

A relation of Swedenborgianism and anthroposophy

The case of the Finnish author Kersti Bergroth and her novel *The Living and the Dead*

My article discusses the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg on a Finnish female author, Kersti Bergroth (1886-1975) through one of Bergroth's novels *Eläviä ja kuolleita* ('The Living and the Dead', 1945). Bergroth was a prolific author with an anthroposophical bent, and an admirer of German idealism. In this particular novel Bergroth refers explicitly to Swedenborg and the story discloses a number of Swedenborgian themes: the doctrine of correspondences; a world divided into material, spiritual, and divine realms; and communication with the spirits of the dead. As Bergroth was an active member of the anthroposophical movement, I will also consider the route, spread, and place of Swedenborg's ideas within anthroposophy and theosophy in the twentieth century.

Introduction

Kersti Bergroth (1886-1975) was a prolific writer.¹ Her career lasted for over sixty years and she published over seventy novels. Bergroth is however almost unknown to Finnish readers of today, as she was to me until some years ago when, in a second-hand bookshop, the title of one of her novels *Eläviä ja kuolleita* ('The Living and the Dead', 1945) caught my attention. It was a promising title, as I was, at the time, mapping the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) on Finnish literature. It caught my interest also for the reason that the authors I had looked at so far, with regard to exhibiting Swedenborgian traits, had all been male and active during the nine-

teenth century (Mahlamäki 2014: 103; Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2010).

The plot of the novel is quickly told: A young woman, Anna, is living an isolated and ordinary life, in a small and tidy home with her husband. After a brief illness, the husband dies, and the young woman starts to write her doctoral dissertation on the friendship of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller. She also becomes involved with a new man, who in the course of the action marries another woman. Anna feels abandoned and suffers a lot, but at the end finds peace in her mind (Bergroth 1945; Mahlamäki 2014: 104; Mahlamäki 2017: 195-9).

I soon discovered that Bergroth explicitly referred to Emanuel Swedenborg in the novel and, as I read on, it appeared to contain a number of Swedenborgian themes, namely; the doctrine of correspondences, a world divided into a material, a spiritual and a divine realm, heaven as a mind-state, and communication with the spirits of the dead. They are, of course, common themes that have inspired many thinkers and authors, but when considering the way they are brought together in this novel, I came to suspect that, by chance, I had stumbled on a twentieth-century female author who was familiar with the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg (Mahlamäki 2014: 103).

In reading Kersti Bergroth's novel, however, I came to realize that she was not exactly or at least not explicitly communicating a Swedenborgian universe. For sure, Swedenborg's ideas seemed to fit perfectly into this novel in the way it explores the relation between the living and the dead, but the universe within which the events of the novel take place is, I came to understand, anthroposophical, emerging from the spiritual science of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). In the novel Bergroth refers only once

1 The article is based on a paper presented at the IAHR World Congress in Erfurt, Germany 2015 in a panel chaired by Professor Jane Williams-Hogan. I dedicate this article to her memory.

to Swedenborg, as also to Rudolf Steiner, in a passage where she reads Swedenborg through Steiner:

Love awakens in human beings at different times, and its effects are always deeply quivering. Rudolf Steiner tells us that at a certain moment in Swedenborg's life a superior love for all that he had learned was enkindled. Rudolf Steiner says: 'More than perhaps any other human being Swedenborg had come to love knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) for its own sake.' (Bergroth 1945: 74; Steiner 1923)²

The lecture Bergroth is citing was given in 1923, and in it Steiner discusses how Swedenborg, at a certain point in his life, came to enter the spiritual realm. Steiner saw Swedenborg as a person who possessed a superior knowledge in the sense of prudence, or cleverness, by way of a karmic evolverment, that eventually activated in him the inner senses to perceive the spiritual world. However, Steiner contends that as Swedenborg, for precisely this reason, had not entered the spiritual realm by way of inner training and preparation, he came to perceive the spiritual world as being coloured by sense perceptions, in an earthly manner. Swedenborg's clairvoyance was thus atavistic and, writes Steiner, he is an 'example of an important personality [who] shows us that it leads to illusions if we ascend to spiritual worlds without being steeped in the ability to step out of the kind of consciousness we apply on the physical plane. We are met by an illusory world.' (Steiner 1915, 1923)

In the novel Bergroth uses Swedenborg as an example of a person who loved knowledge. At the same time Swedenborg is placed alongside the German idealists Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller and Novalis, whom Bergroth abundantly cites and discusses. Within the field of Western esotericism both Swedenborg and Steiner – the latter as a continuer of the tradition of German *Naturphilosophie*, the former as a precursor or inspiration of it – are regarded as pivotal architects of eso-

2 'Rakkaus herää ihmisessä eri aikoina, ja sen vaikutukset ovat aina syvästi mullistavia. Rudolf Steiner kertoo, että Swedenborgissa erääseen aikaan hänen elämästään heräsi ylivoimainen rakkaus siihen, mitä hän oli oppinut. Rudolf Steiner sanoo: "Enemmän kuin tuskin kukaan ihminen maailmassa Swedenborg oppi rakastamaan tietoa (*Erkenntnis*) sellaisenaan."'



The statue of Emanuel Swedenborg in Stockholm, Sweden. Photo: Tiina Mahlamäki.

teric thinking (see, e.g., Faivre 1995, Stuckrad 2005, Versluis 2007, Goodrick-Clarke 2008). Researchers have, however, seldom brought Swedenborg and Steiner together. One exception is Jane Williams-Hogan (1998: 250–2), who affirms that Steiner was familiar with Swedenborg's writings, and that Steiner probably in some ways also was influenced by his thoughts.

In her novel, Bergroth thus expresses a sphere of kinship, a world of authors that are related to each other and express similar or mutually supporting views. The novel proceeds on two levels; the first is an open and general one that has to do with art and learning, of being witty, *Bildung*. The other level – the esoteric one – is not immediately obvious to the general reader, as it is an order that is merely alluded to or hinted at. Art, learning and an aura of mystery are interwoven and presents or bestows the actors in the novel with certain peculiarities. For Bergroth to be an anthroposophist is primarily to be a creative artist, to have a love for great literature, and to be curious about how humans act and think. This includes both the 'living and the dead'; both the contemporary, ordinary and less ordinary lives, and the lives and thoughts of great authors and artists in history. What makes Bergroth's novel in part esoteric is the dwelling on seemingly ordinary events, on individuals and on communications, on persons acting, feeling and thinking. It suffices to understand what is human, as by understanding ourselves we come to understand the world. The human perspective is the key to unlocking all mysteries, insofar as they are the

mysteriess of existence, of coming into being and of passing away. Before I go on to analyse these traits in the novel I will start with some biographical data.

Kersti Bergroth as an author and anthroposophist

Kersti Bergroth was born in 1886 and spent her childhood in the city of Vyborg in the Karelian isthmus, an area which is now part of the Russian Federation. Before the Second World War Vyborg was the third largest and by far the most international city in Finland. During her childhood Bergroth was greatly influenced by Vyborg's cosmopolitan milieu, and she often returns to the city in her literary works. Bergroth's parents belonged to distinguished families of the clergy and the intelligentsia. They also took part in the Pietistic revival movement of the late nineteenth century. Later in her life, Bergroth expressed her gratitude to her religious parents and forefathers for bestowing on her the rare gift of trust or faith in a spiritual world. She confessed that she was privileged: already as a child she had been shown the 'Promised Land', as 'a model and image' (Rantavaara 1952: 19; Bergroth 1942: 136; Bergroth 1971: 9–16, 20–1; Mahlamäki 2014: 104, 109).

In her early youth, Bergroth adopted an atheist worldview, or at least, she became extremely critical of Christianity. She studied aesthetics, French, and art history at the University of Helsinki from 1904 till 1910. During those years, many of her friends also defended skeptical, agnostic, or atheist views, paired with a contemporary mood of meaninglessness that is present also in Bergroth's early novels. She started her career as a professional author soon after graduating (Bergroth 1973: 61–7; Mahlamäki 2014: 109–110).

Kersti Bergroth was a productive and multi-talented author who besides novels also wrote plays, essays, causeries, fairy tales, young people's novels, novels of light entertainment, travel books, aphorisms, film scripts, poems and memoirs. She used various pseudonyms for the different genres. Bergroth's novels were never bestsellers, but she did have admirers and a devoted group of readers. Many of her critics paid respect to the way she used language. Bergroth did not experiment with style or structure; her skills lay more in descriptions of the human mind and in the use of dialogue. The most well known of her works are the novels for young people which tell of a class in a school, written under the pseudonym of Mary Marck. Her play, *Anu ja Mikko* ('Anu and



Kersti Bergroth 1886–1975. Photo by the courtesy of Finnish National Archive.

Mikko, 1932), written in the Karelian dialect, is also especially remembered and valued among Karelian evacuees and their families. She is also remembered as a talented and important author within Finnish anthroposophy circles (Rantavaara 1952; Mahlamäki 2014: 104–5; Mahlamäki 2017: 146–52, 274–5).

Kersti Bergroth was married twice. Her first marriage ended with her husband's death, and the second in divorce. She never had children. During the years of sickness of her first husband, Bergroth started to reflect on the ultimate questions concerning life and death. She also started to read theosophical writings, mainly the works of Annie Besant. The theosophical movement reached Finland at the turn of the twentieth century, and it attracted and inspired a number of artists and writers. Among them was a pioneer of modernist literature, the distinguished Finnish poet Edith Södergran (1892–1923). New spiritual and religious movements usually reached Finland via Sweden; one common denominator among Finns adopting new ideas was that they were usually Swedish-speaking. This was also the case with the theosophical movement (Mahlamäki 2014: 105–7; on Södergran see Häll 2006; on the theosophical movement see Ahlbäck 1995).

The writings and ideas of Rudolf Steiner were well known among theosophists in Finland. Steiner himself visited the country in 1912 and 1913, delivering lectures both at the local Theosophical Society and to a wider public. In the period between the visits, Steiner had left the Theosophical Society and laid the foundations of anthroposophy, a spiritual science that put more stress on Western philosophical and mystical traditions than theosophy did. Presumably, Bergroth's familiarity with Besant and the distinctive discourse and concepts of theosophy had prepared her to endorse the views of Rudolf Steiner. During the early years of anthroposophy this seems to have been the most common way to become an anthroposophist: the path went from theosophy to anthroposophy (not the other way around) (see Kuusela 2012; Mahlamäki 2014: 105–6).

During the same period, which is to say, at some point in her late 20s – the actual year is unknown, but after she had become familiar with Besant's ideas – Bergroth experienced something she called an 'awakening', a realisation, and sudden understanding, of the existence of a spiritual world. She does not use the term 'conversion' in describing the change in her worldview. But if conversion may be defined as Geoffrey Galt Harpham (1988: 43) does, as an 'exemplary plot-climax, a reversal of a certain way of being and a recognition, an awakening to essential being, to one's truest self', this is precisely the way in which Bergroth describes her experience both in her letters, novels and memoirs. She describes her gradual awakening in terms of a remarkable event that forced her to think differently (Mahlamäki 2014: 110–11; Mahlamäki 2017: 56–63).

In both her early novel *Kiirastuli* ('Purgatory', 1922) and her late memoirs *Löytöretki* ('Discovery', 1973), Bergroth conveys that she had had, occasionally, perceptions or experiences of the spiritual world. The first and most important such instance occurred during a walk in the city of Helsinki, when she abruptly sensed the simultaneous presence of two different realities: 'Before her were two worlds. They were interwoven and interpenetrated each other' (Bergroth (1922) 1952: 266). In her memoirs she writes:

I see a street view before me. Tall blocks of flats on both sides of the street ascending the hill. Behind them is the sky. Suddenly the scene changes. At the upper end of the street the

buildings are thinning out, becoming transparent. Behind them is another, lighter landscape. At that moment I know this is the spiritual world. (Bergroth 1973: 94)³

After this experience, the existence of a spiritual world became for Bergroth a self-evident truth, something she would accept without the need for further evidence (Mahlamäki 2017: 56–63). Another description can be found in a letter: 'I suddenly woke up to understand that a spirit exists behind the material. The world was in a sense transparent, I knew that all that is earthly was just a veil that covers the spiritual world from ordinary eyes' (Bergroth's letter to General Lennart Oesch 15.11.1942, Finnish National Archive).⁴

In 1924 Bergroth joined the Anthroposophical Society in Finland – which had been founded in the previous year – and became an active member of the society. She was later even elected as the president of the society for several years. During the following decades she also made several visits to the headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society at the Goethenaum in Dornach, Switzerland, where on her first visit she met Rudolf Steiner in person (Bergroth 1973: 120–2; Mahlamäki 2017: 91–2). The process of becoming an anthroposophist and of developing one's inner senses is described by Bergroth in her letter to a friend:

You know, I'm an 'anthroposophist'. My long periods of research have gradually given me inner 'evidences' so that all this research has changed my thinking and my emotions. Things and events that I come across open up to me much more than before. Within me has developed a kind of inner key through which I can cope with the problems of the world in a wholly new way. ... My research, or should I say

3 'Näen edessäni katukuvan. Korkeavuorenkadun molemmat kiviset rakennusmuurit, jotka nousevat mäkeä ylös. Niiden taustana on taivas. Yhtäkkiä näky muuttuu. Kadun yläpäässä olevat rakennukset harvenevat, tulevat läpinäkyviksi. Niiden takana on toinen, kevyempi maisema. Samassa tiedän, että se on henkinen maailma.'

4 '...minä yhtäkkiä heräsin ymmärtämään, että aineen takana on henki. Maailma oli kuin läpinäkyvä, minä tiesin, että kaikki maallinen on vain harso, joka tavalisilta silmiltä peittää henkisen maailman.'

practice, has opened up new worlds to me, just as the world opens up to someone who is learning the alphabet... (Kersti Bergroth's letter to General Lennart Oesch 30.1.1943, Finnish National Archive)⁵

Bergroth's conversion and anthroposophical orientation are mirrored in her first novel, *Urbans väg* ('Urban's Way', 1919), which metaphorically describes the process of awakening (see Mahlamäki 2017: 67–71). Henceforth this influence is discernible in all her novels and writings, as they had a profound impact also on her understanding of art, of the significance of being an artist.

Negotiating art and faith

Bergroth was thus, openly and actively, a member of the Anthroposophical Society. She wrote in anthroposophical journals, associated with anthroposophists, and lived for two decades in Rome, Italy, together with another anthroposophist, Liisa Ottonen. But in her memoirs and interviews Bergroth denied that she ever openly declared anthroposophical principles in her novels. In an interview, she stated that 'literature with a tendency is never art; you must not be instructive, you must not impose your own convictions on anyone'. She also maintained a strict divide between her artistic work (published under her own name) and other literary works (published under pseudonyms). The predicament of being both an artist – a professional writer – and a convinced anthroposophist creates a tension in her life and work (Bergroth 1942, 1973; Mahlamäki 2017: 108–9, 114; Mahlamäki 2014: 105).⁶

5 'Tiedät että olen "antroposofi". Pitkänä tutkimusaikanani olen vähitellen saanut sisäisiä "todistuksia" siitä, että tutkimustyöni on muuttanut ajatteluani ja myöskin tunne-elämäni. ... En, vaan on kuin kaikki ilmiöt ja tapahtumat, jotka sattuvat tielleni, avautuivat minulle paljon enemmän kuin ennen. Minussa on kehittynyt ikään kuin sisäisiä avaimia, joiden avulla pääsen mielestäni aivan uudella tavalla käsiksi maailman ongelmiin. ... tutkimustyöni, sanoisinko harjoitteluni, on avannut minulle uusia maailmoja, niin kuin esimerkiksi uusi maailma avautuu sille, joka oppii aakkoset.'

6 '...tendenssikirjallisuus ei ole koskaan taidetta, tendenssitaide ei ole taidetta, ei saa olla opettavainen ei saa tyrkyttää omia vakaumuksiaan kellekkään...'

Bergroth deals with spiritual questions and anthroposophical ideas in her literary work, but, in a veiled manner, which makes it comprehensible largely only to anthroposophically-minded readers. This is in concord with Rudolf Steiner's ideas on art: according to him, the spiritual manifests itself in art. The meaning of art is to place 'the world of the spirit within the world of the senses'. Steiner also maintains that 'the true artist more or less unconsciously confesses the spirit' and penetrates 'to a knowledge of the spiritual world' (Steiner 1951: 104). Rudolf Steiner's writings evidently appealed to artists in general, because in his thinking he strongly connects spirituality with creativity. The artist in fact becomes the conveyer of spiritual truths. Bergroth endorses Steiner's view that a true work of art is an expression of the artist, who ultimately, since artists define beauty and truth, approaches questions of the meaning of life and the mystery of death (Rantavaara 1952: 7–8; Mahlamäki 2014: 114; Mahlamäki 2017: 72–8).

As an author Bergroth was not interested in external or material facts; she does describe ordinary everyday life, but contemplates the spiritual dimensions of the characters and their inner worlds, especially their spiritual growth and development. When she describes a crisis in the life of a character, it always functions as a threshold or stepping stone, allowing that character to move onward or upward along a spiritual path. In an interview she says that 'art should express changes within the human, in the sense they are always on a journey somewhere, not stagnant, as in photographs...' (Arto Nuortio interviews Kersti Bergroth 16.9.1971, Finnish Literature Society).⁷

This becoming of human beings is reflected in Bergroth's novels – including *The Living and the Dead* – so that faith, or firmness of faith, is not something one obtains quickly and easily. It is something that develops slowly, matures, something one has to struggle for. Life, in its entirety, is a striving

7 '...ihmisen pitäisi taiteessa niin kuin ihminen oikeastaan on mutta taiteessa sen pitäisi ilmetä hänessä muuttuvaisuus muuntuvaisuus että hän on matkalla jonnekin lähdössä johonkin ei se että hän on paikallaan kuin valokuvauksellisesti vaan kuin filmissä tapahtuu siis että niinkun ihminen elämässäänkin hän muuttuu joka hetki niin kuin kasvi vaikka ruusu sehän muuttuu joka hetki ja tämä muuttuvaisuus olisi saatava taiteessa esille silloin siihen tulee mehevyyttä ja elämän liikuntaa.'



The cover of Geoffrey Ahern (1984) *Sun at Midnight. The Rudolf Steiner Movement and the Western Esoteric Tradition*. Aquarian Press.

towards spiritual growth. It is like the chalice of the Grail, with truth gleaming within it (Mahlamäki 2017: 75–6). She describes her writing on human beings: 'you have to stress how the person is reacting, what powers are in motion, how they transform because of them, and allow them to become whatever is permitted, but as soon it turns to preaching or fostering a certain ideology, art disappears completely ...' (Arto Nuortio interviews Kersti Bergroth 16.9.1971, Finnish Literature Society).⁸

Anthroposophy is ultimately concerned with the wisdom of human being. For Steiner, man is the deepest mystery in the universe. By studying the human being, one learns about the world and about mankind as a whole. As Steiner states, through our knowledge of the world, through our knowing, the cosmos becomes gradually more conscious of itself, and more complete (Steiner 1951; Lachman 2007; McDermott 2005: 8738–9). It was this process that Bergroth wanted to describe in her novels; the inner world of human beings, their thoughts and visions, how they changed and acted. The novels of Bergroth are, in certain senses, deeply anthropocentric. Changes that occur in societal conditions do not, Bergroth contends, belong to art. They are momentary and pass away (Arto Nuortio interviews Kersti Bergroth 16.9.1971, Finnish Literature Society).⁹

8 '...pääpainon pitää silloin olla siinä miten ihminen siihen suhtautuu mitä voimia hänessä liikkuu miten hän muuttuu muuntuu sen johdosta ja tulla silloin mikä tahansa on sallittua mutta niin pian kuin siitä tulee saarnaamista tai määrätyn ideologian ajamista tai jotain sellaista taide häviää kokonaan kerta kaikkiaan...'

9 '...yhteiskuntaan ja yhteiskunnallisiin oloihin se on minusta hyvin oikeastaan taiteeseen kuulumatonta, se on hetkellistä, se menee ohi ja josta hirveän innokkaasti 100 vuotta 50 vuotta sitten kuvailtiin esim. naisen emansipaatiota, se on niin, ettei kukaan ihminen viitsi lukea sitä...'

In the next chapter I attempt to explore these ideas in more depth by returning to Bergroth's novel *The Living and the Dead*, briefly discussed in the introduction. In this, we will see, 'confessing the spirit' and penetrating to the 'spiritual world', is informed especially by Emanuel Swedenborg's ideas.

Eläviä ja kuolleita (1945) - 'The Living and the Dead'

Kersti Bergroth's *Eläviä ja kuolleita* ('The Living and the Dead') was published in 1945, just after the hard years of the Second World War. The worst times of terror and fear were over, but the mourning for lost loved ones, and preparations for a new era of peace had only just started. Many were dead, many were more or less wounded. The peace gained was very fragile and the threat of Soviet invasion was present all the time. The subsequent depression was also very real, as many were short of food and materials. Nothing of this, however, is discernible in *The Living and the Dead*.

The main structure of the novel emerges from the character Anna's communication with three different realities, a seemingly Swedenborgian pattern which Bergroth explicates in terms of a number of meanings. In Swedenborg's vision the concept of correspondence is very central. Correspondence 'is the way in which the whole of the created universe, spiritual and natural, coheres and makes one' (Williams-Hogan 1998: 218). For Swedenborg, each human being lives simultaneously both in the natural and in the spiritual worlds:

Nothing can exist anywhere in the material world that does not have a correspondence with the spiritual world – because if it did, it would have no cause that would make it come into being and then allow it to continue in existence. Everything in the material world is an effect. The causes of all effects lie in the spiritual world, and the causes of those causes in turn (which are the purposes those causes serve) lie in a still deeper heaven. (Swedenborg (1749–56) 2008: #5711)

The life of Anna in Bergroth's novel exists on three different levels or dimensions. She tells her supervising professor: 'I have three different lives. ... My ordinary private life, my life with dead friends and relatives, and my life with dead great men [Goethe



The statue of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Schiller in Weimar, Germany. Photo: Tiina Mahlamäki.

and Schiller]. What right has anyone to say that only the first one is a real life?’¹⁰ (Bergroth 1945: 99). Anna’s talk of her encounters with her dead relatives and great men reflects an understanding of both Swedenborg and Steiner. Swedenborg had stated that he could communicate both with people he had known personally, and with persons he knew through their writings and actions – that is, people of whom he could form an idea. This was the case with Steiner as well, who had had two remarkable experiences with deceased men whom he never had met, but came to know through the contact with their surroundings, especially their libraries (see e.g. Swedenborg (1758) 2010: #437; Steiner 1951: 216–19; Lachman 2009: 108).

The title of Bergroth’s novel, ‘The Living and the Dead’, may be seen to be alluding to a lecture of the same name that Rudolf Steiner delivered in 1918 during the First World War. In the lecture, published

10 ‘Minulla on kolme elämää, ... Tavallinen yksityinen elämäni, elämäni kuolleitten ystäväni kanssa ja elämä kuolleitten suurmiesten kanssa. Millä oikeudella sanotaan, että vain ensimmäinen niistä on todellista elämää?’

in 1927, he informed his listeners about communication with the dead. The spiritual worlds are open to us in the curious state of consciousness that occurs between sleeping and waking, in which state we can communicate and send comforting words to departed souls (Steiner 1918). In the lecture Steiner says that ‘as we fall asleep and enter the hypnagogic state, we ask the dead a question, [whereby] it is really the dead themselves who give the answer to us, just as when we rise out of the sleep, the answer we receive actually comes from ourselves’ (*ibid.*). Swedenborg also spoke of the hypnagogic state as the one best suited for entering the spiritual realms. In *The Secrets of Heaven* he writes:

The person is brought into a certain condition midway between sleep and wakefulness. In this condition, the person is fully convinced that he or she is completely conscious. The person’s senses are all as wide awake as they are when the body is fully alert – sight, hearing, and (amazingly) the sense of touch, which is keener now than it could ever be during physical wakefulness. During this state, I have also seen spirits and angels literally as big as life, and I have heard and even touched them, surprising to say. (Swedenborg (1749–56) 2008: #1883; see also Swedenborg (1758) 2010: #440)

We find that in Bergroth’s novel this is one of Anna’s ways of making contact with the inhabitants of the spiritual world. While trying to get to sleep she reminds herself that ‘she was born, lives and will die’, and asks for help from her late relatives: ‘The world widened around her. She began to affiliate in her thoughts with people already in the realm of the dead.’ For Anna, individuals often became more important when they were dead than when they were alive; she had come to love the deceased ones as kinds of ideal people, as they were greater and more sentient than those still living (Bergroth 1945: 51).¹¹

11 ‘Hän palautti mieleensä, että hän on syntynyt, elää ja kuolee. Maailma suureni hänen ympärillään. Hän alkoi seurustella ajatuksissaan sellaisten ihmisten kanssa, jotka jo olivat kuolleitten valtakunnassa. Ihmiset olivat Annalle usein tärkeämpiä kuoltuaan kuin eläessään. Anna rakasti kuolleita ihmisiä kuin jonkinlaisia ihanneihmisiä, suurempia, syvempi-tunteisia kuin elävät.’

Communication with her late aunt takes place in this particular mind-state and in her dreams:

Anna thought about the love of her Aunt Maire, that was never exhausted, but always neglected and despised. This was a remarkable commitment in itself. ... It felt almost like a triumph that Aunt Maire had been freed from her ugly and clumsy body, from the fear and coldness in her life. She was a spirit among spirits, and her destiny was examined as carefully as was those of the family's more important members; her love was weighted and recognised as more abundant than most people's. (Bergroth 1945: 39)¹²

Love has a central position in both Steiner and Swedenborg, as has also the unique character of every human being. This uniqueness does not disappear but becomes more obvious as we come to see the souls separated from the material realm, as 'ideal persons'. Serving as a point of departure Bergroth's novel opens with a list by Novalis that contains properties, features, habits and fancies of his lovers (Bergroth 1945: 78). Out of this list, the novel develops into an elaborate study of human qualities and capacities, represented by Bergroth's characters. It is a matter of how reality ultimately is constructed; through individuals, by various mental compositions and temperaments ultimately by as many compositions as there are humans. If there is progress in the world, it is human progress. At the same time Bergroth's novel (*ibid.* 54) takes the form of a tribute to the dead in the sense that everyone that has passed away represents a quality or virtue: 'Elma teaches her humility, her father graveness, her former teacher in gymnastics happiness, her schoolmate Martta an aptitude for studying'. The love for the deceased is like the epitome of love, Bergroth writes, as it does not deliver any external benefits or advantages.¹³

12 'Anna ajatteli Maire tädin aina hylättyä ja halveksittua rakkautta, joka ei milloinkaan väsynyt. Sehän oli suunnaton elämäntyö jo itsessään. ... Tuntui melkein riemuvoitolta, että Maire täti oli vapaa rumasta, kömpelöstä ruumiistaan, pelostaan ja elämänsä kylmyydestä. Hän oli henki henkien joukossa, hänen kohtaloaan tarkastettiin yhtä uutterasti kuin suvun päämiesten ja heidän rouviensa kohtaloita, hänen rakkautensa punnittiin ja huomattiin painavammaksi kuin useimpien ihmisten.'

13 'Jokainen kuollut on jonkin hyveen opettaja, ajatteli

In the novel Anna expresses the view that she is 'three persons, with three homelands, [and] at the moment I am in Weimar, mourning Goethe's death. It is reality, it distresses my heart like any other grief.' She also has 'three biographies: one earthly, one heavenly, and one that manifests through communion with great spirits' (Bergroth 1945: 100).¹⁴ Anna further discusses with her professor in what senses a person creates his or her own heaven and hell. As with Swedenborg, heaven and hell are said to be merely states of mind in our consciousness, something humans create and construct by themselves (Swedenborg (1758) 2010: #545-50; Lachman 2009: 114; McDannell and Lang (1998) 2001: 181-227). In the novel, Bergroth describes the spiritual realm as follows:

Anna perceived the spiritual world in all its beauty. It was fertile, like everything real and living. There was a humming and sprouting, a feeling of forest everywhere. A feeling of July, with its blissfulness and endlessness, was the basic atmosphere in the spiritual realm. (Bergroth 1945: 169-70)

As in Swedenborg, heaven or paradise is depicted in the novel as a place of sensibility, where one vividly sees, hears and smells the surroundings. It is a place of growth and life forces, in contrast to the lifelessness of hell. For those who have experienced the heavenly regions, 'the common representation of paradise as a garden feels, although accurate, almost like a technical construction. ... Paradise represents infinite freshness.' (Swedenborg (1759) 2010: #421-31; Bergroth 1945: 169-70)¹⁵

Anna. Elma opetti hänelle nöyryyttä, isä vakavuutta, hänen vanha voimistelunopettajansa iloisuutta, hänen koulutoverinsa Martta henkistä opiskelunhalua.'

14 'Minä olen kolme ihmistä, jolla on kolme kotimaata, ... Tällä hetkellä olen Weimarissa ja suren Goethen kuolemaa. Se on todellisuutta, se vaivaa sydäntä niin kuin muukin suru. ... Minulla on kolme elämäkertaa: maallinen, taivaallinen ja se, joka tapahtuu suurien henkien yhteydessä.'

15 'Muussa talossa oli tänä iltana vakava myrskytunnelma, syksyinen kukkien ja lehtien kariseminen. Annan ja hänen äitinsä huone tuntui Annasta pieneltä kevätneilyltä syksyisyyden keskellä. Täällä kaikki nyt oli kasvamassa ja itämässä. Helvetin elottomuus, mineraalisuus oli voitettu, ja henkinen elämä alkoi. Anna näki henkisen maailman koko loistossaan. Se oli kasvullinen, niin kuin kaikki oikea ja elävä. Siinä

Art should not, according to Bergroth, be concerned with family life and other ephemeral things, but with the journey of Faust, which Goethe transferred through epochs and worlds from the perishable to immortality. Art should not express what is temporary, but what is eternal. (Bergroth 1945: 22)

Concluding remarks

Kersti Bergroth mentions Swedenborg by name only once in the novel *The Living and the Dead*. Even this is highly unusual in a work of Finnish twentieth-century literature. Bergroth discusses all the authors belonging to the esoteric current, all the names of German romanticism, as if it were self-evident that the reader, a civilized one, knows them all. They were not in need of any explanation or clarification. Goethe, Schiller, Novalis, Steiner and Swedenborg all belong to a continuity of learned men and women. They are also, in one way or another, part of the esoteric discourse. Bergroth thus assumes that all learned, civilized readers in 1940s Finland know both Emanuel Swedenborg and Rudolf Steiner. It is obvious that most of the readers didn't. But those familiar with anthroposophical ideas did know.

Bergroth came to challenge novels written with an ideological purpose; they are not True Art. What matters is the author's originality and individuality. Ideologies are collectively shared views, or doctrines. Hence anthroposophical themes are discernible in her writings only indirectly, tacitly; there is an anthroposophical core or vein running through her work, but no direct proclamation of its principles. In this sense she could be characterized as an esoteric writer. She writes about the mysteries of the human being, but she does it as an individual artist, and through the cipher of her own experiences. But the inner core of her novels is open only to those who are familiar with the writings of Rudolf Steiner. That is to say, to adepts (Bergroth 1930: 19; Rantavaara 1952; Mahlamäki 2014: 105; Mahlamäki 2017: 71).

Anthroposophists and Swedenborgians understand each other. It may be seen as a kinship, a family resemblance, a language game, or as a general esoteric

humisi ja oli lehväistä, metsän tuntu oli kaikkialla. Heinäkuun tunnelma, sen autuus ja loppumattomuus, oli henkisen maailman perustunnelma. Paratiisia ei suotta kuvata puutarhaksi, se on melkein teknillinen kuvaus. Elämän puu, virtojen kostuttama luonto, se kuvailee taivaan ääretöntä raikkautta.

discourse. What they share is basically the same vision of the world and its structure – a hierarchical cosmos of grades and levels, spirits and inhabitants, that dwell in different dimensions and at different stages. If one has read Swedenborg, one understands what Steiner wants to say. While it is uncertain if Bergroth ever read Swedenborg directly, she nevertheless read *of* Swedenborg, through her mentor Rudolf Steiner. Steiner gave lectures on Swedenborg at least in 1915, 1923 and 1924. When reading the transcripts of these lectures, it becomes clear he was well versed in Swedenborg's ideas.¹⁶ He sees Swedenborg as an important scholar and one of the greatest thinkers of his time. He also acknowledges that Swedenborg was a spirit seer and clairvoyant.

During the nineteenth century among the reading audience in Europe, as in Finland, Swedenborg was a well-known name (see e.g. Mahlamäki and Mansikka 2013). In the first decades of the twentieth century he became largely pathologised, at least in Germany and Finland, as can be seen, for instance, in the works of the Finnish philosopher and psychoanalyst Rolf Lagerborg (1924) and literary critics such as Viljo Tarkiainen (1984: 24), who used Swedenborg as an example of a lunatic, his visions seen as creations of a sick mind, with no relevance for intellectuals or prominent authors. As a result Swedenborg's visions, teachings and doctrines were fostered and moved forward into twentieth century only indirectly, mainly through theosophy and anthroposophy (see also Milosz 1975: 304). This novel is one example of this. ■

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16 Steiner was, for instance, deeply read in Kant and Goethe, whom both had encountered Swedenborg and discussed him in their writings.

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