

COPENHAGEN CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF THEOSOPHY AND ESOTERICISM

PAN-SOPHIA

STUDENT JOURNAL



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Vol. 6
April, 2023

Pan-Sophia

A student journal dedicated to the study of
theosophy and esotericism

Vol. 6

Published by
H.E.R.M.E.S. Academic Press

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ISBN: 978-87-992056-8-4

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Preface

It is with great pleasure I hereby present Pan-Sophia, a student journal solely dedicated to the study of theosophy and esotericism. The articles published in this journal are principally excellent student essays written in relation to courses offered by the Copenhagen Center for the Study of Theosophy and Esotericism at the Institute for Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies (ToRS) at the University of Copenhagen.

Every semester several students write very interesting, highly informative, and decidedly relevant exam essays in connection with the center's courses on various aspects of theosophy and esotericism in relation to science, philosophy, religion, literature, and art. To me it always seemed a great pity to simply put good essays on the shelf once they have served their purpose as exam essays. Thus, motivated by my enthusiastic students, I thought that if these essays were adapted, as they are in this journal, to article format, they could also be of benefit to readers outside our courses interested in this field as well as to students just beginning their journey into the study of theosophy and esotericism. Building on this idea, our journal is now a reality and welcomes articles from all students working on theosophy and esotericism.

For ongoing support in making this happen, I wish to express my gratitude to The Blavatsky Trust, all my students, and my co-editors Ida Skovhus Hansen and Mathias Nikolaj Reidl.

For further information please visit: [http://ccrs.ku.dk/research/centres-and-projects/ccste/Tim Rudbøg](http://ccrs.ku.dk/research/centres-and-projects/ccste/Tim%20Rudb%C3%B8g), Copenhagen, 16.3.2018

ERINDRINGEN OM HEKSEN

Julie Knudtzen

Indledning

I 1486 skriver munkene Jacob Sprenger og Heinrich Institoris det værk, som senere skulle få tusindvis af menneskeliv på samvittigheden: *Malleus Maleficarum* eller på dansk *Heksehammeren*. Det var et udførligt og detaljeret skriv om hekseri, som blev startskuddet på en af historiens mørkeste perioder, nemlig heksejagten. Den foregik primært i Europa og USA, hvor omkring 100.000 mennesker mellem 1400-1775 blev dømt for hekseri, hvoraf ca. 50.000 endte med døden til følge¹.

Over 70% af heksene var kvinder, og især ældre, fattige enker var i målgruppen for at blive beskyldt. Dog kunne ingen vide sig sikker, og i nogle tilfælde skulle der ikke mere til, end en misundelig eller vred

¹ Levack, Brian P. "Introduction" i *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford University Press, 2013. S. 5

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nabo for at sætte rygter i gang². Selvom det i dag er flere hundreder år siden, at heksejagten udspillede sig, er der stadig folk, som husker heksen og gør brug af hende i politiske, religiøse og historiske sammenhænge. En gruppe, som er vokset de sidste mange årtier, er Wicca, som forsøger at genetablere det, de ser som den oprindelige heksereligion³. En anden kontekst, man ofte ser heksen i, er feministisk aktivisme, som bruger heksen som eksempel på undertrykkelsen af kvinden.

Både munkene, Wicca og feministerne har gennem tidens løb haft deres egen version af, hvem heksen var, og hvad der skete under heksejagten. Men hvad ligger egentlig til grund for, at forskellige grupper kan huske den samme historiske begivenhed på vidt forskellige måder? Og hvordan erindres og konstrueres heksen hos disse grupper? Det er netop de spørgsmål, som denne artikel vil dykke ned i og forsøge at besvare med udgangspunkt i Maurice Halbwachs teori om kollektiv erindring. Jeg vil først redegøre for Halbwachs erindringsteori fra bogen *"The Collective Memory"* fra 1950, hvorefter vil jeg analysere 3 forskellige kilder med udgangspunkt heri; *Malleus Maleficarum* fra 1486, *Witchcraft - a tradition renewed* fra 1990 og *W.I.T.C.H Manifesto* fra 1968. Herefter følger et diskussionsafsnit og en afrunding med en konklusion, der samler op og besvarer problemformuleringen.

² Rowlands, Alison. *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe* I *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford University Press, 2013. S. 12

³ White, Ethan D. *Wicca: History, Belief, and Community in Modern Pagan Witchcraft*. New York: Sussex Academic Press, 2016. S. 187

Maurice Halbwachs teori om kollektiv erindring

Analysen i denne artikel tager afsæt i den franske filosof og sociolog Maurice Halbwachs (1877- 1945) teori om kollektiv erindring. Hans værk *The Collective Memory* blev udgivet på originalsprog i 1950 og grundlagde studiet om den kollektive erindring⁴.

Maurice Halbwachs var inspireret af Emile Durkheim og introducerede erindring som et sociologisk fænomen frem for et individpsykologisk fænomen. Han mener, at forudsætningen for den individuelle hukommelse er den kollektive kontekst, og at vi altid vil bruge gruppen som ramme for, hvad vi husker og hvordan. Samtidig skriver Halbwachs, at der er en direkte forbindelse, mellem hvordan vi opfører os som gruppe, og de kollektive erindringer vi har, og at vi i høj grad konstruerer vores egen udgave af historien ud fra gruppens identitet. Teorien om kollektiv erindring drager mange paralleller til socialkonstruktivismen, da den understreger, hvordan fortiden rekonstrueres indenfor nutidens virkelighedsopfattelse hos folk, og at erindringerne bliver en selektiv og kunstig virkelighed:⁵ "The memory of a society extends as far as the memory of the groups composing it".⁶

Halbwach kategoriserer i *The Collective Memory* individuel og kollektiv erindring som "autobiographical memory" og "historical memory".⁷ Førstnævnte definerer det, som du selv har oplevet og husker, og sidstnævnte er det, som du ikke selv har oplevet, men som du får hjælp til at forestille dig gennem andres minder – også det

⁴ A. Coser, Lewis. Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory. The University of Chicago Press, 1992 s. 1

⁵ Bryld, Claus og Warring, Anette. *Kollektiv erindring – hvad er det?* Fortid og Nutid, 1999 s. 227-235

⁶ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 82

⁷ Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Harper & Row, 1950. S. 52

Halbwachs kalder "borrowed memory".⁸ Begge slags hukommelser interagerer dog mere eller mindre med den anden; individet bruger andre som referenceramme til at udfylde både egne erindringer og forestillinger om andres erindringer, mens gruppen er mere afskåret fra individets påvirkning og i højere grad transformerer individets selvstændighed ind i gruppens fælles bevidsthed.⁹

På trods af Halbwachs kobling af begreberne "kollektiv erindring" og "historical memory", introducerer han to grundlæggende forskelle på historie som videnskabelig disciplin og erindring som en personlig handling. Den første forskel, han nævner, er, at den historiske metode forsøger at adskille de historiske perioder fra hinanden med fokus på forskellene mellem fortid og nutid, hvor den kollektive hukommelse i højere grad fokuserer på lighederne på tværs af historiske perioder, og ikke adskiller sig fra historiske begivenheder og grupper, så længe den nutidige gruppe kan identificere sig med disse.¹⁰

Den anden forskel, Halbwach nævner, er, at historikeren er ligeligt interesseret i alle detaljer, som kan forme historiens helhed, og at den kollektive erindring omvendt fokuserer på de detaljer af historien, som støtter op om gruppens interesser og værdier og dermed passer ind i deres verdenssyn:¹¹ "But the group, living first and foremost for its own sake, aims to perpetuate the feelings and images forming the substance of its thought".¹² Historikeren er altså drevet af rationalitet og objektivitet, og mennesket er drevet af at tilføre meninger og argumenter til sit personlige ståsted. Halbwachs påpeger, at interessen for en historisk begivenhed først rigtig tager form noget tid efter, den er passeret, og at begivenheden på dette tidspunkt tidsmæssigt er så

⁸ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 51

⁹ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 52

¹⁰ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 80

¹¹ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 83

¹² Halbwachs, 1950. S. 86

langt væk, at gruppen automatisk fylder historien ud med eget narrativ.¹³

Maurice Halbwachs dedikerer et helt afsnit i *The Collective Memory* til tidsbegrebet, hvor han undersøger den historiske- og kollektive erindrings indgangsvinkel til dette og skelner mellem ”universal times” og ”historical times”.¹⁴ Han konkluderer, at historien som akademisk disciplin, vil kategorisere flere begivenheder indenfor samme skuffe baseret på datoer og perioder, også selvom disse begivenheder ikke ellers har interageret. Modsat vil den kollektive hukommelse sprænge rammerne for tid og sted og arbejde ud fra et universelt tidsbegreb, hvor man sagtens kan identificere sig med fortidens begivenheder, selvom de tidsmæssigt ligger meget langt væk. Det eneste, der optager den kollektive erindring, er, hvorvidt det vedrører noget i den selv: “But the memory of a people records only the repercussions affecting them and not the events themselves”¹⁵

Halbwachs pointerer, at den historiske tids-bevidsthed har meget lidt indflydelse på folk, medmindre de selv har oplevet begivenhederne som interagerende med deres nutid. Han skriver, at tidsbegrebet breder sig mere og mere ud, jo mere folk på en eller anden måde praktiserer traditioner koblet til fortiden, og at hver gruppe dermed konstruerer sin egen opfattelse af tid: “Each locally defined group has its own memory and its own representation of time”¹⁶.

¹³ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 79

¹⁴ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 101

¹⁵ Halbwachs 1950. S. 103

¹⁶ Halbwachs, 1950. S. 104

Malleus Maleficarum

Malleus Maleficarum blev i 2009 oversat til "*The Hammer of the Witches*" eller på dansk "*Heksehammeren*", og er nok det mest indflydelsesrige dokument, der er skrevet om hekseri. Værket er skrevet af munkene Jacobus Sprenger fra Schweitz og Heinricus Institoris fra Frankrig i 1486 som begge tilhørte den katolske Dominikanerorden.

Heksehammeren er delt op i spørgsmål, som besvares med en hel masse referencer, og indholdet går i detaljer med alt, lige fra hvorfor hekseri eksisterer, hvem der begår forbrydelserne, til det juridiske i, hvordan de skal straffes. Sprenger og Institoris boede ikke isoleret fra samfundet i kloster, som de fleste munke traditionelt gjorde – de var på en mission mod den stigende tendens til hekserikriminalitet, og de fik endda Pave Innocens VIII's velsignelse til at udføre det i fred for de lokale autoriteter¹⁷.

I *Heksehammeren* er der tale om kollektiv erindring, da de to munke udtrykker sig på vegne af hele den katolske kirke, som ønsker ensretning af kirken og krig mod kætterne. Sprenger og Institoris bruger talrige referencer til at understøtte deres holdninger til, hvem heksen var, og de varierer bredt i alt fra bibelske¹⁸, filosofiske¹⁹, mytologiske²⁰, historiske²¹, naturvidenskabelige²² kilder til egne erfaringer. Nogle gange henviser de også blot til "nogen", "andre" eller "de", hvor det ikke er helt klart, hvis hukommelse de bruger²³, men alt

¹⁷ Mackay, Christoffer S. *The hammer of witches, a complete translation of the Malleus maleficarum*. Cambridge University Press, 2009 s. 73.

¹⁸ Mackay, 2009. S. 164: Det gamle og det nye Testamente.

¹⁹ Mackay, 2009. S. 166: Sokrates.

²⁰ Mackay, 2009. S. 166: Seneca, Medea.

²¹ Mackay, 2009. S. 168.

²² Mackay, 2009. S. 160: Doktorer.

²³ Mackay, 2009. S. 160, 164.

sammen indikerer et bredt flertal af respekterede autoriteter, som bakker dem op. Kilderne, de henviser til, fungerer som gruppens "borrowed memory", da det er andres minder om, hvem heksen var. Selvom der er flere århundreder mellem mange af referencerne og 1486, hvor Heksehammeren blev skrevet, identificerer munkene sig med temaet om heksen. Ligesom Halbwachs skriver, søger den kollektive erindring lighederne på tværs af historien frem for forskellene, og den største lighed af alle er her, at de alle deler det kristne verdenssyn.

I løbet af analysen vil der dukke flere eksempler op på, at forfatterne udvælger de detaljer fra biblen, som passer ind i de interesser, gruppen har. Et eksempel på dette er deres henvisning på side 162 til Matthæus evangeliet: "What else is a woman but the enemy of friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable disaster, a danger in the home, a delightful detriment, an evil of nature, painted with nice color?". Biblen underbygger altså her, at kvinden er en ond skabning, som man har god grund til at frygte, men der er andre steder i selv samme bibel med et helt modsat syn på kvinden. I 1. mosebog kapitel 2 vers 18-24 skaber Gud eksempelvis Eva ud fra Adams ribben af den grund, at det ikke er godt for mennesket at være alene, og Adam siger "Derfor forlader en mand sin far og mor og binder sig til sin hustru, og de bliver et kød". Halbwachs ville mene, at historikeren ville vægte dette citat lige så meget som det første for at skabe et samlet, nuanceret indtryk af, hvad biblen siger om kvinden. Den kollektive erindring gør det stik modsatte; den udvælger detaljer af en erindring, som passer ind i den kollektive bevidsthed.

Et andet retorisk virkemiddel, som kunne pege i denne retning, er, at forfatterne bruger mange gentagelser. Dette kan selvfølgelig både indikere, at de vil understrege denne pointe, men det kan også - ud fra

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Halbwachs' perspektiv - fortolkes således, at de løber tør for henvisninger, som taler ind i deres interesse, og at de derfor må genbruge dem²⁴. *Heksehammeren* inkluderer egentlig i nogle tilfælde detaljer, som ikke stemmer overens med deres egen agenda, men i sidste ende kun for at kunne modbevise dem og stå stærkere i deres egen kollektive erindring af biblen²⁵.

Heksen som satans elskerinde

Spørgsmål 6, som besvares fra s. 159-173, er det, som bedst beskriver, hvem heksen er ifølge munkene, og det er derfor dette afsnit, som jeg vil gå mest i dybden med i min analyse. Heksen i *Heksehammeren* er først og fremmest kvinder, og dette slås fast sort på hvidt på side 170: "But for intelligent men it appears to to be reasonably unsurprising that more women than men are found to be tainted with the heresy of sorceresses. Hence, and consequently, it should be called the Heresy not of Sorcerers but of Sorceresses, to name it after the predominant element".

De indleder deres svar på, hvorfor dette er tilfældet, ved at henvise til, at nogle doktorer forklarer, at der er tre elementer i verden, på tværs af kønnet, som ikke formår at holde balancen mellem ondskab og godhed; en tunge²⁶, en kirkemand og en kvinde. Disse tre kan enten svinge ud og blive ekstremt gode eller ekstremt onde, og selvom de både uddyber tungen og kirkemanden, bruges der langt flere sider på, at beskrive det potentielt onde ved kvinden, end ved de to andre, og det potentielt gode bliver ikke udforsket yderligere. Dette er ikke sidste gang, de bruger dualistiske træk til at understrege kvindens manglende

²⁴ Mackay, 2009. S. 162, 164 og 162, 166.

²⁵ Mackay, 2009. S. 164.

²⁶ Her bruges "tungen" som metafor for talegaver.

balance og dermed farlige uforudsigelighed. De skriver fx på side 163, at en kvinde enten elsker eller hader, og at hun kun græder tårer af enten ægte sorg eller med snedige bagtanker – der er ingen mellemvej, og hun er ude af kontrol!

Der henvises til et citat fra Ecclesiasticus²⁷: ”Every evil is small compared to the evil of a woman”²⁸; så hvis en kvinde først er blevet ond, er det den værste form for ondskab, der findes, og der står efterfølgende, at det vil være mere behageligt at være i samme rum som en løve og en slange end med en ond kvinde. På samme måde er der intet, der overgår kvindens vrede og temperament: ”There is no head worse than the head of a snake, and there is no anger surpassing the anger of a woman”²⁹. *Heksehammeren* argumenterer samtidigt for, at kvinden har lettere ved at give efter for ondskaben end manden og forklarer, at mens der skal utallige fristelser til at få manden på forkert spor, skal der kun en enkelt fristelse til hos kvinden. Hun er altså en synder i sin natur, og på side 169 står der følgende: ”so we can justly say with Cato Uticensis that if the world could exist without women, we would interact with the gods”. Kvinden er en hindring for, at mænd kan leve i harmoni med Gud, og de skal tage kontrol over hende og dermed sikre sig deres egen plads i Paradis³⁰.

Kvinden beskrives som en snu og manipulerende skabning, der narrer dig med sin falske sirenesang: ”For she is lying in speech just as she is in nature”³¹. De bruger på samme side en metafor om, at blomsten af Venus er en rose, fordi der under den mørkerøde farve gemmer sig

²⁷ Det latinske navn på en apokryf kaldet Siraks bog fra det Gamle Testamente, kilde: <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/Ecclesiasticus> d. 22.05.22 kl. 13.48.

²⁸ Mackay, 2009. S. 162.

²⁹ Mackay, 2009. S. 162.

³⁰ Mackay, 2009. S. 168.

³¹ Mackay, 2009. S. 169.

stikkende torne. Man kan her tolke blomsten af Venus som symbolik for kvindens kønsorgan og frugtbarhed³², som lokker dig til sig med sin skønhed, men snyder dig og påfører dig smerte. Det er ikke første gang, der henvises til kvindens seksualitet som et manipulerende nummer, som lokker manden i fordærv, og på side 187 nævnes det da også, at samleje er den hyppigste form for hekseri.

På side 171 beskrives forførelsens 7 trin. Det første trin er at bilde mændene ind, at der er en særlig kærlighed på spil, og et par trin længere henne forvandler de mændene til udyr - alt sammen for at forårsage en abort, hvor de ofrer babyer til dæmoner.

Heksehammeren hentyder desuden flere steder til, at kvinden besidder et grådigt og ustyrligt begær: "There are three insatiable things...and a fourth that never says, "It is enough," (namely the opening of the womb) and for this reason they even cavort with demons to satisfy their lust"³³. Kvinden har altså samleje med dæmoner for at forløse deres ustyrlige lyst, og de skriver tilmed på s. 169, at der ikke findes en mand, som stræber mere efter at behage Gud, end en kvinde der stræber efter at behage mænd. Mænd skal modstå hende og ikke lade sig lokke af hendes falskhed: "He who pleases God will shun her. He who is a sinner will be captured by her"³⁴. På side 172 italesætter de konsekvensen af, at mænd lader sig lokke: "the men allow no harm to be done to the sorceresses either by themselves or others, and thus the sorceresses multiply daily". Heksene er altså en sand trussel, og de skal stoppes for ikke at fordoble sig og tage over.

Selvom kvinden beskrives som en snu, manipulerende og farlig skabning, beskrives hun samtidig flere steder som værende uden intelligens og fornuft, og hun sammenlignes endda med et barns

³² <https://symbolleksikon.lex.dk/Venus> d. 23.05.22 kl. 10.09.

³³ Mackay, 2009. S. 170.

³⁴ Mackay, 2009. S. 170.

intellekt³⁵. Udover at være mentalt underlegen er hun også fysisk svag og bruger derfor hekseri til at kompensere for denne svaghed³⁶. Ud fra disse karaktertræk skulle man ikke tro, at manden eller de religiøse skulle have noget at frygte, men det er altså ikke tilfældet.

En ting at lægge mærke til i Sprengers og Institoris retorik er, at de faktisk ikke beskriver heksen mange steder, men i stedet beskriver kvinden. Hvordan kan alt dette så svare på, hvem heksen er i *Heksehammeren*? Det kan det fordi, at ”kvinden” langt de fleste steder omtales som denne onde, farlige, manipulerende skabning, der ligger til grund for at ”heksen” overhovedet findes. Kvindens natur er roden til hekseri. Man kunne altså sige, at der ifølge Sprenger og Institoris er en hårfin grænse mellem at være kvinde og heks, hvis der altså overhovedet er nogen. De skelner ikke noget sted mellem, om det er de onde eller gode kvinder, som de taler om – de taler bare om ”kvinder”. Lad os undersøge om de gode kvinder egentlig findes ifølge Sprenger og Institoris. På side 163 henviser de til kvinder, som er blevet hyldet for deres godhed, og nævner, at en troende kvinde kan frelse en ikke-troende mand, velsigne hans liv og forlænge hans levetid. Det er tydeligt, at definitionen på ”den gode kvinde” her er ”den kristne kvinde”, idet hun beskrives som ”holy” og ”virgin”. De givne eksempler på gode kvinder fremhæves også på baggrund af deres heltemodige gerninger i kristendommens navn, fx: Esther som brugte sin indflydelse som konkubine til at få en fjende til jøderne henrettet. Denne passage afsluttes dog brat med en ganske urelateret henvisning til et citat fra Ecclesiastes om, at kvinden altid vil være underlagt kødets lyster, og ”I found woman more bitter than death”³⁷.

³⁵ Mackay, 2009. S. 165.

³⁶ Mackay, 2009. S. 164.

³⁷ Mackay, 2009. S. 164.

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De forholder sig altså ikke yderligere til den ”gode kvinde”, end at hun er kristen og hellig. Dog virker det som om, at selvom du betegnes som en hellig kvinde, vil du stadig indeholde ondskaben fra dit køns natur. De giver på side 166 eksempler på, at selv de kvindelige, bibelske karakterer bebyrder manden med deres raseri, og at det derfor må være endnu værre hos normale kvinder. På trods af alt dette forsikrer de os flere steder om, at kvinder godt kan være hellige og gode³⁸.

Heksehammeren fremlægger, at mange taler ondt om kvinder pga. Evas synd i Paradisets have, men at en Jerome siger, at denne synd blev tilgivet med Jomfru Marias velsignelser³⁹. Forfatternes eneste kommentar til denne sag er, at man ved at undersøge disse argumenter med sin fornuft og erfaringer må erkende, at kvinder er ødelagte i sjæl og krop, og at det derfor ikke er overraskende, at de begår mere hekseri end mænd. Dette er altså et tydeligt eksempel på, at de bruger biblen som erindring på en selektiv måde, idet de henviser til den i det omfang, den passer ind i deres egen agenda, og på samme måde afleder læserens opmærksomhed væk fra den, når de er uenige.

Der er generelt set en del modstridende og ulogiske argumenter angående, hvorfor kvinder hyppigere begår hekseri. På side 164 står der: ”The first is that they are prone to believing and because the demon basically seeks to corrupt the faith, he assails them in particular”. Kvinder er altså tilbøjelige til at være troende og derfor søger dæmonen dem mere. Lige her gøres selv de gode, hellige kvaliteter til noget problematisk, og man kan undre sig over, hvilke kvinder der undslipper dæmonen, hvis både de troende og ikke-troende overtages af ham? De modsiger da også sig selv på side 165, hvor der henvises til, at kvinder faktisk ikke har tro fra naturens side, og at det er derfor oftere er dem

³⁸ Mackay, 2009. S. 161, 163.

³⁹ Mackay, 2009. S. 164.

som er heksene: "It is also clear in connection with the first woman that they have less faith by nature..". Dette bakkes op af en etymologisk forklaring på at ordet "feminus" er sammensat af "fe", som kommer af "fidem", som er latinsk for "tro" og "minus" som er noget, der ikke er. Man kan nu spørge; beskytter det at tro imod hekseri eller ej? Hvad er kvindens naturlige tilstand i forhold til tro? Og hvad er så egentlig grunden til at heksene er kvinder?

Et andet eksempel på modstridende konklusioner er, at der på side 163 står, at kvinder har reddet nationer, lande og byer, men så står der senere at "all the kingdoms of the world have been overturned because of women"⁴⁰. Et sidste eksempel, der topper dem alle, er på side 173, hvor der står, at den, som tror, at noget andet væsen end Skaberen selv kan forvandle et menneske til det bedre eller dårligere, er en vantro kætter. Dette argument klinger hult efter mange siders argumenter for, at djævelen samarbejder med kvinden for at nå manden med sine onde gerninger⁴¹. Disse modstridende konklusioner er interessante ift. at stille sig kritisk overfor munkenes argumentations- strategi og dermed også stille sig kritisk overfor erindringen af heksen. Det bliver meget tydeligt at se, at forfatterne udvælger og vinkler kilderne, hvor de passer ind i gruppens (kirkens) interesser og verdenssyn, og at de overser den ulogiske helhed, som man sidder tilbage med som læser.

Witchcraft – a tradition renewed

Doreen Valiante og Evan J. Jones skrev bogen *Witchcraft - a tradition renewed* om heksereligion i 1990, og den er en hyldest til deres afdøde lærer, okkultisten Robert Cochrane. I introduktionen får man indblik i

⁴⁰ Mackay, 2009. S. 168.

⁴¹ Mackay, 2009. S. 173.

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hvilket gruppemiljø, kilden skriver sig ind i; de afgrænser sig hurtigt fra den nyreligiøse "Wicca" bevægelse ved at skrive, at deres er den helt gamle heksereligion⁴², selvom begge grupper har denne selvopfattelse. Forfatterne erindrer heksen via hendes religion, som tilbeder Gudinden og benytter sig af både gruppesamlinger, ritualer, riter, ceremonier, sabbat, dans, ofringer, magi, clairvoyance og tidsrejser⁴³ i den religiøse praksis. Det er altså denne kollektive, religiøse bevidsthed, som sætter rammen for, hvordan heksen konstrueres hos gruppen.

Der er ikke langt mellem forfatterne og den historiske heks. Et godt eksempel på dette er på side 8, hvor de skriver: "Even after they had stopped actually hanging and burning us, the authority of Church and state continued a determined onslaught against the survival of the olde, pagan craft". De omtaler altså sig selv som "os" - som de selvsamme hekse der blev brændt. Dette fortæller noget om, hvor stærk en identifikation de føler med de hekse, som blev jagtet under heksejagten, og det er et godt eksempel på Halbwachs teori om den kollektive erindrings universelle tidsopfattelse. Menneskets tidsopfattelse kan ifølge ham strække sig meget langt - især hvis man praktiserer traditioner fra fortiden. Og selvom der er flere århundreder mellem dem og de oprindelige hekse, føler de, at de er dem. Forfatterne skriver fortsat, at heksejagten stadig er i gang, selvom den sidste heks blev brændt i 1951⁴⁴. Nutidens heksejagt kommer ifølge forfatterne fx til udtryk, når kristne fundamentalister bandlyser forelæsninger eller boghandlere. Her indtræder den sammenligning mellem fortidens og nutidens mennesker, som Halbwach skriver, at den kollektive erindring

⁴² Valiante, Doreen & Jones, Evan J. *Witchcraft – a tradition renewed*. Phoenix, 1990. S. 7.

⁴³ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 19, 30, 34 og 49.

⁴⁴ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 9.

søger, men som aldrig ville blive koblet sammen i videnskabelig historieskrivning. Der er altså en lighed mellem den diskrimination, forfatterne oplever i nutiden, med den diskrimination, heksene oplevede under heksejagten.

Heksen som spirituel spåkone

Doreen Valiante er forfatter til bogens forord, og hun introducerer værket ved hurtigt at slå fast, at bogens udgave af heksereligionen er den ægte, gamle tradition, modsat den som Gerald Gardner startede med Wicca i 1950'erne, som hun beskriver, består mest af nøgendans og en lalleglad attitude mod alt⁴⁵. Forfatterne understreger senere, at den helt gamle heksereligion har meget mere på sig og handler om at turde gå sin egen vej og bryde mønstre fra tidligere liv: "The path of the Goddess were never an easy one to follow"⁴⁶. Heksen er altså en modig, selvstændig sjæl, og Valiante advarer imod, at indholdet kan virke forstyrrende og provokerende for dem, som er vant til den moderne, mere let- spiselige udgave af heksereligionen.

Der er mange interessante ting at bide mærke i ved forfatterernes gentagne argumenter for, at deres udgave af heksereligionen er den helt gamle slags⁴⁷. En ting er, at de samtidig lægger vægt på, at religionen er uetableret pga. manglende kilder, og at man skal finde sin egen vej⁴⁸. En anden ting er, at man løbende får øje på, at heksereligionen bliver koblet til mange nutidige og tværreligiøse elementer. På side 11 introduceres klimakrisen som noget, hekse går op i pga. deres tætte forbindelse med naturen, og Valiante forklarer, at vi lige nu går fra en

⁴⁵ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 7.

⁴⁶ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 32.

⁴⁷ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 52.

⁴⁸ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 19.

historisk periode til en anden, nemlig fra "Fiskenes alder" til "Vandbærerens alder". Her bruger hun altså termer fra den astrologiske verden til at forklare, hvorfor flere og flere mennesker søger mod den gamle religion og ønsker at passe bedre på naturen.

Der er da også flere andre tværreligiøse "lån" såsom på side 49, hvor Gudinden sidestilles med Adonis fra græsk mytologi, den Egyptiske Osiris og Majsgudinden fra Europæisk tradition. Manden bliver sammenlignet med solen, og kvinden bliver sammenlignet med månen, som går igen i Yin/Yang princippet fra kinesisk filosofi⁴⁹.

Man aner samtidigt en del henvisninger til den moderne New Age religion⁵⁰. En ting er de lånte elementer fra Østen, men en anden er det skærpede fokus på selvudvikling og selvterapi. På side 33 skriver de: "They have taken their first step in awareness that there is something more to life than being born, growing up, settling down to a middle-aged existence, then growing old, with death as the finish of it all". Der er altså et element af selvrealisering at hente, for dem som praktiserer heksereligion, og religionen kan fungere som vejen ud af det simple, konservative liv. Her vil jeg kort nævne Charles Taylors tese om "The subjective turn", som beskriver, at vi lever i en mere individualiseret tid, og at dette også smitter af på de religiøse tendenser, som først og fremmest opererer ud fra princippet om, at du er din egen autoritet, og at du skal mærke efter⁵¹. Et andet princip, som går igen fra New Age-bølgen, er fokuset på de naturlige love, som i Valiante og Jones bog fremhæves som det, der ligger til grund for, at magi virker⁵². Det tyder altså på, at ældgamle traditioner blandes sammen med nutidige tendenser i Valiantes og Jones rekonstruktion af den gamle

⁴⁹ https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/yin_og_yang D. 24.05.22 kl. 11.11.

⁵⁰ https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/New_Age D. 03.09.22 kl. 15.28.

⁵¹ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, 2008.

⁵² Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 34.

heksereligion. Heksen er i deres erindring en spirituel kvinde, som er dybt forbundet med naturen, og som går sin egen, alternative vej.

Disse lån fra andre religiøse traditioner og aktuelle samfundstendenser er gode eksempler på Halwachs teorier om universel tid, fordi Valiante og Jones sprænger rammerne for, hvad der kan kobles sammen på tværs af tid og sted. Lige meget hvor langt væk tids- eller stedsmæssigt disse kilder er fra hinanden, er det vigtigste, at det er noget, som gruppen kan identificere sig med og bruge til at underbygge deres argument om, hvem heksten og heksereligionen er. På side 13 gør Doreen Valiante klart, at heksetraditionen ikke blot er magi men en rigtig religion. Erindringen om denne religion bygger i høj grad på Kristendommens historie, og hun introducerer på side 10, at Gud oprindeligt var kvinde, før de kristne "tog hende" og skiftende hendes køn. Gudinden, Guds kvindelige modstykke er gået i glemmebogen med det kristne, patriarkatske verdenssyn, og de kristne konstruerede deres helligdage ud fra den gamle folkereligions helligdage og jagtede alle dem, som havde en anden tro end deres egen⁵³. Det er altså tydeligt, at der ligger et minde om, at Kristendommen har stjålet heksereligionen i gruppens hukommelse, og at dette er med til at definere heksten som den glemte, undertrykte kvinde.

På side 26 sætter forfatterne nogle flere ord på Gudinden med et vers, som er modtaget i gave til rituelt brug: "Beloved Bloodmother of my especial breed, welcome me at this moment with your Willing womb". Her kobles Gudinden til kvindens køn og frugtbarhed ved at henvise til livmoderen, og ved at kalde hende "Bloodmother". Brugen af "Bloodmother" kan tolkes som en forbindelse til kvindens menstruationscyklus, som repræsenterer hendes frugtbarhed.

⁵³ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 9 og 24.

Menstruationscyklussen kobles til månens faser: "Turning their eyes to the heavens, they saw the female cycle mirrored in the lunar phases. The waxing and waning of the moon were like the growing and weakening of the female fertility cycle"⁵⁴. Referencer til månen går igen på side 43, hvor Gudinden beskrives som at vise sig i månefaser, der repræsenterer kvindens forskellige aspekter; ungpigen ved nymåne, moderen ved fuldmåne, gammelkonen ved aftagende måne. Gudindens livmoder hylde som kilden til alt liv⁵⁵, kvindens frugtbarhed guddommeliggøres, og dette står i skarp kontrast til den fjendtlige tone mod kvindens seksualitet i *Heksehammeren*. Dette viser tydeligt, at gruppens rekonstruktion af heksen ligger i, at sætte hende i skarp kontrast til det, som Sprenger og Institoris konstruerede hende som, og de ønsker at hylde det, som engang blev udskammet.

Der er ingen tvivl om, at forfatternes erindring af heksen i høj grad bygger på heksen som den udstødte, marginaliserede kvinde, og at dette skaber det, som opfattes som gruppens kerneværdi; fællesskab. Vigtigheden af at dele religionen med "likeminded" personer gentages flere gange gennem kilden⁵⁶, og dette er et godt eksempel på, at de kollektive erindringer skaber gruppens opførsel. Den kollektive bevidsthed er generelt enormt stærkt i heksereligionen, og de bryster sig gentagne gange ved, at den har udstået og overlevet alle disse prøvelser⁵⁷. Dette argument bruges da også som legitimation for, at religionen bærer sandheden med sig; "The concepts and workings became established in the past because they did work, and time itself has in no way invalidated the

⁵⁴ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 48.

⁵⁵ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 44.

⁵⁶ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 19, 33, 36.

⁵⁷ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 50.

truth of them”⁵⁸. Det er altså tydeligt, at erindringen om, at heksereligionen har overlevet på trods af middelalderens barske kår, styrker gruppens overbevisninger og selvtillid.

Bogens konstruktion af heksen viser generelt tydeligt, at den kollektive erindring søger lighederne frem for forskellene mellem de historiske perioder, som Halbwachs påpeger er karakteristisk ved den kollektive erindring, og at den fokuserer på de detaljer af historien, som gavner egne interesser. De overordnede ligheder, som Valiante og Jones fremhæver, er, at de praktiserer magi og er bevidste om, at de skiller sig ud fra samfundet, ligesom heksen under heksejagten gjorde. Denne lighed gør ifølge Maurice Halbwachs, at gruppen overser alle de forskelligheder, der ligger mellem dem og den historiske begivenhed, de husker og identificerer sig med.

Ifølge bogen *Witchcraft- a tradition renewed* er heksen altså en rebelsk enspænder, som har lidt under alt det, autoriteterne har budt hende, og hun tager modigt ansvar for sin egen frelse: ”By turning to the Goddess, a person must accept that they have changed to the extent of realizing that their spiritual salvation is in their own hands”⁵⁹. Heksen er altså først og fremmest defineret ud fra den religion, hun praktiserer, og forfatterne og deres ligesindede tager den religion tilbage, som Kristendommen så brutalt frarøvede hende.

W.I.T.C.H Manifesto

Ifølge historiker og formand for moderne kønsstudier ved Universitetet i Sydcalifornien, Alice Echols, opererede den radikale feminisme som amerikansk bevægelse hovedsageligt fra 1968-1975, hvor retten til

⁵⁸ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 46.

⁵⁹ Valiante & Jones, 1990. S. 31.

prævention og abort var kampen, der skød det hele i gang⁶⁰. Radikale grupper som Redstockings, Cell 16, The Feminists og New York Radical Feminists begyndte at arrangere politisk feministisk aktivisme, og en af disse grupper var W.I.T.C.H., som opstod i kølvandet på New York Radical Feminists's opløsning. Navnet W.I.T.C.H. står for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, og allerede her fornemmer man den aggressive ånd, som gennemsyrede gruppens aktivisme. I 1968 grundlagde de 6 kvinder, som gruppen bestod af, sine grundprincipper med manifestet "*W.I.T.C.H. manifesto*"⁶¹.

Manifestet er først og fremmest, hvis ikke kun, et feministisk, aktivistisk dokument, som bygges op omkring "heksen" som feministisk ideal. De lægger ud med at beskrive, at heksen var den første til at kæmpe imod særligt, men ikke kun, kvindens undertrykkelse. Man aner en hel del dualisk, "os og dem" retorik gennem hele kilden, og det, som gruppen kæmper imod, er patriarkatet, undertrykkelse, grådighed, autoriteter og puritanisme, som kobles op på hankønnet. "Before the death-dealing, sexual, economic, and spiritual repression of the Imperialist Phallic Society took over and began to destroy nature and human society"⁶². Det er altså et mandsdomineret, fallisk samfund, som kom udefra og ødelagde det balancerede, samarbejdende, ligestillede samfund, som engang fungerede til alles glæde. Det var ikke atypisk, at radikale feminister fra 70'ernes anden feminisme-bølge ville fremhæve heksen som

⁶⁰ Echols, Alice. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1989. S.vii-viii.

⁶¹ Fahs, Breanne. "Burn It Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution". Verso, 2020 s. 465-466: W.I.T.C.H. (Women's international terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). W.I.T.C.H. manifesto, 1968.

⁶² W.I.T.C.H., 1968. S. 1.

eksempel på det patriarkatske samfunds misogynisme, og også W.I.T.C.H taler ind i denne tendens.

Heksen som feministisk ideal

Gruppens konstruering af heksen beskrives meget direkte i første afsnit af siden: "Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary". Det er altså tydeligt, at de husker heksen, som hende der udfordrede og intimiderede datidens kristne mænd med sin overlegne intelligens, seksualitet og selvstændighed. Dette uddybes i sidste linje med: "You are a Witch by being female, untamed, angry, joyous, and immortal". Heksen er altså en vild kvinde, som ikke lader sig kue, og det er tydeligt, at disse erindringer om heksen ligger til grund for gruppens ideologiske ståsted og aktivistiske opførsel. De understreger, at heksen er en kvinde, og dette er bare et af de identifikationspunkter, som ligger mellem heksen og gruppen.

En interessant detalje er, at W.I.T.C.H skriver, at 9 millioner kvinder blev brændt som hekse. Dette, pointerer historikeren Alison Rowlands, er en ekstrem overdrivelse, som mange radikale feminister har påstået for at fremme egen agenda, og der i virkeligheden "kun" blev brændt mellem 45-60.000 hekse i Europa⁶³. Dette er interessant, fordi det stemmer overens med Halbwachs teori om, at gruppen ukritisk og selektivt plukker og vinkler historiske begivenheder, så de understøtter og tilfører mening til egen vilje og bevidsthed.

⁶³ Rowlands, Alison. "Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe", I: *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford University Press, 2013. S. 3-4.

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Manifestet slår fast, at heksen var den første alkymist, den første til at bruge prævention samt til at abortere, og at hun ikke bøjede sig for nogen mand. Disse ting samlet er alt det, som heksen dømmes, frygtes og hades for i *Heksehammeren*, og det er netop det, som hun bliver hyldet for hos feministerne. Dette eksemplificerer, at kristendommens undertrykkelse og kontrol af kvinder taler til gruppens feministiske bevidsthed og er med til at forme den kollektive erindring af heksen. De trækker da også en parallel fra egne, nutidige irritationsfaktorer til de historiske hekses undertrykkelse; samfundet kræver, at de som kvinder bærer make-up og kvælende, stramtsiddende tøj. Det viser den lighed, grupper identificerer sig med på tværs af historiske perioder, og det kvælende tøj bliver metafor på, eller direkte sammenligning med, heksens manglende frihed, som blev forårsaget af de kristne, mandlige autoriteter.

Manifestet opfordrer kvinder til at danne en gruppe af hekse og finde deres egen måde at udtrykke heksen på: "theater, satire, explosions, magic, herbs, music, costumes, cameras, masks, chants, stickers, stencils and paint, films, tambourines, bricks, brooms, guns, voodoo dolls, cats, candles, bells, chalk, nail clippings, hand grenades, poison rings, fuses, tape recorders, incense—your own boundless imagination"⁶⁴. De henviser altså både til typisk religiøse udtryk med "magic, chants, voodoo dolls, incense" og helt almindelige hverdagsting som "costumes, cameras, stickers, nail clipping" og dette viser, at det ifølge W.I.T.C.H ikke er afgrænset, hvordan du kan udtrykke dig som heks, så længe det bare bruges i en aktivistisk sammenhæng. Essensen af heksen er altså frem for alt aktivistisk og ikke udelukkende religiøs. Til sidst skriver manifestet følgende: "You are pledged to free our brothers from oppression and stereotyped sexual roles (whether they like it or not) as well as ourselves". En del af

⁶⁴ W.I.T.C.H, 1968. S. 1.

missionen for heksen er altså at gøre op med stereotyper og seksuelle roller, og dette taler igen ind i den feministiske aktivisme, som heksen konstrueres til at symbolisere.

Diskussion

I Maurice Halbwachs teori fra 1952, skelner han mellem historikerens og den kollektives erindring og definerer karaktertrækkene ved den kollektive erindring ud fra dette skel. Men kan man overhovedet adskille mennesket fra hans akademiske titel? Og har mennesket ikke altid et personligt ståsted og en dertilhørende agenda, som former erindringen om noget? Disse spørgsmål er nogle, der er blevet stillet indenfor det videnskabsteoretiske studie i mange år, og det er svært at finde frem til noget helt entydigt. På den ene side kan man argumentere for, at akademikeren først og fremmest er menneske, og at selv faget og det underordnede emne, som han specialiserer sig i, er valgt ud fra, hvad der taler til hans persons identitet og evner. På den anden side kan man mene, at det er en del af den videnskabelige uddannelse at tilsidesætte egne interesser, og at det dermed er noget, man må lære, ligesom man kan lære alt muligt andet. I historikerens tilfælde er der nogle helt klare grænser at arbejde indenfor i form kilder, som begivenhederne er bygget op om, men det personlige kan spille ind ved, hvordan man så fortolker disse kilder.

Netop dette spørgsmål går tilbage til den hermeneutiske tankegang, som nok hælder mest til at mene, at historikeren ikke kan fralægge sig egne synspunkter i sit akademiske arbejde.

Hermeneutikken beskriver, kort sagt, at vi fortolker det nye med det gamle, vi allerede bærer rundt på. Alt det, du ved, har oplevet, hørt og tænkt, er en del af livets rygsæk, som bestemmer, hvordan du fortolker det næste, som du møder. Vi bruger det hele tiden ubevidst, og især i

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det akademiske arbejde kan man argumentere for, at det ikke er muligt at starte helt fra bunden med et rent lærred, hver gang vi arbejder; så ville vi aldrig nå videre. Viden bygger ovenpå eksisterende viden, og det er sådan, vi udvikler os.

Hvis det nu forholder sig sådan, at videnskabsmanden ikke kan adskille sig fra sit private menneske, hvad sker der så med Halbwachs teori? Man kunne argumentere for, at grundlaget for skellet mellem den historiske og kollektive erindring så forsvinder, og at der dermed kun findes den kollektive erindring. Dette ville pille teorien lidt fra hinanden, og vi ville nu kun have det kollektive, som det der konstruerer altings erindring og dermed opførsel.

Hvis vi antager, at man godt kan skelne den professionelle titel fra mennesket, kunne man pointere, at historikeren, i Halbwachs teori, omtales som individ overfor noget kollektivt. Her kunne man spørge sig selv, om det ville give mening at lave en kategori, som hedder kollektiv, historisk erindring, idet historikere jo også arbejder indenfor bestemte akademiske paradigmer, som er konstrueret kollektivt. Der har gennem tiden været mange forskellige videnskabelige paradigmer, som ubevidst har lagt linjen for, hvad der blev forsket i, og hvilke konklusioner der blev skrevet.

En anden metodisk overvejelse er angående Halbwachs pointe om, at folk skaber deres egen erindring, og at den historiske erindring ikke påvirker folk, medmindre de kan identificere sig med noget i den: *"What counts is the way a group interprets an event and gives meaning to it"*. Man kunne spørge sig selv hvad værdien af den akademiske historieskrivning består i, hvis folk alligevel husker den, som de gør? Er det overhovedet den samme begivenhed, hvis den huskes så forskelligt?

På den ene side kan man sige, at de kollektive erindringer er en vigtig del af at finde sin identitet – både som individ og gruppe, og at de er forudsætningen for at føle sig som en del af et fællesskab. Med

dette in mente er det måske ikke så vigtigt, hvad der skete i virkeligheden. På den anden side, og fra et videnskabeligt funderet synspunkt, kan man argumentere for, at det altid vil have værdi at stræbe efter at udbrede viden, der er tættest mulig på det, som, vi ved, er sandt, da vi alle skal uddannes i at tænke kritisk fra et neutralt sted. Videnskaben ville måske sige, at vi kunne undgå meget ulykke, vold, sygdom, krig osv. hvis alle var bedre uddannet og i højere grad handlede på baggrund af historiske erindringer frem for følelser og personlige agendaer.

I mine 3 kildeanalyser, som tager udgangspunkt i Maurice Halbwachs teori om kollektiv erindring, står det meget klart, hvor forskelligt en historisk begivenhed kan huskes. De husker langt henad vejen ud fra samme "borrowed mind" – fx biblen, og alligevel er det vidt forskellige ting, der fremhæves. Og dog – for der er da også beskrivelser, som, de er meget enige om, hører til heksen, men hvor grupperne blot har forskellige holdninger til, hvorvidt dette er gode karaktertræk. Et eksempel er, at de alle husker heksens vrede og seksualitet, og hvor den fordømmes af munkene, hyldes den af de religiøse "hekse" og de feministiske "hekse". Det går hermed også begge veje; den kollektive erindring former gruppens opførsel, og gruppens opførsel (eller identitet) former erindringerne.

Konklusion

I denne opgave ville jeg undersøge, hvordan heksen erindres af 3 forskellige grupper, og hvorfor den samme historiske begivenhed huskes vidt forskelligt, alt efter hvilken gruppe du spørger. Jeg dykkede ned i Maurice Halbwachs teori om kollektiv erindring og fandt ud af, at de kollektive erindringer konstrueres af grupperne selv for at passe bedst muligt ind i deres verdenssyn. I *Malleus Maleficarum* former de

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heksen til at passe med deres dualistiske, kristne verdensbillede – heksen er ond og arbejder for djævelen, og de udvælger bibelske passager, som bekræfter dem i, at kvinden er den primære synder bag heksekriminaliteten. I *Witchcraft - a Tradition Renewed* skaber de heksen som kvinden, der blev frarøvet sin holistiske naturreligion og lægger især vægt på tabet af det feminine, guddommelige princip. I *W.I.T.C.H Manifesto* konstrueres heksen som feministisk ideal – den vrede, intelligente, selvstændige frihedskæmper, som ikke underordner sig nogen mand. Vi ser i alle 3 eksempler, at det, som heksen bliver gjort til, passer med det, som gruppen har interesse i at gøre hende til, og dette understøtter Halbwachs teori om, at gruppen vinkler erindringerne, for at bekræfte deres eget ståsted. Jeg har både fundet eksempler på ”borrowed memory”, skel mellem historisk- og kollektiv erindring, ”universal” og ”historical times” og har påvist den selektive, konstruktivistiske måde, som grupperne behandler deres erindringer med. Til sidst diskuterede og udfordrede jeg Maurice Halbwachs teori og metode, og stillede herunder spørgsmålstejn ved, hvorvidt man kan adskille akademikeren fra sin private person, samt hvad værdien af historikerens erindring er. Hvis artiklen havde været længere, ville det have været spændende at dykke ned i forholdet mellem det, som grupperne husker heksen som, og det, man ved, heksen i virkeligheden var. En ting har alle erindringerne til fælles; heksen var en kvinde, og det kan historikere jo bekræfte, da over 70% af heksene faktisk var kvinder under middelalderens heksejagt.

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THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS

Knowledge and Secrets in John Dee's Monas Hieroglyphica

Benedicte Sejr Schlichtkrull

Introduction

For the nosy neighbor, the corporate spy or the curious researcher, a secret is an interesting thing to find. Sticking your nose into other people's business and wanting to know secret things is something most people can relate to. But as those who keep a secret usually want it to be kept hidden, it is not always easy to learn it. Connected intimately with secrets is knowledge, and how it is disseminated. Today, we have a relatively open academic society but this has not always been the case. In the Renaissance, it was normal for alchemists and similar scholars to write cryptic texts with hidden meanings. The people who were not part of their group would then have trouble with the texts, and likely not understand them. But these same scholars had to communicate their secret knowledge to each other in a way that did not let the uninitiated understand. At the same time, the Renaissance author

could not be too cryptic, as his contemporary peers had to understand the text. One famous scholar from the 16th century is John Dee. He wrote the *Monas Hieroglyphica* in 1564, a rather cryptic text with several layers of meaning. This article is a microhistorical analysis of this text, which provides a case study of how secrets are simultaneously revealed and concealed. This will answer the question of how Dee talks about knowledge and reveals secrets in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. In the following, the context surrounding John Dee is first set forth. Then the current understanding of esotericism and related issues are discussed and Dee's worldview is accounted for with reference to Håkan Håkansson's study. The analysis itself narrows down the target audience and looks at how a polemical discourse of knowledge is used to legitimize the text. It ends with an investigation of how Dee uses layers of meaning to hide knowledge and how secrets could be accessed and thereby revealed.

John Dee

John Dee (1527-1608) was a British scholar, who has written about a variety of topics. He covered navigation, geometry, astrology, alchemy and more in his various published and unpublished works. He was a counsellor to Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603) and was known as a philosopher and mathematician among other titles. While he was famous for these things, he also held a more negative reputation as a conjurer, or later, as someone deluded by devils.¹

¹ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 7-9, Goodrick-Clarke, N. 2008, s. 60-61.

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John Dee was educated in London. In 1546 he became a member of the Trinity College in Cambridge, founded the same year. He didn't stay long though, as no more than a year later he made his first of many trips to the European continent. In the 1550's he returned to England to make a career as a court intellectual. In 1555 he was briefly confined after being accused of trying to enchant Queen Mary. Regrettably for Dee, mathematics and astrology had become associated with black Magic after Henry VIII's (1491-1547) death and he spent the summer under the supervision of a bishop. According to Dee's diaries, the bishop found nothing wrong with his religious attitude. When Elizabeth became queen in 1558, Dee was asked to calculate a day for the coronation, and he had a fortunate result. At the end of the 1560's he settled down in Mortlake, outside of London, where he built his library, alchemical laboratory and gathered a variety of objects.²

In the 1560's before settling in Mortlake, Dee once again travelled to the continent. He attended the coronation of Maximillian II (1527-1576) of Hungary in 1563. In 1564 he travelled to Antwerp where he might have lived with the printer Willem "Silvius" Verwilt³ while writing *The Monas Hieroglyphica* - a small book about a sacred glyph of his invention, which embodied the unity of several disciplines. Dee dedicated that work to Maximillian II and appealed to him to defend the work against critics.⁴ The publication and reception of the *Monas Hieroglyphica* are dealt with more thoroughly later.

In 1582 Dee met Edward Kelley, an alleged forger, who was willing to scry for Dee and who helped him communicate with angels. The two held their conversations with the angels for the purpose of

² Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 9-14, Goodrick-Clarke, N. 2008, s. 61.

³ V. Broecke, S. 2017, s. 2.

⁴ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 87, Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 81, 120.

learning the language Enochian – dictated to Dee and Kelley by the angels themselves. Dee and Kelley travelled to the continent, before eventually separating in 1588. As Dee returned to Mortlake in 1589, he found his library and laboratories destroyed. He spent the remainder of his life at Mortlake nonetheless.⁵

Contemporary research

There are two relevant things to look at within our contemporary research. The first is how the term “esotericism” is used contemporarily. This is to make sure that we do not use the term anachronistically or out of context. The second relevant thing is how Dee understood various central concepts in his own time. This is to give an idea of what worldview Dee held, though we shall not cover it extensively. Such an understanding is however necessary in order to read the text *Monas Hieroglyphica* properly. In the following, the two relevant things are covered in the above order.

Esotericism

The term “esotericism” has had different definitions and approaches within historical research in the 20th and 21st century. The next couple of paragraphs will not be an exhaustive list of the definitions of, or approaches to, this term, but rather a discussion of those I considered the most relevant to include here. Among honorable mentions is Kocku von Stuckrad’s definition which looks at esotericism as a discourse

⁵ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 15-20, 30-34.

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with two dimensions: 1) Claims of higher knowledge and 2) ways of accessing this “truth”.⁶ As should quickly become apparent in the later analysis, this approach leaves very little to discuss, as it is broad enough to easily include a text like the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. As such it was judged to be of little interest here. In the following, we look at three different approaches to esotericism and some related issues.

Tim Rudbøg describes esotericism as a general concept that is used to classify and categorize related concepts. Within current research the term esotericism is therefore useful for many different contexts and frameworks.⁷ He points out that while “esotericism” is a relatively new concept from the end of the 18th century, the word “esoteric” stems from ancient Greece and simply means “inner” in opposition to “exoteric”. With regards to knowledge, the original distinction was between non-public/esoteric and public/exoteric knowledge. The various sources using this distinction are dated as far back as Aristotle.⁸ Esotericism then becomes something one should be careful not to use anachronistically. As a category of concepts, esotericism is useful for an analysis as it makes it easier to choose a perspective when approaching the subject matter. But categorizing is also an analytical tool, and Dee has not necessarily held the same categories or the same understanding of concepts as we do today. Additionally, the *Monas Hieroglyphica* is written in 1564 before the term esotericism saw use. This means that esotericism should not be used out of its context, which is in our own time, and it becomes a theoretical term that we apply. To consider something esoteric at Dee’s time, might have meant nothing more than the ancient Greek distinction between public and non-public

⁶ Stuckrad, K. 2005, s. 78, 92-93.

⁷ Rudbøg, T. 2013, s. 30-32.

⁸ Ibid. s. 22-24,26.

knowledge. This is important to remember when speaking of esotericism.

Wouter J. Hanegraff approaches western esotericism as the historical product of a polemical discourse. He traces this discourse back to the beginnings of monotheism. He sees western esotericism as a theoretical construct that covers the currents and phenomena that have at one time or another been considered problematic from the perspective of established religion, science etc. As such this polemical discourse takes part in the construction of identity by creating narratives. With respect to this, he establishes a “Grand Polemical Narrative” as a major pattern in western culture.⁹ The usual problems with major patterns and grand narratives is that they are often generalizations made over large periods in time, areas or similar bounded categories. As this analysis is largely microhistorical, it would be remiss of me not to provide a perspective that gives an example of how such a macrohistorical generalization could be flawed. The *Monas Hieroglyphica* was addressed to King Maximilian II. Though the king’s reception is unclear, Queen Elizabeth I did not find the *Monas Hieroglyphica* problematic.¹⁰ One could make the argument that Hanegraff did not mention the political establishment, but at this time it was not separate from the religious. The conclusion here is that what is considered problematic at one point in time can vary between regions. Added to this should be Dee’s confinement with a bishop in 1555. The second conclusion is then that what is problematic varies greatly in a relatively short amount of time within one region, as the establishment changes and redefines itself. The third thing to add here

⁹ Hanegraff, W. J. 2005, s. 225-6, 247-248, 250.

¹⁰ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 88-89.

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is that while Queen Elizabeth I might not have found Dee problematic, Dee did have the reputation of being a conjurer.¹¹ What can be considered the established group does not necessarily have a univocal opinion, on what is problematic. In total, the bounded categories cannot be seen as separate from one another, and the established group is not necessarily unified in its discourse. Even though this is far from an extensive analysis, it does highlight some problems that can be found within the grand polemical narrative. This does not mean that Hanegraff has not found a pattern, but rather that there are exceptions to be accounted for. What this exemplifies is the importance of the perspective of the analysis, and that one should not assume something applies to Dee, just because it is a general theme or trait from his time. Arthur Versluis looks at what he terms "...esoteric literature and art"¹² and how esotericism is transmitted in the west. He argues, that to answer this question, it is necessary to consider what role language and image play in the spiritual experiences. He uses the word esoteric to mean individuals or groups, whose works are self-understood as bearing hidden knowledge. In his model, the central characteristic of esotericism is gnosis, which here means insight into the divine via experience. Furthermore, Versluis sees western esoteric traditions as fundamentally about reading – and to read an esoteric work correctly one has to use imagination. He also concludes that western esotericism lacks an initiatory lineage, and therefore literature and art play the initiatory role.¹³ Whether or not western esotericism lacks an initiatory

¹¹ The Queen and her court's opinion of Dee can be discussed, as Clulee makes a mention that he was nominated for several positions, but then politically blocked. (Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 122).

¹² Versluis, A. 2004, s. 1.

¹³ Ibid. s. 1-3, 8, 12, 14.

lineage is a historical problem, that I do not wish to go into depth with, as this article is not a suitable place for it. I will however make one comment: Several oral traditions are lost to us, and this includes whatever the alchemists had. It might then just appear to us, as later readers, that there is no initiatory lineage outside of literature and art. Aside from that, we cannot assume that our imaginary world, when we read texts, is the same imaginary world as a person from the Renaissance would have had. Therefore, any hint that our imagination gives us about the interpretation of a text, should be considered at least a little suspect. This does not mean that it should be discarded completely, as creativity and imagination are important when trying to understand something from different perspectives. For this article, it means we need to look at how Dee viewed the world to avoid making conclusions from ideas that are taken out of context. This will also aid us in avoiding anachronisms with regards to esoteric discourses and knowledge. The remainder of this chapter deals with what worldview Dee might have had, though as previously noted, one should be careful with applying general themes.

John Dee's worldview

The *Monas Hieroglyphica* is a cryptic text at best. In order to gain an understanding of how Dee reveals and/or conceals secrets, it is therefore necessary to first understand Dee's intention with the text. He begins the small book by saying that he will explain "mathematically, magically, cabbalistically, and anagogically".¹⁴ So an understanding of what these ways of explaining contained for Dee, and what the

¹⁴ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 155.

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traditions connected to them were in Dee's time will be useful. It is not possible to do this extensively here, so short and concise explanations will have to do. This includes choosing what part of these traditions are relevant to deal with in this case, and the total should not be understood as any more than a case study. For this purpose, we rely mainly on Håkan Håkansson, who has written a longer study on Dee and renaissance occultism. In his book he looks at general themes, where Dee might have met them and how they applied to Dee's own works. This gives an image of what general themes and traditions can be used to describe Dee's worldview, without assuming that they apply to Dee just because they are general themes. In the following, it is elaborated what Dee means, when he says "mathematically, magically, cabbalistically". "Anagogically" is left out, as it simply put refers to a method of interpretation where one looks for hidden, mystical meanings in a text.

Dee uses mathematics through most of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, and connects it to the basic principles of his hieroglyph.¹⁵ As is evident when reading both the dedication to Maximillian and the *Monas Hieroglyphica*,¹⁶ Dee is very familiar with Pythagorean symbolism, and numbers as basic units of the cosmos. Pythagoreanism cannot be seen as separated from mathematics here. Håkansson writes that the Monad symbol embodies the laws of creation in geometrical form, which corresponds with a Pythagorean scheme of creation originating with Proclus.¹⁷ Furthermore, mathematics is one symbolic language that Dee fuses with others in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. There are close

¹⁵ Ibid., s. 155.

¹⁶ The Pythagorean Y at the very beginning and then most clearly in Theorem XXIII, when he is done explaining how to create an amulet of the Monad symbol.

¹⁷ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 192-193, 196, 201.

ties between hieroglyphs and number symbolism in the text, going so far as to make mathematical and hieroglyphical reasoning the same. For Dee this kind of reasoning becomes a bridge between the terrestrial and the spiritual and opens the possibility for a mystic ascent of the soul.¹⁸ Håkansson notes that Dee also regarded number symbolism and the kabbalistic technique *tsiruf*¹⁹ as identical.²⁰ This leads to the next tradition that Dee mentioned in the beginning of *Monas Hieroglyphica*: (Christian) Kabbalah.

The branch of Jewish mysticism called Kabbalah is also highly relevant for the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, and Dee became interested in this in the early 1560's. Kabbalah contains the concept of language as a means to gain knowledge of the divine. Another important part of this tradition is the understanding, that it is a secret tradition of knowledge granted to the divine prophets and then passed down.²¹ Christian Kabbalah was however also very different from the Jewish version, even if it was inspired by it. Here Kabbalah is connected to the ancient wisdom narrative and considered part of the perennial philosophy. The impact it had on Christian scholarship reinforced the notion that language yields knowledge of nature. The function of Kabbalah also remained, and written language was regarded as symbolic expressions of the divine. Through permutation of the letters, one could attain a mystic ascent of the soul, as with the contemplation of the Monad

¹⁸ Ibid. s. 186, 202-203, 206.

¹⁹ A passage is interpreted by rearranging the order of letters and making anagrams (Ibid. s. 173). Dee's connection between *tsiruf* and mathematics is e.g., visible in the rule of permutation he explains. (Josten, C. H. 1964, 209).

²⁰ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 201.

²¹ Ibid. s. 170-171, 173, 181.

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symbol. It should not come as a surprise now, that Christian Kabbalah was influenced by Pythagoreanism.²² There is now both mathematics, hieroglyphics and Christian Kabbalah, where contemplation of symbols or language becomes a way to gain knowledge of the divine. This necessitates an elaboration of Dee's understanding of language and symbols, which is also an important thing in *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

One of the most important things to discuss in the context of *Monas Hieroglyphica* are language and signs. This is because *Monas Hieroglyphica* is concerned with a sacred art of writing, which Dee has been divinely inspired to formulate. This new writing mirrors nature, because it reflects mathematical principles from the creation of the world, and it will restore a variety of disciplines such as astronomy etc..²³ As is more than evident now, Dee's understanding of language is also central to the worldview in *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Once again, we turn to Håkansson for an elaboration of the relevant general themes. He notes that Dee considers symbols as a means of exploring the world and thereby revealing truth. The Monad symbol is in this view not something constructed out of other symbols, but rather the place where these symbols originate. This highlights a central feature in Dee's approach to natural philosophy, namely that he seeks to find a language, that contains the sum total of knowledge about the world. Language and the Monad symbol, with this understanding, yields knowledge.²⁴ Nature can in this way be interpreted through language, and the metaphysical becomes comprehensible for humans through the Monad symbol.²⁵ From all of the above, it is apparent that the Monad

²² Ibid. s. 174-180, 184.

²³ Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 82-83, 105.

²⁴ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 78-83.

²⁵ Ibid. s. 293.

symbol is not just a hieroglyph, but part of a sacred, symbolic language connected to the ascent of the soul. This covers the basics of what Dee means, when he writes that he will explain mathematically and kabbalistically. There remains now Dee's understanding of Magic.

Though it is somewhat difficult to ascertain the part Magic plays in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, Håkansson locates some traditions anyway. He finds that Dee fuses two branches of Magic in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*: Talismanic and hieroglyphic. For Dee the Monad symbol functioned as a magical talisman, that could attract celestial forces and unite the terrestrial and celestial. Corresponding to drawing down celestial influences, the symbol also held the power to induce a mystical ascent of the soul in those who used it. The hieroglyphic Magic relates back to the mathematical principles of creation that one could comprehend by contemplating the Monad symbol. This contemplation, once again, induces a mystical ascent of the soul.²⁶ This mystical ascent of the soul has been mentioned a few times now, and it should be safe to say that this is one of the main themes of Dee's text. To shortly summarize all of the above, the Monad symbol can be used to discover things previously hidden in nature. Through contemplation of this symbol, man can attain divine knowledge. Dee manages to synthesize mathematics, Kabbalah and Magic into one category, and as such all three things are necessary to consider when trying to understand the cryptic text. Now that we have some idea of how Dee viewed the world differently from us, we should look closer at the circumstances regarding the publication of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. This might seem technical, but it is nonetheless important, when

²⁶ Ibid. s. 290, 298-299, 307-308.

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considering how secrets are revealed. Additionally, as a general rule of thumb, the context of the historical source is always relevant.

The circumstances of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*

Dee published the *Monas Hieroglyphica* at Antwerp in 1564. He had previously used the hieroglyph on the title page of another of his works, but for now the hieroglyph becomes the focus of 24 theorems. Dee dedicates this work to Maximillian II and writes a letter of dedication to preface the *Monas Hieroglyphica*.²⁷ He also writes a letter to his friend, the typographer Silvius. All translations used here are from C.H. Jostens article in *Ambix*. The basic circumstances (excepting the reception) regarding the *Monas Hieroglyphica* have already been covered, but some important aspects of the source are more complicated. As is seen above, the intention with the *Monas Hieroglyphica* is not necessarily clear to a modern reader. Furthermore, the target audience is also a little more complicated than it seems at first. Adding to this, Dee's choice of printer is unlikely to have been impulsive or randomly made. In the following, we shall first deal with this choice. Thereafter we look at the reception of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. As the text deals with alchemy and was cited in alchemical works, a few technical details about alchemical allegory are added. The exact target audience, being a point of discussion, is dealt with more extensively in the analysis.

²⁷ Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 77, 81.

Publication

Dee put a certain amount of thought into how the *Monas Hieroglyphica* should be published and Silvius was not a randomly chosen printer. From Dee's letter to Silvius, it is clear that Dee seems to have considered him a friend and the correct choice for ensuring that diagrams and schemata are printed properly. Furthermore, Dee has a certain amount of faith that Silvius will not sell his book to anyone who shouldn't understand the knowledge in it.²⁸ The two articles referenced in the following elaborate on the choice of printer for the *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

Steven Broecke looks at the knowledge society and cultures of secrecy surrounding Silvius' publication of the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. He concludes that Dee deals with issues of credibility regarding his own text by establishing a relationship between the readers of the *Monas Hieroglyphica* and Maximillian II. This sort of alliance is found in other works published by Silvius. The dichotomy of those who can understand the true knowledge and those who cannot was also a discourse familiar to Silvius.²⁹ This discourse is known from esoteric works, as the public/non-public knowledge dichotomy. As Dee did not wish for his book to be completely publicly available, Silvius' familiarity with other esoteric texts could have made Dee consider him a suitable printer. This is however not the only benefit that Silvius gave Dee. Another author also looks at why Silvius was important, but from a slightly different angle.

²⁸ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 149-153.

²⁹ V. Broecke, S. 2017, s. 14-15.

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Stephen Clucas argues that the diagrams in *Monas Hieroglyphica* reveal as much truth as the text itself does and that Dee's book is the first alchemical work to focus on this diagrammatic representation of the alchemical process. He points out that Dee needed Silvius' experience with reproducing printed diagrams, as the diagrams in *Monas Hieroglyphica* are designed to aid the contemplation of the text. The *Monas Hieroglyphica* becomes an example of the possibilities that typography offered scholars and the collaboration this required.³⁰ Both of these articles support the evidence from Dee's letter to Silvius. The choice of printer then also reveals some of the intention behind *Monas Hieroglyphica*. For one, it makes it clear that *Monas Hieroglyphica* is not just a case of people thinking there is something hidden when there is not. There would have been little point in being careful with the diagrams, had there been nothing of value to interpret in them. Secondly it reveals that Dee took a certain care to not reveal his work to those who would not understand it. This relates to the problem of who Dee thought might read his text after it was published, as is returned to later. Firstly, we look at who actually read his text, instead of just who he thought might.

Reception

The *Monas Hieroglyphica* could rightly be considered an obscure text, though some alchemists did make use of it. Peter Forshaw discusses Dee's reputation as an alchemist, particularly with regards to the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Forshaw looks at works written and published in the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century. He finds it relatively

³⁰ Clucas, S. 2017, s. 140-141, 155-156.

easy to find English references to Dee's work and therefore also focuses on references in other languages. Here he also finds a good number of references. Forshaw concludes that, while not mentioned often or at large scale, the *Monas Hieroglyphica* appears in major alchemical works and collections, through the two centuries after its publication.³¹ From this it seems that at least the alchemists made use of the text. Forshaw avoids talking about other groups, as that is not his focus in the article. In relation to this it should be noted that, as Dee had, Renaissance alchemists generally had more than one occupation in the sense that they might e.g., be both alchemists and physicians. That alchemists found use of Dee's book should not be surprising as the *Monas Hieroglyphica* also concerns alchemy. Due to this it becomes relevant to quickly summarize a technical method of keeping secrets that is often found in alchemy.

Alchemical allegory

Allegory and metaphor in early modern scholarship were used as representations of reality in a true form and this includes hieroglyphs. For an early modern scholar, a metaphor or allegory wasn't simply likeness, but a layer of meaning built into the world as part of creation. Furthermore, in esoteric writing, allegories served to maintain secrecy.³² Allegorical language was also a common feature in alchemical writings. Here it was common to use *Decknamen* as codes for various substances. Such a cover name would usually have a metaphorical link with the substance it replaced the name of. These

³¹ Forshaw, P. J. 2005, s. 247-250, 269.

³² Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 162-63, 166, Principe, L. M. 2013, s. 205.

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metaphors were designed to simultaneously reveal and conceal the meaning of the text.³³ Another important metaphor found in alchemical texts is the connection between the purification of metals and the purification of the alchemist's soul. Dee holds a similar understanding of the alchemical quest for gold.³⁴ The *Monas Hieroglyphica* also includes a series of examples of how alchemical notions are inherent in the hieroglyphic writing. Dee has three themes when it comes to alchemy³⁵:

- 1) The alchemical process as analogy to genesis
- 2) Alchemy as a sort of Magic where the elements are governed by the tetractys
- 3) The previously mentioned mystical ascent to God

Once again, a mystical ascent becomes a theme in the text along with a process like alchemy serving as a link between the terrestrial and celestial realms. This is familiar from the paragraphs on Dee's worldview.

The above gives us a grasp of the circumstances regarding the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. The text was affected by the printing press and the familiar narrative of revolution, that this technology brought about. The purposeful choice of Silvius as a printer exemplifies one problem, that writers of esoteric texts might have had with this technology. This is that the typographer would not hold the same divide between non-public and public knowledge, as the writer of the text might have. The typographer could just sell the book to whomever, and the writer of the

³³ Principe, L. M. 2013, s. 18, 152-153.

³⁴ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 229-230.

³⁵ Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 106.

esoteric text would have little control over who read it. In this regard, secrets then became harder to keep, as books became easier to access for those who could read and afford them. Simultaneously, choosing Silvius as a printer also reveals an awareness of the possibilities, that new methods afforded, in the sense that Silvius had experience with reproducing diagrams. Identical copies of images and their placement in a text became easier to manage, when copies were no longer handmade. With that it became easier to reveal secret things in diagrams, as you could rely on all the copies of them being identical and thus not missing a tiny symbol that makes the difference between a functional cryptogram and a non-functional one. Furthermore, many of the diagrams in the *Monas Hieroglyphica* contains alchemical symbols or allegory of that kind.³⁶ This corresponds well with the alchemical reception of the text, as while it was not widely mentioned it does appear in major works and was part of the knowledge society in at least central Europe and England at the time.

Analysis

Now that we have an understanding of the context, we can begin answering the question of how Dee talks about knowledge and reveals secrets in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. The first thing we do is discuss who Dee is addressing, when writing this text. We then look at how he uses a polemical discourse surrounding knowledge, and what this discourse entails. At the end we discuss how Dee layers meaning to

³⁶ For a good example, that is not the Monad itself, look at the egg. (Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 176).

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reveal and conceal secrets, and how the secret knowledge could be accessed.

The Audience

The *Monas Hieroglyphica* is very obviously not a text intended for a greater public audience. As have been mentioned above there is a distinction between esoteric/non-public and exoteric/public knowledge. This division, between those whom the secrets must be protected against, and those who can know the mysteries, was common in occult writing. It can also be found in *The Monas Hieroglyphica*, as Clulee has noted.³⁷ But due to technologies like the printing press, books became much more easily available and thus knowledge more accessible. Nonetheless Dee chose to take advantage of the printing press. In connection with this, he must anticipate different types of readers of his book. Thinking of Versluis' approach to esotericism, language and image is absolutely central in this regard, however simply reading is not necessarily enough to be considered part of the wise group. In the following we look at the people Dee expected to read his book, and how he talked about them. Lastly, we return to Versluis' approach to esotericism. We begin by adding a dimension to Dee's worldview.

Dee makes a fundamental distinction between philosophers and the vulgar. This is clear already from the beginning of the dedication, where he explains the two paths people can take in life and draws a diagram of the Pythagorean Y to illustrate it.³⁸ The distinction is not isolated to the dedication, as it also appears in Dee's letter to Silvius,

³⁷ Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 79-80.

³⁸ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 117.

when he asks the printer not to give the work to the common people.³⁹ This distinction serves to divide the people of the world into those who can know the truth and those who cannot. Furthermore, it also serves to create two different types of readers that Dee could have had. For the purpose of this analysis, we shall refer to the two groups respectively as the vulgar and the philosophers, as it mirrors the distinction from the Pythagorean Y. Dee writes *the Monas Hieroglyphica* for only one of these groups of readers – the philosophers. But he still addresses the other group.

Dee has both the vulgar and the philosopher as intended readers for the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, in the sense that he expects both groups to read the book. When talking about the alchemical egg⁴⁰ he writes:

And this, [once] said, should be enough to the wise. [...] May those very inexperienced impostors, in their desperation, hereby understand what is the water of the white of eggs...⁴¹

Dee continues with the alchemical allegory, telling a story about an eagle and a scarab, instead of saying anything clearly.⁴² It is doubtful that anyone inexperienced and not familiar with alchemical allegory could understand this. It is possible, considering the link between metaphors and reality in early modern scholarship, and Dee's conception of symbols, that Dee intended for this to be understood

³⁹ Ibid. s. 151.

⁴⁰ Allegory referring to a vessel used in transmutation.

⁴¹ Ibid. s. 177.

⁴² Ibid. s. 177-179.

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intuitively. But this is not the only place Dee addresses the vulgar. In Theorem XX he more specifically writes:

...since I have already spoken to those whose eyes reside in their hearts,
I shall now have to address myself to those whose hearts are yet
projecting from their eyes.⁴³

Those whose eyes reside in their hearts refer to the select few, the divinely inspired, or the ones who have been initiated in mysteries, as noted in other literature.⁴⁴ In shorter terms, one had to belong to the group who has access to true knowledge. Dee then addresses the last part of Theorem XX to those who do not belong to this group – the vulgar. There is no difference in what he actually says to the two groups in Theorem XX, but rather in how he says it, as he draws the diagram to explain to the vulgar group. Dee has with this addressed both the philosophers and the vulgar in his text, though in different ways. Considering Dee's words to Silvius about making sure the book did not fall into the wrong hands, this is a bit strange. Looking at the text from another perspective will also allow us to make a secondary claim that at first might seem to contradict this one.

Dee did not want those he considered vulgar to understand his text. Dee very tellingly ends the book with:

“The vulgar eye will here be blind and most distrustful.”⁴⁵

As mentioned above he also uses alchemical allegory to hide what he talks about with regards to the egg. It seems from this that Dee did not want the vulgar to know what he wrote about. But he did want to make it seem like his book also addresses them in certain places, as Theorem

⁴³ Ibid. s. 185.

⁴⁴ Ibid. s. 185, Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 147,167.

⁴⁵ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 219.

XX exemplifies. For Dee to present himself as a legitimate source it should be enough to explain to the wise philosophers and reveal nothing to the vulgar. This is then not the reason Dee addresses the vulgar group. There are a few possible reasons for addressing both groups. These are dealt with below, though it should be noted that a longer historical analysis would be beneficial.

Dee begins the book by saying he will explain which is one reason for addressing the vulgar group. But he makes no promises to do so in a way they understand. With regards to the egg, he might genuinely think some inexperienced people will understand and in Theorem XX he tells the vulgar and wise the same thing. Simultaneously, hiding things with alchemical allegory show that not all secrets are directly revealed. A well-known consequence of the printing press is a wider audience, and this would include the vulgar group. Writing in alchemical allegory, that only those considered the select few could understand, would serve as a solution to this problem. Additionally, somebody who was inexperienced might understand what Dee means, and in this way the text can function as educational, or initiatory as Versluis might have put it. And as Dee has little control over who buys the book, the breaks in the initiatory lineage could also occur. This gives the added consequence of the philosopher's group also growing, which means competition. Writing with a hidden meaning in mind lessens that, but it also makes the initiation that Versluis talks about difficult. One interpretation of this could then be that Dee needs to strike a balance between explaining to those who are merely inexperienced and concealing knowledge from those who should not know it. The printing press could serve to exacerbate the need for

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secrecy in this regard, but a further historical analysis using earlier sources would be necessary to reach a proper conclusion.

The Truth and its Shadow

Dee talks about knowledge in a variety of ways both in the dedication to Maximillian and the *Monas Hieroglyphica* itself. In the book there is not only a divide between who can know the true knowledge, but also a divide in the knowledge itself. The discourse here divides knowledge into true knowledge and its rival knowledge. References to light and shadow surround the two types of knowledge and connects the true knowledge with light. This is a discursive trait known from places like the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Additionally, the discourse follows the basics of a polemical discourse, as Hanegraff constructs the concept. In this sense, the discourse surrounding knowledge is also used politically to delegitimize Dee's critics. The following expands the discourse surrounding knowledge in the dedication to Maximillian and the *Monas Hieroglyphica* itself.

Dee divides knowledge into distinct categories. One category is a true knowledge that the wise philosopher has access to. The other is largely false and a shadow of the true knowledge. Dee writes in the dedication to Maximillian:

...this is not the place to compare the several honest sciences with their false rivals, vague as shadows, those odious, tiresome [subjects], useless to human society...⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Ibid. s. 143.

Dee creates a very clear distinction between, what he talks about as honest sciences opposed to their dishonest, shadowy rivals. This distinction in knowledge is not the same as the esoteric/exoteric distinction, as the inferior knowledge here is not solely public knowledge but also false. Additionally, Dee later writes

For, as all bodies have a borderline in common with their shadows (as is well-known to mathematicians), so also in this matter the phrases of speech and writing are common to the shadows and to the real bodies, as the wise admit.⁴⁷

The inferior shadow knowledge is not completely separate from true knowledge, and neither is it entirely false. Those dealing with the inferior knowledge also writes similarly to the wise. This passage in the text should then also be taken as a safeguard against critics of Dee's text, as he can simply refer them to the group of people who do not understand, incl. when the critics are Dee's own peers. The distinction in knowledge gains a practical purpose in this sense. But as is notable of the first passage quoted above, a very negative discourse surrounds the shadow knowledge. The discourse surrounding both of these types of knowledge is reliant on metaphors of light and shadow.

True knowledge and the ability to understand and communicate it are talked about with metaphors of light. Dee writes in his letter to Silvius

⁴⁷ Ibid. s. 145.

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...the body, which I have (by God's will) borne well formed in all parts, may not, through the negligence of typography, see the light mutilated or deformed, unworthy of so great a King...⁴⁸

Here Dee sees the mutilation of the light as a wrongly presented text, that therefore is false and unworthy. If we look the *Monas Hieroglyphica* he also mentions the "light of the philosophers" in relation to the creation of the Monad symbol.⁴⁹ This discourse is familiar from Christianity in general and is also found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, of which Dee had an annotated copy.⁵⁰ The philosophers and their knowledge are thereby connected to light, in the sense that light can be seen as a metaphor for wisdom or intellect. The other side of this discourse is also present, but in a more explicit manner.

The rival knowledge and those who pursue it are talked about with metaphors of shadow and corruption. We have already seen two examples, but Dee also writes

...Let us ascribe trumpery, error, and all [manner] of impiety to those vulgar sciolists, who not only pursue eagerly the shadows of great arts, but also falsify and counterfeit them...⁵¹

As if this was not enough, he later writes:

The ignorant, rash, and presumptuous apes grasp mere shadows, naked and inane, while the wiser philosophers enjoy the solid doctrine...⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid. s. 149-151.

⁴⁹ Ibid. s. 157.

⁵⁰ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 212-213.

⁵¹ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 143.

⁵² Ibid. s. 145.

The rival knowledge to the philosopher's knowledge is here talked about with an explicitly negative language and related to shadow. Though it should be noted that the rival knowledge is false in the sense that it is either deliberately falsified or not understood. This is then a kind of corruption of knowledge. Here a counter group to the philosophers is created, which, in turn, can be seen as a form of Other. As has already been mentioned, Dee wishes to delegitimize the critics of his own text.⁵³ It is also worth adding that this discourse follows the basic conditions that Hanegraff sets for a polemical discourse.⁵⁴ The sense of threat here is that the *Monas Hieroglyphica* is delegitimized by Dee's peers, which is not a readily accessible source of threat. This also gives a target. The audience would here be Maximillian II and his court, and the known metaphor of light vs. darkness makes the discourse reasonably simple. Furthermore, the opposition of true vs. falsity/error is mentioned as a procedure of exclusion. The strategy of exclusion connected to this is ridicule.⁵⁵ This corresponds with Dee referring to naked apes grasping at shadows, while the philosopher is wiser and does not. In this way, the discourse about knowledge becomes a rhetorical tool, to delegitimize opponents of the text. It also shows that knowledge is talked about with familiar metaphors of light and shadow, to make a simple us/them divide in the discourse. As Dee must be considered part of the establishment with regard to science at the time, this again shows that one cannot assume the establishment is univocal.

⁵³ For actual critics, there is Meric of Causabon (Josten, C.H. 1964, s. 84).

⁵⁴ Hanegraff, W. J. 2005, s. 226-227.

⁵⁵ Ibid. s. 228-229.

Revealing and concealing secrets

There are several layers of meaning in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, that serve to hide secrets. The alchemical allegory has already been noted above, but additionally the text cannot be understood fully without knowledge of both mathematics, Kabbalah and Magic. This serves to hide meaning from the uninitiated, even though Dee both intends to, and does reveal, secrets in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. In this way, Dee keeps a balance between revealing and concealing secrets. On top of this, Dee considers it immoral to reveal great secrets in published writing, and some secrets must only be contemplated. This infers a hierarchy of secrets, and a dimension can be added to this, as some secrets can be revealed to the initiated in cryptic writing. But to communicate anything understandable, Dee must make the some of the secret knowledge available. This is part of the intent of his book.

Dee has the intention of revealing secrets in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*, and so has to make them accessible for the correct audience. As a result, the text has layers of meanings and interpretations. As mentioned, Dee begins by saying he will explain. He then continues with Theorem I stating:

The first and most simple manifestation and representation of things, non-existent as well as latent in the folds of Nature, happened by means of a straight line and a circle.⁵⁶

This is how he begins the construction of his Monad symbol, and so the symbol represents non-existent and hidden things. To explain this, Dee has to reveal certain secrets, but as mentioned earlier Dee also conceals

⁵⁶ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 155.

knowledge from those who should not know it. One way to do this is to hide knowledge within layers of meaning and interpretations of the text. Returning to the quote above, a straight line and a circle might refer to the straightedge and compass construction in geometry. As a mathematician, Dee would have been familiar with this. Dee also considers the Monad symbol capable of solving problems like squaring the circle,⁵⁷ which is one of the well-known mathematical puzzles within this construction method. Another meaning these first passages hold is as the Pythagorean scheme of creation mentioned earlier. Håkansson notes an analogy between the creation of the universe and the geometrical construction of the Monad symbol from one point. In this, the circle represents the divine world, and the straight line represents our earthly world. This also relates to the belief that the technical arts, such as geometry, imitate nature.⁵⁸ Dee does not say any of these things directly, but with a few passages he still manages to both refer to a scheme of creation and a geometrical method of construction. To find this meaning in the text one has to interpret it anagogically, as Dee also mentioned in the beginning. The result of this is that the Monas Hieroglyphica has several layers of meaning. These layers of meaning can be more or less hidden, but the Monad symbol should, with reference to Dee's worldview, be capable of revealing these truths.

The Monad symbol is indeed considered capable of revealing hidden things about the world. This is a short confirmation of what Håkansson finds. Dee writes

⁵⁷ Ibid. s. 129-131, Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 84.

⁵⁸ Håkansson, H. 2001, s. 195-198.

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You [will] see how exactly, how openly, the anatomy of our hieroglyphic monad [...] answers the arcana, [here] to be intimated...⁵⁹

And later he similarly writes that

Our monad demonstrates most clearly and perfectly also these most secret mysteries...⁶⁰

The Monad symbol then not only reveals secrets but does so perfectly. If we return to Dee's understanding of language and symbols as Håkansson also found, Dee considered symbols as a means of exploring the world and thereby revealing truth. This is shortly confirmed now. This lets us move on to the question of how secrets are accessed, and one way is through the Monad symbol.

Secret knowledge can be obtained through contemplation of the Monad symbol. As it has been previously mentioned the Monad symbol could be used to attain a mystic ascent of the soul and one could understand the principles of creation, simply by thinking about the Monad symbol. This contemplation does not have the philosopher as the sole participant. Dee writes in his dedication to Maximilian II:

We have done this in such a way that the hieroglyphic interpretations fall into place most gently and, as it were, of their own accord.⁶¹

And later in the *Monas Hieroglyphica* about how the Monad symbol reveals secrets about astrology:

⁵⁹ Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 165.

⁶⁰ Ibid. s. 167.

⁶¹ Ibid. s. 123.

...our monad, which, in the light of Nature and of life, will at all times reveal itself to us as is here shown, and will, by its pleasure, quite openly discover the most secret mysteries...⁶²

The Monad symbol can, so to speak, help in the contemplation and it is by the pleasure of this symbol, that secrets are discovered. To consider a symbol an active participant in contemplation seems very strange to us today. However, if one gains true knowledge by e.g., divine inspiration then it is not strange to gain knowledge from sacred writing. That the symbol can act in this way, can be explained by the symbols property of attracting celestial influences, as it was mentioned when elaborating Dee's view on Magic earlier. So, one way to access secrets is through contemplation. Another way is through reading, but these two are not equal.

Dee considers revealing certain secrets in text immoral. Corresponding to this, he considers some knowledge inappropriate to express in words. In Theorem XX Dee writes about the things hidden in the central point of the cross and while explaining them says

I beseech Thee, O God, to forgive me, if now I have sinned against Thy Majesty by revealing so great a secret in published writings...⁶³

There would be little reason for Dee to ask God for forgiveness if it was not immoral to reveal great secrets in more readily accessible writing. He later writes, at the end of the 23rd Theorem:

⁶² Ibid. s. 175-177.

⁶³ Ibid. s. 183.

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More conclusions may be drawn from these schemes (if considered in a more inward manner) than it is proper to express in clear words.⁶⁴

There is then a type of knowledge that should be considered in an inward manner i.e., contemplated. Such knowledge is improper to reveal in text. There is now two ways of accessing secrets: 1) the immoral way through text and 2) the proper way through contemplation. This gives Dee another reason to write a cryptic text, but as earlier mentioned in Theorem XX Dee addresses both the wise and vulgar group. This is the same theorem he apologizes to God in, but he does so before attempting to explain the secret to the vulgar group. As revealing great secrets in text is considered immoral, it seems strange that he would attempt to explain to the vulgar group at all. But he does not actually reveal to those, who might be considered vulgar, as there are layers of meaning in the text, that cannot be completely understood, if one does not know something of both mathematics and Kabbalah.

The secret supposedly revealed in Theorem XX is in actuality concealed from someone familiar with only mathematics and not philosophies like Pythagoreanism or Kabbalah. It is more specifically regarding this passage:

Let us now proceed to that quaternary which we have assigned to our cross. [...] Obviously, not only is our quaternary left over, when it [sc. the central point of the cross] is severed...⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid. s. 215.

⁶⁵ Ibid. s. 183.

Dee has with this split his cross into four separate lines. Dee draws a diagram and explains this part to the vulgar group afterwards.⁶⁶ However in Theorem VI, where Dee talks about the quaternary he describes it as:

...the quaternary [in so far as it consists] of four straight lines including four right angles...⁶⁷

The quaternary assigned to the cross, which Dee talks about in Theorem XX, includes four right angles. If the quaternary has no central point, then the four straight lines do not intersect and there are no angles (per the mathematical definition of angles). However, he retains the four straight lines and therefore still has a quaternary. Speaking purely mathematically the problem of the lack of angles remain. But from the stand point of Christian Kabbalah rearranging the order of things to find new meanings is a basic technique. Dee has previously done this to the Monad symbol.⁶⁸ A person who knew nothing of Pythagoreanism or Christian Kabbalah, might read this as a purely mathematical statement, in which case the secret revealed is flawed. So, Dee does in a sense hide the meaning from those who would not be considered initiated. This is done through layering interpretations of the text and relying on the reader to look for the hidden meanings. But in order to create a text where the proper readers find similar hidden meanings, Dee also must reveal enough to indicate the correct interpretation. In

⁶⁶ Ibid. s. 184-185, See Appendix C.

⁶⁷ Ibid. s. 157.

⁶⁸ Clulee, N. H. 1988, s. 92-95. See for example Theorem XII-XIII. (Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 161-165).

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correspondence with this, there is a hierarchy of secrets in Dee's book. The two following paragraphs elucidate this.

There is a hierarchy of secret knowledge in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Some secrets must be contemplated, others can be revealed to initiates, and yet others can be illustrated in diagrams. This hierarchy has already been inferred, as some secrets are improper to express in words, and must be reached through contemplation. Dee also writes

...I show your Royal and Serene Highness certain more secret vessels of the holy art (indeed entirely cabbalistic ones) which may be revealed only to initiates...⁶⁹

Here he reveals secrets to Maximillian II (or other readers) that according to himself only initiates can know. But this same theorem contains either corrupted printing or an unsolved kabbalistic riddle.⁷⁰ What Dee actually reveals is not clear at all, though it seems he rearranges parts of the monad symbol into letters (kabbalistic method), which in turn references some kind of chemical process. Once again, Dee layers meaning within symbols and in his text. In these layers of meaning Dee simultaneously reveals to the initiated (if they could solve the riddle) and conceals from the uninitiated. In order to reveal he has to keep this balance, as directly revealing a great secret in a text was considered immoral. However, Dee does reveal more directly in some diagrams e.g., when talking about the sign for Jupiter:

⁶⁹ Ibid. s. 195.

⁷⁰ Ibid. s. 197.

And for the same reason it also had the name of Jupiter, and retained that more secret shape [of the sign for Jupiter].⁷¹

Here he talks about his own symbol for Jupiter, which he derives from the Monad symbol. Attached to this part of the text is a chart where he has drawn this symbol for Jupiter.⁷² Dee also draws a diagram in Theorem XX that illustrates what he means there, and in a later theorem he illustrates what he derives from the Pythagorean quaternary.⁷³ Other diagrams are more cryptic, such as the alchemical egg.⁷⁴ So, it should not be assumed they cannot contain riddles of their own. But Dee does use them to illustrate, and sometimes that means illustrating something secret, as with the sign for Jupiter. So, some secrets can be illustrated. This leaves us with a hierarchy of secrets, where there are secrets that must be contemplated, secrets that can be revealed to initiates through cryptic writing, and secrets that can be illustrated. This is an expansion of the earlier divide between secrets that could be expressed in words and secrets that could not.

Discussion

We began the article by asking how Dee talks about knowledge and reveals secrets in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. To understand how Dee does this we first talked about his worldview. He understood symbols, including his own, as a means of exploring the world and thereby

⁷¹ Ibid. s. 163.

⁷² Ibid. s. 162-163, See Appendix A.

⁷³ Ibid. s. 208-211.

⁷⁴ See Appendix B.

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gaining knowledge. Contemplating the symbol could result in a mystic ascent of the soul. In order to publish a book about this symbol, Dee chose the printer Silvius. Silvius had skill with replicating diagrams and he was both a friend of Dee and already familiar with the esoteric/exoteric knowledge dichotomy. These benefits made Silvius a good choice as a typographer, and while the book could be considered obscure it was still read by various alchemists in Dee's time.

The audience that Dee addresses in his book is not so clear-cut. The book is not intended for a wide public audience; however, Dee still addresses a vulgar group of people. One reason for this could be that Dee genuinely wishes to explain to as many as possible. But that is unlikely, considering he also uses alchemical allegory and layers of meaning to hide what he knows. More reasonably one could say that Dee strikes a balance between explaining to the novices and hiding from the uninitiated. A revelation of secrets, addressed directly to the vulgar group as in Theorem XX, could then be taken as an explanation to the novice. But Dee also conceals knowledge by layering different meanings in his text, so that it cannot be correctly understood if one does not know, what he means with mathematically, kabbalistically and magically. Knowledge is in this way concealed from those who would be considered uninitiated, and simultaneously revealed to others. This allows Dee to address the vulgar group and reveal nothing of value to them.

Knowledge and secrets are divided into different categories. Firstly, there is true knowledge and false knowledge. This divide is familiar and the metaphors of light and shadow can also be found here. The polemical discourse surrounding false vs. true knowledge additionally serves to delegitimize Dee's contemporary critics. The other divide is between different ways of accessing secret knowledge.

Here some secrets must be contemplated and it is immoral to express them clearly. For the initiated, cryptic writing would have to suffice, as revealing secrets in published writing was improper.

Knowledge and secrecy have, in this way, become intimately connected. Secrecy serves to hide knowledge and create a privileged group of people, who knows the secrets. But the two are not identical, and secrets should merely be considered a type of knowledge. The hierarchy of secrets in Dee's book and the layers of meaning is therefore another dimension of how Dee talks about knowledge. In the course of this analysis, knowledge have often been divided into categories in order to better explain the discourse surrounding it. These are binary categories like esoteric/exoteric, true/false and revealed/non-revealed secrets. This is an analytical tool. To divide something into binary categories makes it easy to study, but it also creates artificial divides in the concept. In the discourse of knowledge, all of these binary categories likely overlap and they should be seen as opposite ends on a spectrum. For example, when Dee reveals secrets, he does so to a certain degree, and in that sense, there are middle points between revealed and non-revealed secrets. Additionally, non-revealed secrets and esoteric knowledge are very similar categories and cannot be understood as completely separate. Therefore, the categories of knowledge also overlap.

One way to obtain knowledge that seems strange to us today was through the Monad symbol. But as it was mentioned in the summary of Dee's worldview, man attains divine knowledge through contemplation of this symbol. This aligns well with Versluis' approach to esotericism, where gnosis played a central role. For Versluis reading also play a deciding role in obtaining gnosis. However, Dee considers

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revealing certain knowledge in texts immoral, so not everything can be read either. Some things must be contemplated and gnosis is then reached through intellection. This provides a kind of inside perspective of looking at esoteric texts. For a more outside perspective, there is Hanegraff, but his approach to esotericism also has some issues in this case. Some have already been mentioned. We can however add to this that Dee actively seeks to delegitimize his rival peers and gain Maximillian II's support through a polemical discourse. This once again shows that the established group did not necessarily have a univocal discourse. This case study then also serves to question standing approaches to esotericism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, knowledge is talked about in different ways in the *Monas Hieroglyphica*. Secrets should be seen as a type of knowledge, and some knowledge is exclusive in the sense that it is kept secret. To reveal this knowledge in textual form is sometimes inappropriate, as it should only be contemplated. At other times it is revealed anyway, though this is immoral. To reveal secret knowledge, Dee uses layers of meaning and cryptic allegories in his text, that cannot be understood completely if the reader does not have a grasp of the different traditions Dee writes within. This allows Dee to keep a balance where he both reveals and conceals secrets. Typography could have had an effect on this balance, but a further historical analysis that includes earlier sources is necessary to conclude anything decisively. Dee also uses familiar discourses of knowledge as rhetorical tools to delegitimize his critics. True knowledge is here connected to light and the false, rival knowledge is connected to shadow.

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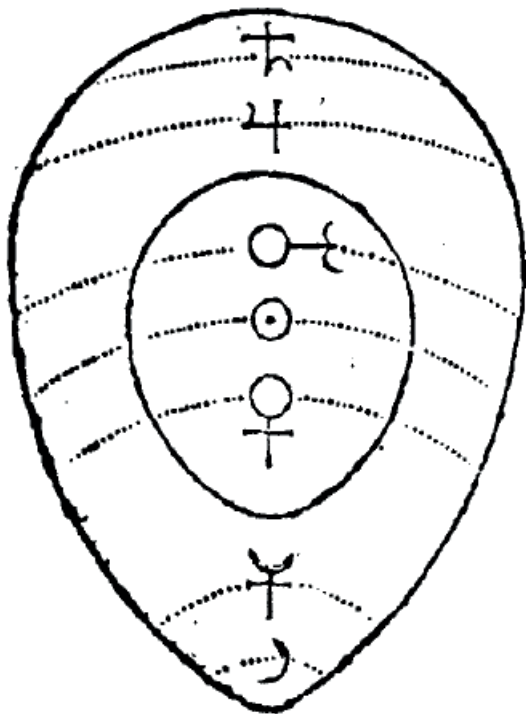
Appendix

A: Josten, C. H. 1964, s. 162

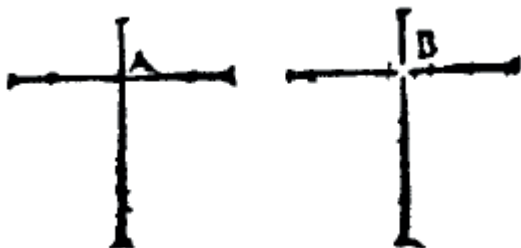
		Saturnus.			Mars.
		Jupiter.			Venus.
		Mercurius.			Mercurius.

B: Josten, C. H. 1964, s.174

The Light shines in the Darkness



C: Josten, C. H. 1964, s.184



TOWARDS A PROCESSUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ESOTERICISM

Christianity, humanism, witches, and
political productions.

Victor Kingo Schmidt Roerholt

Introduction

The study of esotericism has, since the beginnings of its establishment as a field, tried to answer a question that every field at some point has to answer: what is our object of study? And of course, there are as many answers to this question as there are people asking it. The point of asking, however, is not to find a final answer, but to shift the perspective of the field, opening new areas and methods of study and analysis. Antoine Faivre has tried to answer the question by focusing on historical currents that have been temporally and geographically restricted (Faivre, 2010). This approach has been criticized by Kocku von Stuckrad, positing that common ground on the study of esotericism can be found: “only when esotericism is seen not as a selection of

historical ‘currents’, however defined, but as a structural element of Western culture.” (Stuckrad, 2005: 78), he then goes on to identify two aspects of esoteric discourse. Also coming from a discursive perspective, although a vastly different one, Wouter Hanegraaff defines the field of study as the product of a “Grand Polemical Narrative” of exclusion (Hanegraaff, 2005: 230). Arthur Versluis defines esotericism as having a central characteristic: gnosis “meaning experimental insight into the nature of the divine...” (Versluis, 2004: 1).

All these approaches have a common feature in their definition of esotericism. They ask the question: ‘what *is* esotericism?’. This has been done with a view of finding a common essence – but this has always defined esotericism as a thing, something static. In this paper, I will try to make a move, as the title indicates, towards a processual understanding of esotericism; asking instead of what esotericism is as a being, what it does as a process. The central questions, that I will try to answer in this paper are as follows:

How can esotericism be understood as a process of production? Which productions does it produce? How does it produce these productions? And how is this process of production a political process?

I will do this by investigating three different subjects characterized as esoteric by the academic tradition studying esotericism. The subjects that I am focusing on in this paper can all be characterized as western. This, of course, brings up a discussion on whether esotericism is a western phenomenon, or if there is such a thing as non-western esotericism. I would argue however, that this is predicated on an understanding of what ‘the west’ is (e.g.: can early Christianity be

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labeled as a western religion?). This discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, however, and I will therefore refer to the object of study as ‘esotericism’.

Theoretical perspectives, concepts and method

How can esotericism be understood as a process of production?

To investigate this question, I employ certain theoretical concepts and perspectives. These concepts and perspectives come from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (D&G). More specifically, from their collaborative work done in *Anti-Oedipus* (2013, orig. 1972). In this chapter, I will give an overview of the concepts that I will be using in the analysis, as well as how I will be using them, and show how this shifts my perspective in such a way that esotericism can be understood as a process of production.

Desiring-machines

The concept of desiring-machines was constructed as an attempt by D&G, to get away from symbolic and idealist analysis, and into materialist analysis (Overview: desiring-machine, 2022). They argue that nature¹ is constituted by assemblages, or constellations of series of binary machines connected by material flows of desire. These machines are both the building blocks of bigger machines, while having smaller

¹ Nature understood as the totality of the universe, not as a dichotomy in relation to ‘man’ or culture.

machines as the parts making up themselves (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, s. 16).

Desiring-machines are binary machines, obeying a binary law or set of rules governing associations: one machine is always coupled with another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature (...) This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow (...) And because the first machine is in turn connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction... (ibid.)

With this concept, D&G create an ontology which is different from conventional philosophy. This machinic ontology is a processual, materialist ontology, as it views everything as being constantly, and materially produced. It is also a post-human ontology, not centering on human understanding and meaning, but instead on the functioning of parts. It will serve as the ontological background for the analysis of esotericism in this paper.

The disjunctive process of recording, exclusive disjunctions and biunivocalization

As machines connect and disconnect, their connections are recorded and inscribed in the space they create in their connections. These inscriptions direct the flows, channeling them up and blocking some flows (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013: 47). Without this direction bigger machines would never form, as they would constantly be broken down by their constituent parts (ibid.). The inscriptions form a larger disjunctive network of channels and blockages, producing certain

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constellations of flows and machines, creating organizations of flows. These can either be replicated or broken, depending on the flows.

These inscriptions can proceed in two ways: inclusive or exclusive; with the inclusive “either..., or..., or...” and the exclusive “either/or”, channeling flows differently (ibid.: 24). Exclusive disjunctions lead to biunivocalizations, where an either/or disjunction lead flows down one of two paths, the two paths both upholding the organization of flows.

As flows flow through these disjunctions, these flows are investments into the network, and produce subjects invested in these organizations.

Coding, overcoding and decoding

Being constantly produced, machinic assemblages are also coded through the disjunctive process of distribution. This code can both be a semiotic code (such as eye-connections being called “seeing”) or affects (such as seeing a friend can make you happy). These codes can affect the process of production, and are material, but they are not directly involved in the process of production, being inscribed on the flows.

Overcoding happens when multiple codes are connected and organized under a single, despotic code (ibid.: 229-230). E.g., bad harvest and plague being connected and organized under the despotic signifier of ‘God’s Wrath’.

Decoding is the process of breaking down codes, releasing the flows directed by the codes (ibid.: 47). Decoding rarely happens without an immediate recoding. E.g., if someone changes their name, they are effectively decoded from their former name and then recoded with a new name, as a part of the same movement.

Territory, Territorialization, Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization

The concept of the territory designates not only territory in a geographical sense, as in the subdivision of land and people, but also in a more generalized way, as in the subdivision of machines and flows (ibid.: 170). The process of subdivision is called territorialization.

The concept also intersects with the concept of coding. This is because the inscription of flows and machines necessarily demarcates them, thereby constituting the demarcated flows and machines as a territory. Thus, every coding is simultaneously a territorialization, and vice versa (ibid.: 48).

Deterritorialization is the process of breaking down territories, and of organizing existing territories under a new territory. This must happen as a part of a twofold movement, where reterritorialization happens simultaneously, if it is not to let loose deterritorialized flows, that could break down larger machines (ibid.: 49).

The despotic machine

In their analysis of different societies, D&G identify three machines that have historically existed (and to greater and lesser extent still exist). These three machines all function (that is, reproduce themselves) by organizing other machines, in turn, making it seem that the organized machines are produced by these machines (ibid.: 21). Only one is wholly relevant for this paper: The despotic machine functions by overcoding territories. It organizes all the territories under the despot, by way of an infinite debt, and through his direct filiation to the

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divine. It thus creates a network of coded flows, that all flow back to the despot (ibid.: 223-224). This happens through a deterritorialization, but not a decoding.

The capitalist-machine is only relevant for this paper as a horizon and will therefore not be explored.

Esotericism as a process of production

Using a machinic ontology, my perspective shifts to looking at how machines are connected and organized, and in turn, how these connections produce. As the connecting of machines is a process, and their connections produce something, looking from this perspective at esotericism produces esotericism as a process: *an esoterization*; a certain way of connecting machines together, that produces some product. But as the process is not running in a vacuum, it is always running within a context of processes, machinic constellations and organizing-machines: we must talk not only about an esoterization alone, but an esoterization of something. The esoterization of something then, will be understood as a certain way of connecting machines that produces a product in relation to the thing being esotericized.

Method

My methodological approach in this paper consists in connecting a tapestry of sources and literature in three distinct areas to the concepts laid out above. By using D&G's concepts, I will provide a materialist and processual analysis of the different elements; I will therefore not try to interpret the meaning of esotericism, but instead its function. This

is also why I have chosen to use D&G, as they provide a functional mode of interpretation: “The schizoanalyst is a mechanic, and schizoanalysis is solely functional” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013: 367). In each of the three main sections, I will analyze the function of esotericism and, as stated in the introduction, look for a process common to these subjects, and how and what it produces.

The esoteric process of production

What does it produce? How does it produce its product?

In this chapter, I will answer the questions mentioned in the title. I will do this by diving into three subjects, and through applying the concepts laid out in chapter 2, I will look for the way machines get connected, and what they produce, to find a commonality between the three subjects.

‘Gnosticism’ and the esoteric process

In this section, I will show how ‘Gnosticism’ was not only created as a discursive category, but that it posed a threat to the newly established church. I will do this by first looking into how the establishment of a church hierarchy based on a disjunctive organization of flows was at the basis of constructing a new despotic machine. I will then analyze how ‘Gnosticism’ posed a threat to the church, as their disjunctive organization created a despotic machine, which deterritorialized the Christian despot. To do this I will be analyzing two sources:

Irenaeus’ *Against heresies*. As this text is a translation, it is already an interpretation, and will always be viewed through the perspective of

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the translator. As my focus will be on the function, and not the meaning of the text, I hope to mitigate some of the interpretive distance, although this can never be fully achieved. The original source was written by the bishop Irenaeus around 180 AD., to discredit schools of Christian theology, that did not align with orthodoxy. As I am using it to show the creation of an exclusive disjunction between ‘Christian’ and ‘Gnostic’, Irenaeus’ bias is not an issue, but the object of study.

The Apocryphon of John as translated by Stevan Davies. As this is a translation as well, the same precautions as above apply. The original source was discovered in 1945, and is a text written by ‘Gnostics’² themselves. Although this text cannot speak for everyone labeled as ‘gnostic’ in the late Roman empire and early medieval period, it will be used as an example of the threat, that the orthodox church felt from unorthodox beliefs.

The despotic church-machine

As Christianity spread and the last Apostles died, the newly created church faced a question of who had authority within the church. In response to this question, the bishops St. Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome laid down principles that would later become vital in the creation of the clerical hierarchy (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Christianity, n.d.). The confrontation with groups like the ‘Gnostics’ led St. Irenaeus to promote apostolic succession, discursively creating a line of filiation to the Apostles (ibid.). The creation of the Christian church was thus the creation of a despotic machine that channeled flows through the clerical hierarchy, organized around the pope. This

² Who is, and who isn’t gnostic is a matter of debate, so I will put the word ‘Gnostic’ in quotation marks to emphasize this (Stroumsa, 2005, s. 46).

demanding a disjunctive network that would keep flows channeled through the hierarchy. This is where the creation of the exclusive disjunction between ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ was created, as Hanegraaff has also pointed out (Hanegraaff, 2005, s. 234-235). Where anyone not invested in the orthodox beliefs, the despotic machine’s disjunctive network “undermines legitimate authority” (ibid.: 235).

This creation of orthodoxy as the investments in the despotic machine of the church becomes clear, when reading Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*. *Against Heresies* is a polemical text, written as the title indicates, against the ‘heretical’³ Christian sects at the time, such as the ‘Gnostics’. His argument is that if the apostles had secret knowledge about salvation, that they would only teach to ‘the perfect’, they would also have taught it to those that succeeded them as heads of the church, that they had set up. In doing this, he also shows the works of a whole despotic machine, that is underway in its construction. It is the layout of the disjunctions that make up this machine that I will focus on, in the analysis of *Against Heresies*.

Irenaeus’ clearly demarcates between the ‘true’ teachings of the church, and the ‘heretical’ teachings of “these men who are now propagating falsehood” (Irenaeus, n.d.: sect. 3). He writes:

He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles — that, namely, which is handed down by the Church. (ibid.: sect. 4)

³ i.e., groups with interpretations of Christianity differing from the teachings of the church.

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In this quote, several things are happening. Not only is the exclusive disjunction between “the aforesaid heretics” and “the Church of God” being emphasized, the authority of “the Church of God” is being established: “that, namely, which is handed down by the Church.”. The authority of the church and its doctrines comes from their filiative lineage: “and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times” (ibid.: sect. 1).

He again emphasizes the authoritative role of the church and its filiation to the apostles:

... by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority (ibid.: sect. 2)

This is all connected to the “preeminent authority” of the church. This is a clear indication of the vast despotic machine, which is in the making: the local bishops are all filiated with the apostles (and thus God) through their connection with the church of Rome, where the despot himself sits, in direct succession from Peter and Paul. We thus see that flows are organized by being channeled through the local churches back to the despot in Rome.

All religious activity, and all flows must go by way of the bishop-infrastructure: “we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner (...) assemble in unauthorized meetings” (ibid.). For if the flows are not channeled into the despotic machine organized around

Rome, they might go elsewhere, creating connections beyond the disjunctive network of the church.

The material flows and investments are all organized around the preeminent authority of the papacy, an authority based upon the lineage of the preaching of the apostles (ibid.: sect 3). The focus by Irenaeus on filiation of the preachings are not only to cement the authority of the church, but also to undermine the authority of what he sees a threat to the church: “these men who are now propagating falsehood, and who conjure into existence another god beyond the Creator and the Maker of all existing things” (ibid.).

The exclusive disjunctions between ‘heretics’ and ‘orthodoxy’, coupled with the despotic machine of the church created a biunivocalization, where desiring-machines either are repressed by the despotic machine, or repressed by being seen as ‘heretical’. But there were people challenging this machine and its biunivocalization.

The esoteric Gnostic-machine

The Nag Hammadi scriptures gives us a view into the ‘gnostic’ world. And just as Irenaeus described a despotic church-machine, I will analyze *The Apocryphon of John* (Davies, n.d.) to see how the ‘gnostic’ cosmology is constructed, and what implications this has.

The text goes through several chapters describing not only a different cosmology than the Christian orthodox cannon, but also different perspectives on biblical stories, than the ones found in the established churches, as seen from the cosmology it has laid out.

The first chapter is “*The Inexpressible One*” (ibid.), which is the foundation of the ‘gnostic’ cosmology:

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The One rules all. Nothing has authority over it (...) Since everything exists within it/It does not exist within anything./Since it is not dependent on anything/It is eternal./It is absolutely complete and so needs nothing./It is utterly perfect... (ibid.).

This ‘One’ described is not the usual God described in Christian cosmology.

In the second chapter, on the origin of reality, this ‘One’ then produces another figure, Barbelo: “His self-aware thought (ennoia) came into being./Appearing to him in the effulgence of his light./She stood before him.” (ibid.). It then goes on to describe three different structures of the divine mind, that are created by the interactions of the Holy Spirit and Barbelo. They beget a son through autogenesis:

The Holy Spirit/Brought his and Barbelo’s divine autogenes Son to completion (...) As the divine autogenes Christ (...) The Invisible Spirit/Placed the divine autogenes over everything./All authorities were subordinated to him./The truth within him let him learn everything. (ibid.)

It then goes on to describe a plethora of godly beings, aeons, which they create.

In the chapter called “A Crisis that Became the World” (ibid.), the text describes how one of the aeons, Sophia, tried to create without her counterpart, Christ: “Without the Invisible Spirit’s consent (...) She brought it into being.” (ibid.). Sophia’s creation is, unlike the other creations told about until this moment, not perfect: “Something imperfect came out of her/Different in appearance from her. (...) She gave rise to a misshapen being unlike herself.” (ibid.). Out of shame, she tried to hide it outside the realm of immortal beings: “Sophia surrounded him with a brilliant cloud,/Put a throne in the center part of

the cloud/So that no one would see it. /She named him Yaldabaoth.” (ibid.). Yaldabaoth is, in the eyes of the ‘Gnostics’ not only imperfect, but also very powerful: “He took great Power (dynamis) from his mother,/Left her, and moved away from his birthplace (...) Created realms for himself...” (ibid.).

The ‘gnostic’ cosmology describes a perfect realm, then, build out of the ‘One’, where only one imperfect being exist: Yaldabaoth.

Yaldabaoth then begins creating malformed realms based on the ones described in the cosmology, going so far as to proclaiming: “I am God, and there is no God but me!”/Since he didn’t know where his own Power originated.” (ibid.). This Yaldabaoth is the god of ‘orthodox’ Christianity. The ‘Gnostics’ then, saw the ‘orthodox’ god as a false god. Even going as far as turning the ‘orthodox’ god’s words against the ‘orthodox’ interpretation:

When he gazed upon his creation surrounding him/He said to his host of demons (...) ‘I am a jealous God and there is no God but me!’/[But by doing this he admitted to his demons that there is indeed another God. For, if there were no other God, whom would he possibly be jealous of?] (ibid.)

The text then goes on to tell the tale of the creation of man, who Yaldabaoth is tricked into blowing his power, that he got from his mother, into, losing it himself. Thus:

Yaldabaoth’s demonic forces envied the man. (...) When they realized that he shone with light/And could think better than they could/And was naked of evil,/They took him and cast him down/ Into the lowest depths of the material world. (ibid.).

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It then tells how some souls might get saved from Yaldabaoth and from their “rage, envy, jealousy, desire, or craving” (ibid.).

The ‘gnostic’ cosmology then, is vastly different from ‘orthodox’ Christianity. Giving the Christian god the role of an imperfect being, whose creation man needs salvation from. It also has a whole cosmology of perfect beings, who are all of the ‘One’, which is the true god. Not only that, but salvation also comes through making one’s soul more powerful than artificial spirit, not through an established church (ibid.).

In relation to the ‘orthodox’ cosmology, the ‘gnostic’ cosmology seems to be a deterritorialization and an overcoding, organizing the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of Christianity as the belief in a false and imperfect god. It also undermines the despotic church-machine, by overcoding its disjunctive network. The ‘gnostic’ communities posed a threat to the church, as their investments and flows didn’t organize through it, but were instead invested in the community of initiated, and the ‘One’:

... we can appreciate more clearly the danger [‘Gnostics’] presented to those in the church who were attempting to unite the Christian communities and to consolidate them against the threat of political persecution (...) So long as their presence is tolerated, Irenaeus warns, they incite confusion and controversy; they call into question the authority of church leaders, and disturb the faith of simple believers. (Pagels, 1975: 160)

We see here that the process of ‘Gnosticism’ is the creation of a territory, a community, which is not overcoded by the established despot, the head of the Christian church. It produces this by way of a disjunctive network organized around a despotic divinity, who

overcodes the established despot and his direct filiation. This overcoding flips the machine on its head, putting the despotic machine in relation to them and not the other way around: organizing the organizing-machine through overcoding.

Early Christianity, an esoteric movement?

Early Christianity grew in relation to the despotic machine of the Roman empire: '*All roads lead to Rome*', the flows of the empire being organized by this vast infrastructure. The Christian god, however, being not only more powerful than any other god, forbade the worship of other gods, thereby not only dismissing the Roman gods (who are central as direct filiation to the emperor), but also putting the Roman empire in relation to the Christian god, overcoding it. The response from the Romans is also telling:

... the profession of Christianity was defined as a capital crime—though of a special kind, because one gained pardon by apostasy (rejection of a faith once confessed) demonstrated by offering sacrifice to the pagan gods or to the emperor. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020)

One had to prove loyalty to Rome over the god of Christianity by way of sacrifice, and thus material and unconscious investment, to either the despot himself, or the affiliate gods; thus showing, that one wasn't organizing the Roman state under the god of Christianity.

The process of production in early Christianity seems to be one of producing communities that overcode the Roman empire, organizing the organizing-machine. It seems then, that the gnostic process isn't a process unique to 'Gnosticism'. In fact, we see the exact same process

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of production in the early years of the Christian church, in relation to the despotic machine of the Roman empire.

Esoteric process of production

That early Christianity had esoteric tendencies is not an unheard assertion (Stroumsa, 2005, s. 27-45). The ‘Gnostic’-machine and the Christian-machine seems then to have a commonality in their process of producing, *an esoteric process of production*.

The same despotic machine that was being deterritorialized by ‘gnostic’ communities, was at the same time producing territories of communities invested in a deterritorialization of the despotic Roman empire-machine. As esotericism is being seen as a process, it makes sense that no movement is esoteric *in itself*, but rather, that it is esoteric in a relation: it *esotericizes something*.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: The creation of the individual as territory.

Having identified a process of production, which is an active part of two esoteric movements, I will in this part of the paper analyze the esotericist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (CRS, 1994), to see if there is some form of continuity between his work and the previously analyzed texts.

The text is a speech in defense of some 900 theses he had drawn from various fields, that he had planned for a public disputation, he had invited scholars from around Europe to attend. It was however prohibited by the pope, as 13 of the theses were denounced as heretical (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). This text is, like the other sources, a

translation; this introduces the same issues as stated above. As the text is a speech prepared for the defense of his theses, it should be kept in mind that it was meant for a public audience.

Man, God, and Knowledge

In the speech, he develops three concepts, that I will focus on in my analysis: Man, his relation to God, and his relation to knowledge.

He starts out by posing the problem of man's position in the world. This problem, he intends to answer through his cosmology:

God the Father, the Mightiest Architect, had already raised, according to the precepts of His hidden wisdom (...) He had already adorned the supercelestial region with Intelligences, infused the heavenly globes with the life of immortal souls and set the fermenting dung-heap of the inferior world teeming with every form of animal life. (CRS, 1994)

As we can see, God created the world according to precepts, which are part of his hidden wisdom. The world is according to Mirandola split in two: the celestial regions, filled with intelligences and the inferior world. Into this, man is put in the middle (ibid.). It describes how other creatures are defined and restricted within certain roles, in contrast, humans are not: "It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine." (ibid.). Man is created as a territory apart from the rest of the cosmos, not being defined by laws, that restrict other beings to certain roles. He also has a relation to God, becoming closer with the creator, if he chooses to pursue it. Man is thus a territory under an overcoding god, apart from the rest of the territories under the same god.

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If, however, you see a philosopher, judging and distinguishing all things according to the rule of reason (...) he is a creature of heaven and not of earth; if, finally, a pure contemplator, (...) here indeed is neither a creature of earth nor a heavenly creature, but some higher divinity, clothed in human flesh. (ibid.)

According to Mirandola, through reason, the territory of man can be united with the god-creator, but this reason does not come by way of preaching from the clergy:

But upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him. (...) if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. (...) [If] he should recollect himself into the center of his own unity, he will there become one spirit with God, in the solitary darkness of the Father... (ibid.)

The unity with God comes through knowledge of one's own unity. This knowledge is obtained through the study of 'the liberal arts' and ancient wisdom:

What else is to be understood by the stages through which the initiates must pass in the mysteries of the Greeks? (...) Only after they had been prepared in this way did they receive "Epopeteia," that is, the immediate vision of divine things by the light of theology. (ibid.)

Through ancient knowledge and techniques, one would, according to Mirandola, be able to gain access to the relation that one has to God, becoming one with him:

Let us be driven, O Fathers, by those Socratic frenzies which lift us to such ecstasy that our intellects and our very selves are united to God.

(...) we shall be, no longer ourselves, but the very One who made us.
(ibid.)

Mirandola thus created the territory of man, which deterritorialized the despotic machine of the church, not by organizing the organizing-machine by overcoding it, but by bypassing it, organizing the territories of men directly under the god-creator, by de- and recoding man directly under god, instead of through the clerical infrastructure: creating new territories in a new organization, instead of creating territories, which reorganize existing territories.

Witches: the closing of the commons and worker-production.

In this section, I will examine the witch-hunts in Europe, and their relation to the creation of the bio-state and the capitalist-machine. I will do this based on Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2014), which broadly argues that the witch-hunts were a key aspect of what Marx described as 'primitive accumulation'. I will be focusing on the reorganization of the body and communities, and the resistances from these communities and bodies to the reorganization, and how the witch-hunts functioned as a tool for the creation of these new machines, whether intended or not.

Population crisis, heretics, and worker revolts

The black death, killing 30-40% of the European population practically inaugurated a new era. Social hierarchies were flipped upside down, workers were in short supply. The familiarity with death also undermined social discipline (Federici, 2014, 44). The plague also

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intensified an already ongoing labor-crisis, as it made labor scarce and expensive, giving agricultural workers the power to rid themselves of the feudal system (ibid.). Countermeasures were implemented but were often resisted (ibid.: 45).

The distinction between production and reproduction wasn't as clearly defined, neither were the distinctions between male and female work, as the household was both the basic unit of production and reproduction. This, compared to later years, gave women a lot more freedom (ibid.: 25).

Meanwhile, heretical and revolutionary movements were springing up:

popular heresy was less a deviation from the orthodox doctrine than a protest movement, aspiring to a radical democratization of social life. (...) The heretic movements also provided an alternative community structure (...) enabling the members of the sect to lead a more autonomous life... (ibid.: 33)

These heretical movements were not just movements calling for the democratization of social life, they also undermined the power of the church: "At the root of popular heresy was the belief that god no longer spoke through the clergy..." (ibid.). Political and social movements then, were often tied up with heresy. When the church increased its attack on sexuality, channeling all sexuality through marriage and targeting 'sodomy', the calls for free sexuality in heretical movements must be seen as an anti-authoritarian stance (ibid.: 38). Later, reproductive crimes such as contraception, infanticide, 'sodomy' and abortion would be associated with heresy (ibid.: 36).

The creation of the capitalist-machine and the bio-state

Against this background, two new machines were being assembled. The feudal-machine could not reproduce itself and accumulation of wealth could not happen, because of high wages. This began a violent period of *primitive accumulation*. Federici writes that the concept was created: "... to describe the social and economic restructuring that the European ruling class initiated in response to its accumulation crisis..." (ibid.: 62). Marx's concept states that capitalism could not have developed without a previously created concentration of capital and labor, and the separation of the workers from the means of production (ibid.). Federici critiques Marx for only focusing on the expropriation of Africa and the Americas by arguing, that for the capitalist-machine to be created, the body had to be transformed into a work-machine, and women's bodies had to be transformed into reproduction-machines.

The fact that there was a labor-shortage, combined with the massive death-toll that the harsh conditions in the colonies⁴ and in Europe produced, posed a threat to the construction of the capitalist-machine (ibid.: 66). In response, the birth of the bio-state⁵ took place, as a tool for the continued production and reproduction of labor.

Primitive accumulation then, required a massive reorganization of territories. One of the biggest de- and reterritorializations to happen was the closing of the commons and land expropriation. Vast tracts of

⁴ Federici mentions both the decimation of the native-American population after the conquest of America, and the horrible conditions of African slaves on plantations (Federici, 2014, 65-66).

⁵ The practices of state control and interference in the reproduction of workers: everything from healthcare to eugenics.

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unowned land were enclosed, while owned land was forced to be sold with taxation and rent increases (ibid.: 68-70). Thus, territories previously coded as communal property was now recoded as private property. This displaced a lot of people, who were no longer able to sustain themselves through foraging and grazing animals on unowned land (ibid.: 71), forcing them to work for money, which separated production and reproduction (ibid.: 75).

Meanwhile, expansionist population policies were implemented, especially with the rise of mercantilism. The creation of workhouses and capture of vagabonds coincided with the declaration of idleness as a social plague (ibid.: 87). The expansion of labor-power was one of the top priorities of the state (ibid.: 91).

The reorganization of bodies

One of the preconditions of the assembling of the capitalist-machine is the ‘disciplining of the body’, which Federici gets from Michel Foucault. She sees it as an attempt by the state and church to turn individuals’ power into labor-power (ibid.: 133). This transformation came by way of a reorganization of the body. This reorganization was created out of the exclusive disjunction, which is also seen in Mirandola’s work: the split between reason and the body.

In the same era as the witch-hunt happened, a new mechanical philosophy came to the foray. The body and its constituent parts and motions were studied meticulously: “*from the circulation of the blood to the dynamics of speech...*” (ibid.: 138). This breakdown and decoding of the body was used to rebuild it anew, a machine reconstructed, with its forces reorganized and recoded to create a more efficient output (ibid.: 140). For this to happen, the old territories in

which bodies existed had to be broken down, so that a reterritorialization could happen. One of these territories and codes was that of magic. The magical worldview that had to be destroyed was that which didn't see a separation between soul and matter, as mechanical philosophy did. The magic perspective: "where nature was viewed as a universe of signs and signatures, marking invisible affinities that had to be deciphered..." (ibid.: 142), led one to a worldview of powers one could use to one's favor, through charms, healing, and so on. As Federici writes:

Eradicating these practices was a necessary condition for the capitalist rationalization of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to obtain what one wanted without work, that is, a refusal of work in action. (ibid.)

It didn't matter whether magic was real or not, as just the belief in magic was a source of social insubordination. Magical practices interfered with work, workers were not willing to work on unlucky days, prophecies could encourage insubordination, and so on (ibid.: 143). Magic and people associated with it thus became prime targets.

Through the mechanization of the body and the split between soul and body, authority could more easily be internalized, the repression of the worker being assigned to an internal conflict of will over body, instead of a political conflict between the worker and his employer or the state. In fact, the whole authoritative apparatus became internalized: "Reason in its role as judge, inquisitor, manager, administrator." (ibid.: 149).

But it wasn't just the working body, that became reorganized, the bodies and community of women were also subject to a transformation.

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This is exemplified with the condemnation, and thus coding, as maleficium of abortion and contraception: this reduced the uterus to a reproduction-machine, coding it as a reproductive organ. Not only that, but it also exemplifies the bio-state's interference with the body, through which, the reorganization of the body took place (ibid.: 144).

This bio-state was constructed out of the population-crisis, which peaked in 1620-1630's (ibid.: 86), some of the most intensive years of the witch-hunt. The main initiative the state took to increase its population was a war against women's control over their reproductive systems; a war primarily waged through the witch-hunt, against birth-control and non-procreative sexuality (ibid.: 88). Surveillance was adopted to ensure that pregnant women did not terminate their pregnancies and midwives were put under suspicion. New medical practices were put in place, which required throwing out the community of women, who had been around the bed of the coming mother, and instead installing male doctors in the delivery room (ibid.: 89). The state began to directly control the wombs of women, recoding their role to reproduction.

What before had been common practices of community control over productive as well as reproductive forces became reorganized under the state, instead of the community itself. As an example, the difference between a witch and an ointment-maker was that of state recognition (Nielsen, Elleby, & Lindgaard, 2020: 26:20-28:25).

The family was constructed as the basis of reproduction, conjoining the work-machines to reproduction-machines, supplying the capitalist-machine with labor-power (Federici, 2014: 88). Women were reduced to the role of reproduction (ibid.: 94-95). This reorganization of women's bodies and productions was enacted through the violence of the witch-hunt (ibid.: 102-103). We thus see that the witch-trials not

only were instrumental in the reorganization of the common land into property, but also of the bodies of workers and women. The communities they were organized in were decoded, then recoded as families, workers, and wives. Their functions in their communities were deterritorialized and reterritorialized as production-machines and reproduction-machines.

Resistance and witch-burning

Not everyone just went along with these reorganizations, however. The witch-hunts were instrumental in enforcing this reorganization, by criminalizing practices that had been common before, and punishing them by horrible means. The charge's vagueness made it a tool of social rearrangement (*ibid.*: 170). The persecution of witches often was a tool for getting rid of insubordinate women, who often were the instigators of peasant revolts against land-enclosures and carried on the insubordination after the revolts had been crushed (*ibid.*: 174). The areas most affected by the reorganization of land and bodies were also the areas most intensely affected by the witch-hunts (*ibid.*: 171).

The witch-hunts had a continuity with the persecution of heretics: the persecution of social subversion in the name of religious orthodoxy, burning at the stakes, and the accusations of sodomy, infanticide and animal-worship is seen both in persecutions of heretics and witches (*ibid.*: 177-179). It also served the same function: to destroy resistance to the established machines.

We thus see the witches being persecuted for resistance to established machines. Their resistance consisting in upholding existing local territories in the face of these new deterritorializations or creating

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new territories that deterritorialize the capitalist-machine: i.e., pulling down fences placed on common land (deterritorialization of newly established territories), creating revolt-movements (creation of territories that deterritorialize the capitalist-machine), using birth-control (decoding of the uterus as reproductive organ), or carrying on resistance after revolts have been put down.

Producing resistance

The witch-trials were a violent reorganization of both land, communities, and bodies, that had to take place, for the capitalist-machine to be assembled. Among the people persecuted as witches were women who in different ways resisted these reorganizations.

Thus, we again see the process of creating a territory, which resists the machines being esotericized, by way of deterritorializing the reorganized territories; either by upholding old territories, or by the creation of new ones, or the decoding of codes related to the machine being esotericized.

The esoteric process of production

It seems that there is a common process between the three subjects: *that of producing a territory, which simultaneously deterritorializes the machines being esotericized*. It does this either through deterritorialization of the disjunctive network of the machine, the overcoding of the codes, de- and recoding, or by upholding already existing territories by deterritorializing the boundaries of new territories.

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And how is this process of production a political process?

In this chapter, I will discuss the political implications of the process analyzed above. The point of departure for the discussion will be the theoretical implications of my chosen ontological perspective, then I will discuss these implications in relation to the analyzed process.

If politics can be viewed as the fights and decisions relating to the organization of the world, which implications would this then have, if connected to a machinic ontology? If the world is made up of flows and breaks, machines and connections, then the organizations of these must be political constellations. This view of politics, as the organization and disorganization of material flows and machines, can be used in a broad and a narrow sense: Either everything is political, or it is only in the breaks with organizations of machines, that we see politics emerge. The broad definition, being very broad, isn't particularly telling. Therefore, in this paper, I have looked at the political and material breaks that happen when productions change existing machines, or come into conflict with these larger machines, halting them or threatening to undermine them.

This implies that the creation of a territory and the deterritorialization of machines being esotericized, the analyzed esoteric process, is a political process. This can also be seen in the three subjects themselves. The early Christians and the 'gnostics' didn't just form a discursive or theological break with the church, but a material and political break. Forming territories of initiated, thus producing resistance to the despotic machine.

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In the second case, that of Mirandola, we see that his bypassing of the clerical infrastructure, instead focusing on inner knowledge, constituted a break with the political and material power of the pope. This then, posed a problem to the power-structures at the time. If people in themselves and through ancient techniques can obtain the divine, or become one with God, they are no longer invested in the despotic machine of the church, as it is no longer needed to connect them with God. This then, constituted a threat to the church. Pope Innocent VIII condemned 13 of Mirandola's theses as heretical and banned the planned public defense (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

In the third case, that of the witch-hunts, the political dimension of the movement is more explicit. We saw that the deterritorializations were in direct resistance to the establishment of a new capitalist-machine. Rebellions, the pulling down of fences and general subversion of politicoeconomic stratification led women to be burned at the stake, among other reasons.

Thus the identified process of production is simultaneously a political production, producing resistances to larger organizing-machines.

Conclusion

Using a machinic and processual ontology, looking at how machines are connected and organized, and in turn how these connections produce, one can understand esotericism as a process of production: a certain way of connecting machines together that produces some product in relation to other production-machines and organizing-machines. This production is a relation, the production of the esoteric machine is the esoterization of another machine.

In my analysis, I have found a common process to the three analyzed subjects, which is that of producing a territory, which simultaneously deterritorializes the esotericized machines. This production is produced by way of deterritorialization of the disjunctive network of the machine it esotericizes, the overcoding of the codes, de- and recoding, or by upholding already existing territories by deterritorializing territories established by the esotericized machine.

As politics is seen as material breaks with established machinic configurations, the esoteric processes of production produce political breaks with the machines, that are being esotericized. The production of territories and deterritorializations constitute these material and political breaks. This is also seen in the analyzed subjects, as they all produced breaks with larger societal organizations.

In this paper I have shown, that by asking what esotericism does as a process, instead of asking what it is as a being, shifts the perspective on esotericism, allowing for new aspects of esotericism to be highlighted and new questions to be raised.

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WITCHCRAFT, BITCHCRAFT

En undersøgelse af heksefiguren i feministisk diskurs

Johanne Schou Vinther

*The flower of Venus is a rose because under / its dark-red color lurks
many thorns.*

Proverbs 5 [3-4]

Indledning

Jeg starter et utraditionelt sted: engang i 7.klasse. Der er pause. Vi er en gruppe, der sidder sammen, og vi snakker om kvinder og feminisme. Jeg husker ikke de egentlige emner eller eksakte pointer. Men jeg husker, at jeg var ganske investeret i diskussionen. Jeg oplevede nogle af de andres pointer som direkte åndsvage og var nok også ret tydelig om netop det og om mine egne holdninger. Nogle ville nok kalde mig spids eller emsig. Det er sådan set ikke pointen. Pointen er, at en af mine klassekammerater bragte diskussionen til en ende ved at udbryde: ”Du kan virkelig være en heks nogle gange!”, og så snakkede vi ikke

mere om det. På sin vis er jeg glad for kommentaren nu, for den afslører nogle interessante sammenhænge imellem hekse, køn og feminisme. Min hidsige forsvarstale for kvinden gjorde mig til en heks. Hvad fortæller det os om vores fælles ideer om heksten, om den kvinde, som går i krig på sit køns vegne, og kan vi spore sammenhængen historisk?

Det er netop den undring, som er udgangspunkt for artiklen her. Tesen er todelt. For det første, at heksefiguren er blevet diskursivt konstrueret som en særlig type kvinde, der truer en patriarkalsk samfundsorden. For det andet at det faktum alene gør det oplagt for senere feministiske bevægelser at tage heksefiguren op, fordi heksten hele tiden har redt den eksisterende patriarkalske orden mod hårene. Det gør heksten til en naturlig aktivistisk modstandsfigur.

For at undersøge denne sammenhæng laver jeg en komparativ analyse af heksefiguren med tre nedslag. Først ser jeg på konstruktionen af den kvindelige heks i hekseforfølgelsesmanualen *Malleus Maleficarum* (herefter *Malleus*). For det andet ser jeg på, hvordan heksefiguren bliver brugt i feministiske bevægelser i 1968. For det tredje slår jeg ned på et mere samtidigt eksempel med Olga Ravns flerårige arbejde med hekse. Den komparative undersøgelse har en tobenet teoretisk forankring. For det første analyserer jeg de diskurser omkring kvinde, køn og heks, der er løs i de forskellige tekster. For det andet anvender jeg den hollandske historiker Wouter Hanegraffs ide om polemiske diskurser og den tyske religionshistoriker Kocku von Stuckrads betragtninger om historisk diskursanalyse.

Teoretiske og empiriske afgrænsninger

Wouter J. Hanegraff foreslår, hvordan studiet af det esoteriske som akademisk felt længe har været skubbet til de absolutte margener af akademisk arbejde som historisk produkt af en polemisk diskurs.¹ Det er en dynamik, som kan spores helt tilbage til monoteismens begyndelse, og endnu vigtigere for mit formål her, så er det en diskurs, som løber under konstruktionen af mainstream vestlig identitet.² Hanegraff identificerer altså polemisk diskurs som led i en identitetsdannelsesproces. Konstruktionen af en given identitet fx vestlig identitet, som Hanegraff beskæftiger sig med, udlægger han sådan, at identitet skabes med en historiefortællingsproces. Vi fortæller historier både til os selv og til andre om, hvem og hvad vi er – og om hvem og hvad vi gerne vil være.³ Det er den indsigt, som jeg tager med mig i min komparative analyse af heksefiguren. Jeg er interesseret i, hvordan ideen om polemisk diskurs kan bruges som en måde at undersøge, hvilke polemiske diskurser, der har ligget til grund for identitetsskabelsen i en given historisk periode, og hvordan netop denne konstruktion har en efterfølgende historie.

Et andet vigtigt aspekt ved den polemiske diskurs er faktummet, at enhver polemisk diskurs har brug for at skabe en fjende – imaginær eller ej. Den polemiske diskurs har brug for at få fjenden til i hvert fald at fremstå som truende overfor den sociale orden, og for at dette kan ske, bliver fjenden simplificeret. Der skabes en reificeret anden, som fremstår i sin grundvold ond, så man selv i modsætning til kan fremstå

¹ Hanegraff, Wouter J.: "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research". *Aries*, vol. 5, nr. 2, 2005, s. 225-254, s. 226.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. s. 226

god.⁴ Hanegraff foretager en skematisk opstilling af denne proces bestående af tre søjler. For det første grunden til, at en given person eller gruppe udstødes: fare / immoralitet / irrationalitet / fejl. Til hver af disse opstiller han et positivt alternativ: sikkerhed / moralitet / fornuft / sandhed. Endeligt illustrer den sidste søjle, hvilke strategier den polemiske diskurs anvender for at neutralisere den trussel, som en given person eller gruppe udgør overfor den sociale status quo. Der er på den ene side et direkte forbud af det, der udgør en trussel. Denne strategi kan bruges ift. til de to første tilfælde af polemisk diskurs. På den anden side i forbindelse med de to sidste tilfælde af polemisk diskurs, kan man i stedet anvende latterliggørelse, så det udstødte kommer til at virke fjollet, useriøst og misforstået. Med al samfundets rationalitet bliver det udstødte pakket væk, fordi det bare er nogle, der ikke helt har forstået, hvordan verden *rigtigt* hænger sammen.⁵

Jeg udfolder senere, hvordan disse strategier er blevet brugt imod de kvinder, der enten har identificeret sig med heksefiguren eller har fået mærkatet af nogle andre. Til mit formål antager jeg imidlertid, at der historisk er sket en diskursiv polemisering af heksefiguren, der har gjort heksen til den reificerede anden, som har understøttet en hvis 'rigtig' identitet – eller i hvert fald en rigtig måde at være på ift. de latente forventninger til individet i en given social matrix. Nedslaget på *Malleus* vil undersøge, hvordan denne diskurs har udfoldet sig. Jeg vil samtidig påpege, at der i arbejdet med de historiske nedslag tegner sig et mønster af, at heksen først er blevet reificeret og udstødt på baggrund af en opfattet fare for samfundet, som derfor har reageret med at forbyde og straffe alt relateret til hekse. Siden er der sket et skred, så

⁴ Ibid. s. 227

⁵ Ibid. s. 229

heksefiguren fremfor at være farlig snarere er blevet lidt fjollet – noget de skøre kvinder render og roder lidt med. Inddæmningsstrategien er med Hanegraffs begreber altså skiftet fra forbud til latterliggørelse.

Jeg vil imidlertid gerne nuancere den sidste strategi nemlig latterliggørelsen. Den ser man i forbindelse med heksen ofte i forbindelse med fiktive historier typisk i populærkulturen. Tænk fx på, hvordan hekse fremstilles i de fleste historier målrettet børn. Men i forbindelse med både '68-feminismens politiske instrumentalisering af heksefiguren og Olga Ravns senere viderearbejde, så synes jeg ikke, at latterliggørelsen som strategi helt fanger, hvordan omverdenen har reageret på det. Det er klart en del af det, men direkte at ignorere tilfældene lader til at være en ligeså udbredt strategi. Dette vidner imidlertid om, at heksen ikke forstås som en direkte fare for samfundet længere. Faren er overført – den er teoretisk betinget. Et instrument til at udstille samfundets uretfærdigheder. Det er det, jeg ligger i, at heksefiguren er blevet politisk og aktivistisk instrumentaliseret.

I analysens to sidste dele om witch/bitch inddrager jeg også Kocku von Stuckrads pointer om historisk diskursanalyse. Han fremhæver, hvordan historiografi – hvilket vil sige selve handlingen at nedskrive historien – essentielt er en strukturering og prioritering af data i et sammenhængende narrativ. Netop hvad der konstituerer et sammenhængende narrativ er også socialt og kulturelt betinget.⁶ Historikere fortæller til deres egen samtid, ikke til fortiden – historiefortælling er dermed også en kreativ proces, hvor udvælgelse, frasortering og valorisering spiller en væsentlig rolle.⁷ Dette er signifikant ift., hvordan den feministiske diskurs bruger heksefiguren,

⁶ Stuckrad, Kocku von og Johnston, Jay: *Discourse Research and Religion. Disciplinary Use and Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, De Gruyter, 2018 s. 77.

⁷ Ibid.

fordi man kan anskue fænomenet som en del af en feministisk historiografi. Stuckrad skriver:

Historical meaning is always ascribed and generated, a process of meaning-making that German historian refer to as *historische Sinnbildung*. Jörn Rüsen [...] distinguishes three elements that together constitute historical meaning: the levels of content, of formal construction, and of function.⁸

Historiografi er altså en måde, hvorpå man kan 'bygge' bevidsthed. I den kommende analyse, vil jeg argumentere for, at den feministiske adoption af heksefiguren er en måde at bruge kvindens historie til at bygge en særlig bevidsthed. I lyset af det er særligt Rüsens sidste element, det funktionelle, spændende, idet det peger på, at den fortalte historie har en stor betydning for samtidig diskurs, fordi "[...] the practical application of the presented past is always an inherent part of the narration."⁹ Der sker altså med andre ord en diskursiv framing i historiografi.¹⁰

Afslutningsvis vil jeg knytte nogle bemærkninger til begrebet diskurs. Hanegraff bruger det i sin diskussion af, hvad der essentielt er identitetsskabelsesprocesser, og Stuckrad knytter det til historiografi,

⁸ Ibid. s. 79

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. s. 80. Denne framing er ligeledes et aspekt, som Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) er blevet interesseret i. Fx skriver Mariana Achugar om CDA og historie: "The Exploration of discourse about situations that have contemporary political and moral impact has provided a critical lens to our understandings of the meaning and uses of the past." Flowerdew John og Richardson John E, *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies*, Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018 s. 299.

altså meningsdannelse i relation til de historier vi fortæller om vores fortid, og hvordan de påvirker vores samtid. Jeg tager begge aspekter med mig i den kommende analyse, men for også at slå helt fast, hvad jeg forstår ved diskurs, så er det for det første, at diskurs refererer til et specifikt sæt meninger, der kommer til udtryk gennem en række former og funktioner. Diskursen er talerøret for bestemte institutioner eller sociale grupper.¹¹ Yderligere er det centralt i min forståelse, at diskurser altid er understøttet af en ideologi forstået som overbevisninger og værdier, der tilhører en bestemt social gruppe. Endeligt oprinder de herskende diskurser fra de klasser, sociale grupper og institutioner, som sidder på magt enten realpolitisk eller symbolsk i et givent samfund.¹² Metodisk anvender jeg diskursanalyse til at undersøge udvalget af kilder, som jeg gerne vil knytte et par ord til, før jeg går videre.

Målet med denne artikel er først at vise, hvordan heksen er blevet konstrueret som kvindelig og derefter, hvordan feministisk diskurs som en modstandsstrategi har taget figuren til sig i en subversiv omvendelse. For at illustrere denne udvikling har jeg valgt tre kilder fra forskellige tidsperioder og fra hver deres geografiske område. Hver af nedslagene har naturligvis sin egen kontekst. Alle nedslag er udvalgt, fordi de hidrører samme historiske udvikling, men de er historisk situeret, og jeg undersøger dem som sådan. Jeg indleder derfor analyserne med et rids af kildens historiske kontekst. Yderligere undersøgelse af, hvordan heksefiguren bliver approprieret af feministisk diskurs gennem tid, bør andetsteds understøttes af flere nedslag, men det ligger udenfor denne artikels omfang.

¹¹ Ibid. s. 2

¹² Ibid. s. 3

Malleus Maleficarum

Statistiske analyser af hekseforfølgelserne i Europa viser, at 70 til 80 procent af alle dømt for hekseri var kvinder.¹³ Op imod 30 procent af anklagede var altså mænd. Alligevel er vores ide om heksen kvindelig. En måde at forklare dette faktum er at undersøge datidens sociale, kulturelle og religiøse dogmer. Jeg vil i det følgende se på en af tidens mest indflydelsesrige heksemanualer, *Malleus Maleficarum* og spore, hvordan den er med til at cementere ideen om, at heksen er en kvinde.

Malleus blev udgivet i 1486 dvs. lige i optakten til det 16. og 17. århundrede – en periode i europæisk historie, der også kaldes *the witch craze*.¹⁴ Hekseforfølgelserne tog til henover det 16. og 17. århundrede, men en stor del af fundamentet for forfølgelserne lægges netop med *Malleus* og andre manualer. Disse heksejagtsmanualer resulterede i, at en ny ide om magi og heksekraft blev dominerende: satanisme og diabolisme.¹⁵ I religiøse samfund blev heksekraft altså genindskrevet som noget farligt og truende.

Malleus er en heresiologi dvs. et studie af en given hedenskab. Manualen er skrevet indenfor den romerskkatolske tradition, og at manualen netop er en heresiologi ekkoer den stigende religiøse uro og knopskydninger af såkaldte hedenskaber, som dominerede perioden. Der er fx kun 31 år fra udgivelsen af *Malleus* til, at Martin Luther

¹³ Levack Brian P, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013 s. 449.

¹⁴ Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009, s.

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¹⁵ Ibid.

offentliggjorde sine teser mod afladshandlen i Wittenberg i 1517 og startede reformationen. En anden prominent hedenskab i tiden var husitterne i Bøhmen inspireret af Jan Huss' lære, og som Henricus Institorius – en af manualens ophavsmænd – selv brugte de sidste år af sit liv på at bekæmpe.¹⁶ Den pavelige opgave med at definere heksekraft som en form for hedenskab skriver sig altså ind i en kontekst, hvor den katolske kirke generelt blev udfordret af alternative trossystemer og -udlægninger, hvorfor den reagerede med inkvisition og skærpet fokus på ortodoksi for at forsøge at inddæmme truslerne mod den katolske kirke.

Ophavsmændene til *Malleus* var de to dominikanske munke Jacobus Sprenger og Henricus Institoris. Det er signifikant, at de to forfattere var dominikanske munke. Ordenen blev stiftet i det 13. århundrede med formålet at bekæmpe hedenskab og fremme kristen ortodoksi. Fordi ordenen skulle bekæmpe hedensk modstand mod kirken, så blev den dominikanske orden efterhånden optaget af teologiske studier, så de bedre kunne vurdere, hvornår noget var hedensk.¹⁷ Fordi *Malleus'* ophavsmænd virkede i en orden, som effektivt var med til at fastlægge, hvad der var kristent dogme, og hvad der var hedenskab, lånte det teologisk legitimitet til den udlægning af hekseri, som findes i *Malleus*. De dominikanske munkes teologiske træning betød samtidig, at det var naturligt for pavesædet at udpege dominikanske munke som inkvisitorer.

I kraft af dette er *Malleus* fra start udstyret med en solid mængde teologisk etos. Dens budskab er sanktioneret af pavesædet, hvorfor det nødvendigvis må tages seriøst, og dens instruktioner ført ud i livet. Det

¹⁶ Ibid. s. 3

¹⁷ Gennemgangen her er en parafrasering af ibid. s. 2

faktum bliver også understøttet af flere andre ting. For det første var Institoris støttet af to paver og blev udpeget som inkvisitor i tyske stifter.¹⁸ For det andet blev der ifm. udgivelsen af *Malleus* udstødt en pavelig bulle af Innocent VIII. Bullen skulle hjælpe Institoris og Sprenger med at overkomme potentiel modstand imod deres arbejde med *Malleus*, og indirekte fungerede bullen som pavelig legitimation af den teologiske udlægning, som præsenteres i *Malleus*. Dermed validerede pavesædet det skærpede syn på hekseri. Heksejagt blev kristent ortodoksi.¹⁹

Den kønnede heks

I sit kapitel om hekse og køn skriver Brian Levack, at der eksisterede et 'web of assumptions' knyttet til køn, som sammenfiltrede ideer om kvindelighed med hekseri.²⁰ En række ideer og antagelser om, hvad der udgør det kvindelige, er altså på spil i konfigurationen af heksen. Netop nogle af disse kan en diskursanalyse af *Malleus* spore. *Malleus* er hele vejen igennem struktureret som en række spørgsmål med tilhørende svar. Desuden falder manualen i tre dele. Den første beskæftiger sig med at fastslå, at hekse eksisterer. Del to handler om, hvordan man bør bekæmpe og beskytte sig imod heksekraft. Del tre er af mere instrumentel karakter ift. heksejagt, da den beskriver, hvordan man opdager, retsforfølger og afhører hekse. Jeg undersøger her afsnittet "There Follows a Discussion of Sorceresses Subordinating Themselves

¹⁸ Ibid. s. 4

¹⁹ Ibid. s. 8

²⁰ Levack: 2013, s. 456

to Demons (It is Question Six According to the Enumeration”, som findes i manualens første del.

At hekseri knyttes tæt sammen med kvinder i manualen antydes allerede i spørgsmålets titel, hvor den kvindelige form ”sorceresses” anvendes fremfor ”sorcerer”. Denne sammenhæng får flere og flere lag bare i løbet af dette ene spørgsmål. Ganske tidligt bliver det fx slået fast, at det brud på den sande tro, som hekseri udgør, oftest finder sted blandt kvinder.²¹ Hekseriet bliver set som ”the condition of women”, men det bliver også hurtigt klart, at det trods alt er en bestemt type kvinde, som bliver heks.²² Resten af kapitlet fremstår som en citatmosaik, der skal illustrere dels, at kvinder oftest er hekse og dels, hvilken type kvinde er heks.

Den første bevisførelse drejer sig om, hvordan særligt tre ting enten er ultimativt gode eller ultimativt onde: tungen, et kirkemedlem og kvinden.²³ Ift. kvinden citerer manualen den gammeltestamentelige, apokryfe Siraks bog: ”There is no head worse than the head of a snake, and there is no anger surpassing the anger of a woman. It will be more pleasing to stay with a lion and a serpent than to live with an evil woman”²⁴ Det er signifikant her, hvordan der sker en glidning fra den vrede kvinde til den onde kvinde.²⁵ Kvinden tegnes op som vred og

²¹ Mackay: 2009, s. 160

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. s. 162.

²⁵ Der er et interessant perspektiv i manualens fokus på følelser, som dette ikke er stedet at dykke ned i, men som jeg alligevel vil påpege. Her er fokus på kvinders vrede, senere bliver det på kvinders sorg og tårer, som vendes til krokodilletårer, der skal manipulere. Hvori ligger modstanden imod, at kvinder åbenlyst viser deres følelser? Hvilken social norm bryder det med? Hvad ville en affektteoretisk tilgang kunne kaste af sig?

derfor ond, og vi må forstå, at en vred kvinde ikke passer i en social matrix. Dette syn underbrygges med et citat fra Johannes Chrysostom, hvor kvinden i rækkefølge er venskabets fjende, en straf man ikke kan undslippe, et nødvendigt onde, en fristelse, en lokkende katastrofe, en fare i hjemmet, en skade, en naturondskab – det hele pakket i kønt papir.²⁶ Altså der er ganske kort ikke rigtig noget godt at sige om kvinden: Hun er i sin grundvold ond.

Selvom der findes eksempler på gode kvinder, er det gennemgående, at kvinder ledes til enhver form for forkerte handlinger og det på baggrund af deres grådighed.²⁷ Dermed føjes endnu et karakteristikum til den kvindelige heks: en uendelig griskhed. Endvidere knyttes ideen om grådighed til noget kødeligt. Heksen har en "carnal desire". Hermed introducerer *Malleus* også et aspekt omkring kødelighed, kropslighed og seksualitet ift. heksefiguren, som jeg skal vende tilbage til. Først er jeg interesseret i andre aspekter, som også bliver knyttet til kvinden. For det første er kvinder mere forfaldne til overtro end mænd. De tror gerne, men fordi djævlens virker ved at korrumpere tro, så er kvindernes parathed til at *overtro* noget, som leder dem i djævlens arme.²⁸ Implicit i denne vurdering læser jeg også en vurdering af kvindens generelle intellektuelle og mentale evner. Hun er ikke i stand til at gennemskue, hvad der er rigtig og forkert tro. Dette bliver også underbygget af grund nummer to, nemlig at kvinder har "a tendency of their temperament towards flux", hvilket leder til, at de fra naturens side er mere letpåvirkelige af fx åbenbaringer gennem

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. s. 163

²⁸ Ibid. s. 164

Witchcraft, bitchcraft

åndesyn og lignende – som djæveln formodentlig arbejder igennem.²⁹ Endelig er kvinder frygtelige sladrehanke, så de kan ikke lade være med at fortælle deres medkvinder om alt det, som de ved om trolddomskunst og andre onde ting.³⁰

Grundene til, hvorfor kvinder er mere sandsynlige til at udøve hekseri, stopper imidlertid ikke her:

[...] this kind of breach of Faith is found more often in women than in men [...] by tracing the reason more carefully beyond the foregoing we can say that since *they are defective in all the powers of both soul and body*, it is not surprising that they cause more sorcery to happen against those for whom they feel jealousy. For in terms of the intellect or the understanding of spiritual matters they seem to belong to a *different variety than men*.³¹ (Mine kursiveringer)

Der er flere ting her, som jeg gerne vil tage fat på. For det første ideen om, at der både ifm. den kvindelige krop og med den kvindelig sjæl opfattes en form for defekt. Kvinden er *damaged goods*. Der er ikke rigtig nogen måde at redde hende på. For det andet igen fokuset på kvindens intellekt. Hun er i modsætning til manden ikke i stand til at begribe spirituelle anliggender *rigtigt*. I manualens følgende udlægning sker der imidlertid en interessant omvending i argumentet, idet den naurlige forklaring på, hvorfor det forholder sig sådan med kvinder, bliver, at de er mere kødelige end mænd.³² Alle disse defekter, som kvinden er belastet med, kan forklares ved, hvordan gud skabte Eva (den oprindelige synderinde) fra Adams *fordrejede* ribben. Denne

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. s. 164-65

³² Ibid. s. 165

manipulation af ribbenet kommer til at fungere metaforisk, så kvinder bliver: "[...] twisted and contrary [...] to man. From this defect arises the fact that since she is an imperfect animal, she is always deceiving, and for this reason she is also deceptive."³³ Gennem den gammeltestamentelige fortælling skifter manualen altså fokus. Kvinden fremstilles først rigtignok som vred og ond, men også som overtroende og for dumme til at gennemskue djævlens ruser. Med fortællingen om kvinden som mandens fordrejede modpart karakteriseres hun nu som manipulerende og forregnende – kvinden og heksen er ude på at fordreje ret tro og de mænd, som praktiserer den rette tro.

Om kvinders "irregular desires and passions" pointerer manualen, hvordan "[...] they [kvinder] are unwilling to be ruled and instead follow their own urges without any piety!"³⁴ Det afslører, at den typiske kvinde, som blev set som heks, nok har været en, der ikke har ladet sig indordne i den eksisterende samfundsorden – eller i hvert fald har italesat den. Omvendt har den gode kvinde netop ladet sig styre. Den feministiske historiker Christina Lerner foreslår så meget i sit feministiske studie af hekseri fra 1981, hvor hun observerer, at de anklagede kvinder typisk var dem, som udfordrede det patriarkalske billede af den ideelle kvinde.³⁵ Det er med en vis påpasselighed, at jeg anvender patriarkat her, da ordet særligt opnår de konnotationer, som vi tillægger det ifm. 2. bølge feminismen. Jeg bruger her ordet i samme betydning som Lerner i hendes studie, dvs. "[...] as historically specific ways of organizing and exercising political, legal, social, economic,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. s. 167

³⁵ Levack: 2013, s. 453

and cultural power, which generally (but not exclusively) privilege men over women [...]”³⁶ Endvidere så er det i min forståelse også netop denne ide om heksen som kvinden, der ikke vil indordne sig, som gør heksen til så oplagt en figur for den feministiske aktivisme og historiografi.

Som en sidste facet af heksen, som hun fremstår i *Malleus* er det store fokus på hendes kødelige lyster, dvs. et aspekt omkring hendes seksualitet, som må have været truende. For det første er hendes stemme lokkende. Den er ligesom sirenernes, de historiske monstre, som lokker mænd i døden – og i denne sammenhæng ud i synden. Kvinder er også kimærer, som nok er smukke, men interaktionen med dem er destruktiv.³⁷ Det er tofold problematisk. For det første fordi kvinden er forfængelig og bruger tid på sig selv og sit udseende fremfor at gøre sig bedre overfor gud.³⁸ For det andet fordi kvinden og heksen antager en truende dimension, idet hun kan lede gudfrygtelige mænd på afveje med sin skønhed og sin utæmmede seksualitet.³⁹

Opsummerende om, hvordan *Malleus* fremstiller heksen og forklarer, hvorfor kvinder som oftest er hekse kan altså siges, at et net af antagelser om kvinde-kønnet, der gør dem mere modtagelige overfor djævlens påvirkninger, påvirker diskursen. Kvinder har let til vrede og ondskab. Hun er grådig, hvilket sammenkobles til et kødeligt/seksuelt element, som ultimativt leder til, at de lokker mænd i fordærv. Endelig har kvinder en kropslig men også åndelig defekt. De er intellektuelle inferiorer, og falder derfor nemmere væk fra den kristne ortodoksi.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Begge sammenligninger findes i Mackay: 2009 s. 169

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. s. 170

Otherring – sociale forklaringsmodeller

Diskursanalysen antyder momentært, at ideen om den kvindelige heks er struktureret af en vis social matrix, som bedst opsummeres med ideen om et patriarkat. Den teoretiske afgrænsning lagde vægt på, hvordan en polemisk diskurs er med til at skabe identitet. Antager vi, at heksefiguren er en del af en polemisk diskurs, hvilken social matrix skal udelukkelsen af heksen så understøtte?

Selvom fx historiker Richard Kieckhefer understreger, at heksejagtens sociale årsager er væsentlige, så italesætter han samtidig, at det ikke er lige til at undersøge en bred social kontekst. Mange hekseanklager kom fx fra en middel- eller underklasse, men kilder til perioden oprinder typisk fra eliten.⁴⁰ Om sociale praksisser skriver han fx: “The documents prior to 1500 [...] shed so little light that one can merely probe in the darkness, in hopes that the patterns discerned are more than creations of one’s own imagination and expectations.”⁴¹ Med det forbehold vil jeg alligevel prøve at ridse nogle sociale faktorer op. Desuden er det en pointe i sig selv, hvordan senere feministisk historiografi netop har båret en række fantasier og formodninger med sig.

Malleus understregede, hvordan nogle kvinder blev set som ultimativt gode og dydige modsat heksen. Men hvorledes bliver dette billede transformeret til det modsatte af fx den gode hustru? Willem de

⁴⁰ Kieckhefer Richard, *European Witch Trials: Their Foundations in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (London, 1976) s. 2-3.

⁴¹ Ibid. s. 93

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Blecourt skriver, at heksen bliver en art ”non-woman” forstået på den måde, at hun ikke falder ind under den sociale norm for femininitet.⁴² Maskuline og feminine domæner var adskilt fra hinanden og kønsnormerne rigide.⁴³ Patriarkatet beskyttede de kvinder, som holdt sig til normerne. Faldt hun imidlertid udenfor dem, var hun mere sandsynligt i fare for at blive anklaget som heks.⁴⁴

Et udvalg af artikler kredser om, hvad det så var for nogle normer. Optræder man tendenser ser det ud som om, at mange af normerne knytter sig til seksualitet, ægteskabsinstitution og kvindens plads i det lokale samfund – herunder hvor meget hun optræder i en offentlig sfære på egne vegne. Ægteskabet var generelt en beskyttende institution. Fx var enker i højere grad økonomisk afhængelige af et samfund, som måske af lavpraktiske økonomiske grunde kunne drage fordel af, hvis enken blev anklaget som heks.⁴⁵ En socioøkonomisk forklaringsmodel kunne altså bestå fx i kapitalismens fremgang i tidlig moderne tid, som restrukturerede præmoderne økonomiske og kommunale sammenhænge. Tidligere kristne normer for økonomisk velgørenhed i lokalsamfundet falder væk til fordel for individuel konkurrence på markedet.⁴⁶ Enker især var udsatte, fordi de med tabet af deres mænd

⁴² Blecourt, Willem de. “The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period”, *Gender & History* 12, nr. 2, 2000, s. 287-309, s. 293.

⁴³ Ibid. s. 298

⁴⁴ Ibid. s. 301

⁴⁵ Levack: 2013 s. 460

⁴⁶ Reed, Isaac “Why Salem Made Sense: Culture, Gender, and the Puritan Persecution of Witchcraft”, *Cultural Sociology* 1, nr. 2 (1. juli 2007), s. 209-234, s. 214. samt Levack: 2013, s. 460.

også mistede en væsentlig beskyttelse. Ægtemanden fungerede altså i et juridisk system som beskytter.⁴⁷

Når ægteskabsinstitutionen spillede denne rolle, kaster det samtidig lys over, hvorfor den *offentlige* kvinde oftere blev set som heks. Med offentlig mener jeg, at kvinden ikke var indfanget og styret af fx ægteskabet og holdt i en privat sfære. Hvis hun fulgte sine egne lyster, som *Malleus* harcelerede sådan imod, eller hvis hun blandede sig i offentligheden med sine meninger,⁴⁸ handlede økonomisk på egne vegne⁴⁹ eller udlevede en seksualitet⁵⁰, der ikke var sanktioneret via ægteskabet, så passede hun ikke ind i den sociale matrix' kønsnormer. På denne måde antager ideen om heksen en sociologisk, funktionalistisk forklaring, hvor hekseri forstås som en løsning på en samling af forskellige aspekter, som truede den etablerede, patriarkalske orden.⁵¹ Ved at udstøde de kvinder, som ikke levede op til kønsnormerne knyttet til femininitet, dvs. en othinging-proces, blev der skabt en polemisk diskurs om heksen/kvinden som den truende anden, som til gengæld bekræftede, hvilken identitet, der var den 'rigtige' og hvilke normer, som man burde leve efter. Kvinden, som enten ikke levede op til eller bevidst overskred kønsrollenormerne og -forventningerne i den sociale matrix udgjorde med Hanegraffs begreber en fare for samfundet. De stod i modsætning til det etablerede samfund, som til gengæld blev nødt til at sanktionere dem for at bevare

⁴⁷ Levack: 2013, s. 461 og Blecourt: 2000, s. 301

⁴⁸ Levack: 2013, s. 461

⁴⁹ Blecourt: 2000, s. 304

⁵⁰ Kieckhefer: 1976, s. 96

⁵¹ Reed: 2013, s. 215.

samfundsordenen. Derfor blev heksekraft udskilt som noget forbudt, og den sociale orden blev derved bekræftet og reproduceret.

W.I.T.C.H./bitch

Jeg bevæger mig nu til moderne tid og laver et nedslag i 1968 med fokus på to feministiske manifeste: *W.I.T.C.H. Manifesto* af W.I.T.C.H.-gruppen og *Bitch Manifesto* af akademiker og feminist Jo Freeman. Begge manifeste udspringer fra amerikansk andenbølgefeminisme, som ekspanderede voldsomt netop i '68.⁵² Samme udvikling skete i intellektuelle og akademiske kredse, hvor en række teoretiske tidsskrifter blev udgivet fx *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* redigeret af Freeman.⁵³

1960'erne var generelt en tid farvet af politiske bevægelser, *counter culture* og *the new left*. Særligt ungdomsoprøret kendetegner perioden. En hel generation af baby boomers var i 60'erne studerende, og de gjorde oprør mod en række ting, som bedst kan beskrives som det etablerede.⁵⁴ Hippiebevægelsen blomstrede og resulterede i *the summer of love* i 1967. *The Civil Rights Movement* i USA pågik henover årtiet, og udbredt både amerikansk og international modstand mod Vietnam-krigen fyldte mere og mere i samtiden. En almindelig opsummering i 1960'erne er altså, at perioden er karakteriseret ved

⁵² Bratich, Jack Z.. "U.S. Feminism, 1968 and Mediated Collective Intellectuality", *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 42, nr. 3 (1. juli 2018): 290–99, s. 292.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tamara Chaplin og Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, "Introduction: The global 1960s: Convention, contest, and counterculture", i *The Global 1960s* (Routledge, 2017), s. 1.

“[...] the power of the people to push back against government, against prejudice, and against military might in ways that appeared unstoppable.”⁵⁵

'68 er altså en tid, hvor feminismen som en del af en større *counter culture* ruller henover landet som netop en af disse bevægelser, der kæmpede imod etablisementet (patriarkatet), og som kæmpede imod latent uretfærdighed i samfundet. Og så er '68 også en tid, hvor heksefiguren vender tilbage som en aktivistisk figur. Begge manifeste er altså dokumenter fra en feministisk *counter culture*, der søgte at underminere patriarkatet og bekæmpe den uretfærdighed, som kvinder oplevede (og oplever) i samfundet.

W.I.T.C.H.-gruppen, hvor akronymet oprindeligt stod for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell,⁵⁶ blev grundlagt Halloween-aften i '68, som en kreativ millitant forgrening fra kvindefrigørelsesbevægelsen i Chicago. Gruppen tog heksekredstækningen til sig, men fungerede primært som et performancekollektiv med fokus på mediedækning og gadeprestandes fx deres forbandelse af sociologiafdelingen på University of Chicago, da denne ville fyre den feministiske professor Marlene Dixon.⁵⁷ Under aliaset Joreen udgiver Freeman *Bitch Manifesto*, som skulle genvinde ordet bitch fra en nedværdigelse til et *badge of honor*. Manifestet bruger ikke direkte heksefiguren. Jeg har

⁵⁵ Ibid. s. 2.

⁵⁶ Gruppen fik hurtigt lokale varianter over hele USA, som også typisk gav akronymet andet indhold fx Women Inspired to Commit Herstory, hvilket binder an til min diskussion af brugen af heksen som en del af en feministisk historiografi.

⁵⁷ Ibid. s. 294-95.

taget det med her, fordi manifestet bl.a. trækker på en række af de kønsnormer, som har trådt hele vejen tilbage fx til *Malleus*.

Manifesterne

”WITCH is an all-women Everything.”⁵⁸ Sådan starter det ganske korte W.I.T.C.H.-manifest. Tonen er dermed slået an. Heksen indeholder hele kvinder – også de ikke glittede elementer, som normalt ikke er socialt og kulturelt sanktioneret. Denne ide om heksen hviler i manifestet tydeligt på en bestemt konstruktion af den historiske heks. Fx hævder gruppen om WITCH: ”It’s an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerillas and resistance fighters against oppression – particularly the oppression of women – down through the ages.”⁵⁹ Gruppens brug af heksefiguren trækker altså på, at hekse i deres øjne altid har været dem, der har bekæmpet undertrykkelse aktivt. Deres version af heksen er ikke en, der fx har blik for socioøkonomiske grunde vedr. alderdom og at være enke. Heksen bliver i stedet en aktiv identitet, som altid har kæmpet imod, og i deres forståelse er det grunden til hekseafbrændingerne – gruppen køber i øvrigt ideen om ni millioner hekse brændt og brugte det som slogan i deres performances. Tallet kommer fra suffragetten Matilda Joselyn Gages artikel *Woman, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages* (1893). Artiklen er ikke faktisk korrekt, men er en del af fundamentet for, hvordan senere feministisk diskurs anvender heksefiguren.⁶⁰ Den feministiske historiografi omkring

⁵⁸ Fahs, Breanne (red.), *Burn it down! feminist manifestos for the revolution* (London ; New York: Verso, 2020) s. 465.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Levack: 2013, s. 450-51.

heksen i dette tilfælde er derfor snarere forankret i ønsket om at skabe et bestemt historisk billede, som understøtter det politiske formål, som W.I.T.C.H. arbejdede for.

Ser man på karakteristikken af heksen, så tildeles heksen i manifestet en række attributter, som bl.a. *Malleus* definerede som slette. Her foretager gruppen en subversiv omvendelse af diskursen, så netop disse karakteristika bliver positive. Det gælder fx at være "courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary."⁶¹ Hvis man ihukommer, hvordan heksen i *Malleus* netop var slet, fordi hun ikke var til at styre, havde for mange ideer selv, ikke passede ind i den accepterede kønsrollenorm og var (mere) seksuelt frigjorte, så kommer det hos W.I.T.C.H. til at være de bedste træk ved kvinden.

Heksen er heller ikke en begrænset identitet: hvis man genkender heksen i sig selv, så er man en heks, og man laver sine egne regler for, hvordan man udtrykker sin heks. Gruppen foreslår, at man kan danne heksekredse og praktisere sammen – tretten er et godt antal.⁶² Kredsen eller kollektivet antager her også politisk potens: "Your power comes from your own self as a woman, and it is activated by working in concert with your sisters. The power of the Coven is more than the sum of its individual members, because it is *together*."⁶³ Heksekredsen bliver altså et sted, hvor man kan gange sin egen kraft op – fællesskabet bliver vigtigt. Vi husker, hvordan *Malleus* så det som en dårlig ting hos kvinder, at de ikke kunne holde mund med onde ting, som de havde lært af djævelen og af andre hekse. På den måde spredte hekseriet sig.

⁶¹ Fahs: 2020, s. 465.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. 466.

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Denne proces bliver i 60ernes feministiske bølge vendt til noget positivt. Forandringen skete netop i grupper, læsekredse, debاتمøder, konferencer osv. Der skete en kollektiv vidensoverførsel og -udvikling, som ansporede bevægelsen. Myriaden af feministiske grupper bidrog alle til en "mediated collective intelligence" dvs. en decentraliseret vidensproduktion, som de forskellige grupper udviklede i fællesskab.⁶⁴

Et sidste aspekt af dette manifest, som jeg vil fremhæve er, at der også tegnes en modstander op: "Whatever is repressive, solely male-oriented, greedy, patriarchal, authoritarian – those are your targets."⁶⁵ Gruppen tegner et fjendebillede af patriarkatet op, og det er netop det, som heksen har ansvar for at bekæmpe. Patriarkatet står for skud, men det gør fx også klasseskellene eller den kapitalistiske økonomi, som de selv kæmpede imod i '68 ved at nedkalde en forbandelse over børsen i New York.⁶⁶ Det er altså hele den sociale og kulturelle formation, som WITCH skal bekæmpe, og denne formation har netop rod i "[...] the Imperialist Phallic Society [that] took over and began to destroy nature and human society."⁶⁷ Hele samfundsformation er ødelæggende og undertrykkende, og heksen er et aktivistisk værktøj til at kæmpe imod.

Før jeg vender tilbage til heksen som aktivistisk værktøj eller figur, vender jeg ganske kort *Bitch Manifesto*. Manifestet her nævner ikke heksefiguren, men arbejder på samme måde med bitch-figuren. Det første træk ved en bitch er, at hun er aggressiv og derfor ufeminin. Hun

⁶⁴ Bratich: 2018, s. 291-92.

⁶⁵ Fahs: 2020, s. 466.

⁶⁶ Opstrup, Kasper "Den utæmmelige kraft: Magisk aktivisme som reaktion på det reaktionæres genkomst", *K&K - Kultur og Klasse* 46, nr. 126 (27. december 2018): 147-76, s. 164.

⁶⁷ Fahs: 2020, s. 465.

er aldrig en "true woman".⁶⁸ I det ligger der, at et bestemt kønsrollemønster eksisterer, og det lever bitchen ligesom heksen ikke op til. Eller rettere de nægter at leve op til det. At bitchen ikke er en rigtig kvinde ekkoer Blecourts argument om, at heksen er en non-woman, fordi hun ikke passer ind i sociale normer for femininitet. Bitchen har desuden en række personlighedstræk, som ligner heksens. Hun er blandt en række andre ting selvhævdende, dominerende, højlydt, selvstændig, ambitiøs, hun gør krav på og er truende.⁶⁹ Bitchen er altså også en, som ikke lader sig styre af andre. Joreen skriver, at: "Like the term 'nigger', 'bitch' serves the social function of isolating and discrediting a class of people who do not conform to the socially accepted patterns of behavior."⁷⁰ Dvs. der er ikke plads til bitchen i den eksisterende sociale formation. Men når ens politiske formål er netop at vælte samme system, så bliver alt, hvad der ikke passer og overskrider grænser, til noget positivt. Det gælder for heksen, og det gælder for bitchen. Bitchen er en trussel ift. det sociale system, og truslen ender med at stille spørgsmål ved systemet.⁷¹ Bitchen afvises derfor som en freak.⁷² Centralt i Joreens positive valorisering af bitchen er netop hendes grænseoverskridende potentiale: "Those who violate the limits extend them; or cause the system to break."⁷³ På denne måde

⁶⁸ Ibid. s. 467.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 468.

⁷¹ Ibid. s. 469.

⁷² Jeg ser dette som et tydeligt eksempel på brug af en polemisk diskurs, hvor bitchen fungerer som et fjendebillede og desarmes via ridicule.

⁷³ Ibid. s. 474.

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står bitchen ligesom heksen tilbage som en aktivistisk figur med revolutionært potentiale.

Untamed: Heksen som aktivistisk figur

Knopskydningerne af feministiske bevægelser i '68 arbejder altså bl.a. med heksefiguren, fordi den historiske konstruktion af heksen hviler på netop det kønsrollemønster og det sociale og kulturelle system, som den feministiske bevægelse revolutionerede imod. At tage heksefiguren til sig var at identificere sig med alle de træk, som tidligere var blevet fordømt at besidde som kvinde.⁷⁴ Heksen bliver derved en måde at opnå "self-impowerment" samt at bygge et autonomt selvbillede op, hvor man har retten til at bestemme i eget liv.⁷⁵ Brugen af heksefiguren bliver altså instrumentaliseret i en række subversive skridt. For det første bruger feminismen den historiske heksejagt – eller i hvert fald deres udgave af en historiografi omhandlende heksejagt – til at etablere et fjendebillede af det patriarkalske samfund, som ultimativt skal bekæmpes. For det andet konstruerer den feministiske historiografi samtidig et billede af de historiske hekse som dem, der altid har bekæmpet et patriarkat – det er derfor, at de blev brændemærket som hekse i det hele taget. At tage heksefiguren på sig er altså i en feministisk selvforståelse at fortsætte en tradition af revolution mod sociale konfigurationer, mod patriarkatet.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Berger, Helen A, *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, s. 57.

⁷⁵ Rountree, Kathryn "The New Witch of the West: Feminists Reclaim the Crone", *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, nr. 4 (Spring 1997): 211-229, s. 212.

⁷⁶ Ibid. s. 216.

Når bl.a. W.I.T.C.H. i '68 anvender heksefiguren, så er det vigtigt at holde sig for øje, at de ikke gør det som en del af en spirituel reclaiming af heksen, som andre i samme periode gjorde, og som jeg skal vende tilbage til senere. Det er snarere en politisk instrumentalisering af en bestemt historiografi vedr. patriarkalske samfundsstrukturer og heksefiguren, som passer med det feministiske projekt. Fx skriver Kathryn Rountree, som bl.a. har undersøgt hekse- og gudindefiguren i New Zealand: "[...] in their [feministernes] determination to force a re-evaluation of the historical "witches" and as a sign of identification with these women, they adopt or reclaim the label "witch" as a potent symbolic gesture."⁷⁷ Herved er jeg tilbage til Stuckrads understregning af, at historiografiske diskurser altid er til samtiden. De er med i en politisk indsats for at bygge en feministisk bevidsthed op om *samtidige* politiske debatter.

Det er nogle af de samme idekonstruktioner, som Kasper Opstrup diskuterer ud fra, når han diskuterer magisk aktivisme som en reaktion på det reaktionæres genkomst. En del af denne magiske aktivisme er netop politiseret heksekraft.⁷⁸ Fx skriver Opstrup:

Hvad jeg finder mest interessant i det magiske er, at det altid er spekulativt og eksperimentelt, to størrelser jeg opfatter som magiens grundtræk. Som sådan er magi en spekulativ teknik baseret på fiasko, der metodisk benytter sig af at sidestille usammenhængende elementer for at se, hvad der sker. [...] det er en metode til at udfordre konsensusvirkeligheden og de dominante subjektivitetsregimer.

⁷⁷ Ibid. s. 225.

⁷⁸ Opstrup: 2018, s. 153.

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Det er altid en form for fikcionalisering og er på den måde en del af fiktionens verdensskabende potentiale.⁷⁹

Der er flere aspekter, som jeg gerne vil kommentere her. For det første det eksperimentelle ved den magiske praksis, som i Opstrups forståelse dels problematiserer en *konsensusvirkelighed* og dels de gængse *subjektivitetsregimer*. Det er netop det, som de feministiske bevægelser bruger heksen til. Når de kaster et kritisk lys på heksens historie og de samfundskonstruktioner, som har muliggjort og sanktioneret en heksejagt på baggrund af normative sociale forventninger fx til kønsroller, så er det samtidig en måde at udfordre en konsensusvirkelighed – patriarkatet med feminismens terminologi – som, om end i andre klæder, stadig gør sig gældende i gruppernes egen samtid. Denne konsensusvirkelighed hviler på ideen om den 'rigtige' og den 'forkerte' kvinde, dvs. konsensusen bunder også i dominerende subjektivitetsregimer. Magisk tænkning er altså både at underminere det eksisterende, men det har også et verdensskabende potentiale. Magi er at fremmane energi og rette den mod et bestemt mål. Samme proces finder man i forbindelse med politiske protester og demonstrationer. Derved bliver magi og i forlængelse deraf heksefiguren til et aktivistisk redskab.⁸⁰

Før jeg går videre til Olga Ravns arbejde med hekse, vil jeg endnu engang se på, hvordan der i forbindelse med '68-feminismens brug af heksefiguren er polemiske diskurser ude at gå. Selvfølgelig skete der ikke hekseafbrændinger efter W.I.T.C.H.'s performances. Omverdenen

⁷⁹ Ibid. s. 155. Magi har en lang og differentieret begrebshistorie og etymologi bag sig, som jeg ikke går nærmere ind i her. Ønsker man det kan man fx starte med Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 s. 164-77.

⁸⁰ Opstrup: 2018, s. 155.

forsøgte i stedet at inddæmme den feministiske trussel mod den patriarkalske samfundsorden ved at latterliggøre dem. Tænk fx bare på, hvordan der diskursivt ikke er langt imellem ordet feminist og ordene hystade, skrigeballong eller lignende. Ved at fremstille feministerne hysteriske forsøgte man at gøre deres budskab til noget, man ikke kunne tage seriøst. Det er altså en modifikation af Hanegraffs ide om latterliggørelse som inddæmningsstrategi.

Imidlertid tegner der sig her en ny polemisk diskurs: diskursen imod patriarkatet. For mig at se er det en del af feminismens subversive omvendelse af diskursen, at de ikke kun tager den tidligere polemiske diskurs' attributter på sig, men at de selv bliver skaberne og afsenderne af en ny imod patriarkatet. Og her er der ikke kun tale om en polemisk diskurs, hvor latterliggørelse er inddæmningsstrategien. Det er en polemisk diskurs, der søger at forbyde alt patriarkalsk. Jeg tillader mig at citere en sætning fra W.I.T.C.H.-manifestet endnu engang: "Whatever is repressive, solely male-oriented, greedy, patriarchal, authoritarian – those are your targets."⁸¹ Patriarkatet skal altså bekæmpes, og der sættes et kæmpe bulls eye på ryggen af alt, der kan sættes i relation til det. Inddæmningsstrategien overfor patriarkatet bliver altså et forbud imod alt det, som tidligere kvindegenerationer har lidt under.

Ravn og heksene

Det er bl.a. denne feministiske konfiguration af heksen, som har haft betydning for forfatter Olga Ravns arbejde med hekse, som også

⁸¹ Fahs: 2020, s. 466

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markerer det sidste nedslag i min ivesigt her. Ravn er dansk, prisbelønnet forfatter, som fx har skrevet den kritiske arbejdspladsroman *De ansatte* (2018) og den feministiske bog *Mit arbejde* (2020) om moderskab. Heksefiguren dukker op over årene i Ravns arbejde fx i forbindelse med Hekseskolen, som desværre ikke findes længere. Skolen var et aktivistisk kunstnerkollektiv, der fx producerede merchandise med sloganerne: ”Kollektivism, feminism, irrationalism og aktivism – under ét: revolution.” og ”Rødder i det radikale, for ikke at sige ultra-feministiske miljø hinsidas.”⁸² Hekseskolen arbejdede bevidst med det aktivistiske og foretog et undergravende arbejde i forhold til den etablerede sociale orden, hvilket fx kan ses i forbindelse med den mulige skolelockout i 2018, hvor de besluttede at oprette en ”radikaliseringsskole” til danske unge, hvis de blev sendt hjem fra skole.⁸³

Det er også ideen om heksen som en politisk og aktivistisk figur, som ligger til grund for, at Ravn siden barnsben har følt en forbindelse med heksefiguren. I første afsnit af podcastserien *Onde Anna*, som handler om hekseprocessen Køge Huskors i starten af 1600-tallet fortæller hun:

Jeg tror altid, jeg er blevet kaldt for heks. [...] fordi at jeg tit kom til at opføre mig på en måde, som måske ikke var hensigtsmæssig i andres øjne. [...] jeg har altid været sådan haft ret meget temperament. Og jeg har også, øh, altid været sådan, øh, haft mange problemer med autoriteter. Og jeg tror, at jeg har haft en opfattelse, [...] at jeg sådan

⁸² Begge er mere eller mindre ironisk citerede fra Marianne Stidsen. Se begge på Olga Ravns Instragram d. 15. november 2019.

⁸³ ”Hekseskolen ofrer gerne hele regeringen: »Så snart Sophie Løhde varslede lockout, vidste vi med det samme, at nu var det på med de spidse hatte«”, Politiken, 24. marts 2018.

helt intuitivt forstod, der er altså noget uretfærdigt på spil her, når jeg bliver kaldt for heks. Og det har jo gjort mig meget vred. Egentlig. Og jeg har følt mig ufri. Og jeg har selvfølgelig også kæmpet super meget med alt den skam, det har medført, også inden i mig, og tvivl man kan få, om opfører jeg mig nu ordentligt, og er det okay, at jeg gerne vil det her, og det her synes jeg er ubehageligt men det kan jeg måske ikke stole på og alt sådan noget. Og der har ligesom heksefiguren hele tiden været noget, jeg er vendt tilbage til som en slags støtte.⁸⁴

Ravn er altså også som barn blevet kaldt en heks og valget af netop det øgenavn har at gøre med, at hun fra en tidlig alder ikke har opført sig på en socialt sanktioneret måde. Ravns første møde med hekseidentiteten har handlet om, at den kunne bruges til at kontrollere opførsel. Dertil kommer Ravns temperament og hendes problemer med autoritetsfigurer. Det er igen en opmærksomhed på ikke at ville modellere sig selv, så man passer ind i en defineret kønsrolle. Når Ravn går videre til at fortælle om, hvordan hun har følt en uretfærdighed på spil i forbindelse med at blive kaldt heks, og at det på en måde har fået hende til at føle sig ufri, så har det dobbelt betydning. På den ene side har det at blive udskammet med heksefiguren fået hende til at få øje på disse strukturer, som har gjort, at hun har følt sig bundet på den ene eller anden måde. På den anden side har hekseidentitet, netop fordi den for Ravn har fungeret som en linse til at finde de punkter, hvor nogle har syntes, at hun skulle opføre sig på en bestemt måde, også været en metode til at identificere, hvor hun kunne gøre modstand. På den måde er heksen en følgesvend i et pågående aktivistisk arbejde.

⁸⁴ Ravn, Olga og Storm, Ruth, "Onde Anna | 1:5 - Du har satan hos dig i din seng | DR LYD". Podcasten kan lyttes i DR Lyd.

Rituel modstand

Ravn har også siden taget hekseidentiteten på sig og har nu en feministisk heksehistoriografi som en væsentlig del af sin praksis. Hun er meget optaget af Køge Huskors-sagen og har siden, hun opdagede sagen, ud over podcasten *Onde Anna*, også arbejdet med at lave et mindesmærke til de hekse, som blev brændt i forbindelse med hekseprocessen. Det har hun gjort igennem en række happenings ved bækken i Køge, hvor heksekredsen efter sigende skulle have mødtes tilbage i 1600-tallet. Hun har lavet en bog med tekster, som lige nu kan skaffes på Køge Kunstmuseum (KØS) og seneste skud på stammen er udstillingen *Et henvørt år* på KØS, som også har sine rødder omkring bækken.

Jeg mener her rødder i helt bogstavelig forstand. Ravn har i løbet af de sidste år beskæftiget sig meget med plantefarvning, planteblæk og -pigmenter. I bedste heksestil har hun i løbet af et år samlet planter ved bækken, forarbejdet dem til blæk og pigmenter og farvet stof, så samlingen fremstår som en art heksekatalog over et område, som havde betydning for Køge-heksene. På hendes Instagram har hun jævnligt delt ud af denne proces, og man kan fx se en del af forarbejdet til udstillingen i hendes opslag fra d. 21. marts 2022. Sideløbende med dette arbejde har Ravn arbejdet videre med retsdokumenterne fra hekseprocessen. Udstilling og gennemskrivning af retsdokumenterne bliver samlet til et mindesmærke for de trolddomsanklagede og udgivet i et samarbejde mellem Ravn og KØS i 2023.⁸⁵ Det taler tydeligt ind i en bestemt historiografi at ville skabe et mindesmærke over Køge-

⁸⁵ "KØS - ET HENFØRT ÅR - et udstillingsrum af Olga Ravn", set 20. maj 2022.

heksene. Hun så at sige rager dem ud af bålet igen og giver dem stemme.

Denne del af Ravns arbejde peger ind i, at der i hendes konfiguration af heksefiguren er noget lidt andet på spil end bare den politiske og aktivistiske instrumentalisering, som tidligere har været og stadig er i feministisk diskurs. Selvom den klangbund findes hos Ravn, så arbejder hun også med heksen på en mere spirituel måde. Wendy Griffin skriver om mere nutidige, feministiske spiritualiteter, at de dels ofte har en feminin forståelse af det guddommelige, og dels insisterer på at lytte til kvinders stemmer og høre deres historie. Anskuet på denne måde kan Ravns arbejde forstås som et feministisk spirituelt og historiografisk arbejde, der skal give Køge-heksene deres stemme og historie tilbage.⁸⁶

Griffin fortsætter: "[...] they [feministiske spirituelle retninger] share women's empowerment as a major goal and the use of language, symbols, ritual, and what could be identified as ritual magic."⁸⁷ Jeg vil gerne hive fat i ritualen som en måde at udøve modstand på, der også taler ind i en historiografisk dimension. En del af Ravns arbejde med at mindes Køge-heksene har nemlig været et selvopfundet minderitual, som hun gennemgår i første afsnit af *Onde Anna*. Efter at have lagt kapsler med humle og baldrian ved bækken i Køge, en for hver dømt kvinde, påkalder hun sig deres navne, et for et, for at give dem deres historie tilbage: "Nogen gange så tænker jeg bare, at det her med at tale om, hvad der er den rigtige udgave af historien, altså det her med at

⁸⁶ Berger: 2011, s. 55.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Ravn er selvfølgelig ikke den første, der arbejder spirituelt med en feministisk heksepraksis. Se fx Griffins gennemgang af amerikansk Dianic Craft i ibid. s. 61 ff. eller Rountree: 1997 om gudindekultur i New Zealand.

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forsøge at huske noget, det er også at give det glimt af retfærdighed [...]” og lidt senere:

Og jeg føler, at der er en direkte sammenhæng mellem mine personlige oplevelser og de historiske begivenheder. Og hvis man kigger væk, så gentager man på en eller anden måde bare historien om, at det var nogen nærmest eventyrvæsener, der blev brændt, og det er jo ret voldsomt det, der egentlig er foregået. Og jeg tror at, at jeg føler, at min individuelle frihed er bundet op på at forstå den her historiske periode.⁸⁸

For Ravn handler arbejdet med heksefiguren altså ikke kun om, at den passer godt i en politisk, feministisk diskurs – altså en i samtiden forankret instrumentalisering af den historiske heksefigur. For Ravn handler det også om de historiske hekse og om de bånd, som løber i mellem dem og hende selv. Gennem ritualer, udstillinger, mindehøjtidelighedsperformances og kommende hybridværker bedriver Ravn herstory, eller hun giver heksene deres historie tilbage og ser på, hvordan de kan berige hendes eget liv. Udstillingen på KØS arbejder med en cyklisk tidsforståelse – alle planter kommer igen om et år –, ligesom at Ravn med sit arbejde med Køge Huskors cirkulerer de historiske hekses erfaringer igennem vores samtid.

På tværs af århundrederne

En stærk drivkraft bag denne artikel har været at illustrere, hvordan heksen og de frygtelige hekseprocesser ikke kun er noget, som vi har

⁸⁸ Begge citater: “Onde Anna | 1:5 - Du har satan hos dig i din seng | DR LYD”.

efterladt i fortiden, og som kun spiller en rolle i samtiden i populærkulturen – tv-serier og film, bøger, kostumer og lignende. Heksen er af dominerende polemiske diskurser blevet forsøgt desarmeret ved den strategi, som Hanegraff kalder *ridicule* og forskellige modifikationer deraf. Se heksen, det gamle, måske småsenile kvindemenneske. Hun er da ikke farlig. På den måde bliver heksens oprør mod det bestående gjort ligeegyldigt.

Men heksen *er* et oprør mod det bestående, mod herskende diskurser og kønsnormer, mod en social matrix, som undertrykker kvinden og indskrænker hendes muligheder for at leve et frit liv. Det er netop det, som artiklens sammenlignende diskursanalyse har forsøgt at vise. Allerede i begyndelsen af den europæiske *witch craze* bliver heksen diskursivt fx i heksejagtmanualer konstrueret som en slet eller dårlig kvinde, og det vigtigste argument i denne konstruktion er, at heksen ikke lever op til de sociale forventninger, der knyttede sig til kvindekønnet. Der er jo ikke nogen kvinder tilbage under heksejagterne, eller det tror jeg i hvert fald ikke, som hverken har fløjet på koste, taget potensen fra mænd, forvandlet sig til dyr eller spist babyer. Men dengang var det nødvendigt at fortælle en sådan historie om kvinderne. Ikke fordi de var til fare, sådan som de ret outrerede eksempler her antyder, men fordi de troede en bestående social orden. Faren havde politisk karakter, idet heksene havde et subversivt potentiale. Derfor fungerede den polemiske diskurs imod kvinderne ved at forbyde (*prohibition* i Hanegraffs skema) for at inddæmme heksens/kvindens politiske trussel imod det bestående.

Allerede i de tidlige år af den europæiske *witch craze* fandtes altså kimen til, hvordan heksefiguren senere er blevet politisk instrumentaliseret i forskellige kontekster. Hverken '68-feminismens

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brug af heksefiguren til deres egen politiske praksis eller Ravens dels politiske og dels spirituelle adoption af heksen ville stå nær så stærkt, hvis ikke netop fordi de låner datidens konstruktion af heksen og gør det skrækkelige ved den historiske heks til det bedste ved dem selv. Eller måske rettere: de fortsætter et politisk undergravende arbejde imod undertrykkelse, der altid har simret under konstruktionen også af den historiske heks.

Jeg indledte med at diskutere mine valg af historiske nedslag, og jeg vil gerne knytte nogle flere ord til det. Den sammenlignende diskursanalyse har haft til mål at vise, hvordan de diskursive konstruktioner af heksen under heksejagterne kaster lange skygger ned gennem historien og den efterfølgende instrumentaliserede brug af heksen. For at belyse sammenhængen endnu tydeligere ligger der et vægtigt arbejde i at udfylde de såkaldte huller imellem de valgte nedslag her. Det ville fx være interessant at dykke mere ned i, hvordan suffragetterne brugte heksefiguren i deres feministiske praksis. Der ligger også et arbejde i at spore, hvornår den polemiske diskurs skiftede strategi fra at inddæmme faren omkring den farlige kvinde/heks vha. *prohibition* til i stedet at anvende *ridicule*. Og endeligt er der i vores samtid flere og flere kulturelle objekter, som arbejder med heksefiguren på en seriøs måde og ikke kun som et farverigt indslag i diverse kulturelle udtryk. Fx fortsætter Ravn sit arbejde og er i gang med at skrive en forestilling om danske hekseprocesser til Store Scene på Det Kongelige Teater. Urforestillingen er planlagt til april 2023. Romaner, der arbejder med heksen som seriøs figur bliver også flere. Fx udgav den danske forfatter Nanna Goul *Heksens alfabet* tidligere i år, hvor kollektivet spiller en væsentlig rolle. Der ligger altså stadig et arbejde i at tage heksen i hånden og følge hende ned gennem historien.

Konklusion

Artiklen har forsøgt at vise, hvordan feministisk diskurs og historiografi har arbejdet med heksefiguren via en subversiv omvendning af tidligere sociale normer og kulturelle konfigurationer. Analysen af *Malleus Maleficarum* viser, at der ligger en række kønsnormative opfattelser til grund for, at heksen bliver konstrueret som en kvinde. Det gælder fx hendes intellektuelle evner, faktummet at de fleste kvinder er latent onde, men vigtigst viser analysen, at en række forventninger til kvindens sociale rolle også lægger til grund for, hvem der bliver opfattet som en heks. Den gode kvinde er hende, som lever op til et historisk patriarkats kønsnormer, mens den slette kvinde, heksen, er hende, som ikke lever op til disse.

Netop faktummet at heksen er blevet konstrueret på denne måde fx i en manual som *Malleus Maleficarum* gør det oplagt for senere feministisk diskurs at tage heksefiguren op igen. Fx W.I.T.C.H. og til en vis grad også Bitch arbejder subversivt med de kønsnormer, som er etableret i et patriarkalsk samfund. Hvis heksen er defineret ved at være en, som nægter at lade sig indordne i en voldelig social orden, og man selv ønsker at gøre op med samme sociale orden, så bliver heksen den perfekte modstandsfigur. Bevægelsen tager alle de attributter på sig, som tidligere har været anset som onde eller dårlige, og de kommer til at fungere som *badges of honor* i den feministiske politiske kamp. På den måde er en del af det feministiske arbejde også at bedrive historiografi omkring heksen.

Endelig viser undersøgelsen her, hvordan de samme mekanismer er på spil i forbindelse med Olga Ravns arbejde med hekse. Hun bruger også heksen som en politisk og aktivistisk figur, men hun går skridtet

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længere ind i en feministisk spiritualitet, hvor heksen ikke bare er politisk instrumentaliseret men meget mere. Ravn arbejder med en cyklisk tidsforståelse og ritualer, som mindes de hekse, der blev offer for historiske hekseprocesser. Her findes der altså også et historiografisk element: Ravn bedriver herstory, når hun kontinuerligt arbejder med at give Køge-heksene deres stemme tilbage, hvilket endeligt også kan ses i lyset af en feministisk spiritualitet centreret om heksefiguren.

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Religionsbricolage i Dan Browns
bestsellerroman

Meike Sørensen

Indledning

Året var 2003. Den tidligere engelsklærer Dan Brown havde for længst sagt sit job op, for at blive fuldtidsforfatter. Og selvom hans bøger *Digital Fortress*, *Deception Point* og *Angels & Demons*, havde solgt fint, kunne disse bøgers succes ikke overgå den bølge af interesse, der skyllede ind over Browns fjerde udgivelse, som udkom det år. Det var nemlig *The Da Vinci Code*.¹ Eller *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, som udgivelsen hedder på dansk. Allerede indenfor de første tre år, havde udgivelsen solgt 60,5 millioner kopier, ifølge *The Wall Street Journal*.

¹ Henninger, Daniel, "Holy Sepulchre! 60 Million Buy 'The Da Vinci Code'", *The Wall Street Journal*, 19. maj 2006, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB114799749952457278>

Romanen, som i grove træk handler om den amerikanske symbolforsker Robert Langdon og den franske kryptograf Sophie Neveus vilde eventyr, for at løse gåden om Den Hellige Gral og Jesu efterkommere, affødte ikke bare massevis af solgte bøger. Den resulterede faktisk i større åndelig interesse. I hvert fald kunne foreninger, såsom f. eks. Frimurerne, melde om et øget medlemstal i kølvandet på udgivelsen.² En undersøgelse blandt danskere, der havde læst Dan Browns romaner, gennemført af professor ved Københavns Universitet, Stig Hjarvard, viste ligeså, at *Da Vinci Mysteriet* og *Engle & Dæmoner*, havde øget interessen for religion hos 53,5 procent af de adspurgte.³

Herpå fristes jeg til at stille et ligefremt spørgsmål: Hvad er det, der er så særligt ved *Da Vinci Mysteriet*? Hvorfor ramte lige præcis den bog så meget plet, at læserne lod sig engagere med de temaer, der behandles i romanen også *efter*, at de havde lagt bogen fra sig? Det er nogle af de spørgsmål, som har motiveret mig til arbejdet med denne roman, og til undersøgelsen, som jeg vil foretage i nærværende artikel.

Da jeg valgte at skrive om *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, havde jeg allerede stødt på titlen i flere undersøgelser af esoterisme i populær kultur. Og flere af de teoretikere, som jeg vil konsultere i denne artikel, nævner også *Da Vinci Mysteriet* som et mønstereksempel på religionsudtryk i moderne, populærkulturelle produktioner. Men i denne artikel vil min

² Miller, Laura, "The Last Word: The Da Vinci Con", *The New York Times*, 22. februar 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/22/books/the-last-word-the-da-vinci-con.html>

³ Revsbech, Tomas, "Dan Brown styrker kirke og religion", *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 3. oktober 2008, <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kirke-tro/dan-brown-styrker-kirke-og-religion>

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indfaldsvinkel være lidt anderledes, end hos de forskere, der mestendels lader til at have set på de overordnede temaer, der er på spil i romanen. I denne artikel vil jeg undersøge, hvad der foregår i romanens univers. Det, der sker i teksten. Det er nemlig min tese, at *Da Vinci Mysteriet* fremstiller esoteriske (og i det hele taget religiøse) aspekter på en særlig måde i tekstuniverset, som gør disse mere inddragende eller appellerende. Derfor lyder min problemformulering, således:

Hvordan er de esoteriske og religiøse elementer til stede i Dan Browns *Da Vinci Mysteriet* og hvordan positionerer Browns fremstilling disse elementer i fortællingen?

Denne problemformulering vil jeg svare på, med følgende fremgangsmåde: Begyndelsesvist vil jeg redegøre for handlingen i *Da Vinci Mysteriet* og kritikken der har været af de såkaldte 'sandheder', der beskrives i romanen. Jeg vil også, for overblikkets skyld, redegøre for hvordan jeg forstår begrebet 'esoterisk', samt for de centrale tekster og begreber, jeg kommer til at trække på i artiklen. Dette værende: Udvalgte pointer fra Tim Rudbøgs *The Academic Study of Western Esotericism: Early Developments and Related Fields*, Wouter J. Hanegraffs tekst "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", Stig Hjarvards begreb 'Banal Religion' og Christopher Partridge's begreb 'Occulture'.

På denne baggrund vil jeg nærme mig det første spørgsmål i problemformuleringen. Her vil jeg først kortlægge de esoteriske elementer i teksten, ved at trække på teorien fra Rudbøgs bog. Dernæst vil jeg med Hjarvards 'banal religion'-begreb, se på, hvordan

yderligere religiøse elementer er flettet ind i romanuniverset, samt hvordan fremstillingen af disse, kan betegnes som 'banal religion'.

Efterfølgende vil jeg tale de resultater, jeg har fået op ad Christopher Partridges 'occulture' begreb og inddrage Wouter J. Hanegraffs perspektiver fra teksten om "forbidden knowledge". Dette med henblik på at besvare den anden del af problemformuleringen. I dette afsnit vil jeg også kort inddrage den canadiske kultursociolog Sarah Thorntons begreb 'subcultural capital' og elementer fra den amerikanske professor Tammy M. Kennedys artikel "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating "The Da Vinci Code".

Redegørelse

For at gøre det lettere at holde overblikket i denne artikel, vil jeg, som før nævnt, begyndelsesvist give en intro til de centrale begreber, kontekster og fænomener, som min undersøgelse kommer til at dreje sig om. Herunder skrives derfor lidt om bogen, forståelsen af det esoteriske og de centrale forskere, som jeg vil trække på.

Dan Browns *Da Vinci Mysteriet*: Debat og handlingsforløb

FAKTA: Priory of Sion – en hemmelig, europæisk loge etableret i 1099 – eksisterer i virkeligheden. På Nationalbiblioteket i Paris fandt man i 1975 nogle dokumenter, kendt under navnet Les Dossiers Secret, i hvilke en række medlemmer af Sion-logen nævnes ved navn, bl.a. Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo og Leonardo da Vinci. [. . .] Alle

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beskrivelser af kunstværker, arkitektur, dokumenter og hemmelige ritualer i denne roman er korrekte.⁴

Sådan starter læserens rejse ind i Dan Browns bestseller *Da Vinci Mysteriet*. Med et fakta-afsnit der erklærer, at læseren nu kan se frem til en gennemgang af en ukendt, men ikke desto mindre sand, viden. En skjult, men ægte, viden, som er handlingens hovedspor og som giver roman et strejf af autenticitet. Men hurtigt efter romanens udgivelse, opstod der debat om de 'sandheder', Dan Brown fremhæver i handlingen.⁵ For det, der står anført som sandt, er ikke sandheden. Det vil jeg nu komme lidt nærmere.

Dan Brown bygger meget af mysteriet i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, på 'fakta' fremført i 80'erne bogen *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* af Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, der af *New York Times* beskrives som et "all-time great work of pop pseudohistory."⁶ *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* beskrives således, da den fremlægger en tese om The Priory of Sions ægthed, bl.a. dokumenteret ved de ovennævnte dokumenter fra hovedbiblioteket i Paris. Værket postulerer, at Priory of Sion blev grundlagt i 1099, og at broderskabet vogtede over hemmeligheden om Jesu efterkommere, da Maria Magdalene flygtede, gravid, til Frankrig efter Jesu korsfæstelse. Præcis sådan beskrives ordenen også hos Dan Brown. I *Da Vinci Mysteriet* har romanens store hellig-gral-ekspert, Leigh Teabing, tilmed bogen stående på hylden. Teabing knytter denne kommentar til udgivelsen: "Efter min mening er der nogle tvivlsomme troværdighedsbrist i forfatterens analyse, men deres grundlæggende

⁴ Brown, Dan, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*. København: Hr. Ferdinand, 2003, s. 7.

⁵ Miller, Laura, "The Last Word: The Da Vinci Con."

⁶ Ibid.

teori er god nok, og de har æren for, at forestillingen om Kristi slægt langt om længe nåede ud til et bredt publikum.”⁷

Dokumenterne, der demonstrerer broderskabets ægthed, skulle efter sigende være plantet på hovedbiblioteket i Paris, af en franskmænd ved navn Pierre Plantard, hvis eget stamtræ skulle gå helt tilbage til det merovingiske dynasti.⁸ Men som journalist Laura Miller fra *New York Times* skriver: ”As early as the 1970's, one of Plantard's confederates had admitted to helping him fabricate the materials, including genealogical tables portraying Plantard as a descendant of the Merovingians (and, presumably, of Jesus Christ) and a list of the Priory's past ”grand masters.””⁹ Pierre Plantard skulle desuden vise sig at have en kriminel fortid med domme for bl.a. bedrageri og associering med diverse højreorienterede, antisemitiske grupper omkring 2. Verdenskrig. Virkelighedens Priory of Sion var ”a tiny, harmless group of like-minded friends formed in 1956.”¹⁰

Handlingsforløb

Allerede nu har jeg været inde på en smule af handlingen i den roman, der er genstand for analyse. Men lad mig for en god ordens skyld give et let oprids af plottet:

⁷ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 263.

⁸ En kongeslægt i Frankrig, omkring hvilken der cirkulerede flere rygter. En af dem var, at merovingerne havde helbredende evner, en anden, at de stammede fra Jesus Kristus.

Kilde: Kolstrup, Inger-Lise og Christensen, Arne Søby, ”Merovingerne”, *Den Store Danske*, 16. august 2013, <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/merovingerne>

⁹ Miller, Laura, ”The Last Word: The Da Vinci Con.”

¹⁰ Ibid.

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Den amerikanske symbolforsker Robert Langdon bliver kaldt til museet Louvre i Paris, da museets inspektør, Jacques Saunière, er fundet død og har bedt sit barnebarn, kryptografen Sophie Neveu, om at finde ham. Det viser sig, at Saunière var stormester i ordenen 'Priory of Sion', der i århundreder har vogtet hemmeligheden om Den Hellige Gral: At Den Hellige Gral var Maria Magdalene, Jesu kone, som var gravid med deres barn. De to hovedpersoner finder frem til, at Jesu blodlinje rækker helt op til nutiden, og at Sophie Neveu er en direkte efterkommer af ham. Jacques Saunière har lagt et spor af gåder ud til de to hovedpersoner, som gradvist bringer dem tættere på Den Hellige Gral og sandheden om Sophies familie. Helt god tid har de dog ikke, for mens de jagter nye spor, forfølges de af den sure, franske kriminalkommissær Bezu Fache og albino-munken Silas, der begge er medlemmer af den katolske organisation Opus Dei. En organisation, som i bogen fremstilles særligt voldsomt i kraft af Silas' selvskadende adfærd. Her beskrives det bl.a. hvordan han pisker sig selv som 'bod' for sine 'synder'.¹¹ I løbet af jagten får de to hovedpersoner hjælp af den excentriske gralekspert Leigh Teabing, der desværre viser sig at være den største skurk af alle. Han ønsker nemlig at blotlægge gralhemmeligheden for den brede offentlighed – koste hvad det vil.¹² Efter en spændingsfyldt jagt gennem Frankrig og England, ender de i Rosslyn kirke i Skotland, hvor Sophie genforenes med det, der er tilbage af Priory of Sion og hendes bedstemor. Kalken, Maria Magdalenes jordiske rester, viser sig at være gemt på Louvre, hvor Robert Langdon finder graven til allersidst i bogen.¹³

¹¹ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 63.

¹² Ibid, s. 437.

¹³ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 464.

Forståelse af begrebet 'esoterisk'

Jeg kommer i denne artikel til at tale om det *esoteriske* ved *Da Vinci Mysteriet*. Derfor vil jeg nu oprids, hvad jeg forstår ved begrebet og hvordan det bliver brugt igennem teksten.

Tim Rudbøg: *The Academic Study of Western Esotericism: Early Developments and Related Fields*

I tidens løb har der været mange forskellige vinkler på, hvordan ordet 'esoterisk' skal bruges og hvilke grupper det titulerer. I denne artikel vil jeg noget af tiden trække på den opfattelse af 'det esoteriske', som kommer af den gamle, græske forståelse af ordet. Dette beskrives i Tim Rudbøgs bog *The Academic Study of Western Esotericism: Early Developments and Related Fields*. Her skrives der, at ordet 'esoterisk' hos de gamle grækere blev brugt til at beskrive viden for de indviede – modsat ordet 'exoterisk', der blev brugt til at beskrive ydre viden.¹⁴ Op til i dag bliver ordet 'esoterisk' anvendt til at beskrive skjult, hemmeligt eller højere viden.¹⁵ Når jeg taler om det esoteriske i *Da Vinci Mysteriet* i forhold til denne forståelse, taler jeg således om den viden, der er blevet holdt skjult og hemmelig for andre end de indviede.

Foruden det græske begreb, vil jeg også løbende referere til koncepter, der sidenhen er blevet associeret med vestlig esoterisme, f.eks.

¹⁴ Rudbøg, Tim, "The original meaning of the term 'esotericism'" i *The Academic Study of Western Esotericism: Early Developments and Related Fields*. Copenhagen, H.E.R.M.E.S., Academic Press, 2013, s. 25.

¹⁵ Ibid, s. 25-26.

gnosticisme, astrologi, okkultisme mm., hvad også fremgår af Rudbøgs tekst.¹⁶

Wouter J. Hanegraff: 'Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics'

Den hollandske historiker Wouter J. Hanegraff og hans tekst "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", fortæller om esoterisme og dets position i forhold til diskurser i samfundet gennem tiden. Denne tekst bliver nyttig i arbejdet med Dan Browns bog, særligt i min artikels sidste del.

Udgangspunktet for Hanegraff i denne tekst er, at feltet 'vestlig esoterisme' er et produkt af en polemisk diskurs, som kan spores hele vejen tilbage til monoteismens begyndelse.¹⁷ Med polemisk diskurs menes, at der tegnes et modsætningsforhold op, hvor noget angives som værende 'fjenden' eller truslen mod den ro og det samfund, der er blevet bygget op – hvad end det er sandt eller ej.¹⁸ Effekten der opnås heraf er: "by simplifying the 'other' as unambiguously bad, polemicists simultaneously create a simplified identity for themselves as unambiguously good."¹⁹ Denne simplificeringsstrategi kan succesfuldt forvirre dem, der enten deltager i eller er underlagt diskursen, således at de tror, at de billeder der vises af godt og ondt, repræsenterer sandheden.²⁰ Forvisningen af 'den anden' til denne 'onde' position, der er i opposition til, hvordan man 'bør' opføre sig, ligger ifølge Hanegraff til grund for den vestlige esoterisme og dens forskellige grupper og

¹⁶ Ibid, s. 33.

¹⁷ Hanegraff, Wouter J., "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", *Aries*, Vol.5 nr. 2 (2005), s. 226.

¹⁸ Ibid, s. 226.

¹⁹ Ibid, s. 227.

²⁰ Hanegraff, Wouter J., "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", s. 228.

retninger. Intet er esoterisk, hvis ikke det er konstrueret af nogen af en grund, skriver han.²¹ Grunde og strategier for ekskludering eller straf, vil jeg komme ind på i min artikels sidste afsnit, hvor Hanegraffs teori anvendes på mit tekstmateriale.

Stig Hjarvard: Banal Religion

Den danske professor i medievidenskab, Stig Hjarvard, låner i afsnittet 'Banal Religion' i bogen *Mediatization and Religion - Nordic Perspectives* begrebet 'banal nationalism' fra den engelske professor i samfundsvidenskab, Michael Billig. Hjarvard har selv skabt begrebet 'banal religion', men mekanismen der ligger bagved, er den samme som i Billigs 'banal nationalism': "Banal nationalism, then, denotes the widespread, yet unnoticeable symbols and actions that may unwillingly reinforce the individual's sense of belonging to a specific nation state and national culture."²² Det handler altså om hvilke tegn og symboler, som vi ikke bemærker, at vi omgives af, men som ikke desto mindre er identitetsdannende. Det er små ting, som henviser til både de institutionaliserede og esoteriske religioner. Eksempelvis er ting og symboler som kors, kirker, hekse og magi blandt nogle af de tegn, som man kan støde på i hverdagen. Disse ses særligt i populærkulturen, hvor fantasyproduktioner som Harry Potter og Ringenes Herre er præmieeksempler.²³

²¹ Ibid, s. 248.

²² Hjarvard, Stig, "Banal Religion" i *Mediatization and Religion - Nordic Perspectives*. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2012, s. 35.

²³ Hjarvard, "Banal Religion", s. 35.

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Det er Stig Hjarvards tese, at disse 'banal religious elements' konstruerer en form for religiøsitet i det sekulære samfund, uden at de henviser til nogen bestemt form for religion.²⁴ Det er snarere en collage af referencer. Som sagt ses det i film og på tv, hvordan de indflettede religiøse komponenter former en collage af denne art. Hjarvard skriver, at denne proces "in a playful manner reworks religious concepts and renegotiates religious imaginations. This is done, for instance, by connecting banal religious elements to existential themes and through playful intertextuality."²⁵ Disse 'banal religious elements' sørger altså for, at religiøse kontekster sniger sig ud af de institutionaliserede rum, og påvirker vores 'religiøse fantasi'. Hjarvard skriver: "In this way, it provides an often playful cultural backdrop of religious imagination and in a Nordic context with limited exposure to the communication of organized religious interests American popular culture becomes a significant factor for the public representation of religion."²⁶ Vi får altså i høj grad vores religiøse indtryk fra populærkulturen, mener Hjarvard, hvor disse optræder i større eller mindre grad som bricolage.

Christopher Partridge: "Occulture is Ordinary"

Centralt for denne artikel er også den engelske religionsprofessor Christopher Partridges begreb 'occulture', som han bl.a. redegør for i teksten *Occulture is Ordinary*. Som ordlyden *hinter* til, er begrebet en sammentrækning af 'occult' og 'culture' - ikke at forveksle med 'occult

²⁴ Ibid, s. 36.

²⁵ Ibid, s. 38-39.

²⁶ Ibid, s. 39.

culture', der betegner et okkult fællesskab. Occulture-begrebet bruger Partridge som sociologisk term, og han beskriver, at det referer til: "the environment within which, and the social processes by which particular meanings relating, typically, to spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial ideas emerge, are disseminated, and become influential in societies and in the lives of individuals."²⁷ Occulture er vævet ind i hverdagen og særligt i den populærkultur, som vi omgiver os med. I teksten *Occulture is Ordinary* hvor ovenstående citat kommer fra, skriver Partridge, at der er sket et skifte fra de autoritære religioner hen mod den personlige, spirituelle rejse. Vesten er fra hans synspunkt ikke blevet mindre religiøs, men anderledes religiøs.²⁸ I virkeligheden kan occulture betegnes som den absolutte modsætning til den gamle, græske ide om at holde en bestemt, 'højere' viden for de indviede. Occulture er allemandseje.²⁹

Når man taler om 'popular occulture', taler man om populærkultur, der skaber en form for åbenhed omkring, at der er mulighed for en metafysisk tolkning. Her nævner Partridge selv bogen *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* og *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, som eksempler på kulturprodukter, der holder pladsen åben for det metafysiske. I relation til denne bemærkning skriver Partridge, at populærkulturen især er medansvarlig for den såkaldte 'reenchantment of the West',³⁰ altså den bevægelse,

²⁷ Partridge, Christopher, "Chapter 6: Occulture is ordinary", i *Contemporary Esotericism*. Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2014, s. 116.

²⁸ Ibid, s. 116.

²⁹ Ibid, s. 121.

³⁰ Partridge, "Chapter 6: Occulture is ordinary", s. 117.

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der modarbejder Max Webers gamle tese om modernitetens 'affortryllelse'.³¹

Både hos Hjarvard og Partridge går interessen for *Da Vinci Mysteriet* igen. Hjarvard står bl.a. bag undersøgelsen om, hvordan læserne er blevet påvirket religiøst af Dan Browns litteratur, som jeg i min indledning nævnte. Partridge står bag en hel artikel om occulture og *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, og skriver også i *Occulture is Ordinary* om hvordan der i *Da Vinci Mysteriet* optræder adskillige esoteriske elementer: "key neopagan themes, such as Goddess Worship, are prominent, as are discussions of popular and subculturally trendy symbols, such as the pentacle, practices such as the Tarot, and romanticized rituals such as the hieros gamos."³² Der er altså ingen tvivl om, at min genstand for analyse, er et populært emne, når man taler om populærkultur og esoterisme.

Esoteriske byggesten

Med baggrund i de foregående afsnit vil jeg nu nærme mig teksten i Dan Browns *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, for at se på, hvordan det religiøse og esoteriske er til stede. Når jeg skriver om det religiøse og det esoteriske, som om de var to forskellige ting, er det ikke fordi jeg benægter, at der er religiøs praksis i esoteriske traditioner. Jeg skriver således, da jeg gerne vil holde øjnene åbne for temaer, der knytter sig til traditionel, institutionaliseret religion, f.eks. som kristendom og islam (det

³¹ Salinas, Ingrid, "Weber og verdens affortryllelse," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 13. juli 2005, <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/kronik/weber-og-verdens-affortryllelse>

³² Partridge, Christopher, "Chapter 6: Occulture is ordinary", s. 123.

religiøse) og til esoterisk praksis (det esoteriske). Jeg deler det således op for overblikkets skyld.

Jeg kommer i dette afsnit til at tale om esoteriske og religiøse elementer i to forskellige spor: Handlingssporet, som jeg mener hviler grundlæggende på esoteriske principper og i selve teksten, som jeg vil undersøge for elementer af 'banal religion'. Denne opdeling er skabt for bedre at kunne se efter både eksplicite og implicite referencer til esoterisme eller etableret religion.

Handling

"Fakta"

For som jeg allerede har beskrevet, da jeg var inde på debatten omkring handlingens ægthed, så implicerer den første side, at nu bliver der fortalt en sandhed. Alene ved at skrive ordet 'Fakta', som er titlen på den indledende side, impliceres, at der nu bliver fortalt noget, som er en sand historie.³³ Rent appelteknisk henviser ordet fakta til logos, logikken,³⁴ og lægger således tonen for romanuniverset.

Desuden hentyder teksten til, at det, der er anført under "fakta"-overskriften ikke er en sandhed, som er almindeligt kendt. Det ses blandt andet, når der skrives, at logen "findes i virkeligheden."³⁵ Dette peger på, at teksten foregriber tvivl hos de læsere, som kunne tro, at historien var ren fiktion. Desuden henvises der til "Les Dossiers Secrets", fransk for "de hemmelige filer", og der nævnes de prominente

³³ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 7.

³⁴ Fafner, Jørgen, "Retorik", *Den Store Danske*, 5. marts 2020, Sidst tilgået d. 29. maj 2022. <https://denstoredanske.lex.dk/retorik>

³⁵ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 7.

logemedlemmer, som filerne skulle berette om. Denne henvisning fortæller implicit læseren, at noget har været hemmeligt på et tidspunkt, men siden er kommet frem i lyset.³⁶

Hvad jeg vil sige med dette er, at introsiden agerer en form for grundtone for det, resten af romanen handler om. Den appellerer til, at læseren skal tro på det fiktive univers, der bliver skabt på de næste 464 sider, og at den verden vi kender, ikke er, som den ser ud. Med andre ord: En grundtone af skjult, esoterisk viden.

Værdig til at kende sandheden

”En kraftpræstation af en krimi,” skriver Washington Post på forsiden af den udgave af *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, som jeg bruger til min undersøgelse.³⁷ Og som enhver god krimi, starter handlingen ud med et mord.³⁸ Men i stedet for at indsamle beviser på gerningsstedet eller læse rapporter fra retsmedicinsk, tager opklaringen et andet udgangspunkt: Robert Langdon ankommer til gerningsstedet i Denon-fløjen på Louvre, og ser, at museumsdirektøren Jacques Saunières lig, allerede i sig selv er et dobbelt symbol: ”Ved at bruge sit eget blod som blæk, og ved at lade sin mave fungere som lærred, havde Saunière tegnet et simpelt symbol på sin krop (...) *Et pentagram*.”³⁹ Dernæst konkluderer Langdon, at Saunière ligeledes har positioneret sin krop, så det flugter med pentagrammets linjer: ”Gentagelse. Gentagelsen af et symbol, er den enkleste måde at forstærke dets betydning på.”⁴⁰ Der er således sat

³⁶ Miller, Laura, ”The Last Word: The Da Vinci Con.”

³⁷ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, omslag.

³⁸ Ibid, s. 43.

³⁹ Ibid, s. 43.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 46.

flere vigtige ting i gang, allerede her: For det første, bliver det tydeligt for læseren, at der er noget mere under overfladen, noget mystisk i denne handling. Hvorfor har den afdøde lavet to symboler? Hvad betyder det? Der er i hvert fald lagt op til noget.

For det andet bliver det vist, at Robert Langdon er en, der kan få det skjulte frem i lyset. Professorens autoritet som både karakter og religiøs symbolforsker, bliver igangsat i denne scene, mener jeg. Det kan bl.a. ses ved Langdons første bemærkninger til efterforskeren Bezu Fache, efter at have set pentagrammet på liget:

”Et af de ældste symboler i verden. Brugt over fire tusind år før Kristus. (...) Symboler bærer forskellige betydninger i forskellige kontekster,” sagde Langdon. ”Oprindeligt var pentagrammet et hedensk, religiøst symbol.”

Fache nikkede. ”Djævleryrkelse.”

”Nej,” rettede Langdon og indså straks, at han burde have valgt sine ord med større omtanke.⁴¹

Professoren fortæller politimanden noget, hvorefter han svarer med en falsk antagelse, der tillader Langdon at uddybe endnu mere og etablere sin autoritet i højere grad. Kort efter bliver professorens evner yderligere verificeret ved, at han løser den første gåde, som Jacques Saunière har lagt ud sammen med kryptografen Sophie Neveu.⁴² Idet de to hovedpersoner formår at løse museumsdirektørens første gåde, vises det, at de ligger inde med færdigheder, der gør dem i stand til at erkende skjult viden: Den skjulte viden, der lægger bag Saunières død.

⁴¹ Ibid, s. 43.

⁴² Ibid, s. 130.

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Desuden muliggør Robert Langdons erhverv som professor, at han naturligt kan holde mini-forelæsninger igennem romanen. Jeg kalder dem mini-forelæsninger, eftersom han selv er meget opmærksom på sit publikum, når han taler om sine ekspertområder. F.eks. knyttes følgende kommentar på ovenstående situation med Bezu Fache: ”Langdon tøvede altid, når han blev stillet dette spørgsmål. At fortælle folk, hvad et symbol ’betød’, var som at fortælle folk, hvad de skulle føle, når de hørte en bestemt sang – det var individuelt.”⁴³ Disse små forelæsninger understreger igen en form for logos, men også etos, troværdighed, når vi taler om appelformer,⁴⁴ som igen bygger karakteren op som en, der finder frem til sandheden.

Når man taler om de esoteriske elementer i romanens handling, i forhold til det gamle, græske begreb, ledes tankerne hen på, at den esoteriske viden var reserveret til de indviede.⁴⁵ Jeg mener, at der i romanen, er et stærkt element af, at Sophie Neveu og Robert Langdon skal gøre sig fortjent til den viden, de opnår. Jeg vil mene, at ovenstående eksempler fra bogen illustrerer dette.

Dette krav om, at man skal gøre sig fortjent til hemmeligheden, kan også ses i en situation, hvor hovedpersonerne taler med gralforskeren Teabing. Her fortæller forskeren, at der findes et gammelt mantra om gralen lydende: ”*Du finder ikke gralen, gralen finder dig.*”⁴⁶ Det er meningen, at det skal være en ’quest’, en opgave. Dette forløb af, at man skal gøre sig fortjent til at kende til gralen, forsætter hele vejen til romanens slutning, hvor Robert Langdon i efterskriftet, finder

⁴³ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 43.

⁴⁴ Fafner, Jørgen, ”Retorik”.

⁴⁵ Rudbøg, Tim, ”The original meaning of the term ’esotericism’”, s. 30.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 285.

stedet, hvor gralen er placeret: ”Langdon hørte Marie Chauvels⁴⁷ ord for sit indre øre. *En dag vil det gå op for dem*. Han stod under den gamle roselinje omgivet af mestrenes kunst. *Saunière kunne dårligt have valgt et bedre sted til gralen*.”⁴⁸ Gralens placering var altså noget, der skulle falde på plads i Langdons tanker, noget, han selv skulle erkende. Det esoteriske (her forstået som hemmelig viden kun for de indviede) er således i høj grad til stede i romanens handlingsspor. Det er desuden tydeligt, at det ikke er hvem som helst, der indvies.

I forbindelse med de esoteriske elementer i bogens handling, ville det også være oplagt at inddrage perspektiver fra Wouter J. Hanegraffs tekst *Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics*, på dette tidspunkt. Dette vil jeg dog vente med at gøre. For nu, vil jeg blot nøjes med at bemærke, at mange af de emner, som bogen berører, falder under Hanegraffs kategori af ’forbudt viden’.⁴⁹ Ligeså oplystes der i Tim Rudbøgs tekst også en lang række esoteriske retninger, som associeres med vestlig esoterisme. Flere fra listen finder vej ind i romanens tekstunivers, herunder astrologi, gnosticisme, frimureri, alkymi, mysticisme.⁵⁰ Hvad de mange esoteriske elementer gør, vil jeg nu komme nærmere, ved at vende blikket mod Stig Hjarvards begreb ’Banal Religion’.

Tekstunivers: ’Banal religion’ i Da Vinci Mysteriet

⁴⁷ Sophie Neveus bedstemor.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 464.

⁴⁹ Hanegraff, Wouter J., ”Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics”, s. 229.

⁵⁰ Rudbøg, Tim, ”The original meaning of the term ’esotericism’”, s. 33.

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Den danske professor Stig Hjarvard pointerede, som jeg allerede har været inde på i min redegørelse, at begrebet 'banal religion' kan bruges til at beskrive, hvordan tilfældige religiøse elementer er vævet ind i meget af den populærkultur, som vi omgives af. *Da Vinci Mysteriet* er ingen undtagelse. I nærværende afsnit vil jeg komme ind på hvorfor, og hvordan man kan se det i teksten. For overblikkets (og pladsens) skyld, har jeg udført denne del af min undersøgelse på to hovedeksempler, som efter min mening tydeligt illustrerer tendensen i teksten.

Inden jeg giver mig i kast med disse eksempler, vil jeg dog kort bemærke, at foruden de esoteriske og religiøse elementer i tekst og sprog, kan *Da Vinci Mysteriets* hovedhandling i sig selv også knyttes til en esoterisk tradition. Her tænker jeg ikke blot på esoterisme i forhold til det gamle græske begreb, som jeg netop har illustreret i forrige afsnit. Jeg tænker også på, at hovedsporet i romanen (der set fra mit perspektiv, er hemmeligheden om Den Hellige Gral, Jesu efterkommere og det hellige blod)⁵¹, leder tankerne hen mod gnostiske grupper. Disse grupper hævdede i kristendommens begyndelse at have en anden kristen viden, end den der stod i Bibelen, samt at Bibelen har udeladt vigtige aspekter af Jesu liv og læring.⁵²

Hjarvard skriver selv i 'Banal Religion'-kapitlet, at Billig skelner mellem 'waved' og 'unwaved flags of nationalism'.⁵³ Hvis denne

⁵¹ San Greal: Oversættes af hovedpersonerne til 'kongeligt blod', men er efter karakterernes udsagn blevet historisk misforstået og således oversat til en genstand: Den Hellige Gral.

Kilde: Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 260-261.

⁵² Hanegraff, Wouter J., "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", s. 234.

⁵³ Hjarvard, Stig, "Banal Religion" i *Mediatization and Religion - Nordic Perspectives*, s. 35.

observation skal overføres til handlingen i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, vil jeg mene, at hovedsporet i handlingen er 'the waved flag', den eksplicitte handling. Nu skal der ses på det, man måske ikke spotter ved første øjekast.

Astrologi

Et eksempel på 'banal religion' er, hvordan elementer af astrologi væves ind i gral-mysteriet (og tekstuniverset generelt). Det sker blandt andet, da de to hovedpersoner har søgt tilflugt hos Leigh Teabing, som udnytter lejligheden til at uddanne dem begge i gralhistorie- og myter: "'I form af profeti,' sagde Teabing. (...) 'Årtusindeskiftet har netop fundet sted, og dermed er den totusindårige, astrologiske Pisces – eller fiskenes – tidsalder slut. Fisken som også er Jesu tegn.'" ⁵⁴ I dette citat nævnes både astrologisk lære, men også en profeti. Begge ting falder under den esoteriske kategori. Profetien blegner lidt i denne replik i forhold til alt det, der fortælles om Jesus og fiskens tegn efterfølgende, hvorfor denne om muligt at endnu mere 'banal religion', efter min mening.

Derudover bruges astrologi også til personbeskrivelse. Det ses i romanens begyndelse, hvor politimanden Bezu Fache bygges op omkring tyrens stjernetegn. Først tales der om Fache blandt kollegaerne, hvilket fremkalder denne reaktion fra Robert Langdon: "'Kalder I jeres chef for *Tyren*?' (...) Taurus var altid tyren. Astrologiens symbolik var ens over hele verden.'" ⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 278.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 25.

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Efterfølgende er tyrens stjernetegn med, når læseren gives et førstehåndsindtryk af Faches karakter: "Chefkriminalinspektør Bezu Fache havde en fremtoning som en vred tyr med dine tilbagetrukne, brede skuldre og hagen, der var presset hårdt mod brystet."⁵⁶ Stjernetegnet tages på denne måde ud af den symbolske og religiøse forståelse, og personificeres i kriminalinspektørens karakter og romanuniversets virkelighed.

Genopstandelse og spøgelse

Ligeledes træder esoteriske elementer ud af det teoretiske og ind i selve bogens karakterer og handling, i introduktionen til karakteren Silas. Silas er den høje albino, der arbejder (og dræber) for Opus Dei. I bogen introduceres han dog som en stakkel, der blev fundet af Opus Dei-præsten Aringarosa og givet en religiøs identitet. Når jeg her skriver religiøs identitet, mener jeg det meget bogstaveligt. Silas var nemlig ikke i stand til at huske sit fødenavn, hvorfor han navngives af præsten, der har fundet ham på dødens rand, efter at Silas var løbet ud fra det fængsel, han var indsat i, da fængslets ydermur styrtede sammen under et jordskælv. Det munder ud i denne scene:

Spøgelset tog usikkert imod bibelen og kiggede på kapitlet, som præsten havde markeret. (...) Versene handlede om en fange ved navn Silas, som lå nøgen og forslået i sin fængselscelle og sang lovsange til Gud. Da spøgelset nåede til vers 26, snappede han forskrækket efter vejret. "*...Pludselig kom der et kraftigt jordskælv, så fængslets grundmure rystedes, i det samme sprang alle døre op.*"⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid, s. 26.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 67.

Herefter insisterer Aringarosa på at navngive Silas efter fangen i Bibelen. Denne scene implicerer, at gamle bibelhistorier til en vis grad kan blive til virkelighed i romanens univers. I hvert fald personificeres historien i Silas. Desuden må man bide mærke i, at Silas omtales som 'spøgelset' (uden stort forbogstav), inden han navngives af præsten i ovenstående citat. Det forklares i personbeskrivelsen som et øgenavn, der er kommet af hans albino-tilstand,⁵⁸ men det leder naturligvis også tanker hen på det overnaturlige. Desuden får det faktum, at han nævnes som 'spøgelset' med lille forbogstav, karakteren til at virke mere som en ting, end et menneske. Denne beskrivelse af Silas, giver ham en bizar dobbelthed af at have det overnaturlige, uhyggeligt spøgelsesagtige og det gudfrygtige i sig på samme tid. Det deler karakterens liv tydeligt op i et før og efter, at han findes af præsten Aringarosa.

De kristne referencer i beskrivelsen af Silas, er ikke kun til stede i ovenstående citat. I samme kapitel vågner Silas op hos Aringarosa, selvom at han troede, det var ude med ham. Her beskrives det med en genopstandelsesmetafor: "Hans seng var blød som en sky, og luften omkring ham var fyldt med en sødlig duft af stearinlys. Jesus stod og kiggede ned på ham. *Jeg er her*, sagde Jesus. *Stenen blev rullet til side, og du er genfødt.*"⁵⁹ I sætningen er ikke kun Jesus, der er et religiøst symbol, men også skyen, der er hans seng, som referer til himlen. Der sættes således lighedstegn mellem Aringarosas hjem og noget helligt, næsten et paradys, hvor Aringarosa er frelseren. Dette er også med til at

⁵⁸ Ibid, s. 64.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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fasttømre Aringarosas karakter, som en mand af Gud – måske næsten som Gud for Silas.

Bricolage

Hvad jeg håber på, at have vist med disse to afsnit er, at de religiøse elementer i tekstens rum, ikke udelukkende holder sig til at beskrive symboler, teorier eller andre konkrete ting, der knytter sig til religion. I kraft af fiktionsgenrens kunstneriske element, træder de udover det konkrete og er i stand til at blive flettet ind i karakterernes træk, samt de metaforer, der bruges til at beskrive romanuniverset. Således bliver universet mere religiøst, uden at man nødvendigvis lægger mærke til det på samme måde, som man lægger mærke til det direkte handlingsforløb. Disse ubemærkede religiøse referencer, er netop hvad Stig Hjarvard peger på som værende 'banal religion'.

Ligeså kan det religiøse mix, som Hjarvard beskriver i 'Banal Religion'-teksten også ses. I første eksempel var det astrologi, som blev blandet sammen med Jesus, da Leigh Teabing forklarede om gralen. Dernæst var det chefkriminalinspektøren, der blev personificeret som stjerne tegnet tyren, på trods af, at han er medlem af Opus Dei. Det samme ses igen med Silas-karakteren, der både er et spøgelse og gudfrygtig. I ét og samme univers, kan karaktererne være flere religiøse ting på samme tid.

Disse eksempler viser, at der ud over det esoteriske handlingsforløb i romanen, også er bricolage på spil, altså en "sammenstilling af elementer, mere eller mindre tilfældigt udvalgt," for at citere Ordnets definition af begrebet.⁶⁰ Spørgsmålet er, hvad denne

⁶⁰ Den Danske Ordbog, "Bricolage", Ordbog, sidst tilgået d. 29. maj 2022. <https://ordnet.dk/ddo/ordbog?query=bricolage>

bricolage gør for fortællingen. Det vil jeg komme ind på i næste sektion af artiklen.

For nu vil jeg blot delkonkludere, at det esoteriske og religiøse i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, er skrevet ind i et banal-religiøst univers, hvor alle sammensætninger er mulige – men som dog har en klassisk esoterisk undertone af, at de, som vil opnå en højere viden, skal gøre sig fortjent til den.

En ny måde at tro på

I dette afsnit, vil jeg forsøge at nærme mig et svar på mit andet spørgsmål i problemformuleringen. Dette vil jeg gøre ved først at vende blikket mod Christopher Partridges tanker om 'occulture'.

Den personlige rejse

While this shift towards an increasing occultural hegemony is relatively well documented, from both emic and etic perspectives, the point here is, again, simply that occulture is ordinary.⁶¹

Occulture er normalt, skriver Christopher Partridge, og *Da Vinci Mysteriet* er et eksempel på den occulture, som vi elsker.⁶² Jeg køber gerne Partridges karakteristik af *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, som værende occulture. Det gør jeg blandt andet på baggrund af analysen fra tidligere

⁶¹ Partridge, Christopher, "Chapter 6: Occulture is ordinary," s. 124.

⁶² Ibid, s. 117.

sektion, der viste, hvordan forskellige religiøse elementer blev sat sammen på nye måder.

Det er en af Partridges pointer, at der i nutiden er en forbindelse mellem esoterisme og opbygningen af selvbillede og image.⁶³ Dette sker, fordi der er mere at hente fra esoteriske traditioner, som lover: "Personal empowerment, metamorphosis, and liberation through the acquisition of illuminated knowledge (gnosis) and, as such, the developing of one's potential as a human being in relation to the cosmos."⁶⁴ Efterfølgende nævner Partridge en undersøgelse, der peger på, at personer født efter 1982 oplever at føle sig tiltagende fremmedgjort overfor de etablerede religioner. I stedet vender folk sig mod: "the creation of personal spiritual paths."⁶⁵

På baggrund af min analyse i forrige sektion vil jeg påpege, at den bricolage der er til stede i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, netop giver en følelse af, at alle religiøse elementer har en form for sammenhæng og værdi, lige meget hvordan de blandes. Kriminalkommissæren Bezu Fache kan beskrives med stjernetegn og være i Opus Dei. Morderen Silas kan gå fra at være et spøgelse til at være en menneskeliggjort bibelfigur. Præsten Aringarosa kan beskrives som Jesus. Inden for romanens univers er der ingen regler for, hvordan de religiøse eller esoteriske traditioner sættes sammen. Og det matcher fint med den tendens, Christopher Partridge beretter om i sin tekst.

Men det er ikke kun de mindre 'banal religious elements', der er relevante, når der tales om ændring af betydning. Også i handlingens hovedspor, ændres gamle fortællinger således, at de passer bedre ind i nutiden.

⁶³ Ibid, s. 114.

⁶⁴ Ibid, s. 115.

⁶⁵ Ibid, s. 116.

Her tænker jeg eksempelvis på, hvordan Maria Magdalene-figuren skrives om i romanen. I bogen omtales det, hvordan hun har været fremstillet som en skamfuld prostitueret, men i virkeligheden var Jesu kone og Den Hellige Gral.⁶⁶

Den amerikanske professor i feminist- og queer studies, Tammy M. Kennedy, skriver i sin artikel "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating "The Da Vinci Code", om hvordan Maria Magdalene er blevet 'misremembered', altså husket forkert, som følge af en historisk og politisk diskurs i den offentlige hukommelse hele vejen op til i dag.⁶⁷

Tammy M. Kennedy er ikke begejstret for Dan Browns fortolkning af Maria Magdalene-figuren, men anerkender, at den er bedre end det renommé, som hun tidligere har haft: "his (Dan Browns, red.) contribution to public memory re-inscribes a traditional and explicitly heteronormative view of gender that truncates her (Maria Magdalenes, red.) agency as a woman and leader in early Christianity. Brown's twenty-first-century construction of Magdalene illuminates how gendered ideologies are rooted in remembering practices that inform popular culture."⁶⁸ Der bliver ikke givet mange point til Dan Brown set fra et feministisk teoretisk synspunkt – og det kunne man sagtens skrive en masse mere om – men for nu vil jeg blot bemærke, at Dan Brown på trods af kritikken, har forsøgt at skrive Magdalene ud af rollen som en prostitueret og en synder med *Da Vinci Mysteriet*. Selvom

⁶⁶ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 254.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, Tammie M., "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating "The Da Vinci Code"" *Feminist Formations*, Vol. 24, No. 2. (Summer 2012), s. 122.

⁶⁸ Ibid, s. 123.

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repræsentationen af Magdalene har flere kritikpunkter og forsat holder kvinden heteronormativt fastlåst, er det et skridt længere ind i moderniteten, hvis man føler Kennedys tankespor.⁶⁹

Samtidig laves der i tekstens rum også et opgør med den etablerede kirke og den repræsentation af Magdalene, som denne har lagt ud. Det ses f.eks. i følgende situation i Teabings hjem, efter Maria Magdalene er blevet nævnt som Den Hellige Gral:

Sophie vendte sig mod ham. "Den prostituerede?"

Teabing gispede, som havde ordet ramt ham personligt. "Det var Magdalene på ingen måde. Den uheldige misforståelse er resultatet af en smædekampagne, som den tidlige, kristne kirke igangsatte. Det var nødvendigt for kirken at krænke Maria Magdalenes ære for at dække over hendes farlige hemmelighed – hendes rolle som Den Hellige Gral."⁷⁰

Ud over, at der i dette citat tegnes et billede op af kristendommen som ond og Maria Magdalene som god, lykkes det også at flette reelle fakta (at Maria Magdalene blev 'misremembered') med fiktive fakta (at hun er Den Hellige Gral).

Denne blanding af fakta, fiktion og religiøse diskurser, peger efter min mening ligeledes på, at der i *Da Vinci Mysteriet* konstrueres en tro på noget mere, noget esoterisk, der er væsentligt bedre, end hvad den etablerede kirke har at tilbyde – og altså bidrager til den følelse af fremmedgjorthed, som er til stede overfor den etablerede religion.

⁶⁹ Kennedy, "Mary Magdalene and the Politics of Public Memory: Interrogating 'The Da Vinci Code'", s. 121.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 254.

'Subcultural cool'

I Christopher Partridges artikel "The occultural significance of *The Da Vinci Code*", cirkulerer der nogle af de samme elementer som dem, jeg har analyseret mig frem til i denne artikel indtil videre. Der skrives eksempelvis: "This is certainly true of *The Da Vinci Code*, in that it selectively and eclectically introduces people to alternative spiritual theories, challenges traditional authorities and rationalizes everything with conspiracy."⁷¹

Her ses igen observationen af, at romanen introducerer sin læser til forskellige spirituelle temaer og kritiske fremstillinger af den etablerede religion. Partridge forsætter i samme tekst, ved at vende sig mod den canadiske kultursociolog Sarah Thorntons begreb 'subcultural capital'. Et begreb, Thornton har udviklet ved at følge Pierre Bourdieus berømte begreb 'cultural capital',⁷² og som beskriver hvordan der inden for subkulturer, er et individuelt system af handlinger og genstande, der giver 'subcultural capital' – altså en form for status eller 'coolness'.⁷³

Herpå er det Partridges argument, at eftersom 'occulture' er blevet tiltagende 'cool', og at skiftet væk fra de autoritære religioner er blevet tiltagende større, forårsager det: "occulture, on the whole, stands over against mainstream Christian religion and spirituality, encourages

⁷¹ Partridge, Christopher, "The Occultural Significance of *The Da Vinci Code*," Northern Lights, Vol. 6 (2008), s. 114.

⁷² Ibid, s. 114.

⁷³ Thornton, Sarah, "The Distinctions of Cultures Without Distinction - Introduction" i *Club cultures : Music, media and subcultural capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, s. 27.

countercultural attitudes.”⁷⁴ Slutteligt konkluderer Partridge at: ”it is worth noting that, as a result, particular organizations and movements are thriving on popular occultural exposure and the sub-cultural capital that they are consequently being invested with.”⁷⁵

Jeg er ikke i tvivl om, at dette på de bredere samfundsmæssige linjer, er en fin observation. Men for min artikels vedkommende, vil jeg tilføje, at denne ’subcultural capital’ der tales om, også er til stede i selve teksten og romanens handling. Derfor vil jeg gerne nuancere Partridges konklusioner lidt, ved at se nærmere på dette aspekt.

Sarah Thornton skriver i kapitlet ”The Distinctions of Cultures Without Distinction” om club-kulturer. Det kan måske i udgangspunktet virke lidt fjernt fra *Da Vinci Mysteriet* og vestlig esoterisme. Men nogle af de samme dynamikker som Thornton beskriver i club-kulturerne, vil jeg mene, er til stede i teksten i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*. Hun skriver:

Club cultures are riddled with cultural hierarchies (...): the authentic versus the phoney, the ‘hip’ versus the ‘mainstream’, and the ‘underground’ versus ‘the media’. However, they are all unified by an unbroken concern with the problem of cultural status.⁷⁶

I *Da Vinci Mysteriets* univers vil jeg mene, at de to hovedpersoner og deres mission i høj grad skrives op imod den konventionelle kirke og de udbredte misforståelser, den står for. På den måde tildeles de noget ’subcultural capital’ som karakterer.

⁷⁴ Partridge, Christopher, ”The Occultural Significance of The Da Vinci Code,” s. 114.

⁷⁵ Ibid, s. 123.

⁷⁶ Thornton, Sarah, ”The Distinctions of Cultures Without Distinction - Introduction”, s. 15-16.

Dette kan eksempelvis ses i begyndelsesscenen, som jeg nævnte i et af de foregående afsnit, hvor Langdon præsenteres for Saunières lig med pentagrammet på maven.⁷⁷ Opus Dei-kommissæren Bezu Fache tror, at pentagrammet handler om djævledyrkelse, men Robert Langdon retter ham, og forklarer symbolets historie. Fache fremstilles på den måde, som en karakter, der hurtigt hopper til konklusioner og har mange fordomme. Denne observation forstærkes yderligere, da Sophie Neveus karakter introduceres for læseren, gennem Faches tanker:

Sophie Neveu var en af kriminalpolitiets største fejltagelser. (...) Fache hævdede, at ministeriets igangværende politisk korrekte aktioner svækkede branchen. Ikke alene manglede kvinder den nødvendige fysiske styrke, som politiarbejde krævede, deres blotte tilstedeværelse distraherede mændene i faget.⁷⁸

Det vises således, at Bezu Fache også er kvindehader. På den måde taler politimandens introduktion til Sophie Neveus karakter ind i den generelle tone romanen om, at kirken ikke bryder sig om kvinder, og er fanget i en misogyn fortid. Bemærkninger som disse viser hovedpersonerne i et godt lys, da de står i kontrast hertil og modbeviser dem.⁷⁹

Robert Langdon og Sophie Neveus karakterer stikker også ud i forhold til gral-forskeren Leigh Teabing, der i virkeligheden er den ondeste af alle i romanen. Han har snøret Opus Dei præsten Aringarosa

⁷⁷ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s 43.

⁷⁸ Ibid, s. 58.

⁷⁹ Ibid, s. 43.

og albino-munken Silas,⁸⁰ til at arbejde for ham. Hans egentlige mål er at offentliggøre hemmeligheden om Den Hellige Gral. Men i kraft af sin kyniskhed, der særligt kommer til udtryk i scenen, hvor han truer de to hovedpersoner med en pistol,⁸¹ virker også hans mission (om end den er positiv overfor Gralen), som en 'ond' mission.

Mit argument er, at der i romanen lægges op til, at hovedpersonerne ved, hvad der er rigtigt at gøre med Den Hellige Gral. Det er de to, der har den 'rigtige' måde at være på: Det er dem, som kæmper for at behandle Gralen med den rette omtanke i modsætning til alle andre parter. De er de mest autentiske, for de prøver ikke at opnå et særligt mål, andet end at Sophie gerne vil finde sin familie⁸² og Langdon gerne vil undgå arrestation.⁸³ De handler med andre ord uselvsk. Således stilles et modsætningsforhold op lig det, som Sarah Thornton beskriver i sin artikel, hvor vi ser 'det autentiske vs. det falske'.

For at give et teksteksempel på denne autenticitet, kan man vende blikket mod scenen, hvor de to hovedpersoner sidder i Leigh Teabings privatfly på vej til England. Her belærer gral-forskeren Sophie Neveu i, hvilket ansvar hun har for at offentliggøre gral-hemmeligheden, hvortil hun svarer:

"Hør nu her," sagde Sophie bestemt. "For nu at citere Deres egne ord; 'du finder ikke gralen, gralen finder dig'. Jeg stoler på, at der er en grund

⁸⁰ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 437.

⁸¹ Ibid, s. 414.

⁸² Ibid., s. 304.

⁸³ Ibid, s. 79.

til, at gralen har fundet mig, og jeg stoler ligeledes på, at når tiden er inde, vil jeg vide, hvad jeg skal gøre.”⁸⁴

Sophie Neveu prædiker, at man ikke skal forcere en løsning på gral-mysteriet eller gralens offentliggørelse. I stedet handler det om at finde sin egen vej, når tiden er inde.

Da jeg i begyndelsen af min analyse talte om, at hovedpersonerne i kraft af deres færdigheder og løsning af gåderne, gør sig fortjent til viden om Den Hellige Gral, kan der således tilføjes et aspekt til denne konklusion: At man også skal have de rette personlige karaktertræk. Karaktertræk, som at være søgende eller åben – modsat de karakterer, der virker til at have fikserede svar på, hvad der er det rigtige: både kirken og Teabing har helt klare intentioner med, hvad de vil med Den Hellige Gral.

De søgende karaktertræk passer langt bedre ind i romanens multireligiøse univers, som jeg fandt ved min analyse. De passer også langt bedre med Christopher Partridges observationer om 'occulture' og det, at finde en individuel, spirituel retning.

Fjendebillede

Når man taler om, at nogle karaktertræk fremstilles bedre end andre i *Da Vinci Mysteriets* univers, bliver jeg nødt til også at inddrage Wouter J. Hanegraffs tekst om ”forbidden knowlegde”. Jeg mener, at denne kan bidrage med et sidste, nyttigt aspekt til spørgsmålet om, hvordan de esoteriske og religiøse elementer, fremstilles i romanen.

⁸⁴ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 306.

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Jeg har allerede konstateret med min undersøgelse, at Dan Browns roman lykkedes med at få det multireligiøse og meningssøgende, til at fremstå bedre, end den religion, der hævder at have fikserede svar på tilværelsens problemer. I relation til dette er det dog også værd at nævne, at romanuniverset stiller den etablerede religion i et dårligt lys. At den tegner et fjendebillede af den, vil jeg nærmest fristes til at sige.

Vender man blikket mod Hanegraffs tekst, taler han i begyndelsen, ved hjælp af tanker fra Michel Foucault, om forskellige strategier og årsager for udstødelse af 'den anden'. Heriblandt nævnes forbud og latterliggørelse som strategier, mens fare, umoralsk opførsel, irrationalitet og fejl nævnes som årsager.⁸⁵ I forhold til strategierne, har Hanegraff erstattet Foucaults oprindelige strategi 'forfølgelse' med latterliggørelse. Han begrundet det således: "because the "other" in question is no longer believed to pose a serious threat today, that prohibition and persecution have been replaced by the milder – but not less effective strategy of ridicule."⁸⁶

I Hanegraffs historiske undersøgelse er det forskellige esoteriske traditioner, der er blevet kategoriseret som 'den anden', herunder gnostisisme.⁸⁷ Dette siger han, er sket siden monoteismens begyndelse. Det er imidlertid min pointe, at forholdet mellem udstødt og udstøder, er det omvendte i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*.

Gennem størstedelen af romanens handling er det Silas, Aringarosa og Bezu Fache, alle tre medlemmer af Opus Dei, der er skurkene. Det beskrives bl.a. hvordan Silas myrder adskillige mennesker, og tilmed truer romanens hovedpersoner.⁸⁸ Der er altså

⁸⁵ Hanegraff, Wouter J., "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", s. 229.

⁸⁶ Ibid, s. 230.

⁸⁷ Ibid, s. 235.

⁸⁸ Brown, *Da Vinci Mysteriet*, s. 287.

ingen tvivl om, at hans tilstedeværelse i romanens handling udgør en fare. Jeg har allerede beskrevet hvordan Fache fremstilles som en kvindehader, hvilket i øvrigt også siges om hele organisationen Opus Dei. Her beskrives denne af nonnen Søster Sandrine i begyndelsen af romanen:

Ud over bevægelsens tilslutning til det okkulte ritual, der omfattede såkaldt korporlig bodsudøvelse, var dens syn på kvinder middelalderligt af værste slags. (...) Det så ud til, at Evas bid af æblet fra Visdommens Træ var en gæld, kvinder var dømt til at betale af på for evigt.⁸⁹

Min pointe med disse observationer er, at organisationen bygges op som værende irrationel, farlig, fanget i fortiden og en trussel mod de to hovedpersoner, der er historiens helte. Strategien imod dem, vil jeg mene, er latterliggørelse. Det ses i slutningen af romanen, efter Teabing har bekendt kulør og er blevet anholdt:

Det havde vist sig, at Teabing havde udtænkt en genial plan for at beskytte din egen uskyld på ethvert område. Han havde udnyttet både Vatikanet og Opus Dei. Hans beskidte arbejde var blevet udført af en uvidende, fanatisk munk og en desperat biskop.⁹⁰

Biskoppen havde været for penge- og magtbegærlig,⁹¹ munken for fanatisk og Faches ide om, at Langdon og Neveu var dem, der skulle anholdes, måtte ryge i vasken, da den sande skurk kom frem. Alle Opus Dei-karakterer, blev holdt for nar af gral-forskeren Teabing. Disse observationer, mener jeg, peger imod, at det er den organiserede kirke,

⁸⁹ Ibid, s. 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid s. 437.

⁹¹ Ibid, s. 439.

der fremstilles som den latterlige 'other' – modsat hovedpersonerne, som er på en værdig mission. Det passer i hvert fald ind i den observation fra Hanegraff, som jeg klarlagde i redegørelsen, om, at den 'anden' fremstilles som "unambiguously bad" hvorved: "polemicists simultaneously create a simplified identity for themselves as unambiguously good."⁹²

Konklusion

Jeg gik til *Da Vinci Mysteriet* med en nysgerrighed efter, hvad der gjorde det esoteriske og religiøse i bogen så inddragende. Selvfølgelig kan jeg ikke afsløre, om det er præcis de aspekter, som jeg har analyseret mig frem til i denne artikel, der har fået så mange til at købe bogen. Det ville kræve en yderligere undersøgelse blandt læserne af romanen. Men jeg kan konkludere flere centrale ting om fremstillingen af religion og esoterisme i tekstens univers, på baggrund af min undersøgelse.

I min problemformulering spurgte jeg om, hvordan de religiøse og esoteriske elementer er til stede i teksten. Det er der flere ting at sige om: For det første er hovedhandlingen i romanen en esoterisk rejse, hvis man ser på teksten ud fra det gamle, græske begreb. Hovedpersonerne Robert Langdon og Sophie Neveu, skal med de evner, de besidder, gøre sig værdige til at blive indviet i gralhæmmeligheden. Sideløbende med dette handlingsspor, er der indflettet flere religiøse elementer ind i romanens tekstunivers. Alt fra Bibelstykker til stjernetegn er til at få øje på i både personkarakteristik og beskrivelser. Med Stig Hjarvards banal-religion begreb, har det således

⁹² Hanegraff, Wouter J., "Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics", s. 227.

været muligt at konkludere, at religiøse elementer har en bricolage-agtig tilstedeværelse i *Da Vinci Mysteriet*.

Denne observation var nyttig, da jeg vendte blikket mod mit andet spørgsmål i problemformuleringen, der handlede om, hvordan det esoteriske og religiøse er positioneret i romanen. Set i forhold til Christopher Partridges analyse af 'occulture' og spiritualitet i dag, er den bricolage-agtige måde at udstille religiøse koncepter på, meget mere i harmoni med vores moderne måde at tro på, hvor folk i højere grad følger deres egne religiøse veje.

Derudover kunne jeg konstatere, at handlingens hovedpersoner bliver investeret med en form for 'subcultural capital', i kraft af deres autenticitet og værdige mission efter at finde Den Hellige Gral. Helt modsat fremstilles den konventionelle religion i *Da Vinci Mysteriets* rum, personificeret ved karaktererne fra organisationen Opus Dei. Ved at holde fremstillingen af Opus Dei-medlemmerne op imod Wouter J. Hanegraffs tekst om 'Forbidden Knowledge' og de mekanismer for stigmatisering og udstødelse, der kommer til udtryk deri, kan jeg konstatere, at rollerne som udstødt og udstøder byttes om i romanen, i forhold til, hvordan det har været historisk. Her er det den katolske organisation, der fremstilles som fjendsk, farlig og let at narre.

Det lykkedes således Dan Brown at fremstille hovedpersonernes nysgerrige, søgende tilgang til Den Hellige Gral, som den 'gode' måde at være på, særligt ved at stille karaktererne op imod konventionel religion. Samtidig lykkedes det ham at skabe et univers af banal-religiøse elementer, med et esoterisk hovedspor, der harmoniserer meget bedre med nutidens måde at være religiøs på. Disse komponenter, er måske med til at forklare, hvorfor *Da Vinci Mysteriet* blev sådan et pletskud af en bog.

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HOW TO APPLY PHENOMENOLOGY TO THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM: EXAMPLE OF AN APPROACH

Fabio Ranzani

Introduction

Looking at the phenomenological tradition in philosophy, we find that several of its major exponents – from Max Scheler to Michel Henry, from Emmanuel Levinas to Martin Buber and Jean-Luc Marion – have written about *revelations*.¹ Edmund Husserl himself, traditionally considered to be the father of the phenomenological movement, can be found to have mentioned – of all types of revelations² – specifically the *mystical* ones. As Daniel Cairns (1976) reports, after having conversed with Husserl in 1932: “Husserl spoke of mysticism. Every genuine

¹ Steinbock 2007 pp.11-12

² For an overview of different possible types of revelations (or, as Steinbock calls them, “vertical experiences”), see *ibid.* pp.15-16. In this article, we shall deal solely with mystical revelations.

evidence has its right. The question is always of the *Tragweite* (range, scope) of any given evidence. This applies also to the particular evidence the mystic has.”³ Mystical experiences are in other words described as having their own “evidence” (*Evidenz*) – roughly, the appearing of the content of an experience as something true to the subject.⁴ Mystical evidence, says Husserl, “has its own right,” that is, should be described in its own uniqueness.

If we nonetheless try to expand on the link between phenomenology and mysticism beyond what single phenomenologists might have written or said about revelations, what we could ask is: Why bother looking at phenomenology at all when studying mystical experiences? What contributions can phenomenology make for the study of mysticism? And how can such contributions be made – that is, how should we apply phenomenology to this academic field?

In order to be in a better position to answer these questions, we shall first look at what we understand by “mysticism” (chapter 2.1.). We shall then continue by briefly outlining what phenomenology is (2.2.), and by subsequently presenting reasons for why phenomenology could be of interest when studying mysticism (2.3.). In the same chapter, we shall also discuss the question of how to apply phenomenology. Following Dan Zahavi (2019a), we shall argue for an approach to phenomenological application according to which we do not apply it by performing certain methodical steps (a use of phenomenology, it must be noted, that is contrary to another, influential

³ Cairns 1976 p.91. See also Depraz 2001 p.1

⁴ Cf. Husserl’s own definition of evidence (*Evidenz*) as “das ‘Erlebnis’ der Wahrheit” (Husserl 1975 p.193). See also Heffernan 1998 p.36; Zahavi 2003 pp.32-33

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view which we shall also discuss). Instead, we can make valuable contributions to what we are researching by employing relevant concepts or ideas taken from canonical phenomenological texts. In the second half of the article, we shall give an example of how such an approach can be performed. Taking Meister Eckhart's account of mystical experiences as a starting point, we shall see, after having presented the preparatory practice of what he calls the "detachment" (3.1.), how Martin Heidegger's concept of "ontological difference" can help us understand Eckhart's descriptions of mystical revelation (which he calls "the birth" (3.2.)).

1. Mysticism and Phenomenology

As this article deals with mysticism and phenomenology, in this first half we shall tackle both notions. Let us start with the former, posing the question: What is mysticism? In formulating an answer, we shall look at some of the most influential theorists in the academic field of mysticism and use Tim Rudbøg's (2013) book on the study of Western esotericism as a supplement.

2.1. The Study of Mysticism

The word "mysticism" comes from the Greek *μυστήριον* (from which we also get the word "mystery"), meaning "to close," probably in reference to the lips or the eyes.⁵ As Rudbøg writes, it has commonly been used in relation to everything that is strange and beyond logic, covering other

⁵ Meyer 1987 p.4; Rudbøg 2013 p.122

concepts such as occultism, magic, and esotericism.⁶ Yet more specific understandings have been put forward by several scholars.

One of the first to do so is Evelyn Underhill. In her book *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (1912), mysticism is understood as a way to get in touch with the “transcendental.”⁷ What this transcendental (at times called the “Cosmic,” or the “Absolute”)⁸ amounts to is hard to say, given its *ineffability*. It neither belongs to the “natural” or sensory life – that is, the world of objects perceived through the senses (the transcendental is, in this sense, “supersensual”); nor does it belong to the “intellectual life,” that is, arguably, the world of objects of thought, imagination, phantasy, etc.⁹ As she writes, “[the mystic's] consciousness is transfigured in a particular way, he lives at different levels of experience from other people.”¹⁰ Images and symbols, albeit necessary to communicate the experience to others, are inadequate, as they fail to express precisely what is experienced at this *sui generis* level of consciousness.¹¹ However, based on what the imagery and symbols used by the mystics suggest, Underhill reconstructs a path of five different steps constitutive of all mystical experiences.¹² Without going through the details of these steps, suffice to say that the mystic undergoes a path culminating with the exhilarating experience of

⁶ Rudbøg 2013 pp.121-122

⁷ Underhill 1912 pp.83-84

⁸ Ibid. pp.84-85

⁹ Ibid. p.90. See also *ibid.* pp.85, 87-89

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. p.94

¹² For a brief run-through of the five steps, see Rudbøg 2013 p.126

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“Unitive State,” that is, of *becoming one* with the transcendental.¹³ The transcendental presents itself as “a more real world of essential life,”¹⁴ also expressed as a “Reality behind the veil,” and “that immaterial and final Being, that some philosophers call the Absolute, and most theologians call God.”¹⁵

In sum, in Underhill’s understanding of mysticism we find the themes of an *ineffable Reality* disclosed by an exhilarating experience of *union*, distinct from sensory and intellectual experiences. Furthermore, we find an essentialist understanding of such experiences, as she conceives of steps underlying them all, irrespective of cultural differences – an understanding she shares with, among others, William T. Stace.¹⁶

For Stace, what characterises the experiential dimension of mysticism – the “mystical consciousness” – is common throughout history to all humans, whereas its interpretation or conceptualisation might differ according to the religious beliefs of the mystic.¹⁷ Even though the concepts used to describe the experiences carry with them different denotations and connotations, stemming from the different religious contexts the mystics are embedded in, Stace argues that all these accounts contain some striking similarities, which makes him hypothesise that the mystical experience itself is independent from all

¹³ Underhill 1912 p.96

¹⁴ Ibid. p.89

¹⁵ Ibid. p.4

¹⁶ Rudbøg 2013 pp.125, 127

¹⁷ Stace 1960a pp.342-343; Rudbøg 2013 p.127

religious interpretations.¹⁸ However, what characterises such an experience? It is characterised by: “[...] the apprehension of *an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things*, a oneness or a One to which neither the senses nor the reason can penetrate.”¹⁹ Here, again, we find the theme of an union-like experience, distinct from sensory and intellectual experiences, that we also find in Underhill.

Albeit sharing the element of apprehension of some supersensual unity, mystical experiences can be classified in various categories. Among the different ways to classify them, Stace divides them into “spontaneous” – i.e., those experienced unexpectedly – and “acquired” experienced – those resulting from some sort of preparation (techniques, exercises, etc).²⁰ The experiences belonging to the former category are usually of the “extrovertive” type, whereas acquired mystical experiences are usually “introvertive.”²¹ With this further classification, Stace distinguishes between experiences where the supersensual oneness is apprehended as “shining” through the multiplicity of perceived objects (extrovertive experiences), and experiences where the oneness is apprehended after having closed one’s mind off from the content of all sensory and intellectual experiences (introvertive experiences).²²

Giving more importance to the differences between mystical experiences are, on the other hand, those theorists who belong to the

¹⁸ Ibid. pp.34-36 (henceforth, *ibid.* will only refer to the first name of the precedent reference, in this case to Stace 1960a). For an example of such similarities, see Stace’s analysis of Lao-tsu and Meister Eckhart in *ibid.* p.168

¹⁹ Stace 1960b pp.14-15; see Rudbøg 2013 p.128

²⁰ Stace 1960a p.60

²¹ Ibid. pp.60-61

²² Parnas & Henriksen 2016 p.79

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non-essentialist position (opposed thus to Underhill and Stace), as for example Anthony J. Steinbock, R.C. Zaehner, and Steven Katz.²³ For these, there seem to exist *qualitative differences* between mystical experiences that stem from the different cultural contexts of the mystics. That is, not only are experiences interpreted differently: They are distinct and irreducible experiences – *contra* essentialist theorists, for whom the apprehension of the oneness is experientially the same across all cultures.²⁴ For our purposes here, however, we shall not pursue the essentialist-contextualist debate any further. We shall instead carry on by dealing with the second notion at play in the question on the cross-disciplinary bridge between mysticism and phenomenology – namely, phenomenology.

2.2. Phenomenology

“Phenomenology” can be used in different contexts with different meanings.²⁵ What we intend here is specifically the philosophical movement founded by Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century and later developed by proponents such as Max Scheler, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Emmanuel Levinas – to name some of the most influential.²⁶

To give an account of all phenomenology can be a daunting task, given the differences between its proponents. If we however look at the word itself as a starting point, we see that it is composed of the word

²³ See Steinbock 2007 p.177; Zaehner 1961 p.198-199; Katz 1978 pp.23-25

²⁴ Ibid.; see Rudbøg 2013 pp.126-127, 129-131

²⁵ See Gallagher 1997 p.195

²⁶ Zahavi 2019b p.102

“phenomenon.” From the Greek *φαίνεσθαι* (“to show itself”), a phenomenon is what shows itself, what is manifest.²⁷ As the etymology indicates, objects in phenomenology are considered precisely not as being independent from experiential subjects. On the contrary, they are studied as things that manifest themselves to somebody – or, to use another expression, that give themselves to a subject, be it in perception, thought, memory, phantasy, etc.²⁸ Following Steinbock (2007), we could say that the central issue of phenomenology is precisely describing *how* objects are given. As he puts it,

[...] I am concerned not merely with *what* is there in experience, but with *how* this “what” appears to us. Phenomenologists, for example, have traditionally expressed with “how” of the appearance under the general title of “givenness” or “modes of givenness.” Experience means the way or mode in which something is *given* to us.²⁹

The subject matter of phenomenology is in other words not limited to objects, as if phenomenologists were simply supposed to offer descriptions of trees, cats, dogs, and the like, listing their particular features in isolation – an interpretation which Scheler mockingly calls “picture-book phenomenology.”³⁰ Rather, phenomenology’s main concern is arguably the correlation between objects and subjects. Insofar as the former are necessarily given to the latter, we cannot settle for mere descriptions of objects: We need to inquire into what is going

²⁷ Heidegger 2001 p.51

²⁸ See Zahavi 2019b pp.119-120

²⁹ Steinbock 2007 p.2

³⁰ Scheler 1973 p.xix

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on in the subject too.³¹ We would accordingly need to ask questions such as: Are the trees, cats, dogs, etc. being perceived by the subject, or are they being imagined? Are they being perceived directly, or indirectly as through a picture? and so on. Once we know what conscious act is going on in the subject, we can then inquire into *how* objects are being experienced, that is, into how different conscious acts make their content appear or give itself. There might indeed be differences in givenness depending on the conscious act. For example, a tree experienced in perception seems to appear “in the flesh,” as something present right there, at a certain distance from my body. But if I close my eyes and imagine the same tree, it will arguably not appear right there “in its flesh” anymore. In other words: Same object (that particular tree), but different modes of givenness depending on my conscious acts.

Opposed however to this view that sees phenomenology as being defined by its subject matter (the subject-object correlation),³² we find the wide-spread view that sees it as being defined by its method. In

³¹ Zahavi 2019c pp.26, 44. See also Husserl 1970 p.166; Scheler 1973 p.265: “Our point of departure is the ultimate principle of phenomenology: namely, that there is an interconnection between the essence of an object and the essence of intentional experiencing.”

³² This is not to say that phenomenologists do not differ in their understanding of what this subject matter more specifically entails. Husserl, for example, would hold that studying the subject-object correlation includes studying the transcendental (i.e., constitutive) conditions of reality. Scheler, instead, famously opposed Husserl for his “transcendental turn,” which he criticised for curbing phenomenology to be a mere study of consciousness (as Husserl identifies consciousness as being a constitutive condition for reality). See Zahavi 2019b p.105.

particular, two methodical steps have been argued to be defining: Husserl's "epochē" and "reduction."³³

Put briefly, the former denotes the bracketing or suspension of our belief in existence. To understand such belief, we might be best served with an example. Were I to look outside the window and spot a tree, my first attitude with respect to the tree's existence would be one of belief. Were I to learn that they are testing holograms in my street, or to remember that I suffer from hallucinations, my belief could well change into a doubt, a disbelief, a questioning, etc.³⁴ Yet, even if my belief in the tree's existence was proven wrong, another, more basic belief would remain unaltered. Upon having learnt that the tree does not exist, I still believe in the fact that something else must then be the case – be it holograms, my hallucinations, etc. There is, as Klaus Held (2003) puts it, a deeper belief in the "not like this, but some other way" (not the tree's existence, but something else, as the hologram's existence, my hallucinated condition's existence, etc.).³⁵ It is then not only the doxic modalities (belief, doubt, disbelief, questioning, etc.) of the single experiences, but also this *Urdoxa* (primordial belief) in the infinitely renewable "some other way" that is to be bracketed or suspended with the epochē.³⁶ By bracketing or suspending them, we do not however change them. The various doxic modalities and the *Urdoxa* are preserved as they are: We are simply abstaining from passing judgment on their *validity*.³⁷ That is, we do not change our

³³ Zahavi 2021 p.260

³⁴ See Held 2003 pp.18-19; Sokolowski 2000 p.45

³⁵ Ibid. p.19. See also Sokolowski 2000 pp.45-47

³⁶ Ibid. p.21; Sokolowski 2000 pp.48-49

³⁷ Ibid.; Sokolowski 2000 pp.48-50; Zahavi 2019b p.108

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belief in the tree's existence into a disbelief: We simply do not engage in the act of believing it anymore. We are, as Robert Sokolowski (2000) phrases it, "putting [our beliefs] out of action."³⁸

The second step, the reduction, denotes on the other hand a shift in perspective. In our everyday life, our consciousness is directed at the objects of experiences, leaving certain features of such experiences, such as this primordial belief underlying them, go unnoticed. With the reduction, instead, we direct our consciousness at the experiences, so as to inquire into their features. We go in other words from having the objects of experiences as our *themes* (leaving, among others, the primordial belief *unthematic*) to having the experiences with all their features as our *themes* in order to study them.³⁹

Now, leaving aside questions on whether these steps indeed are defining of *doing phenomenology* in a philosophical context,⁴⁰ what is of interest to us is the question of whether academics should perform them when *applying phenomenology* to other contexts – specifically, to the study of mysticism. And if not, how else can phenomenology be applied?

2.3. Application of Phenomenology

Before discussing how to apply phenomenology, we still need to tackle the issue of why one would want to apply it in the first place. To put it bluntly: What can phenomenology do for the study of mysticism that we would bother applying it?

³⁸ Sokolowski 2000 p.55

³⁹ Held 2003 pp.20, 23; Sokolowski 2000 pp.48-49

⁴⁰ See Zahavi 2021 p.260

As we have seen, a central issue for phenomenology is how experiential content is given to the subject. There is in other words a focus on the *lived experience* – the first-person experience of the content showing itself to the subject – and this experience is reported as it is lived through.⁴¹ As such, phenomenology can be said to be particularly attentive to the unique facets of experiences, thereby being in a privileged position to treat them *in their own right*. From such a position, phenomenology can avoid committing the error of reducing mystical experiences to what they are not.

An example of such an error is illustrated by Steinbock (2007). As he argues, mystical experiences are often reduced to what he calls “horizontal” or “presentation,” understood as the mode of givenness peculiar to sensory and intellectual objects.⁴² Yet, by being attentive to the features described by the mystics in their first-person reports, one can become aware of the differences between the two modes of givenness. Without going into details, Steinbock identifies the features of mystical experiences to be “mystery and reverence,” as they disclose something unprovoked, uncontrollable, but also awe-inspiring, whereas sensory and intellectual objects are experienced as being “within reach, graspable, controllable.”⁴³ The latter can in fact be ushered into appearance by the subject, who can for example move to see more profiles of a perceived object or start thinking and hereby make the object of thought appear. Mystical content, on the other hand, comes unprovoked, i.e., without the subject being able to usher it or its

⁴¹ Steinbock 2007 p.27; Burch 2021 p.285

⁴² Ibid. p.9. For a definition of horizontality and presentation, see *ibid.* p.7

⁴³ Ibid. p.13

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profiles into appearance.⁴⁴ The two modes of givenness seem in this sense to be irreducible to one another.

Phenomenology, in other words, can disclose such differences and describe mystical experiences in their own uniqueness. To this first reason for why bother applying phenomenology, we can add a further one, specific to the epochē and the reduction. With the performance of these two steps, we could say that phenomenology is in the privileged position to contemplate reports of mystical experiences without falling prey to presuppositions and prejudices about the non-existence of their content. There seems in fact to be a tendency, especially in the scientific field, to dismiss reports of the “Absolute” (as Steinbock also calls the mystical content) as empty talk. As Steinbock puts it,

Because there are certain areas of experience that are conceived in advance as not being able to be described meaningfully since they are putatively non given, many of our reflective enterprises have been dismissed as so much theology, sophistry, or dogmatism.⁴⁵

The Absolute, that is, is taken to non-exist, to be an abstract construction of religious talks with nothing “real” about it (cf. “putatively non given”). On the other hand, phenomenology – with the epochē – suspends all beliefs in existence, including prejudices about the non-existence of the Absolute. So, instead of “[...] decid[ing] *a priori* that mystical claims are mumbojumbo [...],”⁴⁶ a phenomenological account can describe more open-mindedly what “kind of reality” is experienced by mystics. There seems in fact to be a

⁴⁴ See *ibid.* pp.7-9, 146

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁴⁶ Katz 1978 p. 23.

specific sense of reality at play here. As Josef Parnas & Mads Gram Henriksen (2016) note, mystics report of experiencing the Absolute as something “undoubtedly true.”⁴⁷ But they also seem to recognise that what is disclosed in their mystical experiences does not belong to the same dimension of reality ascribed to sensory objects. Margaret Prescott Montague, after having experienced mystical revelations while hospitalised, reports for instance:

Entirely unexpected (for I had never dreamt of such a thing) my eyes were opened and for the first time in my life I caught a glimpse of the ecstatic beauty of reality [...]. I saw no new thing but I saw all the usual things in a miraculous new light – in what I believe is their true light [...]. Once out of all the grey days of my life I have looked into the heart of reality; I have witnessed the truth.⁴⁸

It seems in other words that the content of mystical experiences is apprehended as a deeper sense of reality, a “new light” distinct from the light in which objects usually are apprehended – which arguably matches with Underhill’s above-mentioned characterisation of the Absolute as a “Reality beyond the veil.” On this issue, scholars of mysticism such as Stace (1960a) and the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1990) have argued that this deeper sense of reality is experienced not as something objective (i.e., observable by other subjects, as sensory objects are), nor simply subjective, since it is experienced as being absolutely certain. Rather, it is “trans-subjective,”

⁴⁷ Parnas & Henriksen 2016 pp.78, 81.

⁴⁸ Stace 1960a pp. 83-84.

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meaning that it is experienced as something existing in itself, in principle true for all subjects, but available only to the mystic.⁴⁹

This and other differences between experiences of sensory or intellectual objects and mystical experiences show that the sense of reality of the latter is something unique, not simply “non-existent” or reducible to the same kind of reality of the former. Phenomenology, having suspended all our prejudices about reality, is in a privileged position from which it can be attentive to all unique facets of the mystical sense of reality, so that these can be described in their own rights.

Recapitulating what we have said so far: Phenomenology, given its focus on first-person experiences, can offer accounts of mystical experiences as they are lived through, in their own uniqueness – that is, without reducing them to other experiences. Second, given the epochē and the reduction, phenomenology can offer unprejudiced accounts of the unique sense of reality at play in such experiences. On this basis, we can understand why one should bother looking at phenomenology when studying mysticism. This particular philosophical movement is arguably in a privileged position, given its non-reductionist and unprejudiced attitude towards experiences, to study what is reported by mystics.

It appears then that a researcher of mysticism indeed would want to perform the epochē and the reduction herself, given the privileged position they would offer her. From an unprejudiced position toward existence, the researcher would then arrive at insights about some specific aspect or implication of the mystical report – e.g., that the

⁴⁹ Parnas & Henriksen 2016 p.81. See Stace 1960a p.148; Nishida 1990 pp. xvii, 26, 50.

reality described in it is trans-subjective. This approach, however, might be excessive. Let us remember that the epochē is a suspension not only of our prejudices about the existence/non-existence of some entities, as of the mystical content. It is, as we have seen, also (and most importantly) a suspension of the *Urdoxa*, that underlying, primordial belief in existence that transcends the doxic modalities of specific experiences. The reduction is precisely a shift in perspective toward this belief too. But as this underlying belief transcends my particular prejudices, it could be argued that it is irrelevant to perform it in a mystical context. What would the researcher gain from having suspended this deeper belief? It seems rather, then, that the Husserlian methodical would be more relevant to a phenomenologist doing phenomenology in a philosophical context, inquiring into all facets of reality, thus including this deeper belief.⁵⁰ In the field of mysticism, on the contrary, such deeper facets are arguably not always relevant – if relevant at all.

Although it gives the researcher an unprejudiced perspective, the Husserlian steps risk in other words to be irrelevant to the researcher of mysticism, as they force her to deal with philosophical issues that, depending on the subject matter of her study, have no or little relevance to her.⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Zahavi 2020 p.3. As he puts it, the epochē and the reduction have *transcendental* aims, that is, they are ultimately aimed at discovering the constitutive conditions of reality. As such, they have “[...] very specific philosophical aims and pursuits” (ibid. p. 8).

⁵¹ For a similar point, see Burch 2021 p.278. As he puts it, forcing researchers from other fields to deal with certain abstruse, philosophical preoccupations, faces the problem of “who cares?”.

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The approach that we want to propose here can on the other hand short-cut this problem of irrelevance. Following Zahavi (2019a), instead of necessarily performing some specific methodical steps, we can employ concepts or ideas from canonical phenomenological texts that we deem relevant to our purposes, and through them make valuable contributions to what we are researching.⁵² In this way, it is not the researcher herself who has to perform the methodical steps: It is the phenomenologists she borrows from who has to (if methodical steps indeed are defining of phenomenology). Without always having to go through the epochē and the reduction, the researcher would be free to choose the phenomenological tools that best suit her. She could arguably still go for performing the epochē and the reduction if they indeed pertain specifically to the subject of her research. If not, she would not need to get her head around the concept of the *Urdoxa*. Instead, she could focus on those ideas that are more pertaining to the area she is studying. A researcher of mysticism, for example, could employ the account of revelations offered by Scheler, Levinas, Marion, or one of the other phenomenologists named in the introduction. Through their ideas about the unique mode of givenness of revelations, she could then hypothetically arrive at a more in-depth understanding of mystical revelations, at formulating new interpretations, or at challenging some of the views dominant in her field. Likewise, a researcher interested more specifically in, say, the role of the body in mystical experiences, could employ phenomenological concepts and ideas concerning the body, and through them arrive at valuable

⁵² Zahavi 2019a pp.905-906; Burch 2021 pp. 280-281.

insights.⁵³ In sum, according to one's purposes, one can choose what is most relevant to oneself.

Now, this approach is itself liable to critique.⁵⁴ A presentation of its apparent shortcomings, and of a possible rebuttal of these, exceeds however the limits and purposes of this article. What we intend to do here is simply to show an example of how this approach can look like and what contributions it can make, which is precisely what we shall do in the next half of the article. Taking Meister Eckhart's account of mystical experiences as our starting point, we shall show how the phenomenological concept of Heidegger's "ontological difference" can lead us to get around Eckhart's contradictory descriptions of God and the union with the divine. Without further ado, let us then delve into Eckhart's text.

3. Meister Eckhart

The works of Meister Eckhart have not passed unnoticed in phenomenology. His descriptions of mystical experiences are praised by Husserl himself,⁵⁵ and Heidegger calls him his "master of letters and life."⁵⁶ A Dominican from Thuringia, who in the course of his life would hold high-ranking offices in the administration of his monastic

⁵³ See Zahavi 2020 pp.7-8 for a similar example with nursing.

⁵⁴ See for example Burch 2021 pp.281-282. His critique concerns how Zahavi's proposal can discern applied phenomenology from phenomenology proper, and philosophical from non-philosophical contexts.

⁵⁵ Cairns 1976 p. 91: "Whole pages of Meister Eckhart, Husserl said, could be taken over by him unchanged."

⁵⁶ Moore 2019 p. 3.

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order, Eckhart (c. 1260 – c. 1328) is traditionally considered to be one of the greatest exponents of Christian mysticism.⁵⁷

Albeit having this reputation, he is fairly reticent about describing the circumstances of his personal mystical experiences, which might lead us to doubt whether he has ever had any.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, we can find examples where he seems to revivify the experiences as his own by using the first-person pronoun.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he writes of “three certain signs” through which one can verify whether the mystical experience indeed has taken place – signs which seemingly describe how one is supposed to feel after having received the revelation.⁶⁰ All this seems to indicate that he knows what he is describing from his own personal experiences.

To find these experiences, we shall look at some of his German sermons and at his short treatise *On Detachment*, where he also describes what seems to be the preparatory process prior to the mystical revelation. As one undergoes this process before experiencing the revelation, let us deal with it first.

⁵⁷ See Eckhart 2009 pp.6-13 for a biography.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵⁹ E.g., in sermon fifty-six (Maurice O.C. Walshe’s numbering), especially in ibid. pp.293-294. Another example is ibid. p.424, as he starts a paragraph with “[w]hen I flowed forth [...]” and carries on with the first-person pronoun.

⁶⁰ Ibid. pp. 59, 201-202.

3.1. Detachment

“Detachment” translates the original High Middle German *abegescheidenheit*.⁶¹ Eckhart opens the treatise *On Detachment* (*Von abegescheidenheit*) by defining it as a virtue. Specifically, as

[...] the best and highest virtue whereby a man may chiefly and most firmly join himself to God, and whereby a man may become by grace what God is by nature, and whereby a man may come closest to his image when he was in God, wherein there was no difference between him and God, before God made creatures.⁶²

Here we find a first characterisation at what detachment is aimed at. Shortly, it is the union with God, what Eckhart calls “the birth.”⁶³ In these lines, this birth is expressed as a joining oneself to God, a becoming what He is, overcoming all differences between oneself and God, yet with a clarification: It is determined by God Himself (cf. “by grace”). As Eckhart writes in his sermon four, “[...] you should know that God *must* act and pour Himself into you [...]”⁶⁴ It is in other words imperative that it is God who acts. I cannot actively join God on my own: The joining is performed by God – it is Him who pours Himself into me. And so is the experience of such joining also determined by grace: “[...] God in His mercy veils it when He will and reveals it when He will and when He knows, like a trustworthy physician, that it is most useful and helpful for you.”⁶⁵ We could say, following Steinbock, that

⁶¹ Moore 2019 p. 65.

⁶² Eckhart 2009 p. 566.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 29.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 58.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 47.

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the birth is not ushered into appearance by the subject, but comes “unprovoked” – or, more precisely, provoked by the external, uncontrollable force that is God. As we shall see later on, a differentiation between the birth and the experience of the birth is needed, since the former is described as something going on eternally, while the latter is seemingly occasional.

Going back to the detachment: Rather than actively instantiate the birth, detachment is described more precisely as aimed at becoming *ready* or *receptive*. As Eckhart puts it, “[...] detachment makes me receptive of nothing but God;”⁶⁶ and “[God] works as He finds readiness and receptivity.”⁶⁷ It is in other words a question of becoming receptive, that is, able to experience the birth as it passively comes upon me.⁶⁸

Now, having seen what detachment aims at, we still need to understand what it amounts to. How do I become receptive?

In order to better understand how the detachment is performed, it might be helpful to look at Eckhart’s account of the soul and its functioning. He distinguishes between two parts of the soul: An inner part, its essence, called with several names – the “ground,” the “castle,” the “spark;”⁶⁹ and an outer part, which operates with the so-called “soul-powers.” These powers are intellect, the will, memory, the

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 566.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 572.

⁶⁸ It seems however that God can create readiness where he finds none, as with St. Paul’s case, where God “[...] made him ready by infusion of grace” (ibid.). Whether readiness is always imparted by grace or can be achieved independently is not clear from these lines.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

senses, anger, and desire.⁷⁰ They are directed outwards, that is, not at the soul, but at “the multiplicity of creatures.”⁷¹ The outer part of the soul has no direct contact with what exists outside of it: It is the soul-powers that, acting as a medium, translate the outer impressions to mental images, then presented to the soul.⁷² Specifically, it is the intellect – seemingly understood as imagination and rational understanding⁷³ – that “[...] abstracts images from outward things [...],”⁷⁴ i.e., performs this translation. We should furthermore note that whether “creatures” only refer to living creatures is not clear. Inanimate sensory objects and intellectual objects are arguably experienced through these powers too. The former can in fact be perceived by the senses and translated into images by the intellect; the latter are arguably directly created as mental images by the intellect.

The inner part of the soul, on the other hand, is devoid of powers, thus of all images. “There is the silent ‘middle,’ for no creature ever entered there and no image, nor has the soul there either activity or understanding [...].”⁷⁵ It remains “unmoved,” that is, unaffected by creatures and objects. Eckhart talks in this regard of Christ and Mary,

⁷⁰ See *ibid.* p. 37 note 9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 29.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 31.

⁷³ Imagination as it creates mental images (see next note); rational understanding as Eckhart talks of “ratiocination and reasoning” (*ibid.* p.34) – i.e., a way to arrive at understanding by rationally inferring from reasons. This understanding is not to be confused with the higher, passive form of understanding that one has when experiencing the birth – what Eckhart calls “the passive intellect” (*ibid.* pp. 46-47).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 30.

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who are described in the Gospels as being “sorrowful” during the events of the Passion. Yet, Eckhart argues, they remained unmoved in their inner soul, “insensible,” “entranced” with respect to sorrow, but arguably also to other sensations, such as physical pain, fear of death, and the like.⁷⁶

What is of interest to us is that this part of the soul – devoid of all powers and images – is described as “detached.”⁷⁷ It is then precisely on this basis that we can understand what detachment amounts to: A *withdrawal* from the outer part of the soul to the inner part.⁷⁸

Therefore the soul in which this birth is to take place must keep absolutely pure and must live in noble fashion, quite collected and turned entirely inward, not running out through the five senses into the multiplicity of creatures, but all intuned and collected and in the purest part – there is His place [...].⁷⁹

It amounts in other words to restraining ourselves from using the outer-directed soul-powers and instead dwell solely in the silent part of the soul. All creatures and objects – as they are apprehended through the soul-powers – would hereby be cut off from our experiential field.⁸⁰ Even our own body would seemingly be cut off. Based on a citation from St. Paul, Eckhart writes of a state of “oblivion of your own

⁷⁶ Ibid. pp. 570-571.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 375.

⁷⁸ Examples of Eckhart’s use of “withdraw” and its derivatives can be found in *ibid.* pp. 33-34.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 29-30.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.* p.33, where Eckhart also explicitly mentions intellectual objects: “Withdraw from the unrest of external activities, then flee away and hide from the turmoil of internal thoughts.”

body.”⁸¹ He subsequently only mentions three sensations – body temperature, hunger, and thirst,⁸² leaving open the question as to how comprehensive the loss of bodily awareness is. It seems at any rate to impact certain sensations: Body-temperature, hunger, and thirst, but arguably also the above-mentioned sorrow, physical pain, etc.

Detachment, in sum, can be described as an all-encompassing withdrawal from the use of our soul-powers, and – as such – a cutting off of what these powers disclose (creatures, objects, and our body, albeit the extent of the loss of the latter being unclear). It represents indeed a profound change in the life of the subject. Eckhart talks in this regard of the soul entering a state of “total self-abnegation,”⁸³ describing the detachment as a process of “naughting and shrinking” resulting in the “total destruction of the self.”⁸⁴

The aim of this destruction of the self is, as we have seen, that of becoming receptive to the birth. Let us then examine this notion, the birth, and see what its experience amounts to.

3.2. The Birth & the Ontological Difference

A first question to help us on the way to understand the birth could be: Why does its experience require the performance of the detachment? Eckhart hints at an answer to this question where he writes: “What is

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.: “[...] vital warmth and body-heat were suspended, so that the body did not waste during the three days when he neither ate nor drank.”

⁸³ Ibid. p. 140.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 517. Whether the self can in fact be totally destroyed in mystical experiences is a discussion that will not be treated here. For more, see Steinbock 2007 pp.168-178; Parnas & Henriksen 2016 pp. 83-85.

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the object of pure detachment? My answer is that the object of pure detachment is neither *this nor that*. It rests on absolutely nothing, and I will tell you why: pure detachment rests on the highest [...].”⁸⁵ In other words, we detach ourselves from all *this and that*’s, that is, from all individual entities, be they creatures or objects, and instead “rest on the highest,” which amounts to resting on “nothing.” Such an equation of the highest with nothing points to a characterisation of God precisely as nothing, or rather, as a *no-thing*, that is, as not a *this or that*, not an individual entity like creatures and objects are. As Eckhart himself puts it, “[...] God is nothing: not in the sense of having no being [*wesen*]. He is neither *this* nor *that* that one can speak of [...].”⁸⁶ The detachment would then be necessary, because only by eliminating all individual entities from our experiential field can we become receptive to the union with this no-thing.⁸⁷ Yet, if God is not an entity, what is it then?

The question of God’s nature is one of the major tenets in Eckhart’s thoughts, which he treats in several of his works. In his sermons, we can find that Eckhart describes God in contradicting terms, with expressions such as “a beingless being” (*ein wesen weselôs*),⁸⁸ or “a mode without mode, and essence without essence.”⁸⁹ It must be noticed that descriptions where X is said to be both Y and not-Y are typical in Eckhart. As Rudbøg (2013) points out, they are part of the so-called *apophatic* (literally, “non-saying”) discourse which Eckhart uses,

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 571-572.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp.316-317. For a similar description, see also ibid. pp. 341-342.

⁸⁷ See ibid. p.572: “For when the detached heart rests on the highest, that can only be on nothing, since that has the greatest receptivity.”

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.317; the original High Middle German is from Eckhart 1958 p. 431.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 142.

where the ineffable nature of what is revealed is expressed in such a contradicting language in order to lead the reader to understand that it is precisely ineffable, “beyond regular semantics.”⁹⁰ As Eckhart himself writes in the above-mentioned citation, God “[...] is neither *this* nor *that* that one can speak of [...]”. No images can be used to describe Him, His modes, or attributes. Indeed, “[...] to speak of God with nothing is to speak of Him correctly.”⁹¹

Given its contradictory descriptions and its unspeakableness, it is not easy to reconstruct Eckhart’s understanding of God’s nature. Different interpretations, based on the German sermons and on the Latin works, have been put forward by scholars. One particular interpretation of interest to us is Reiner Schürmann’s (1983), who – in a paper published on *Research in Phenomenology* – compares Eckhart to Heidegger. Specifically relevant to us is his clarification of Heidegger’s concept of the “ontological difference,” that Schürmann in his paper uses to draw a parallel between three thinkers – Plotinus, Eckhart, and Heidegger.⁹² Leaving Plotinus aside, let us see how Schürmann, using this Heideggerian concept, comes up with an interpretation of Eckhart’s notion of God.

Heidegger’s ontological difference is a notion first explicitly used in his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1988).⁹³ Now, a full account of such a notion exceeds the purposes of this article and arguably the

⁹⁰ Rudbøg 2013 pp.132-133. See also Moore 2019 p. 84.

⁹¹ Eckhart 2009 p. 140.

⁹² See Schürmann 1983 pp. 30-34.

⁹³ See Heidegger 1988 p. 17.

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interests of researchers of mysticism. To our aims, Schürmann's concise definition will suffice. In his words:

Simply stated, this [the ontological difference] is the difference between the process of coming to presence—of entering into our field of attention—and the thing that is present or that so enters into our horizon. The first is best expressed by a verb, "presencing," the second by a noun, "something present."⁹⁴

Put differently, it is the distinction between a dynamic, *verbal* process of presencing – what Heidegger calls *Sein*; and a *noun*, designating the entity that is the subject to the verb, the thing that is present (*Seiendes*).⁹⁵ Transposing the same model of a distinction between verb and noun to Eckhart, Schürmann finds a similar distinction in the mystic's use of two different words for "being:" *wesen* and *ih̄t*. The former is a verb, whereas the latter is a noun usually employed to designate entities, that is, the things that are.⁹⁶ The argument is then that the Eckhartian God, described precisely as a *no-thing*, could be understood verbally, as *wesen*, along the lines of Heidegger's *Sein*. In this sense, the God with Whom we unite in the birth is interpreted by Schürmann as the non-nominal, dynamic process of being.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Schürmann 1983 p. 30.

⁹⁵ Ibid.. See also Nicholson 1996 pp.357-359.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 31.

⁹⁷ Ibid. This is not to say that God cannot also be understood as an entity, as one does when for example speaking of God as "the creator." Yet, the relevant conception of God at play here for Eckhart is not a nominal one. In order to better distinguish the two senses, Eckhart employs at times the term "Godhead" (*gotheit*, *deitas*), arguably identifiable with the verbal *wesen*, as opposed to God (*got*, *deus*), understood as an entity with all His attributes (i.e., nominally). See

Following this interpretation of God, some of the above-mentioned apophatic descriptions could be understood as pointing at the difficulty of the language of the time, but arguably also of our modern languages, to speak of this verbal sense of being without hereby nominalising it. It is arguably hard to express the verbal sense without hereby talking about something, when, as a matter of fact, this being is precisely not some-thing. For instance, we have so far explained this being as “*the process of being*,” that is, with a noun. But even using “being” alone can give rise to nominalisation. One seemingly tends to forget that “being” is not a something, especially when one uses it as subject or object in a sentence (e.g., when saying: “being is X,” or “X has being”). Furthermore, certain languages can be ambiguous when it comes to the word used to define such a verbal process. The English participle “being” can in fact refer both to the predicate “to be” and to the noun “a being” (as in “a living being”).⁹⁸ The fact that Eckhart’s God is to be understood verbally would arguably explain why He is so ineffable: Given our linguistic tools, it is hard to speak of Him without nominalising Him. And apophatic expressions such as “being without being” (*wesen âni wesen*) could arguably be read as a warning against any nominalisation of *wesen* – literally, as saying that God⁹⁹ must be understood as “verbal being without any nominalised sense of being.”

In sum, following Schürmann, we can interpret the Eckhartian God of the birth as this purely verbal sense of being, which renders Him hard to express with language. And not solely God: The inner part of

ibid. pp.27-28, 31; Moore 2019 p.11. See also Eckhart 2009 p.293 for an example of such a distinction between Godhead and God.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 30.

⁹⁹ See note 97 on the possibility for God to be an entity.

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the soul, described, as we have seen, precisely as devoid of all things, as a “state of pure nothingness,”¹⁰⁰ could also be understood verbally, as a *no-thing* (non-noun).

Yet, what about the birth? How could we understand it following Schürmann? The joining oneself to God, becoming what He is, coming closest to Him as when no difference between one and God existed: All these characterisations from the passage we cited in the beginning of the previous chapter can be understood as describing the identity relation between God and one’s own inner soul, as both are “being” in this verbal sense. There is, in other words, no difference between God and the “ground” of my soul, inasmuch as both are simply *wesen*.¹⁰¹

In another passage, they are described as so akin that they are “a single impartible one.”¹⁰² Such unity, or one, is not to be grasped as an identity between entities: Rather, “[...] God and I are one in this operation [...]” (*einheit im gewürke*),¹⁰³ where “operation” (*gewürke*) can be taken to precisely highlight the dynamic, verbal character of the two relata in this identity relation.¹⁰⁴ These relata, God and the inner soul, are one and the same dynamic, verbal process – or one could likewise say, “operation” – of being.

With this interpretation, we can also understand why the birth is said to be “eternal.” As Eckhart puts it, “[...] we are celebrating the eternal birth which God the Father bore and bears unceasingly in

¹⁰⁰ Eckhart 2009 p. 57.

¹⁰¹ Schürmann 1983 pp.28, 31-32.

¹⁰² Eckhart 2009 p. 280.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.332; in Schürmann 1983 p.32 rendered as “identity in operation.”

¹⁰⁴ Schürmann 1983 p. 32.

eternity, because this birth is now born in time, in human nature.”¹⁰⁵ Seen as the presence of *wesen* (God/inner soul) in me, the birth is continuously taking place. God is in a sense always pouring Himself into me. Not only into me, but in all humans, and generally all entities – i.e., all things that *are*. As he writes, one of the signs through which we can verify that the birth indeed has been revealed to us is precisely a subsequent feeling of the presence of God in all creatures. “Your face is so fully turned toward this birth that, no matter what you see or hear, you can get nothing but this birth from things. All things become simply God to you, for in all things you notice only God [...]”¹⁰⁶

Finally, we are now in a position to give our interpretation of the experience of the birth. Based on what we have said, it seems to amount to the experience of *becoming aware* of the presence of this dynamic, verbal process of being happening in us and in all entities.¹⁰⁷ Using Stace’s terminology from the beginning of this article, we could say that it has both an introvertive and extrovertive moment – as the presence of God is felt both in me, upon having detached myself from all external things, but subsequently also outside, in all external things. It is furthermore arguably neither a sensory nor an intellectual experience (since we have withdrawn from using the senses and the intellect). Its content is not ushered into appearance, but rather

¹⁰⁵ Eckhart 2009 p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ See Moore 2019 p.15: “[...] making our implicit oneness with the Godhead explicit.”

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seemingly experienced passively, unprovokedly revealed to us while we are in a state of detachment.

Conclusion

Recapitulating what we have done in the last two chapters: Using the notion of ontological difference to find a similar distinction between being as verb and as noun in Eckhart, we have been able to formulate an interpretation of Eckhart's notion of God, of His ineffability, of the birth, and of the experience of the birth. Albeit not being definitive (more in-depth analysis of Eckhart's works would be needed to assess them), these interpretations are a prime example of how the employment of phenomenological concepts and ideas can contribute to the study of mystical experiences.

Taking a step back from arguing for this specific approach to its application, we have also seen why phenomenology in general can be of interest to the study of mysticism. Its relying on first-person experiences and its unprejudiced attitude towards existence allow for an appreciation of the unique facets of all experiences – making it a privileged theoretical position from which we can study the often-mischaracterised mystical revelations. The question of whether we, in a non-philosophical context, need to worry about methodical steps such as Husserl's epochē and reduction, has subsequently led us to proposing a non-methodical approach, which has arguably shown itself capable of valuable contributions. With these contributions as a proof, we can at any rate conclude that phenomenology indeed can be of great potential to the study of mysticism.

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Volume 6

ISBN 978-87-992056-8-4



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