Da kritikken mistede ånden."

17. "In other words, if the early Church had once needed a concept of 'heresy' (gnostic or other-wise) to define its own 'orthodox' identity, and Protestantism had needed the concept of a 'pagan' opponent (Roman Catholic or otherwise) to define its own identity as true Christianity, the newly developing academic orthodoxies created reified 'Others' more suitable to their own needs of self-definition: irrational 'superstition' based on human ignorance, credulity, prejudice, and sheer stupidity in the case of Enlightenment philosophers, 'alchemy' in the case of modern chemists, 'astrology' in the case of modern astronomers, 'magic' and 'occult philosophy' in the case of scientists in general. In this manner the category of 'the occult' emerged during this period as a conceptual waste-basket for 'rejected knowledge,' and it has kept functioning as the academy's radical 'Other' to the present day" (Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy,* 221).

18. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, 312.

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esoteric tradition. Certain literary movements have a particular affinity with the esoteric: Romanticism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, fantasy, science fiction, and magical realism. What these movements and authors have in common, in other words, is that with knowledge of the esoteric cultural code, one can interpret their works and the implicit worldview in an adequate manner. Thereby, one avoids falling into what Wentzel calls "minus labels" and what Hanegraaf calls "the waste-basket category of 'prejudice,' 'superstition,' 'foolishness,' or 'stupidity.'"[19] The novel (and similar novels) can be analyzed as a work in its own right and not as representative of an erroneous worldview. In this sense, the reception of *The Quiet Girl* illustrates a wider cultural tendency to dismiss or marginalize esoteric modes of thought in contemporary intellectual discourse.[20]

Both Bukdahl and Danish criticism in general seemed to lack knowledge of this larger cultural context and the cultural code behind *The Quiet Girl*. Høeg is not only in agreement with Jes Bertelsen but with a far more comprehensive current in European intellectual history, namely esotericism. The reception of Høeg's *The Quiet Girl* is a particularly good example since we here see both a lack of knowledge of the history of esotericism and an ideological dismissal of the implicit epistemology. On a terminological level, this is seen in the pejorative

19. Ibid.

20. The difficulty of the process toward general acceptance of Western esotericism as a field of research is evident in Hanegraaff's monograph *Esotericism and the Academy*. In the personal section of the introduction, Hanegraaff describes how, during his studies, he came across names like Marsilio Ficino, Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Jacob Böhme, who seemed to exist in a "no-man's-land" between philosophy, religion, literature, art, and science: "And it became clear that, far from being marginal outsiders, they had been remarkably influential in their own time, and stood at the origin of large and complex intellectual traditions that could be traced through the centuries and even up to our own time." But when Hanegraaff asked his professors for advice, he was met with nothing but fear: "My interest in this domain seemed to make my teachers uncomfortable, and to my repeated request for information and suggestions, they responded by tossing the embarrassing topic on to another colleague as if it were a hot potato. Nobody seemed willing to touch it, and it did not take me very long to decide that if this were the case, then somebody had to do it" (ibid., 2).

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use of the label "New Age" which is not a precise designation of the historical background of neither Høeg nor Bertelsen.[21]

In her article "Beyond Belief," Christine Ferguson argues that esoteric literature should not be reduced to expressions of authorial belief or treated primarily as documentary evidence of occult commitment. Instead, she emphasizes the aesthetic complexity of such texts, warning against overly biographical or belief-oriented readings.[22] However, Ferguson's perspective is situated within an Anglophone scholarly context, where esotericism has to a larger degree been integrated into literary studies. The Danish reception of *The Quiet Girl* points to a different problem structure.

In the Nordic literary field, the dominant critical reflex is not an over-identification of literature with belief, but rather a *pre-emptive epistemic dismissal* of spiritual or esoteric worldviews as illegitimate. Labels such as "New Age," "kitsch," or "spiritual sermonizing" function not as analytical tools but as minus-markers that foreclose interpretation in advance. In this context, Ferguson's claim that esoteric perspectives are not marginalized in literary scholarship does not fully apply. While it is certainly true that important Anglophone literary studies of esotericism exist — some of which I have myself drawn upon

21. Religious scholar Helle Hinge has written about the Jes Bertelsen movement as New Age. She defines the main characteristics of New Age as characterized by holistic thinking, a "view of the present as a global crisis that heralds a paradigm shift and the imminent arrival of a new paradisiacal time on Earth, namely the Age of Aquarius" (Hinge, *New Age på dansk*, 112, my translation). She sees the New Age as part of the broader Human Potential Movement, whose basic idea is that human beings have a psychological and spiritual potential that has not yet been realized (ibid., 16). Bertelsen links the idea of spiritual potential to mysticism, which is compatible with the New Age movement's general interest in "non-ordinary states of mind."

22. "By paying closer attention to such gaps and absences, we have the opportunity to substantially expand the approaches and textual corpora we use to appraise the protean range of connections which link literature to occult practice, belief, and style. This expansion will in turn allow us to better understand why particular narrative gambits might serve or subvert particular religious purposes. Perhaps more importantly, it will allow us to dethrone authorial intention from its role as chief or even exclusive determinative of narrative meaning, a position that, as we will see, it continues to occupy in some veins of esotericism studies long after its displacement in literary studies." Ferguson, "Beyond Belief," 206–7.

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in earlier research — these do not alter the broader reception-historical pattern observable in Denmark, where esotericism continues to operate as a boundary-transgressing and stigmatized cultural code.

The case of *The Quiet Girl* therefore highlights a cultural and institutional asymmetry between Anglophone and Nordic contexts. Where Ferguson addresses the danger of reductive belief attribution within an already pluralistic literary field, the Danish case demonstrates the persistence of what Hanegraaff has described as "rejected knowledge": an epistemological regime in which esoteric traditions are excluded not through critical engagement but through ideological disqualification. Seen in this light, the relevance of Ferguson's literary turn lies not in contradicting the argument advanced here, but in helping to clarify how differently esoteric literature is positioned and negotiated across national and scholarly contexts.

The Quiet Girl: *A Spiritual Thriller*

The Quiet Girl follows Kasper Krone, a world-famous circus clown and musician with an extraordinary auditory sensitivity that allows him to perceive human emotions as musical tones. At the novel's outset, Kasper appears to encounter nine-year-old KlaraMaria for the first time—a girl whose profound access to inner stillness connects her to the Rabia Foundation, a modernized Orthodox Christian convent led by Mother Maria, the so-called Blue Lady. Believing the girl to have been kidnapped, Kasper becomes entangled in what seems to be a thriller-like search for her.

As Poul Behrendt demonstrates in *Den hemmelige note* (*The Secret Note*), this premise is deliberately misleading.[23] The novel's temporal architecture — shifting between one week in 2006 and the spring of 2005 (the entire second part) — conceals crucial information from both Kasper and the first-time reader. What appears to be Kasper's first encounter with KlaraMaria at the beginning of the novel is in fact his second; the therapy session that opens the book is merely "a pretext," as Behrendt notes, to inform both Kasper and the reader of her alleged

23. Behrendt, *Den hemmelige note,* 246 (my translation).

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abduction. Neither Kasper nor the reader yet realizes that the abduction is staged by KlaraMaria herself, nor that she is Kasper's daughter with his vanished former lover, Stina Claussen. The earlier agreement made in 2005 between Kasper, Mother Maria, and KlaraMaria is revealed only after more than a hundred pages, ensuring that the reader shares Kasper's limited horizon of knowledge, while Mother Maria, Stina, and KlaraMaria operate with a far broader overview.

This narrative design recalls the structure of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, where a secretive "Society of the Tower" guides the protagonist's development from behind the scenes.[24] A comparable function is performed in *The Quiet Girl* by the Rabia Foundation — a community devoted to cultivating stillness. In Høeg's novel, stillness is not merely an inner spiritual attainment but a form of metaphysical power. The twelve "quiet children" gathered at the Foundation can, through a collective "stillness synergy," influence external reality so profoundly that they are capable of inducing earthquakes.

It is this extraordinary capacity that attracts the attention of Josef Kain, the head of an investment company eager to exploit the children's abilities for financial gain by triggering an artificial earthquake in Copenhagen Harbor.

24. How parallel the structure is can be seen in the following literary-historical description of the Masonic background of the tower society in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*: "Die Logen vertreten ja … eine teilweise quer zu den stattlichen und kirchlichen Autoritäten stehende Elitenbildung, wie sie Goethe in der Turmgesellschaft in Wilhelm Meister schildert, die sich um Wilhelms Schicksal kümmert und auf ihre Weise sein Geschick lenkt, den Lehrling zum Meister erzieht, der nun selber Gutes stiften kann. Auf andere Weise als Staat und Kirche wollten die Maurer wohltätig wirken, und in der fiktionalen Welt des Romans spiegeln die immer wieder auftauchenden und hilfreichen Vertreter der Turmgesellschaft den Glauben an — oder jedenfalls die Hoffnung auf — den Einfluß der geheimen 'Oberen', die fast allwissend und allgegenwärtig scheinen und im Verborgenen eingreifen, wenn es not tut" (Jørgensen, Bohnen, and Øhrgaard, *Aufklärung, Sturm und Drang, frühe Klassik*, 46). Antoine Faivre also believes that the motif of a society of masters operating in secret derives from Goethe's involvement with Freemasonry: "This idea of a society controlled by masters who would be manipulating the destiny of certain people, in truth, was to know the success we are well familiar with. It is Goethe once more who describes this, through the Society of the Tower, in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796). The theme of an intellectual and spiritual government by hidden or secret elites is found again in a number of initiatic novels. And closer to our times, in Hermann Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel* (1943)" (Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 186).

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Though one of Kain's accomplices causes the death of one of the children and mortally wounds Kasper, the novel ultimately moves toward reconciliation rather than retribution. Kain, expressing remorse (and perhaps offering substantial financial support to the Foundation), is not only forgiven but integrated into the Rabia community as Mother Maria's partner. Kasper, for his part, survives and is finally reunited with Stina and their daughter, KlaraMaria.

Unlike authors such as Haruki Murakami, who establish a recognizable realist-fictional world before introducing various metaphysical elements,[25] Høeg's readers are from the very beginning forced to accept a protagonist with paranormal hearing. In Murakami's works, the readers must draw their own conclusions about the metaphysical occurrences. Høeg adopts a more direct literary strategy by allowing the metaphysical to define the narrative framework from the outset. He lets his protagonist, Kasper Krone, quote the world's wisdom traditions and continuously discuss spiritual and religious issues. Through these quotes and discussions, the reader is able to crystallize a religious and spiritual agenda that, on the one hand, includes a critique of traditional institutionalized religion and, on the other, a shift towards spiritual experience.

Kasper gives the following analysis of the conditions for spiritual experience in contemporary Denmark: "And the Danish State Church didn't really help with that; the only ones who took religious experience seriously were the fundamentalists in the Indre Mission Church, and they didn't like the circus. So some artists developed their own religion, like my father; he's a believing atheist and proud of it. Others used one of two shops, the Catholic Church

25. Strecher writes: "Over the years, as Murakami's popularity as a writer has grown around the world, scholars and critics have been drawn increasingly to his writing style, his apparent rejection of *belles lettres* (literature as Art), his probing into the human psyche, his play with the metaphysical (especially through the literary trope known as "magical realism"), his peculiar take on history, and his encyclopedic knowledge of music (particularly jazz)." Strecher, *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami,* e-book, 21/641. In Strecher's book, a chapter has the telling title: "Into the Mad, Metaphysical Realm."

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on Bred Street or the Eastern Orthodox Church."[26] This passage describes the religious landscape of contemporary Denmark as being characterized by strong atheism and a Protestant national church that is not interested in religious experiences on the one hand and Christian fundamentalism, Catholicism and the Russian Orthodox Church on the other.

However, the reader does not learn much about Catholic mysticism or the spirituality of Protestant sects, as the focus is on Russian Orthodox Christianity. The latter is positively valorized because of the emphasis placed on spiritual practice[27] and the possibility of achieving enlightenment by following the guidance of a master, a so called *staretz*. Høeg presents Russian Orthodox Christianity in two editions: a traditional version and the previously mentioned modernized version called the Rabia Foundation. The Rabia Foundation allows Høeg to show how he would like to modernize the traditional world religions. Thus, the Rabia Foundation came to function as a utopian alternative to traditional religion in the form of Russian Orthodox religion.

The Blue Lady, Mother Mary, puts it this way: "If Christianity is to survive . . . a decisive change must take place" (407). The premise seems to be that one needs to distinguish between the pre-modern organization of traditional world religions and the authentic spiritual practices they offer. At the organizational level, the reader learns that the Rabia Foundation, an Eastern Church nunnery founded in the 1920s, was excluded from the Eastern Church because they chose a woman as their metropolitan, Mother Rabia. According to the patriarchal ecclesiastical regulations, a woman cannot attain a higher rank than deaconess (260).

The pre-modern worldview behind the Orthodox Church is also illustrated by the physical location of the Russian Orthodox Church in Copenhagen: "On

26. Høeg, *The Quiet Girl*, 236.

27. In *erlebte Rede*, the virtues of the Russian Orthodox Church are described through Kasper Krone's perspective: He listened to "its discipline. Its compassion. Its stubbornness. Its deep understanding of how experiences of the Divine require training. It was like the circus. To Kasper, Luther's idea that everything is preordained had always seemed completely contrary to everyone's daily experience," 385.

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the border between Bred Street, with its traffic, restaurants, auction houses, hotels, and glittering prostitution. And a church building that leaned back toward a two-thousand-year-old tradition and a Middle Ages reality that was on the verge of disappearing forever" (ibid.). Later it appears that the same church is the gathering place for the religious patriarchs, the Catholic priests, the Catholic bishop, the chief rabbi and the royal confessor, but that only the inclusion of Mother Rabia and the imams would really renew religious life in Denmark (387). The first step towards modernizing world religions is gender equality. The novel's gender equality program is already evident on the first pages, where the masculine God is replaced by the androgynous "SheAlmighty."

The Blue Lady also represents a modernization of Orthodox Christianity in other respects. There is no doubt that she appears as an enlightened female master, a *staretza*, within the framework of Christian spirituality. However, she does not follow the orthodox ideal of asceticism associated with the behavior of traditional saints. The modern saint is in touch with both body and spirit, embracing both sexuality and spirituality.

Correspondences between Høeg and Bertelsen: Gnosis, Perennialism, and Jungian Psychology

The correspondences between Høeg and Bertelsen are most visible where *The Quiet Girl* foregrounds spiritual practice and experiential states – stillness, prayer, meditation, synchronicity – rather than doctrine or institutional belief. This is precisely the zone where Danish criticism tended to reach for the catch-all label "New Age," thereby obscuring the historical traditions on which it draws. If we want to understand what is actually being negotiated here – both in Høeg's writing and in the reception – we need a slightly more differentiated map of the esoteric coordinates at work. In the following, I therefore highlight three elements that the Danish critics largely failed to recognize, but which situate Høeg's spiritual thriller within a broader esoteric horizon and clarify his affinity with Bertelsen:

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a) Gnosis (faith–ratio–gnosis): Hanegraaff's epistemological distinction helps clarify why Høeg and Bertelsen privilege experiential insight over ecclesiastical faith and discursive reason.

b) Perennialism: the assumption of a universal, transhistorical truth at the core of the world's religious and spiritual traditions.

c) Jungian psychology: Jung as a key mediating discourse between historical Western esotericism and modern (and New Age) forms of spirituality.

Emphasis on Gnosis

Peter Høeg's modernization of religion is undoubtedly inspired by Jes Bertelsen.[28] His distinction between the (regressive) cultural side of religion on the one hand and advanced spiritual techniques on the other corresponds to Bertelsen's theories.[29] It has also been mentioned in the reception of the

28. Bertelsen's master's thesis *Kategori og afgørelse — Strukturer i Kierkegaards tænkning* (*Category and Decision - Structures in Kierkegaard's Thought*) was the expression of the existential focus of his early academic career, but from 1974 he combined the philosophical perspective with analytical psychology and yoga. Of particular interest in this context is his clear influence from Jung. His doctoral dissertation *Ouroboros — en undersøgelse af selvets strukturer* (*Ouroboros — A Study of the Structures of the Self*) attempted to combine Kierkegaard's existentialism with Jungian depth psychology. After defending his doctoral thesis, Bertelsen was awarded research funding to study at the Jung Institute. In his works on *Dybdepsykologi* (*Depth Psychology*) (volumes I-IV), Bertelsen strived to combine different traditions – very much in line with neo-perennialism. He attempts to synthesize the psychology of birth trauma (Stanislav Grof, Otto Rank, C.G. Jung) and the psychology of rebirth (shamanism, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Teresa of Avila), Western meditation (e.g. Rudolf Steiner) and Eastern meditation (yoga, tantra, Tao, Zen). From 1978 until the early eighties, Bertelsen worked with the Irish healer Bob Moore who lived in Denmark. This work resulted in the book *Drømme, chakrasymboler og meditation* (*Dreams, Chakra Symbols and Meditation*).

29. Since the 1970s, Bertelsen had been a supporter of the idea that it was possible to distinguish between exoteric religion (ecclesiastical religiosity) and esoteric (monastic) mysticism: "I have always been of the opinion that there are two sides to religion: something you might call ecclesiastical religiosity, where one relates to rituals, texts, dogmas, and belief systems. And on the other hand, a monastic spirituality. And here, in mysticism or monastic spirituality, I saw again two aspects: one that is culturally defined-for example, relating to God and the Devil, or having to be of male gender in order to experience a process of enlightenment; and another aspect that was universal. And from the very beginning I was interested in the universal aspect. Personally, I had next to no interest in the ecclesiastical religious matters of belief systems" (Bertelsen, *Essence of Mind*, 121f, my translation). Bertelsen's focus was thus on the sphere of experience (gnosis) rather than on religious belief systems.

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novel that the Rabia Foundation is similar to the Growth Center,[30] and the metropolitan of the same foundation, Mother Mary, seems to have features in common with Jes Bertelsen.

Just as Bertelsen is the charismatic leader of a spiritual community centered around disciplined spiritual practice, Mother Mary and the Rabia Foundation are highlighted as a spiritual organization that is structured in a similar way. How close the connection between Bertelsen and the Blue Lady is, is emphasized — as Poul Behrendt has explained in *The Secret Note* — by a passage where the metropolitan quotes a passage from Jes Bertelsen's *Dzogchen Practice as Width of Consciousness*. In the latter work, Bertelsen reproduces Leibniz's idea of theodicy by comparing God to an artist who takes pains with his creation.[31] Høeg's Blue Lady says something quite parallel: "In the *Théodicée* he says that God is like a kitchen maid. When she has baked a loaf of bread, she has done her best. And that includes everything. The burned part of the crust too. Evil must also be from God somehow" (323).[32]

Bertelsen's influence is most clearly seen in *The Quiet Girl's* descriptions of spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation. This important motif can be linked to the programmatic shift from theology and mythology to universal spiritual experiences and insights. Here we find the reason for the novel's interest in spiritual experiences and the importance of spiritual *practice*. The central concept in this "metaphysics of experience" is "stillness," a stillness that Kasper Krone does not master himself, but which he has a sense for by virtue of his paranormal hearing.

30. In 1982, Jes Bertelsen founded the Growth Center, where he offered courses in depth psychology, dream interpretation, and meditation.

31. Bertelsen, *Dzogchenpraksis som bevidsthedsvidde*, 116.

32. Poul Behrendt even believes that Peter Høeg is the author of the passage in Bertelsen's book *Dzogchenpraksis som bevidsthedsvidde*. He is thanked by Bertelsen for his help as a linguistic consultant, and since the passage uses the artist as a metaphor, Behrendt believes that Høeg must have written it. Therefore, he believes it is an *intratextual* reference, not an *intertextual* reference. However, we can only be sure that the reference is intertextual, its possible intratextuality must be considered uncertain.

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The novel is called *The Quiet Girl*, and the girl mentioned, KlaraMaria, along with eleven other children, has mastered "stillness" to such an extent that she can influence the physical world on a grand scale. Undoubtedly, these highly spiritual children playing in complete harmony and stillness are the novel's utopian vision of the next step in the evolution of human consciousness. On the whole, "stillness" (or "silence," as it is called in the translation) is the most important spiritual category of experience in the novel. Krone himself – despite his paranormal hearing – is only just beginning to discover the depth dimension of meditative stillness. The Blue Lady is the novel's adept, who perhaps in her most mature form represents this stillness:

> For most of my life . . . I've searched for silence. Within oneself, and between people. I know it's to be found. I've never been totally within it myself, but I know it exists. You have it. You are standing in it; I can hear that your voice comes out of the silence. Also the little girl, KlaraMaria. She's close to the same silence. I want to be in there. Otherwise I'll go crazy (121–22).

But the experience of stillness is also the area that gives Høeg the opportunity to experiment the most with language. For example, he combines synesthetic visual metaphors (colors and the sphere as a spatial category) with silence as an auditory phenomenon: "Then he heard the silence. It spread spherically around the girl, reached his body, enveloped it, reached the chassis of the car; the chassis faded to a pastel color. He gripped the steering wheel as if to avoid a collision" (261–62). Later, Krone manages to experience the stillness with the Blue Lady: "He felt the silence open. Like a great hand that was preparing to pick him up" (318). In his use of synaesthesia, Høeg writes himself into an important esoteric-artistic tradition. As a stylistic device, synaesthesia is closely related to Romanticism and Symbolism, but was not only perceived as a linguistic strategy, but also as an epistemological mode.[33]

33. Famous symbolist examples of synaesthesia are Rimbaud's poem "Les Voyelles" (c. 1871) and *À rebours* (1884) by Joris-Karl Huysman. In his esoteric art theory *Ur-Geräusch* (1915), Rilke wrote that by connecting the five senses synaesthetically, the artist would be able to

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Another spiritual practice often mentioned in the novel is "prayer" or "mantra." Kasper Krone refers to prayer fifty times (and "mantra" twice), which can be seen as a strong *leitmotif*. At the beginning of the novel, he talks about "the unnatural consolation of prayer," and he is later guided by the Blue Lady in prayer as a way to give up the ego struggle. Later, he prays with his driver Franz Fieber in front of an icon. The practice of prayer is even associated with synchronicity: "For those who pray . . . the number of remarkable coincidences increases" (321). The similarities between Høeg and Bertelsen are thus so striking that they are hardly coincidental.

These examples show that Bertelsen and Høeg share an *epistemological orientation* concerned with the value of mystical experience. Here, Hanegraaff's distinction between *ratio*, *faith*, and *gnosis* offers a useful heuristic for situating both *The Quiet Girl* and Bertelsen's teaching within the broader esoteric tradition, and there is no doubt that Høeg and Bertelsen emphasize gnosis, or personal experiences of insight or "enlightenment." This emphasis on the personal category of knowledge also leads to a polemic against both scientism (ratio, or science as the exclusive access to knowledge) and traditional religion, which is believed to be based on blind faith rather than gnosis.[34] In *The Quiet Girl*, this double demarcation strategy can be observed in the emphasis on spiritual *practices* such as prayer, meditation,

clairvoyantly conquer new areas of reality (cf. Magnússon, *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik*, 314). Wassily Kandinsky ascribed both artistic and spiritual significance to synaesthesia. Synaesthesia was contained in the title of his play *Der gelbe Klang* (1909), which was published in *Der blaue Reiter* in 1912. In *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1912), the connection between colour and sound was an important element in his theory of art, where the artist appears as a spiritual innovator (cf. Wassily Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. Introduction by Max Bill. Bern/Bümplitz: Benteli Verlag 1952, 62). Alexander Scriabin was also influenced by esoteric thoughts and made use of synaesthesia in his tone poem *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1911). It is well known that both Kandinsky and Scriabin were preoccupied with theosophical thought, and both may have found inspiration in Blavatsky's *Esoteric Instructions* (1888–1891), where she writes that color and sound originate from the same substance (Petsche, *Gurdjieff and Music*, 68).

34. In *The Quiet Girl*, there is a critique of academics as fragmented: "At the time, having an academic career required neurotic, biased mental overexertion. Kasper had met professors who were in the audience with Maximillian at the premier performances. They had been fragmented" (197).

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and experiences of stillness. Characteristically, the experience of deep stillness, for example, is reserved for only a few characters in the novel, such as KlaraMaria and the other "chosen" children and the Blue Lady, Mother Mary.

Jungian Psychology and Holism in The Quiet Girl

Similarly, the novel's presentation of Jungian psychology can be said to be related to the esoteric concept of gnosis.[35] As Hanegraaff writes, Jung was a modern esotericist who formed an important link between traditional esoteric currents and later esoteric currents, including New Age spirituality.[36] Høeg refers to various basic Jungian concepts that gradually became part of modern spiritual currents and the New Age in general, including "synchronicity," or meaningful acausal coincidences.[37] Thus, the concept functions as a spiritual response to the theory of the randomness of everything ("I'm a card player. I know the odds of coincidence. This is outside those odds") (277). He uses the concept humorously ("When the cosmos dishes out artificial coincidences it's nice not to have an overdose") (392), but he also links it to Jung's concept of individuation ("To meet her was magnificent synchronicity. Of the sort that Jung says happens only for those who have taken a seven-mile step toward the unknown in their process of individuation.") (141–42).[38] Individuation denotes the gradual development toward an authentic self that does not depend on social roles and external moral rules.

A third Jungian concept used by Høeg is "archetype." Kasper Krone, for example, describes a woman he meets as "the epitome of the Bad Mother archetype

35. Jung was even explicitly concerned with gnosis, which he defined as spiritual insight. Before Jung arrived at alchemy as a deep psychological world of images and thoughts, he had dealt extensively with gnosis and Gnosticism which is reflected in the so-called *The Red Book* (1914–1930), first published in 2009.

36. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 497.

37. Jung developed the theory in collaboration with the theoretical physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Hanegraaff summarizes the idea as follows: "[It] gives a strongly holistic account of the interdepen[den]ce of mind and matter" (*New Age Religion*, 72). Cf. Jung 1952. The work is reprinted in: Jung, *Synchronicity* along with other thematically related works.

38. Krone also speaks subjunctively of "a monumental synchronicity" (391).

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he had not yet integrated. It is extremely depressing to have turned forty-two and still be performing among fragments of your parents that have yet to be carried out of the ring" (56).[39] Changing clothes with his ex-girlfriend is what Kasper calls "an archetype with good fortune," and he draws a parallel to Beethoven's *Fidelio*, but also links the archetype to the integration of the anima and animus.[40]

As the examples show, Høeg has such a good grasp of Jung's basic concepts that he can use and combine them at will. This is not surprising in light of the inspiration he has undoubtedly received from Jes Bertelsen, who has worked extensively with Jung and even spent an extended period at the Jung Institute. But as Hanegraaff's study of the history of esotericism shows, Jung is part of a much larger context. Synchronicity, individuation, and archetypes are a natural part of the New Age discourse. The concept of synchronicity made it possible within the New Age to argue for connections other than causal relationships, including meaningful coincidences and telepathy.[41] Jung presents esotericism in psychological form and thus gives it scientific legitimacy.[42] By describing the psychological processes in spiritual terms, Jung also helps to sacralize the psyche.

Both of these concepts fit well with the New Age tendency to think holistically about consciousness and matter rather than dualistically (the Cartesian paradigm). The same Jungian anti-dualistic point is built deep into the plot of *The Quiet Girl*. Initially, the plot — in keeping with the thriller genre — sets up a battle

39. Elsewhere, the opposite archetype, the Good Mother, is mentioned: "It was the full volume of a mother's love for her child. And not just one mother. The love of all mothers for all children" (256).

40. "This here is an archetype with luck. Like in *Fidelio*. She is looking for her beloved in the underworld. Disguised as a man. As the lovers approach each other, they are pushed to explore the opposite sex within themselves. On the other side of that journey awaits the great love encounter" (341f.).

41. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 500f.

42. It was Jung's interest in esoteric and romantic ideas led to a break with Sigmund Freud. Freud tried to convince Jung that sexual theory should be a dogma and a bulwark against "the deluge of the occult" [*Schlammflut des Okkultismus*] (Jung, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*, 155). Freud wanted to lay the foundation for a rigorous scientific exploration of the psyche — often with a view to pathological content — where Jung, in accordance with the Romantic-esoteric tradition, ascribed creative and spiritual potential to the psyche. Cf. Magnússon, *Dichtung als Erfahrungsmetaphysik*, 240f.

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between good and evil: the good Kasper Krone must fight the villain Josef Kain, who has apparently abducted innocent children. But as the story progresses, the relationship between "hero" and "villain" becomes less black and white.

Here, the Eastern Church appears as a "holistic" ("Jungian") framework that can accommodate Kain. Kasper Krone struggles to comprehend how the Russian sauna could remain open to Josef Kain: "How you can open the door to a fierce baboon like Kain is beyond my understanding" (393). The deacon replies: "If a place or an atmosphere is, in the truest sense, divine . . . then it can't be closed to anyone" (ibid.). This inclusiveness makes Kasper see a potential for modernization in the Church of the East: "Kasper felt he had been mistaken about the Orthodox Church. Perhaps in the end it would encompass and survive the modern world after all" (ibid.).

The sauna meeting between Kasper and Josef Kain shows that Kasper — through his egocentrism — has more in common with his antagonist than he is willing to admit. The scene begins as a comical competition in spiritual humility, but degenerates into a brawl, commented on by the omniscient narrator: "The difficulty for us is that our good intentions have a hard time tolerating situations that are a little more stressful. When it comes right down to it, compassion often proves to be just a thin layer of gold leaf over a somewhat coarser metal" (390). Later in the story, it turns out that the metropolitan and KlaraMaria, the quiet girl, are far more in league with the "villain" Kain than Kasper Krone realizes at the beginning of the novel. This is emphasized at the end when the Blue Lady enters into a relationship with Josef Kain, the highest representative of enlightenment in the novel universe and the presumed villain. The point seems to be that Kasper Krone is not as good as he thinks he is, and that Josef Kain is not as evil as Kasper Krone (and the reader) believes.

Jung used Nikolaus von Kues' (1401–1464) concept of *coincidentia oppositorum* to describe the whole as a synthesis of (apparent) opposites, and in the action plan Høeg also creates the coincidence of opposites by uniting Kain and the

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Blue Lady.[43] Høeg and Bertelsen's inclusion of Leibniz's idea of theodicy points in an anti-dualistic (holistic) direction, as noted by Poul Behrendt: "This is why the grand plan is so much harder to see through. Only on the surface is the world dualistic, i.e. divided between male and female, good and evil, subject and object."[44]

Perennialism in The Quiet Girl and The Children of the Elephant Keepers

A central element of the esoteric thought structure operative in Peter Høeg's *The Quiet Girl* is a form of perennialism. The novel mobilizes a neo-perennialist constellation of ideas according to which the world's religious traditions are assumed to share a common experiential core, accessible through mysticism and irreducible to dogmatic or institutional forms of belief. In Høeg's work, perennialism functions less as a metaphysical system than as a legitimizing framework for experiential knowledge (gnosis), combined with a critical stance toward religious exclusivism and fundamentalism. This orientation becomes visible above all in the protagonist Kasper Krone's dense network of quotations and references, which range from Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Catherine of Siena to Eastern figures like Ramana Maharshi and Milarepa, as well as modern esoteric thinkers including Rudolf Steiner, Gurdjieff, and Martinus.

The cumulative effect of this intertextual montage is not merely encyclopedic eclecticism, but the enactment of a perennialist worldview structured by the logic of concordance. Importantly, however, Høeg does not allow this perennialist posture to remain unproblematic. In his review of *The Quiet Girl*, Lars Bukdahl in particular was irritated by the many quotes from various spiritual authorities from different times and traditions, which he perceives as "calendar page bon mots from various old masters."[45] However, he does not reflect on the fact that this criticism is also voiced within the framework of the fiction by Kasper

43. Henderson, "The Coincidence of Opposites," 101–13.
44. Behrendt, *Den hemmelige note*, 266 (my translation).
45. Bukdahl, „Skindøde badutspring på yogamåtten" (my translation).

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Krone's ex-girlfriend Stina Claussen. When he starts namedropping, she says: "You were never anything but pop culture" (357) and later adds about his knowledge: "That's borrowed. Stolen. Patchwork!" (358)

An implicit criticism is also expressed when the story's (eventually repentant and "converted") villain, Josef Kain, mirrors Kasper by quoting a church father: ""Saint Symeon the New Theologian . . . writes that it's important not to attribute omniscience to a spiritual teacher. Even the greatest ones are human beings.' Kasper found it painful to breathe. Perhaps it was the steam, perhaps it was the bitterness of no longer having a monopoly on citing the Church fathers" (389).

Høeg pursues a dual strategy: On the one hand, he allows Kasper Krone to be a natural spiritual talent due to his super-hearing and openness to the world's wisdom traditions (*philosophia perennis*). On the other hand, the implicit criticism of the protagonist's immaturity and fallibility reflects on *the way* he conveys his knowledge of the same wisdom traditions. Nevertheless, Kasper Krone's many quotes from spiritual masters, esotericists, mystics, and theologians from East and West function as an attempt to counteract the exclusive approach to truth of literalist fundamentalists.

In *The Quiet Girl,* the aforementioned Russian sauna associated with the Nevsky Russian Orthodox Church is the gathering place for religious patriarchs: "Mother Maria told me about it. It's a meeting place for the religious patriarchs. The priests from St. Ansgar Church come here. The Catholic bishop. The chief rabbi. The royal confessionarius. Mother Maria says when the day comes that they also invite her and the imams, a new perspective will open for religious life in Denmark" (386–87). Despite the criticism of the lack of inclusion of women and imams, the sauna is a symbol of a possible dialog between religions.

That perennialism is important to Høeg is emphasized by the fact that it also plays a major role in his subsequent novel *The Children of the Elephant Keepers* (2010):[46]

46. In many ways, *The Children of the Elephant Keepers* is a thematic extension of *The Quiet Girl.* Høeg uses a precocious 14-year-old narrator who – like Kasper Krone – likes to quote various spiritual authorities. Much of the action takes place on the fictional island of Finø, and the

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> All the great religions have two sides to them. And if you ask me, one's dafter than the other. There's a side that faces outward. They call it *exoteric*, and it's what the vast majority of adherents relate to. Then there's the side that faces inward. That's what they call *esoteric*, and it's reserved for the chosen few. The exoteric, outward-facing side is what's practiced in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, in the Catholic Church, in mosques, temples, synagogues, and gompas all over the world. It's all about external rites and rituals comforting believers, telling them that while they might be going through a rough patch right now, everything will be all right once they're dead. The other side, the esoteric part, is for the loonies.[47]

Here, Høeg employs the well-known rhetorical strategy familiar from spiritual literature to assume the role which the "rationalists" assign to you: the lunatic. You show that you understand how it looks from a rational standpoint, but you still insist on its validity. The distinction between the outward, exoteric dimension and the inward, esoteric dimension of religion is, of course, a central feature of esotericism. Rooted in the perennialist tradition, this perspective holds that all religions share a common esoteric core accessible through mysticism, despite often significant differences at the exoteric level.

An important element in the novel's plot revolves around four terrorists joining forces to prevent the Great Synod — a meeting of the world's religions based on the experiences of mystics, aimed at exploring the possibility that something common might lie behind the great religious traditions:

> It's the first attempt ever on such a scale to open up a dialogue among madmen and mystics about the possibility of their being something unifying behind those faiths. The lunatic idea they've taken into their heads is to investigate whether their various religious understandings might share some common foundation. And to that end they've brought in neural scientists and psychologists. What the floaters are afraid of is that the different religions should discover themselves to have more in common than they thought. And if they do, fundamentalism loses its legitimacy. No one's likely to feel threatened by a person who's basically as deranged as themselves. That's what's brought them together.[48]

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intention to find a more humorous tone is reflected in the quirky names of the characters. Høeg also sticks to the thriller genre. In this case, the plot is driven by the disappearance of the parents of two 14-year-old siblings.

47. Høeg, *The Children of the Elephant Keepers,* e-book 555/684.

48. Ibid.

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In *The Children of the Elephant Keepers*, *philosophia perennis* operates as a counterforce to religious fundamentalism, to the extent that the planned interreligious gathering becomes the target of terrorist intervention.

In both *The Children of the Elephant Keepers* and *The Quiet Girl*, Høeg articulates a perennialist vision that seeks reconciliation between the world's spiritual traditions. In *The Quiet Girl*, perennialism is not merely thematic but also narratively staged: it structures Kasper Krone's syncretic engagement with Christian, Eastern, and esoteric authorities, and finds symbolic expression in scenes such as the Russian Orthodox sauna, envisioned as a proto-interreligious meeting place grounded in shared spiritual experience rather than doctrinal agreement. In a similar way, *The Children of the Elephant Keepers* stresses the importance of perennialism as a framework of interreligious dialogue. Thus, both works explore the same esoteric motif: the search for a universal, experiential core of religion that stands in opposition to dogmatism and fundamentalism.

Conclusion

The Danish reception of *The Quiet Girl* reveals epistemic boundaries in Nordic literary culture, where secular rationalism continues to frame spiritual or mystical worldviews as illegitimate. The novel's harsh critical treatment cannot be adequately explained by aesthetic criteria alone — as demonstrated by its more sympathetic international reception — but rather reflects what Wouter Hanegraaff identifies as the persistent marginalization of esotericism as "rejected knowledge" within Western academic culture.

This study has demonstrated that *The Quiet Girl* participates in the Western esoteric tradition through three key motifs: gnosis (privileging spiritual experience over faith or reason), perennialism (seeking universal truth across traditions), and Jungian psychology (linking historical and contemporary esotericism). These elements situate the novel within a complex intellectual current extending from Renaissance Neoplatonism through Romanticism to contemporary spirituality — a genealogy obscured by dismissive labels like "New Age kitsch."

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Understanding esotericism as the *tertium comparationis* illuminates the Høeg-Bertelsen relationship in new terms. While Bertelsen has undoubtedly influenced Høeg personally and creatively, the elements attributed to this influence belong to a broader esoteric movement. Both figures participate in what might be called contemporary re-enchantment: the reintroduction of esoteric modes of experience into cultures dominated by secular rationalism. *The Quiet Girl* thus represents not spiritual eccentricity but a literary engagement with marginalized epistemologies — an engagement that deserves critical understanding rather than reflexive dismissal.

The question raised by *The Quiet Girl's* reception extends beyond one novel: How can literary criticism adequately engage with works that draw on esoteric traditions when those traditions remain "rejected knowledge" within the academy itself? This study suggests that recognizing esotericism as a legitimate cultural code — alongside other interpretive frameworks — would enable more nuanced readings of authors from Goethe and Strindberg to Høeg and beyond.

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Diana W. Pasulka. *Encounters: Experiences with Nonhuman Intelligences*. New York: St. Martin's Essentials, 2023. 248 pp. ISBN: 781250879561. $27.00.

Dr. Diana Walsh Pasulka is a professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. She initially specialized in Catholic history, publishing a study on purgatory, before shifting her focus more recently to the subject of unidentified flying objects ("UFOs" or "UAP"—unidentified anomalous phenomena). Her 2019 book *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology* (Oxford University Press) stands out for several reasons. First, it is (unfortunately) still uncommon for a scholar with an established academic career to engage seriously with the study of UFOs. Second, the book was published by Oxford University Press, a highly regarded academic publisher, which lends credibility to her unconventional research.

In *American Cosmic*, Pasulka recounts an expedition with two scientists—referred to under pseudonyms—to a concealed site in New Mexico, where they discovered materials purportedly originating from a crashed extraterrestrial craft. While Pasulka refrains from endorsing a definitive position on the ontological reality of UFOs, she analyzes the phenomenon through the lens of religious studies. She interprets it as a new form of religion wherein technology assumes a sacred role. This is evidenced both in its function as a sacred object (e.g., alleged artifacts from UFO crashes) and as a sacred medium (e.g., UFOs as portals that allow humans to connect with superior or transcendent nonhuman intelligences). Despite her neutral stance, Pasulka's engagement with the subject suggests a conviction that there is a substantive phenomenon worthy of academic inquiry.

Encounters can be read as a sequel to *American Cosmic*; the two works form a single, cohesive narrative. *American Cosmic* presented remarkable observations and provocative claims, which skeptics might easily dismiss as contributing to the UFO conspiracy narrative it seeks to analyze. However, the credibility afforded by its

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publication through Oxford University Press lends the work an air of legitimacy and academic rigor. *Encounters* ventures into broader and "wilder" territory, exploring UFO-related and esoteric topics such as luminous orbs, weird dreams, precognition, encounters with angels and demons, and revelatory experiences or "downloads" (knowledge acquired from supranatural sources, sometimes after having followed "protocols" for a certain amount of time).

The central claim of the book seems to be that the experiences it documents indicate a deep connection between the UFO phenomenon and esotericism. This is a highly interesting claim, but unfortunately the book falls short in terms of methodological rigor and critical analysis.

To begin with, Pasulka does not often make clear the connection between people's experiences and UFOs. Take for example her conversation with Dr. Iya Whiteley, a "space psychologist" who has studied the psychological experiences of astronauts. Whiteley contends that these experiences necessitate a new linguistic framework, one that in her view is also able to incorporate the UFO phenomenon, though in what way is not made explicit. Whiteley also subscribes to "panpsychism," the philosophical view that all entities in the environment—animals, plants, insects, and even the environment at large—possess some level of sentience and can potentially be communicated with. On the basis of this she developed a method that she believes enables babies from around six months old to synesthetically engage with what she terms an "Earth language." This is all very interesting, but what this has to do with UFOs remains unclear.

Something similar can be said for the chapter on "Moon Girl," the pseudonym for "Simone," an investor "in companies focused on AI, quantum computing, space, and decentralized technologies" (143). Simone discusses her experiences of receiving "downloads" (which she describes as intuitive ways of acquiring knowledge) or by using "protocols" (a phenomenon she claims to have experienced since childhood and developed further through engaging with Western esotericism). But what protocols? And again: how is this related to UFOs?

More interesting for scholars in esotericism are the experiences of a government

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scientist Pasulka refers to as "Gray Man." He reported an encounter with the angel St. Michael, which was followed by UFO sightings and vivid, unusual dreams. "Gray Man" interprets the UFO phenomenon through a framework of angels and demons. This chapter underscores a recurring theme: that "many people who see UFOs experience supernatural or unwanted paranormal events, such as time distortion, sleep paralysis, and a feeling that the entities they see are evil or divine" (98). But of course, this observation is not new, being well-known from the literature (for example, works by John Keel and Jacques Vallée). Pasulka clearly knows that, she just doesn't expound on it, which in my view is exactly what a scholar in religion should do.

The chapters on "Jose" tell the story of a former student of Pasulka who reported demonic (or are they alien?) encounters and claimed to have developed a "sixth sense" that aided his survival serving as a soldier in Afghanistan. Pasulka characterizes Jose as a mystic of esotericism who believes "that there are at least two networks—the organic network, or [Teilhard de] Chardin's Earth Soul, and the internet" (120). According to Pasulka, Jose instinctively knows how to connect with this Earth Soul, a capability she also attributes to Gray Man and Dr. Whiteley. She interprets this as an example of "spontaneous esotericism" displayed by such experiencers, but what exactly she means by "esotericism" in this context remains rather vague (123).

And then there is the account of Len Filppu, who, after witnessing a UFO with his teenage friends, reported a series of unusual experiences, including precognitive dreams. Filppu posits the existence of what he calls "The Knowing"—a phenomenon he connects to the concept of a transcendent, Platonic realm in which time and space are intertwined. He suggests that there are individuals, like himself, who appear to have access to this metaphysical dimension. Again, the reader is left craving for analytical depth that never comes.

In my view, a major challenge with *Encounters* is that it seems to lack the thematic focus that characterized *American Cosmic*. However one judges the academic merits of the earlier book (it is a topic of discussion), it clearly

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endeavored to interpret the UFO phenomenon through the lens of religious studies, framing it as a new religious movement. *Encounters*, by contrast, does not appear to clearly articulate its objectives nor does Pasulka define her target audience. As a result, the work feels far less coherent than its predecessor.

Encounters reads as a compilation of accounts of Pasulka's interactions with "experiencers." Notably, many of these experiencers are somehow connected to technology, with artificial intelligence frequently playing a significant role in their narratives. The exact nature of the connection is never made entirely clear, nor is the question of how this all ties up with the UFO phenomenon. Pasulka offers no definitive conclusions at the end of the book. However, she does state that: "One conclusion I've reached is that UFO encounters must be placed with contexts and not extracted from the lives of the people who encounter them" (198–99).

In other words, UFO encounters are far more complex and enigmatic than their portrayals in the popular media often suggest. These encounters frequently serve as catalysts for revelatory experiences and esoteric phenomena that are deeply intertwined with the lives of those who report them. This perspective implies that an overemphasis on the "nuts-and-bolts" aspects of UFOs—such as their physical or technological characteristics—may obscure the broader significance of the phenomenon. Pasulka hints that familiarity with religion, and particularly esoteric traditions, might offer a more insightful interpretive framework for understanding the experiences discussed in the book. This is highly interesting, and I tend to agree with her on this point. But again, the book itself does not offer examples of such an interpretive framework that would illustrate her point nor does it constructively give pointers toward developing such a framework.

Can *Encounters* be recommended as a scholarly or academic work? In my view, while authored by an academic scholar, the book lacks both focus and the structural and formal elements typically expected of scholarly publications. Most notably, it lacks a coherent theoretical framework for connecting UFO experiences and esotericism. Critical reviewers of *American Cosmic* (such as the theologian Ted

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Peters) have already noted the simplicity of its theoretical underpinnings and its superficial treatment of the term "religion." In *Encounters*, Pasulka adds to the already vague term "religion" not only by introducing equally undefined concepts such as "spirituality" and "esotericism," but also by a lack of rigorous analysis that elucidates the characteristics that make UFO-experiences spiritual or esoteric.

This book may perhaps be better understood as an exercise in popularization, targeting the growing audience of individuals intrigued by the UFO phenomenon. Moreover, Pasulka has been successful in monetizing the book, by organizing a range of paid online seminars and courses featuring several experiencers from the book, such as Whiteley and Filppu, as speakers. On social media, reactions to the book have been predominantly negative, with many readers expressing disappointment at the superficial treatment of the UFO topic, its lack of critical discussion, and its inclination towards advocating a vague, New Age spirituality. As this review shows, the present reviewer found the book a fascinating but ultimately frustrating read, and thus joins the choir.

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Thomas Willard. *Thomas Vaughan and the Rosicrucian Revival in Britain: 1648–1666*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022. xx + 338 pp. ISBN: 978-90-04-51972-5. $209.00.

Thomas Willard's *Thomas Vaughan and the Rosicrucian Revival in Britain* (32nd volume in the *Aries Book Series: Texts and Studies in Western Esotericism*) focuses on Thomas Vaughan (1621–1666), twin brother of the Anglican poet Henry Vaughan. A native of Wales, Vaughan was a Royalist clergyman, writer, and alchemist, lauded as the English translator of the first two Rosicrucian manifestos. Living in seventeenth-century Britain during the English Civil War, Willard identifies Vaughan as the "first spokesman" of a Rosicrucian revival that occurred between 1649–1660 (10). Spanning a range of subjects, Vaughan's writings explored philosophy, medicine, magic, Kabbalah, and alchemy, serving as an exemplar for examining Rosicrucianism within the context of the period (10). In distinction to the Royal Society, Vaughan believed that reconciliation between differing areas of knowledge—such as religion and science—could be achieved through a middle path "between superstition and iconoclasm" to restore "the true goal of learning" (13).

Willard offers a dissection of Thomas Vaughan's life through close analysis of his texts, with attention to sources, style, and influences (1). The book argues that Vaughan is a pivotal figure in the seventeenth-century Rosicrucian revival, a continuation of the movement that began in Germany in 1614 with the publication of its first manifesto (1). Situating Vaughan's life, writing, and intellectual network within the broader cultural and intellectual currents of his time, Willard emphasizes Rosicrucian themes as they intersect with magic, alchemy, and religion. He contends that there is a "center" holding Vaughan's works together, with Rosicrucianism serving as the basis for comprehending his textual works. The centrality of Rosicrucianism—and more broadly, Hermeticism—is demonstrated as a useful lens for discerning the meaning of Vaughan's work. This nuanced account of Vaughan's intellectual legacy connects the history of ideas to his

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multidisciplinary engagements with poetry, alchemy, Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, and other subjects, during a period when Vaughan and the Rosicrucians were expanding from an intimate and personal readership to wider audiences.

This monograph consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion, supplemented by appendices, a bibliography, and an index of names, subjects, and biblical citations. The work builds on Willard's longstanding scholarship—dating back to his 1978 doctoral thesis on Thomas Vaughan—along with updated references that reflect his engagement with Vaughan's historical and intellectual contexts. At the outset, the introduction addresses Vaughan's use of language in relation to literature, intellectual prose, and the magical, with Willard noting that Vaughan's magical writings and poetry, even if said to be clearly stated, were just as confusing as his academic work. In this chapter, Willard establishes that interest in Vaughan is closely tied to interest in Rosicrucianism, which was socially relevant both in the seventeenth century and in subsequent periods.

The first chapter establishes Thomas Vaughan's historicity, tracing his life within the work's defined timeframe and exploring the intellectual influences which shaped his esoteric and Rosicrucian interests. Willard establishes that Vaughan's lifelong interest in magic, and his formal academic background, were essential for participation in the Rosicrucian milieu. The second chapter connects Vaughan to the broader history of intellectual thought, examining the Hermetic culture of Renaissance magic and, more specifically, the intellectual and esoteric movement of seventeenth-century Rosicrucianism, through the authorial influences of figures such as Agrippa, John Dee, and Paracelsus. Willard firmly establishes that Vaughan's understanding and positioning within the Western esoteric tradition "were in many respects a creation of the Renaissance" (85).

Chapter three draws attention to the relationship between writing, rhetoric, and language in Vaughan's thought, which selectively reveals esoteric and exoteric knowledge. This esoteric understanding and use of language reflects a Rosicrucian idea of magical writing—a secret script that could replace scholastic grammar and logic and aid in the revelation of the occulted aspects of nature.

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Vaughan employed poetic language to align with an inner, mystical world, "and perhaps lead [readers] into inward reflection," while expressing contempt for alchemists captivated by "meer words" (213).

The fourth chapter considers Vaughan through the lens of his reputation, shaped by his association with the Rosicrucian cultural movement. Detractors turned Vaughan into a rhetorical target, using him as a vehicle for critiques of alchemy and mysticism. During a time when magic was juxtaposed with the rising primacy of rationalism and empiricism, such critiques provoked harsh condemnation. Reinterpreted over successive periods, Vaughan's legacy provides insight into shifting historical perceptions of alchemy—ranging from eighteenth-century Masonic lodges that appealed to Rosicrucian ideals, to the nineteenth-century occult revival that situated his works within esoteric and New Age movements, and finally to twentieth-century organizations such as AMORC, which identified Vaughan as a crucial link to the Rosicrucian tradition.

In the closing chapter, Vaughan emerges as a product of Renaissance Hermeticism, shaped by magician figures who engaged in a "unified theory of magic," a framework that allowed for his Rosicrucian positioning (275). Willard argues that categorizing Vaughan solely under the Rosicrucian label is overly restrictive, arguing instead for recognizing his broader contributions to the history of magical ideas and to intellectual history more generally (277).

Willard highlights aspects of Thomas Vaughan's thought that deepen our understanding of his work, demonstrating its continued relevance across academic perspectives. For instance, Vaughan recognized the "division between the exoteric and esoteric expressions of magical ideas," advising against artificially heightening Hermeticism's coherence or misrepresenting Rosicrucianism (277). Structurally, his writing incorporated "poetry to give readers pause . . . and perhaps lead them into the inward reflection" (213). Willard notes that Vaughan's thought is consistently composed of two counterbalancing "movements": an "onward movement" and an "inward movement of illumination" (158). His alchemical rhetoric employed a strategy of "saying one thing and meaning

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another," thereby exercising both concealment and discrete disclosure of information (160). Vaughan's dichotomies—such as the division between the natural and spiritual worlds—further parallel Emile Durkheim's and Mircea Eliade's categories of the sacred and the profane (137). Together, these contributions situate Vaughan's thought within a living intellectual tradition.

The alignment between Julius Evola's perspective on alchemy as "a special form of magic" and Vaughan's view of alchemy within the broader Hermetic tradition reinforces Vaughan's relevance to subsequent contributions on alchemical and esoteric thought (5). The similarity between Vaughan's and Evola's perspectives on "philosophical alchemy" provides a framework for further engaging with Evola's works, such as *The Hermetic Tradition*, in which alchemy is presented as a unified and universal tradition that serves as a key to comprehending other facets of Hermeticism, including its symbology and astrology. Situating Vaughan within the Hermetic tradition, Willard notes that there is "very little evidence of a secret tradition in alchemy . . . that there is no secret tradition as such, only a host of secrets and traditions" (146). Vaughan's placement within Hermeticism benefits those searching to understand the philosophy of alchemy as articulated by Evola and, by extension, provides context to other contributors to the traditionalist school of philosophy, such as René Guénon and Titus Burckhardt.

Viewing Vaughan exclusively through the lens of Rosicrucianism prevents discussion of topics such as alchemy, astrology, magic, and Kabbalah outside the Rosicrucian framework. Vaughan and the Rosicrucians shared an intellectual eclecticism built on an occult synthesis collectively termed "the new learning called Pansophia," which encompassed biblical exegesis, elements of Kabbalah, millenarian politics, magical procedures, and alchemical cures (145). Championing intellectual independence, Vaughan searched for virtues in knowledge areas regardless of prevailing assumptions, using an inner individuality to find meaning. Both Vaughan and the Rosicrucians "did not ignore secular literature and ideas, but rather tried to place such material in a new context" (146). Synthesizing information from multiple traditions—whether

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mystical, philosophical, or theological—demonstrates that true knowledge, for Vaughan, concerned not the "letter" but the "spirit" (153). Readers should avoid conflating distinct practices with their incorporation into Rosicrucianism. While Rosicrucianism was a singular current during Vaughan's lifetime, the movement remains secondary to the central focus on Vaughan himself.

Willard emphasizes that Vaughan's work, while Rosicrucian in character, belongs to a broader Hermetic complex of esoteric tradition. This context is facilitated through the book's structure, with the first two chapters being crucial to fully understanding Vaughan's historical and intellectual setting. The internal structure of the work effectively immerses the reader in the lens necessary to comprehend Vaughan's writing. While the first two chapters provide sufficient scaffolding for the remainder of the book, Vaughan's historical and textual obscurity may still challenge readers. Those already familiar with esoteric traditions are likely better fitted to navigating Vaughan's work, alongside the aforementioned topics presented in Willard's context.

In summary, Willard's *Thomas Vaughan and the Rosicrucian Revival in Britain* provides a critical examination of an area of scholarship unexplored in discourse and literature, offering the first full-length scholarly study of Thomas Vaughan and drawing attention to his continued obscurity compared to adjacent occult figures. Having reconciled mystical and rational thought, Vaughan acknowledged that reader engagement with language motivates both inner reflection and the revelation of information, distinguishing enlightened alchemical practitioners from those of "meer words." His intellectual eclecticism integrated folk culture and late classical texts from the extant European tradition into a coherent, synchronic worldview. Willard's work clarifies Vaughan's literary, philosophical, and intellectual output, positioning these contributions within an esoteric revolution shaped by Rosicrucian and Hermetic currents, and connecting readers to the enduring intellectual legacies of the early modern period.

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Timothy Grieve-Carlson. *American Aurora: Environment and Apocalypse in the Life of Johannes Kelpius*. Oxford & New York City: Oxford University Press, 2024. *xiii* + 310 pp. ISBN: 9780197765562 (hardcover), 9780197765579 (paperback). £78 (hardcover), £26 (paperback).

Environmental history emerged as a field of study in the second half of the twentieth century, following the momentum of *Silent Spring* (1962), the seminal work by conservationist and biologist Rachel Carson. Its early research paradigm had strong affinities with intellectual history, but shifts that came about just before the turn of the millennium have made these two subdisciplines of history drift apart in the last few decades. Quite recently, environmental historian Paul Sutter wrote in a review article reflecting on the modest renewal of their cross-pollination: "For the sake of both fields, it's time to restore the fragmented habitats that have isolated our subdisciplines."[1] This brief outline illustrates *American Aurora*'s importance for the history of esotericism, which is closely related to intellectual history. Terms like "nature" and related concepts are ubiquitous in esotericism studies, but this omnipresence has not resulted in the widespread use of environmental-historical approaches. Together with works like Dan McKanan's *Eco-Alchemy* (2017) and Devin Zuber's *A Language of Things* (2019), *American Aurora* is one among the very few monographs in this academic domain to integrate such perspectives into its analytical framework.

Timothy Grieve-Carlson, after pointing out the relationship between seventeenth-century environmental conditions and Hermetic and alchemical ideas, makes an important statement: "I think this is a missed opportunity for scholars of esotericism, who do not often locate their analyses in the history of environmental thought, since this is exactly where many environmental

1. Paul S. Sutter, "Putting the Intellectual Back in Environmental History," *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no. 2 (2021): 569–605.

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historians locate the very same subjects" (12). He names Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature* (1980) and Philipp Blom's *Nature's Mutiny* (2019) here: not only before, but also since the aforementioned paradigm shift, a few environmental historians have dealt with subjects we now place under the rubric of esotericism. It is high time to rectify such missed opportunities — from our end — and incorporate these perspectives into the history of esotericism, a turn that Grieve-Carlson pioneers with this book. *American Aurora* focuses on Transylvanian-Saxon Pietist ascetic Johannes Kelpius (1667–1708), the religious, socio-political, and environmental contexts in which he was embedded, as well as his reception in popular culture and scholarship from the eighteenth century to the present.

Grieve-Carlson provides the reader with ample contextualisation of the topic. After an informative introduction laying out the analytical focus of the book, the first chapter illustrates the importance of interpreting celestial phenomena such as comets and eclipses for people like Kelpius and many of his contemporaries in a turbulent world rocked by religious intolerance, crises of piety, and the environmental effects of the Little Ice Age — a cold period during early modernity that peaked in the late seventeenth century, coinciding with Kelpius's lifetime. A concept coined in the introduction is utilised here: *environmental knowledge*, which consists of interpretations of the cosmos informed by Hermetic modes of thought, emphasising the vitalistic character of a world through which humans are in dialogue with God. Besides treatment of the formative influences of contemporaries on Kelpius after he moved from Transylvania to Germany, Grieve-Carlson explains the importance of three foundational figures for the development of environmental knowledge in what he calls "Hermetic Protestantism": namely the radical theologians Paracelsus (1493–1541), Johann Arndt (1555–1621), and Jakob Böhme (1575–1624).

In Chapter Two, we move on to the local context where Kelpius would settle in the 1690s: Pennsylvania, an outpost for heterodox Christians at the time, including many Quakers and Pietists. The analytical value of environmental

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knowledge is really demonstrated here, as Grieve-Carlson shows the intertextual significance of the three figures listed above for the cosmologies developed in colonial America. These cosmologies fundamentally informed the ways in which the relevant historical actors related both to the world around them as well as to the indigenous people living in the area, called the Lenape. The text strikes an impressive balance between applying analytical rigour to the worldviews in question as well as to products of said worldviews, such as agricultural almanacs, while also paying crucial attention to the socio-political consequences of the European colonial project in what is, based on Lenape creation narratives, often referred to as Turtle Island. *American Aurora* is not concerned with abstract ideas removed from the material conditions out of which they emerged, but explains how environmental knowledge informed praxis in early-modern Pennsylvania.

Chapter Three, which Grieve-Carlson calls the heart of the book, provides a more detailed background of Kelpius and his community tucked away in the Wissahickon Gorge, a few miles outside of Germantown, Pennsylvania. It lays a solid foundation for one of the book's aims: to serve as a rectification in the appraisal of Kelpius and his community, peeling away many discursive layers that have accumulated over 300 years. This historiographical sediment has often overcompensated for the perceived paucity of primary source material, inevitably obscuring it in the process. Through Kelpius's journal and his academic work, the writings of his close friends and fellow Wissahickon hermits, such as Johann Gottfried Seelig (1668–1745), and those of others in both the close circle and the periphery, as well as an analysis of religious and political issues in Pennsylvania at the time, we get a grasp of the social structure and ideas held by this community. By tracking correspondence with visitors and community members who outlived Kelpius, reliable insights extend far into the eighteenth century.

In a letter from 1706 to a Quaker missionary, Kelpius mentions a "threefold wilderness state," which is the subject of Chapter Four. This entails a technique of self-negation that draws from the wellspring of Hermeticism and a personal biblical

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exegesis, especially of Revelation 12. In describing its stages, Grieve-Carlson unpacks the ambiguity and complexity of a term like "wilderness." Here it is considered as much a place as a mental state and cannot be separated from its biblical connotations, including the journey from Egypt to Canaan by the Israelites under Moses's leadership, and the importance of wilderness for the narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. In navigating these stages, reading signs in the world itself was crucial. Grieve-Carlson points out well how Kelpius's practice, despite the trappings of desert asceticism, is quintessentially modern: all inspiration for the threefold wilderness state — whether ancient, medieval, or early modern — was filtered through his natural-philosophical experimentalism. The environment in which these historical figures lived is of paramount importance here and underlies all the religious and cosmological motifs present in the chapter.

The reception of Kelpius in the novel *Wieland* (1798) by American author Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810) form the basis of Chapter Five. The story revolves around the Wieland family, German immigrants living in Pennsylvania, echoing the Wissahickon hermits. Grieve-Carlson foregrounds the epistemic chasm of the Enlightenment standing between Kelpius and Brown, while showing how the narrative nevertheless articulates the logic of environmental knowledge. Those layers of reception that Grieve-Carlson had peeled away in Chapter Four are not discarded but mostly reserved for Chapter Six. While a lot of that material at best does not help, and at worst frustrates, attempts at reconstructing the "historical Kelpius," it is nevertheless invaluable for investigating the reception of the Transylvanian-Pennsylvanian Pietist from the eighteenth century onwards. Grieve-Carlson evaluates many contributions to this reception, both big and small, and those of confessional, historical, and literary character. The text shows serious erudition and breadth in contextualising a rather long period without losing its focus on the evolving cultural representations of Kelpius.

Before we move on to my final evaluation of *American Aurora*, it is necessary to talk about a facet of the book that has not been mentioned so far: the *vitae*. Grieve-

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Carlson has chosen to reserve Kelpius's biographical aspects for three short sections between some of the chapters, detailing his life in Europe, while crossing the Atlantic, and when settled in Pennsylvania. In my view, a lot of this material could have worked just as well in the form of a prologue that contextualises the contents of the chapters beforehand, or could have been distributed among the relevant chapters, but the *vitae* set the stage well for the material that follows. One benefit of this structure is that the analytical pace of the six chapters is not interrupted.

American Aurora is a very solid contribution to the study of Johannes Kelpius, his associates, and the broader history of religion and spirituality in the Thirteen Colonies. Grieve-Carlson brings Hermetic modes of thought to the forefront and underscores the importance of environmental knowledge for the worldviews propagated by many of these historical figures. He also accomplishes many interrelated but distinct tasks with this book, including tracing a "prehistory" of aspects of the paranormal, as it would later be known. In my opinion, his biggest achievement pertains to the domain with which I began this review: demonstrating the importance of environmental-historical and ecocritical perspectives for the study of esotericism and analysing his sources with such a research programme in mind. Besides this methodological contribution, the concept of environmental knowledge will prove a useful theoretical lens for many scholars working on topics within the wider rubric of esotericism. *American Aurora* is strongly recommended to those working within, or with an interest in, the study of esotericism, environmental history, religious studies, intellectual history, history of science, and adjacent domains of scholarship.

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Mike A. Zuber. *Spiritual Alchemy: From Jacob Boehme to Mary Anne Atwood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. xiii + 269 pp. ISBN: 978-0190073046. $94.00 / £74.00

A distillation of his 2017 PhD dissertation, *Spiritual Alchemy* is Mike A. Zuber's contribution to the historiography of alchemy. The book contains ten chapters, sixty-six pages of notes, a works cited section, and a very useful general index.

The introduction provides a clear summation of popular ideas about alchemy, and how historians have studied it. It begins by tracing the initial modern approaches to studying Early Modern alchemy, first by the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment polemicists," who broadly denounced the art of the philosopher's stone as "utterly misguided and fraudulent" (2). This view persisted as late as 2002, when *ISIS*, the leading journal for the history of science, classified research into alchemy under the header of "pseudo-science." However, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a contrasting and much more flattering view of alchemy emerged, which viewed adepts as engaging "not primarily with material substances but with their inner selves" (2).

Though Zuber does not follow through with the reception and development of spiritual alchemy (henceforth "SA") after Mary Anne South's (later Atwood's) *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery*, he does include in the introduction some brief mention of later developments, such as (A) the American Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock's moral approach to alchemy, (B) Viennese psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer's mystical and psychological approach, (C) Romanian-American historian of religions Mircea Eliade's approach, most widely known in *The Forge and the Crucible* (1962), and (D) the most prominent exponent of a psychological conception of the royal art, C. G. Jung. Hereward Tilton's 2003 monograph on Michael Maier, *The Quest for the Phoenix*, however, which includes its own approach and is partly dedicated to spiritual alchemy, is not mentioned.

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Zuber also traces the overturning of the Jungian approach, first by Swiss art historian Barbara Obrist, and later expanded and further refined by two historians of science, William R. Newman and Lawrence M. Principe — the latter providing one of the three praising blurbs on the back cover of Zuber's book. Through a series of studies, Newman and Principe replaced Jung's approach with a new paradigm known as the "New Historiography of Alchemy," which has since firmly integrated alchemy into the history of science (4). However, with a quite voluminous footnote attached, Zuber asserts that the "New Historiography" is not without its critics. From various perspectives, critics agree that the "New Historiography" implies "an overly restrictive view of its subject and downplays important aspects in favor of chemical content and experimental technique," within which "lies the danger of a latent essentialism," which in some cases "has led to an implicit view of alchemy as 'really' science (and not religion)" (5).

Zuber states that his book is not intended to continue this "long-standing tug of war," instead advocating for the perspective of "an impartial observer" (6). Nevertheless, he does state explicitly that the book addresses a critique by Principe and Newman, namely the claim that all declarations of continuity regarding spiritual alchemy are mere "conjecture" and without "clear historical evidence." This book, Zuber states, marshals forth the "hitherto elusive evidence," found in obscure manuscript sources (12).

The first chapter contextualizes the origins of spiritual alchemy (SA) within broader Reformation-era developments, which provided the soil from which the tradition blossomed. Firstly, the Paracelsian alchemists Gerard Dorn, Heinrich Khunrath, and Oswald Croll are acknowledged for the extent to which "religious concerns shaped their alchemical works" (18). Khunrath even explicitly posited a "linkage between the Incarnation of Christ, . . . the philosopher's stone, and the rebirth of the individual believer" (18). However, Zuber argues that the tradition of SA does not begin with Heinrich Khunrath but instead originates in "pseudepigraphic texts attributed to Valentin Weigel." The reason for this is

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due to Khunrath's insufficient fixation on "the mystical identification of Christ and the believer" (18), which is of primary import for Zuber's criteriology for inclusion in the SA tradition throughout the book.

The pseudo-Weigelian texts Zuber identifies are *Azoth et Ignis* (Azoth and Fire), composed in the late sixteenth century, and *Ad dialogum de morte* (Concerning the Dialogue on Death), published in 1614. The former combined "Weigelian spiritualism with alchemical terminology and apocalyptic speculation," and "was very likely the first text to draw an analogy between laboratory alchemy and spiritual rebirth while emphasizing the mystical identification of Christ and the believer" (25). The latter text emphasized similar themes, with more focus on the death and resurrection of Christ, the *unio mystica* being the most important recurring motif. The reception of pseudo-Weigelian SA is detected first in a work by Nuremberg chymist Johann Siebmacher titled *Wasserstein der Weysen* (Water-Stone of the Wise, 1619), the only alchemical work to which Jacob Boehme referred by its title (30), and secondly in *Introductio Hominis* (1607), within which Siebmacher "revealed his familiarity with *Azoth et Ignis*" (32).

Chapter Three is dedicated to the mature writings of Boehme, which deal with the SA of rebirth he developed in works composed from 1619 to 1622. Attention is first paid to *Signatura rerum* (*The Signatures of Things*, 1622), which contains extensive discussion based on the "three-way *lapis-Christus in nobis* analogy [and] Christ's incarnation — [where it is presented] as an alchemical process" (48). An original contribution of high value, Zuber is the first to posit this "in nobis" as the third component within SA, which was lacking in Khunrath, who tended to be binary with "Christus" and "Lapis." Zuber then focuses on chapter twenty-two of Boehme's *Aurora* (1612), titled "Concerning the metals in the earth," where Boehme described "the purification of gold in seven stages" (49) and used alchemical terminology such as *multiplicatio* to describe spiritual rebirth accompanied by a physically tangible transformation. As Zuber emphasizes, "To Boehme . . . this was not to be understood in a purely religious or metaphorical

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way . . . . It was something that happened literally and physically" (55). The remainder of the book is devoted to "how Boehme's readers — from Franckenberg to Atwood two centuries later — rediscovered, adapted, and transmitted SA" (68).

Chapter Four is concerned with the Silesian mystic Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652), who developed his own SA of rebirth in *Theophrastia Valentiniana*, itself ostensibly a discussion of the teachings of second-century Gnostic Valentinus. Typically remembered for his most famous work, *Raphael* (*The Healing Angel*), Zuber asserts that *Theophrastia Valentiniana* is "the most comprehensive statement of his SA" (94). Adding alchemical symbols in the margins of the text, Franckenberg "described Valentinus' rebirth as a process of tincturation and fixation" (75). In addition to indicating the presence of the "mystical identification with Christ" motif, Zuber also draws attention to an important difference between Boehme and Franckenberg's SA: "Whereas the theosopher's [Boehme's] lead of fallen humanity would appear wholly passive, Franckenberg argued that all human beings still carried within themselves some of the paradisiacal earth from which they were first created [before] the Fall" (78). Differences notwithstanding, Zuber shows how Boehme's SA played a significant role in shaping Franckenberg's. Zuber concludes the chapter by emphasizing the continuity of the *unio mystica* motif "pioneered by Boehme and refined by Franckenberg" (86).

Chapter Five is devoted to Franckenberg's "spiritual and philosophical son," Georg Lorenz Seidenbecher, mostly remembered for his millenarianism. Zuber first discusses accusations of heresy which Seidenbecher was embroiled in, being accused of being a "heretical millenarian and Rosicrucian sympathizer," before focusing on how Franckenberg "initiated his pupil into the mysteries of SA" (88). The most notable texts by Seidenbecher that bear the influence of Franckenberg's SA are *The Journey of Friedrich Gallus* (1648) and *Kabbalistic Regimen* (date not provided), the latter of which Zuber describes as "a veritable recipe book for the aspiring spiritual alchemist" (105).

Chapter Six concerns a friend of Seidenbecher's, Friedrich Breckling, a Danish pastor and author who shared Seidenbecher's millenarian convictions and whose

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SA is contained in two works: *Christus mysticus, sol et sal sapientiae* (*The Mystical Christ, sun and salt of wisdom*) and *Pseudosophia mundi* (*The Fake Wisdom of the World*), both published in 1682. These works, and Breckling's general SA project, were inspired by the first complete edition of Boehme's works, printed in the early 1680s. Much attention is paid in this chapter to the aforementioned "Boehme Edition" and who was involved in its production. While it is commonly assumed that Johann Georg Gichtel more or less "singlehandedly saw [it] through the press," Zuber argues that Gichtel being "solely responsible" is "highly unlikely" (110).

This discussion, while important, takes the reader a bit far afield from the primary concern of SA and more into the historiography of the printing of Boehme's works. Perhaps this reflects a difficulty in distilling a doctoral dissertation into a book: namely the focus sometimes drifts from the expressed thematic concern to scholarly historiographical digressions, which may come off to the more casual reader as dry or distant.

Concern for printing history over content is also extant in Chapter Seven, which explores how Breckling's SA was transmitted through contributions he made to works by the little-known sixteenth-century author Bartholomaeus Sclei. Intriguingly, Zuber shows how Breckling made acquaintance with laboratory practitioners in his last years, demonstrating an important overlap of "alchemies" in the period. Those responsible for the 1682 Boehme edition, particularly Gichtel, attracted Dionysius Andreas Freher of Nuremberg to Amsterdam in 1685.

Freher, "Boehme's apostle to the English," is the subject of Chapter Eight. Freher is remembered for fascinating images he made exploring Boehme's alchemical-theosophic worldview, and the chapter focuses on a section from his *Fundamenta mystica* (date not provided) titled "Process in the Philosophical Work," which Zuber argues "guarantees the continuity of SA from Boehme to Atwood" (159). Freher's Boehmistic and SA writings were received in the nineteenth century by the collector Christopher Walton and Thomas South, the father of Mary Anne South. Chapter Nine discusses how they all shared

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an interest in Boehme through letter correspondence while Mary Anne was composing her *Suggestive Inquiry*. Disagreements emerged between the parties due to Walton's preference for bookish mysticism, whereas the Souths' primary interest lay in Mesmerism (animal magnetism).

Zuber convincingly shows in these last chapters how the Souths saw alchemy as "similar but superior to Mesmerism." Importantly, the final chapter also discusses Isabelle de Steiger, Atwood's closest confidante and correspondent, who, in addition to reissuing her *Suggestive Inquiry*, wrote a study of alchemy and mysticism titled *On a Gold Basis: A Treatise on Mysticism,* published in 1907. The chapter further considers how the various approaches to SA of the period encountered, integrated, or contrasted with emerging discussions of biological evolution in the wake of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. For example, whereas De Steiger criticized Darwinian theory, A. E. Waite embraced it.

One may wonder whether the contents of Zuber's book indeed exhaustively address the entire SA tradition or just the particular stream running from Boehme to Atwood. The eighteenth-century manifestation of the Orden des Gold- und Rosenkreutz and the *Geheime figuren der Rosenkreuzer* documents, for example, with its diagrams featuring symbols of alchemical substances not always intended for laboratory use, seems to also fit within the SA tradition, but receives no attention in the book. These minor gaps notwithstanding, in sum, Zuber's book represents an essential contribution to the historiography of alchemy in general, and the spiritual tradition within alchemy in particular — a tradition spanning (at least) three hundred years, from Boehme through to Atwood.

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Aaron French. *Max Weber, Rudolf Steiner, and Modern Western Esotericism: A Transcultural Approach.* Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2025. *vii* + 200 pp. ISBN: 9781032566382. $204.40/£150,91.

In a comparative study of Rudolf Steiner and Max Weber — likely considered radical by proponents of old, well-established paradigms and historiographical categories — this volume challenges entrenched dichotomies, positioning esotericism and its advocates as counterparts to modernity. The volume convincingly demonstrates that the demarcation of Weber as rational and modern, in contrast to Steiner as irrational and antimodern, is not only flawed but also a significant obstacle to understanding the many facets of modernity. By situating Steiner and Weber in a comparative framework of the *zeitgeist* of German and European modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Aaron French shows that they both responded to the same historical impulses of modernity.

The goal of this approach is to rethink ideas of European and modern identities, to show that Steiner and Weber were not polarities, and to encourage scholars to take the influence of esotericism more seriously. By challenging such assumptions, the author aims to foster an understanding of what he calls a global modernity. The suggestion is that Steiner and Weber were developing an early form of global philosophy, which French particularly addresses through the context of transculturality and a focus on East-West exchanges (1–2, 7, 18–19). In a way, neither Steiner nor Weber takes centre stage in this volume; instead, the focus is on the *zeitgeist* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the fears, hopes, and dreams of the people who lived through them. Instead of upholding Steiner as an irrational mystic and Weber as a rational scholar, French asks the fundamental question: how did two seemingly different people share so many concerns?

The comparison of Steiner and Weber rests on a solid foundation that not only includes the *zeitgeist* but also a personal dimension. In the first chapter,

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"Some Surprising Historical Connections," these are shown to be perspectives concerning matriarchy and patriarchy, a life characterised by breakdowns and depression, and also a return from these "abyss experiences," renewed (36–37, 52). In the second chapter, "Light from the East," Steiner and Weber are placed in the broader context of European intellectuals who concluded that, since Western thought had produced a chaotic situation in Europe, the inclusion of Eastern thought seemed logical. Thus, while maintaining European uniqueness, Weber endorsed Confucian ideas, while Steiner integrated ideas of reincarnation (70). This part of the analysis is particularly fruitful for French's argument on a global philosophy, as he shows that Chinese thinkers like Gu Hongming (1857–1928) and Mou Zongsan (1909–1995) were part of the same discussions as Weber and Steiner. Such thinkers appealed to each other on a transnational level, the author argues, because their ideas were rooted in the same discussion of rationality, disenchantment, polytheism, and science.

However, as evidenced in Chapter Three, Steiner and Weber can also be compared based on their fear of "The Threat of Technology." Both sought the borders of technology and spirituality, and for both, instrumental rationality and materialism were a central part of what their contemporary, Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), described as contributors to the *Decline of the West*.[1] The final analytical chapter, "Max Weber in Ascona," adds another layer to the comparison, showing that through their environment and social circles, Steiner and Weber can also be compared. Crucially, it links Weber to spiritual milieus like the Eranos Kreis (1904–1908) in the first decade of the twentieth century and the social circles in Ascona, Monte Verità, which Weber visited in 1913–1914.

One of the few points of criticism of this volume concerns the implementation of the global concept. Given the work's explicit aim to explore a "global philosophy" or "a global way of thinking," there is surprisingly little clarification and reflection

1. See, for instance, David Engels, "Oswald Spengler and the Decline of the West," in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 499–507.

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on the nature and utilisation of this concept. In some cases, the "global" seems located in the very ideas of Weber and Steiner — for example, that both sought solutions in the "East" to solve the problems in the "West." The global, in this case, is thus empirical in nature. At other times, the global dimension seemingly emerges through the methodological framework of comparison, as reflected in the transcultural approach stated in the subtitle of the volume.

While not made explicit, French can be said to follow a global historical framework in two ways. Firstly, the work conforms with a research trajectory grounded in global history, concerned with departing from Eurocentric scholarship focused on Western frameworks and actors.[2] In this spirit, French argues that "Weber and Steiner can be reinterpreted in light of the recent scholarship that seeks alternative (non-Western) rational approaches to modern problems" (3). Questions of Eurocentrism and Orientalism are, therefore, with good reason, brought up in the introduction. These matters are insightfully and thoroughly discussed in Chapter Two, but with a few exceptions, receive very little mention in the remaining chapters. While Steiner and Weber evidently sought "the Light of the East," they did so to solve the crisis they saw in European society, which aligns with the general thesis of the work: that a global philosophy was a part of European modernity.

Secondly, French follows a method of comparison discussed by several global historians, which concentrates on cultural and historical points of similarity *despite* obvious differences.[3] In many ways, French's analysis incorporates elements of Siep Stuurman's reflections on the concept of "common humanity," a specific way of thinking that transcends borders, concentrating on commonalities by

2. Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History? (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3–6.
3. Samuel Moyn, and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 17; Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), xv–ix; David Washbrook, "Problems in Global History," in *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the 21st Century*, ed. Maxine Berg (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

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transcending cultural differences.[4] This is true both in the general comparison of Weber and Steiner, which French argues have been wrongly placed in two different cultural categories, and in the comparative framework in which he shows similarities between Chinese and European ideas.

One of the great merits of the work is that French does seem to locate a form of "global" philosophy and successfully treats this from the theoretical standpoint of global history. However, a clear and explicit demarcation of the empirical and theoretical dimensions of the "global" could have contributed to a theoretical discussion with great potential for the fields of global or transnational history. The work's underlying premise – that Steiner and Weber are (empirical) examples of a global philosophy embedded in European modernity – could have benefited from a discussion of the empirical and methodological approach in isolation, as well as how these two elements relate to each other.

The global dimensions remain one of the few points of criticism of the work, yet they are far outweighed by its merits. French's central contribution is showing how non-European knowledge, and crucially esotericism, had a significant impact on both Steiner and Weber, and generally what it meant to be modern. His work underlines that esotericism is a significant part of European history and modernity. A no less central contribution is the well-researched foundation of the work, including carefully researched archival material, which brings many new sources into the discussion. Arguably, one of the most significant observations of this work is that the concerns of Steiner and Weber remain as relevant today as they were in the early twentieth century. "Western civilisation," its crisis, and its possible collapse are still being debated, just as anxieties about technology are

4. Siep Stuurman, "Common Humanity and Cultural Difference on the Sedentary-Nomadic Frontier," in *Global Intellectual History,* ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 35–38.

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still central.[5] Moreover, the project of thinking of the East and West together, as Weber and Steiner did, or thinking of Steiner and Weber together, as French does, has roots in the field of global history as it has developed since the 1990s.[6]

The greatest merit of French's book is that he shows how two historical figures, rarely discussed within the same framework, shared many sentiments situated in the same historical context. The work contributes an explicit comparison of Steiner and Weber, of which just one previous study exists.[7] This not only shows that esoteric figures like Steiner can and should be compared with more mainstream figures like Weber, but also shows what happens when such an analysis is carried out: the established understanding of figures as inherently rational (Weber) or irrational (Steiner) is blurred, showcasing how these individuals were entangled. This not only concerns the *zeitgeist* of the period, in which machines and technology were seen as threats, but also concerns the personal experiences and places of men like Steiner and Weber as they looked to solve the problems they saw in Western society. While some undoubtedly would consider the comparison radical, fundamentally, comparison should make sense and yield new insight — and it does when it comes to Weber and Steiner. Hopefully, French's work will inspire much more "radical" comparison of this nature.

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5. See, for instance, Miguel Angel Centeno, ed., *Historical Systemic Collapse: Managing the End of the World as We Know It* (London: Routledge, 2023); Michel Saloff-Coste,*Innovation Ecosystems: The Future of Civilizations and the Civilization of the Future* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2022); Mark Sedgwick, *Traditionalism: The Radical Project for Restoring Sacred Order* (London: Pelican, 2025).

6. Georg G. Iggers, Supriya Mukherjee, and Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2017), 49–50; Huntt Lyn, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014); Dominic Sachsenmaier, and Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam, "Global History," in *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (11.02.2010): 4; Bruce Mazlish, "Comparing Global History to World History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 3 (1998): 395.

7. Perry Myers, *The Double-Edged Sword: The Cult of "Bildung," Its Downfall and Reconstitution in Fin-de-Siècle Germany (Rudolf Steiner and Max Weber)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004)..

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Marcus Plested. *Wisdom in Christian Tradition: The Patristic Roots of Modern Russian Sophiology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. xiv + 288 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-286322-5. $105.00

Across the entire expanse of Eastern Christian theology since the fall of Byzantium, perhaps no single concept has a legacy more indeterminate, more cryptic, or more shrouded in controversy than Sophiology—the theological discourse concerning divine wisdom. Here one finds more questions than answers regarding everything from the role of philosophical knowledge in salvation to the Christian doctrine of the divine feminine.

Marcus Plested's *Wisdom in Christian Tradition* was written to address these issues and to answer the pressing question of whether Sophiology lies inside or outside the bounds of acceptable Church teaching. Attempts to address this question have typically taken one of two forms: the pious rejection of Sophiology outright as merely heterodox occultism, or the embrace of its esoteric strangeness as the grounds for forwarding a feminist/Gnostic critique of orthodox Christianity. Plested seeks to finally move beyond this stagnant dialectic by situating Sophiological discourse within the patristic and medieval sources upheld by Church tradition, while also providing a critically supportive interpretation of twentieth-century Sophiological writing. After performing his examination, this seasoned theologian offers his own solutions to the mysterious paradoxes constituting Sophiology. Such antinomies revolve around the energy-essence distinction, the presence of the uncreated God in contingent creation, the divine masculine and feminine, as well as the apparent conflict between divine immanence and transcendence.

In order to reconstruct an Orthodox Sophiology that also addresses the concerns of its twentieth-century form, Plested takes a seven-pronged approach. The first section gives an overview of the Sophiological movement and its

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associated figures, namely Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), Pavel Florensky (1882–1937), and Sergius Bulgakov (1871–1944). The next three sections cover, respectively, the roots of Sophiology in the Old and New Testaments, the Ante-Nicene Fathers, and authors spanning from Clement and Origen to St. Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. The fifth and sixth sections cover the invocation of Sophiological themes across the late antique and medieval periods, in both the Greek East as well as the Latin West. In the final section, Plested forwards a "Re-Oriented" Sophiology situated within the whole of Christian tradition.

This powerful rehabilitation results in a Sophiological project which has all the promising qualities of its forerunners whilst remaining rooted in the very center of Christian Orthodoxy. This stunning genealogy offers a perspicacious treatment of the Christian divine feminine and the creature-creator distinction, while overturning the dominant conception of Sophiology as something fringe or heretical. The resulting vision frames Sophiology as something that pious critics and detractors are not only compelled to consider but obligated to accept.

When he begins his examination, Plested first covers the legacy of Vladimir Soloviev, Fr. Pavel Florensky, and Fr. Sergius Bulgakov. He distinguishes them primarily on the basis of the degree to which their Sophiological projects situated themselves in the work of the saints, the scriptures, and the early Church Fathers. The thinker whose concept of Sophia is least rooted in the soil of Eastern Orthodoxy is Vladimir Soloviev, who situates his work in sources both internal and external to Church tradition. Rather than embrace German Idealism and esotericism as a preferred source, like Soloviev, or sheepishly downplay its influence, like Florensky, Bulgakov openly critiques German Idealism and seeks to assert his Sophiology solely on the basis of tradition. Plested notes that it was really Bulgakov who gave Sophiology the Orthodox grounding it needed, since he went "far beyond both Florensky and Soloviev in the extent and depth of his engagement with patristic treatments of the theme of wisdom" (36).

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Plested situates this Bulgakovian move in its historical context. In a period when Russian elites were fascinated with German Idealism, organizations like the secret "Lovers of Wisdom" circle sought to build an authentically Russian philosophical culture. Prince Vladimir Odoevsky and the poet Dmitri Venevitinov organized this particular group around replacing spiritually benighted French Enlightenment thinking with a fundamentally numinous, organic metaphysics. They drew primarily from Schelling and believed that the arts and poetry granted access to metaphysical truths unavailable to empirical reason. Bulgakov's emphasis on a tradition-centered Sophiology was preceded here by Ivan Kireevsky, an occasional member of the "Lovers of Wisdom" circle, who had reportedly been "surprised to find in the Church Fathers everything that had captivated him about Schelling" (23).

Plested generally intertwines the German Idealist and ecclesial bases for Sophiology, questioning the notion that the two can be neatly divided. More will be said on this shortly, but first it is necessary to cover his most useful schematization: the fourfold notion of S0–S3, used to classify Sophiological insight.

Mentions of wisdom take such varied meanings across Christian and Western esoteric literature that confusion becomes inevitable. Plested schematizes references to wisdom in the following manner: S0 refers to wisdom as a purely human thing—wisdom in its colloquial usage. S1 refers to wisdom drawn from encounters with life and the created order. S2 wisdom refers to the divinely guided inculcation of talent or knowledge and the educative process of formation (*paideia*) that gives rise to insight and intuitive understanding. Finally, S3 wisdom is presented no longer as the object of knowledge but "as an active divine subject or hypostasis calling humans to herself (and she is undoubtedly a 'she')" (71). Sophiology is most famously associated with this last category.

This novel and valuable schema allows for the classification of the varied references to wisdom present in the historical record, providing key conceptual tools for scholars and seekers alike. Plested uses it to effectively track the

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development of Sophiology through the centuries, concluding that it ought to be understood as a polyvalent reaction to Anglo-Saxon modernity. While modern, Sophiology is itself anti-modernist. It seeks to reject the divide between reason and revelation that gave rise to the increasing exclusion of God from nature, culminating first in Descartes, followed by Deism, and finally in secular or atheistic naturalism. However, Plested avoids a standard cliché so rampant in Eastern Orthodox literature: polemicizing against the West with unsophisticated, broad-stroke analysis. Perhaps most remarkable about this book is his historiographical blending of Western European and Russian sources, expressed most clearly in his trailblazing sixth chapter on Sophiology in the Latin world.

To my knowledge, there has never been an extended treatment of the Latin West's Sophiological thinking. Most Sophiological writing tends to disregard the West and Latin theology due to its rationalistic, Aristotelian nature. Plested lays out a short but tantalizing genealogy to demonstrate an alternative view. His broad historical examination spans Alcuin's commission of the *Missa de Sancta Sapientia*—a special votive mass—to transcultural figures like John Scotus Eriugena, who goes to great lengths explaining how it is that divinity mediates between itself and creation—a chief Sophiological concern. Plested sharply observes that Eriugena is "the principal conduit for . . . the emergence of modern Russian Sophiology" because Eriugena impacted Soloviev's greatest German influences by inspiring "later Christian Platonist mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa, and indeed the functionally pantheistic Idealism of Schelling and Hegel" (202). In this, he subtly problematizes the notion that German Idealism lies wholly outside the bounds of ecclesiastical tradition.

He goes on to perform a stunning analysis of St. Hildegard von Bingen, claiming she had an indirect influence on the German Romantic and Idealist movements via her monastic epigones. German philosophical trends are of course precisely what gave rise to Sophiology upon their reception in Russia by Soloviev and others. Hildegard's visions depict a *Sapientia* understood as

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the energetic activity of God in creation, representing prophets, Mary, and contemplation itself as various colors adorning a divine woman. Her visions stand out as a clear example of Plested's S3 category of wisdom discourse. Soloviev and company never cite Hildegard directly, on account of her obscurity in the Christian East, yet all parties are in candid agreement: Sophia seems to stand primarily for the divine immanence and activity within creation.

By tracing the role of wisdom in the rational structure of creation, Plested even rescues Aquinas from Bulgakov's charge of being unsophiological and critiques the latter for this claim. Plested's most salient critique of the Russian Sophiologists is that they rejected Latin discourse on divine wisdom, despite the fact that Latin sources most clearly state that divine wisdom is identified chiefly with the simple divine essence rather than with a person like the Son. Given that this is a central plank of Sophiology—essential to avoid wisdom's reduction to the logos, the Holy Spirit, or a discrete divine energy—Plested claims it was a mistake for Bulgakov to view Latin sources so negatively.

Plested concludes by offering his own attempt at reconciling the Sophiological paradoxes that have defined the trajectory of this strange and powerful strain of Russian esoteric theology. For Plested, "God is wisdom according to essence, hypostasis, and energy. God is wisdom in his unknowable and transcendent essence; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are essential wisdom—one wisdom" (241). Additionally, creation is the manifestation of divine wisdom, the eternal ideas for creation corresponding to the uncreated divine energies sustaining and underpinning the world, whose soul is Sophia herself, the bridge between the created and the uncreated. Plested argues that the separation of nature from divine wisdom is what gives the world its spiritual aimlessness, environmental destruction, materialism, global neoliberalism, totalitarianism, and dialectics of opposition. In contrast, Sophiology theologizes about everything that makes the world brilliant, artistic, and knowable, marrying incarnational theology to the principal insight of German Idealism—that the finite is the vehicle expressing the eternal rather than its opposite.

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Thus, Plested's work stands as an attempt to invite Sophia back home from cold Russian exile—from the periphery of the Christian world back to its center. It is clear that he wishes to invite along with her the whole world's wisdom, and he makes this evident through citations spanning both the Greek East and the Latin West. His methodology does not in any way foreclose participation from the Orient either but rather provides a framework that makes further Sophiological investigation possible in places where it has not occurred before. This points to Sophiology's potential to integrate gender, culture, and global *Wissenschaft* into a new universal project modeled after Byzantium and Constantinople. Plested chooses for the cover art the interior of the Hagia Sophia, a center of the world where Asia, Africa, and Europe are one. His book is like the Church of Holy Wisdom's marble. Both express the living memory of a time when the Christian contemplative life was not tied to a geographical domain but was understood as a universal noetic horizon.

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Brian C. Muraresku. *The Immortality Key: The Secret History of the Religion with No Name*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2020. xx + 460 pp. ISBN 9781250207142 (hardcover). $29.99 / $39.99 Canadian.

Brian C. Muraresku's *The Immortality Key* begins and ends embedded in the current wave of scientific research on psychedelics, associated most prominently with ongoing psilocybin experiments at Johns Hopkins Medical Center. It was the hype around this research that first aroused Muraresku's interest in the subject of psychedelic spirituality, by way of a 2007 article in *The Economist* called "The God Pill." The framing is apt, as *The Immortality Key* never really leaves the ideological field of reference maintained by modern psychedelic science. Thus, while *The Immortality Key* is an engaging and adventuresome read—thoroughly and intelligently researched, passionately pursued, and skillfully woven together—it serves mainly as a projection into ancient history of the very modern idea that psychedelics open the door to a one-size-fits-all "mystical experience," and that this experience is the true essence of all religion. Perhaps "The God Pill" sums it up.

Muraresku's book has enjoyed widespread appeal, inside and outside of academia. It carries an aura of finality and mystification, and its theses resonate with prevailing cultural trends and agendas. It is therefore important that the conceptual strategies and normative assumptions defining the book's orientation be carefully examined. Ostensibly, *The Immortality Key*'s guiding project is a historical one, presented in two ambitious parts. Part One seeks to trace the diffusion of a Proto-Indo-European psychedelic ur-culture at the end of the last Ice Age, from Göbekli Tepe westward to Greece and eastward to Iran and India, thus seeding both the rites at Eleusis and the Vedic *soma* tradition, and providing the "secret inspiration behind European civilization" (119). Part Two offers fragmentary evidence that this psychedelic lineage extended through the central practices of early Christianity. Specifically, Muraresku views the

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eucharistic sacrament as the result of direct influence from the Eleusinian mysteries—which, following classicist Carl A. P. Ruck and others, he understands as a secret tradition maintained with near continuity from 1500 B.C.E. to 392 C.E., involving the communal ingestion of an ergot-infused psychedelic potion.

The motivation and conception of this historical project are deeply shaped by Muraresku's own personal spiritual quest. Raised Catholic and educated at a Jesuit prep school—before going on to study classics at Brown University and law at Georgetown University—he is disappointed by a perceived lack of spiritual power in present-day Catholic ritual. Having never experienced psychedelics directly, he hopes that a historical study of ancient Greco-Roman practices will confirm the availability of legitimate means for restoring the psychedelic potency his tradition has lost. With such historical grounding, he hopes that the path might be cleared for a "third Reformation," in which the Catholic Church embraces a psychedelic-assisted "return to its mystical roots" (14).

Moreover—inspired by the enthusiastic accounts of ancient initiates, such as the 4th-century Roman aristocrat Vettius Agorius Praetextatus—Muraresku looks upon this restoration as a possible key to the survival of the human species on Earth. Not only would the psychedelic sacrament reawaken humanity spiritually by revealing "the mystery of death and rebirth"; it would renew the planet ecologically, promote gender balance by restoring the spiritual leadership of women, and nurture equality by democratizing access to divinity and exalted states of consciousness (73).

These are not just empty claims or vain fantasies. Muraresku's quest is sincere and emblematic of a familiar modern sense of multileveled crisis. Distrust of organized religion and the longing to reclaim authentic spirituality are core modernist themes. Today, Muraresku is far from alone in hoping psychedelics will help fulfill this longing. To equate such imagined fulfillment with discovering the secret behind all religion is also a conspicuous modernist trope. Here, the problem is not so much perennialism as the assumption that "religion" can be defined generically in terms of a modern scientific, Eurocentric,

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monotheistic construct of mystical noesis. By turning his personal quest into a grand historical thesis, Muraresku reduces all forms of religion, and all varieties of psychedelic practice, to a post-Catholic interpretation of an alleged Proto-Indo-European sacrament: "The God Pill." Psychedelics are assimilated to religion (Eurocentrically defined); religion is reduced to its "mystical core" (modernistically defined); mysticism is reduced to the "unitive" experience (monotheistically defined); and the unitive experience is wholly attributable to psychedelics (scientifically defined). What will come of this formula—either spiritually or as a mode of historical discourse—now that it is loose in the world? At the very least, it has the virtue of pointing to the possibility of an experience that completely removes the fear of death.

Whether any of this can save humanity from patriarchal violence, ecocide, and political instability is another question. Even the scientific data on personal transformation through psychedelics is mixed. What Muraresku says on this topic—again, picking up a thread from Praetextatus—is intriguing. In 364 C.E., as the Christian emperor Valentinian I was threatening to outlaw the two-thousand-year-old rites at Eleusis, Praetextatus dissuaded him, insisting that such prohibition "would make the life of the Greeks unlivable" (72). Praetextatus went on to declare that the annual mysteries are what "hold the whole human race together" (72).

Muraresku links these comments to the delicate balance sustained by the Greek "biotechnology" of the psychedelic *kukeon*. Closely following Ruck, he regards the process of harvesting, preparing, and partaking of the *kukeon* as "the origin of all human science," which upholds a necessary harmony of *chaos* and *cosmos*, wild and civilized (73). Indeed, the potential for this balancing is inherent in the *kukeon* recipe itself. Just as essential to the *kukeon's* life-sustaining force was the role of women in its production and administration. "The job of the priestesses," Ruck contends, "would have been to monitor closely the growth of the darnel and ergot so that neither got out of control. Too much, and the deadly weed and fungus can ruin the entire crop, threatening life itself. Too little, and there's no active ingredient for the *kukeon*" (73–74).

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According to Muraresku, all of this came to an end with the ascendancy of imperial, patriarchal Christianity and its "campaign to rid the world of pagan influence" (76). Even if elements of the primordial psychedelic sacrament were preserved in early Christianity, it would not be long before the potent mix was replaced by a lame placebo. For Muraresku, as for Praetextatus, the implications have been grave. Removing psychedelics from the eucharist has tipped humanity's balance too far toward civilizing discipline and away from nature. Again, Muraresku appeals to modern scientific research, claiming that psychedelics unlock a genetically coded natural morality "by tapping directly into what the mystics have been trying to mine over the history of Christianity with all their chanting, meditation, fasting, and prayer. And what the religious authorities try to beat into young children" (75). The history of Christian practices (and, by extension, those of other mystical traditions) is no more than a testament to what has been lost. Muraresku weighs the situation, delivering his thesis in a series of *Ancient Aliens*-style leading questions:

> Is this what Praetextatus meant by holding 'the whole human race together'? . . . Did the transformational inner journey unleashed by the *kukeon* remind us how to care for one another and the planet? Was this the true technology on which Western civilization was built? Is a society that fails to incorporate this mystical experience fundamentally flawed, its institutions empty of the shared vision that made the world's first democracy actually work? (75).

The zeal and conviction animating these statements are what give *The Immortality Key* its propagandistic force. It makes for a compelling narrative—again, very much in tune with the contemporary zeitgeist. However, there are many ways to tune in to these matters, intellectually and otherwise. By now, it is no secret that psychedelics have been demonized and repressed throughout history, and their promise as spiritual catalysts has been amply demonstrated. However, neither the repression nor the spiritual power of psychedelics is adequately addressed by Muraresku's analysis. Did the "Indo-Europeans" invent psychedelic ritual? Muraresku gestures towards a common psychedelic tradition, inherited at Eleusis, "that seems at least as old as Raqefet Cave and Göbekli Tepe, and likely much, much older," but

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the specific routes he traces are all geographically and culturally circumscribed by narratives of Proto-Indo-European migration (306). What of Africa, East and Southeast Asia, the Americas, or Aboriginal Australia? What of the myriad visionary healing and divining practices—which have nothing to do with "God" or "mysticism"—so often studied under the sprawling rubric of "shamanism"?

At its best, *The Immortality Key* is a much-needed reminder that attention to psychedelics can activate a basic rethinking of prehistory and of humanity's place on Earth. At its worst, it is a repetitive 460-page advertisement for the elitist schemes of the modern psychedelic establishment. We must consider that the awakening and recovery needed by the Earth at this moment might not be found in psychedelics. However, to the extent that psychedelics do offer gifts and lessons for humanity, these will continue to play out through diverse, ungovernably complex interrelationships that are in no way reducible to a single eucharistic sacrament or "immortality key."

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