

# The Presence of Western Esotericism in Latvian Literature

**Anita Stasulane**

Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Daugavpils University

Vienības street 13, Daugavpils, LV-5401, Latvia

Email: [anita.stasulane@du.lv](mailto:anita.stasulane@du.lv)

**Abstract** After detecting a gap in cultural studies regarding the influence of Western esotericism on Latvian culture, this paper attempts to illustrate the presence of Western esotericism in Latvian literature. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latvian writers searching for new means of expression found a source of inspiration in esotericism, gaining metaphors and symbols from Spiritualism, Theosophy and Agni Yoga/Living Ethics. With particular attention paid to Antons Austriņš (1884–1934), Viktors Eglītis (1877–1945), Rihards Rudzītis (1898–1960) and Konstantīns Raudive (1909–1974), the author seeks to show, that the influence of esotericism on the creative work of writers strongly differs: some adopted esoteric ideas without a critical approach, others did some sifting and reworked them, while others, having read a few esoteric texts or having heard something about it, just got some idea or image. As the artist's worldview is reflected directly in their creative work independently of the author's own will, the paper argues that it would be timely for contemporary literary studies to focus greater attention on the connection of authors with Western esotericism.

**Key words** Western esotericism; Spiritualism; Theosophy; Agni Yoga; Living Ethics; Latvian literature

**Author** Dr. Anita Stasulane graduated in Latvian Language and Literature from the University of Latvia and in History of Religions from the Pontifical Gregorian University (Italy). She has focused her research mainly on new religious movements. Currently she is Professor of History of Religions at Daugavpils University (Latvia). She has published extensively on Western esotericism in contemporary culture, including *Theosophy and Culture: Nicholas Roerich* (Rome, 2005). Since 2006, she has been the editor in chief of *Kultūras Studijas* (Cultural Studies) issued by Daugavpils University.

## Introduction

The influence of Western esotericism on literature is an unexplored field in Latvian literary studies, as the tendency to look at the literary process as a whole, without excluding the influence of esoteric ideas in literature, has only appeared in recent decades. This article attempts to illustrate the presence of Western esotericism in Latvian literature.

The term *esotericism* is used with two meanings in the academic environment. In the typological aspect, the term *esotericism* is usually understood as *secrecy*, and is used to describe a practice maintained in various religious contexts to reserve some portion of *salvific knowledge* for the preferred (initiated) followers. The idea of secret knowledge available only to the elite is a global phenomenon, which is encountered in various religions and in various eras. As opposed to the typological aspect, which understands esotericism as a religious type or a religious structure, from a historical aspect, *esotericism* is “a general label for certain specific currents in Western culture that display certain similarities and are historically related” (Hanegraaff 337). Nowadays, in discussing culture, most researchers prefer the term *Western esotericism* to avoid misunderstandings. The author of this article maintains this position, despite continuing debates about the need to fine-tune the terminology.

Latvian national literature had its beginnings in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>, which is why we can talk about the possible influence of Western esotericism on the creative work of Latvian writers, starting from this period. In the 1880s–1890s, romanticism and realism arrived in Latvian literature. It is futile to search for the influence of Western esotericism in the literature of this period, as romanticism in Latvia gained the so-called national romanticist form, which was characterized by an idealization of Latvian ancient times, while realism repudiated everything unreal. However, it is hard to believe that Latvian cultural circles which had close contacts with both German and Russian culture would not have come into contact with esotericism.

## The Influence of Spiritualism

Esotericism reached Latvian society firstly in the form of Spiritualism, or more precisely, attempts to contact the spirits of the departed. It has existed in all eras and in all cultures and did not bypass Latvia, but gained an organized and systematized form in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the development of a new religious movement,

---

1 Juris Alunāns' (1832-1864) “Dziesmiņas, latviešu valodai pārtulkotas” (Little Songs, Translated for the Latvian Language) which was published in 1856, was the first literary significant classic collection of secular poetry in the Latvian language.

Spiritualism.<sup>1</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Latvian society also got carried away with dancing tables, automatic writing, the summoning of spirits, materialization and other methods which were widely used elsewhere in Europe, using a medium as an intermediary in contact with the spirits of the departed. As opposed to Baltic-Germans, who adopted esoteric ideas from Western Europe, intellectuals of Latvian origin came into contact with them in Russia, mainly in St. Petersburg where a considerable number of Latvians were studying.

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, St. Petersburg had become the centre of esotericism in the whole of Russia due to high society's interest in the world of the occult.<sup>2</sup> From an analysis of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian newspapers, it can obviously be seen that esotericism in St. Petersburg was almost officially recognized at this time.<sup>3</sup> It was discussed not only in salons, but also at lecture evenings which were organized by various societies. It is hard to imagine that budding Latvian lawyers, writers, artists and engineers, who were living in St. Petersburg in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, would not have come into contact with the culture of the Russian Silver Age (1890–1914), which was permeated by the most diverse forms of esotericism.

It is significant, that Latvian writers and artists adopted Western esoteric ideas, metaphors and symbols even if they themselves were not actively involved in esoteric groups, for example, writer Antons Austriņš (1884–1934). Judging from his story “Purmalas kumēdiņi” (Purmala's Tricks), he was informed about the activities of spiritualists. As “Austriņš has done the most translations of Russian Symbolist prose”<sup>4</sup> (Sprōģe 23), including the works of Valery Bryusov<sup>5</sup> as well, it would be surprising that Spiritualism would have remained unknown to the Latvian writer.

---

1 1848 tends to be considered the beginning of Spiritualism, when the American Fox sisters began to make contact with the spirit of some murdered man. Cf. Mather G. A., Nichols L. A. *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) 263.

2 As the family of the Tsar had a sick heir, the courtiers also turned to various healers, those with secret knowledge, mediums etc. Latvian writer Austriņš, in describing the St. Petersburg of that time, mentioned that “the Russian aristocracy with its belief in miracles is still at home” there (Austriņš 1931: IV, 219).

3 Cf. Bogomolov, Nikolay A. *Russkaya literatura nachala XX veka i okkultizm* (Moskva: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 1999) 312.

4 Here and afterwards translation by author – A.S.

5 Valery Bryusov (1873–1924) was very taken with spiritualism. In his diary, Bryusov noted (1900) that the trance and epiphany experienced at a Spiritualist séanse were significant moments in his life. Bogomolov, Nikolay A. *Russkaya literatura nachala XX veka i okkultizm* (Moskva: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 1999) 37.

However, Spiritualism did not leave a deep impression on Latvian culture, as only a small number of intellectuals got carried away with it: chemistry professors Kārlis Blachers (1867–1939) and Jānis Kupcis (1871–1936), theologian Valdemārs Maldonis (1870–1941), and writers Aleksandrs Grīns (1895–1941) and Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa (1877–1950), who gathered at a spiritualist club in Riga. Spiritualist séances were also held by the Latvian Parapsychological Association (1925) headed by Emma Apare, using local medium Fricis Gailis. It should be added that spiritualists had to compete with chiromantists, fortune-tellers, and clairvoyants, whose numbers reached approximately 200 in 1926.<sup>1</sup> The main figure among them was the clairvoyant Eižens Finks (1885–1958), who outclassed all the rest: he had foreseen an assassination attempt on Mussolini, the tragic death of the Latvian foreign minister, and the death of the first president of Latvia, all sensationally written about in the newspapers and still remembered today.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, writer Konstantīns Raudive (1909–1974), who was a refugee during the Second World War and later lived in Sweden and Germany, turned to a new form of spiritualism. Outside of Latvia he is known as a parapsychologist, who considered that it was possible to make contact with the spirits of the departed and used a tape recorder as a means of communication. Experiments with the so-called *electronic voice phenomenon* were very popular in the 1960s–1970s. This form of Spiritualism is now called *instrumental transcommunication* (ITK)<sup>2</sup>.

Estonian singer and painter Friedrich Jürgenson's (1903–1987) book in Swedish *Röster från rymden* (Voices from the Universe), (1964) prompted Raudive to become active in the audio ITK area. The book, which provoked a great sensation

---

1 Zarubins, N. 2002. "Visi Rīgas zīlnieki un himomanti paredz 'lielus notikumus' 1926. gada novembrī." In B. Raudins, ed, *Rīgas gaišreģis Eižens Finks* (Rīga: Jumava) 83-84.

2 The term *transcommunication* was introduced by German physicist Ernst Senkowski (1922-2015), who published the magazine *Transkommunikation* (1990-2002). By the term *transcommunication* he described the process during which an exchange of information takes place, furthermore, in a way which cannot be explained with concepts in physics like frequency, waves etc. Instrumental transcommunication is made up of different branches, of which the oldest is audio instrumental transcommunication, followed by video instrumental transcommunication, while computers are used nowadays. Thousands of interested people searching for possibilities to contact their departed, nature spirits and heavenly choirs, use the most diverse equipment: the telephone, radio, television, fax and computer. They have come together in a broad international organization I. N. I. T. (International Network for Instrumental Transcommunication). The activities of its members shows that interest about *invisible interlocutors* has still not disappeared.

in Sweden<sup>1</sup> at that time, tells of how Jürgenson heard the voice of his departed father addressing him while he was listening to bird songs recorded on a tape recorder. The sensation quickly died down again, but Raudive's interest remained. Raudive began working on his own with the goal of clarifying whether it was a voice from the *afterworld*. He set up his own *studio* in Krozingen (Germany) and collated his research in a book called *Unhörbares wird hörbar* (1968) (The Unheard Becomes Heard).<sup>2</sup> Raudive's success was facilitated by the publication of the book in the English language, which came out in Great Britain and the USA (1971) in a supplemented edition and with the title *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* (1971).

After ten years of intense work, Raudive suddenly announced that he would no longer be working with *voices*. Raudive's announcement as to why he had decided to stop working with voices is particularly significant: "I have done what I could. *If all of it has no connection with the afterworld, then it does not captivate me. Then I abandon it.* [Italics mine – A. S.] I return to literature" (Quoted in Gills 244). These words from Raudive provide an exhaustive answer to the question of why he stopped working with *voices*. The writer confessed that he had been unable to gain evidence that the source of the voices had been transcendent. Even though Raudive himself terminated his research, he has inspired a new generation of Spiritualists and the electronic voice phenomenon is now called *Raudive voices*.

Raudive was an existentially thinking writer, and to a large degree this was determined by his captivation with 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialism. Turning against Hegel and positivism, as well as against the dominating role of science and technology in the world, existentialism determined the cultural climate of the time. In this context, several directions in philosophical thought developed, including *philosophy of life*. Even though Raudive had been captivated by spiritualism for ten years, it has not left a significant imprint on his works. However, the influence of life-philosophers Miguel De Unamuno (1864–1936) and José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) can clearly be seen.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Influence of Theosophy**

Theosophy, the historical beginnings of which in Latvia are, as yet, unknown has

---

1 Raudive lived in Sweden from 1947 to 1965, when he moved to Krozingen (Germany).

2 Raudive, Konstantin. *Unhörbares wird hörbar*. Remagen: Otto Reichl Verlag, 1968.

3 For more information, see Anita Stasulane, "Raudive Voices: *The Latvian Writer in the Field of Scientific Spiritualism.*" Ed. Ch. M. Moreman. *The Spiritualist Movement, Santa Barbara, Denver, Oxford* (USA, United Kingdom: Praeger, 2013): 245–264.

had a deeper influence on Latvian cultural processes. Currently, there is very little idea about the way in which the ideas of the Theosophical Society (1875) founded by Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), reached Latvian society. First of all, the question of Helena Blavatsky's (born von Hahn)<sup>1</sup> genealogical connection with Latvia is worthy of research, as the Hahn family has also had a branch in Latvia, where it was one of the wealthiest families for more than 400 years. It is indisputable that theosophical ideas came into Latvia first through Baltic-German community, and that these ideas were also familiar in Latvian circles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The year 1908 could be considered a historical reference point, when Blavatsky's closest confrere H. S. Olcott's "A Buddhist Catechism" was published in Latvia, and it was translated into Latvian by the well-known Latvian writer Augusts Deglavs (1862–1922).

Latvian writers' close contacts with the followers of Blavatsky's teachings should be taken into account in answering the question of the way in which theosophical ideas reached Latvian writers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Latvian writer and poet Viktors Eglītis (1877–1945), who worked at Princess Maria Tenisheva's Talashkino Art Centre in 1902, and became acquainted<sup>2</sup> with Russian Ballet impresario Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) is a fine example. In supporting Diaghilev's efforts to gather together young Russian artists who would break the traditions of *academic* art, the princess had given over her summer residence Talashkino to the activities of the *Mir Iskusstva* (Art World) artists' society and financially supported the publication of a magazine of the same name. Eglītis meeting Diaghilev is extremely significant, as Anna Filosofova (1837–1912), born Diaghilev, one of the most active theosophists, who financed Russia's Theosophical Society, was a close relative of the Russian ballet impresario. The elite of society at that time, which undoubtedly talked about Theosophy, gathered at her salon in St. Petersburg. It can be asserted that Eglītis inevitably would have come into close contact with the teachings of theosophy at Tenisheva's summer residence, as the Talashkino Art Centre was also a gathering place for Theosophically oriented artists.

The exhibitions staged by the *Mir Iskusstva* group of artists had also attracted the attention of Austriņš. It seems that it was no accident that Krams, the main character in the story *Nemiers* (Unrest), decides to stay in St. Petersburg another

---

1 Helena Blavatsky's parents: her father, colonel Peter von Hahn (1798–1873), a son of Lieutenant-General Alexis Gustavovich von Hahn, her mother, a writer Helena von Hahn (born Fadeyeva) (1814–1842).

2 Cf. Sprōģe, Ludmila and Vāvere, Vera. *Latviešu modernisma aizsākumi un krievu literatūras "sudraba laikmets"* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2002) 57.

two days, "... to visit ... the *Mir Iskusstva* exhibition" (Austriņš 1931: IV 46). It is possible that Austriņš may have attended several *Mir Iskusstva* exhibitions, as, in evaluating what he had seen, his literary hero deliberates "The *Mir Iskusstva* exhibition *this year* [Italics mine – A.S.] too was colourless. It lacked maturity" (Austriņš 1931: IV 47).

Latvian writers also came into contact with theosophical ideas at Vyacheslav Ivanov's (1866–1949) *Bashnya* (Tower) salon, which was in a sense a mirror of Russia's cultural atmosphere at the time. Eglītis visited Ivanov's salon in February 1906, at a time when censorship had already been liberalized after the 1905 revolution. This was a period when all occultist trends flourished, as the influence of the Orthodox Church had decreased in Russia after the 1905 revolution and occultist publications began coming out in ever greater numbers: by 1905 the Russian spiritualist journal *Rebus* "boasted more than sixteen thousand subscribers" (Carlson 5).

Anna Minclova (1865–1910), who can be considered as the determiner of the atmosphere at the evenings when these people met, had an important role at Vyacheslav Ivanov's salon. She was "a Mme Blavatsky double who "theosophized" the eminent scholar, writer, and critic Viacheslav Ivanov" (Carlson 8). Minclova was an important St. Petersburg occultist, as she had contacts with the leaders of the Theosophical Society, including Rudolf Steiner too<sup>1</sup>. Rumours spread, obviously based on Minclova's own statements, that she also had communication with the secret teachers of the planet's history.<sup>2</sup>

Even though there is no documentary evidence that Austriņš had been a guest at Ivanov's *Tower*, it is clear that the Latvian writer was well informed about what took place there. For example, in the novel *Garā jūdze* (Long Mile) he recounts Eglītis' meeting with Russian symbolists, which took place at Ivanov's salon.<sup>3</sup> Other facts, and people who could be met there who were associated with the *Tower* are also mentioned in the novel. We can conclude that Austriņš' works show that the writer came into contact with the teachings popularized by Blavatsky's followers. First of all, the story *Leišu nedēļa* should be mentioned, where we read: "I, as a

1 R. Steiner (1861–1925) was the leader of Germany's Theosophical Society from 1902 to 1913.

2 For further information about the role of the teacher or mahatma in the theosophical system, see Stasulane, A. *Theosophy and culture: Nicholas Roerich* (Roma: PUG, 2005): 91-126.

3 L. Sprōģe and V. Vāvere consider that Eglītis visited V. Ivanov's salon several times. Cf. Sprōģe, Ludmila and Vāvere, Vera. *Latviešu modernisma aizsākumi un krievu literatūras "sudraba laikmets"* (Rīga: Zinātne, 2002) 36.

theosophist, have different views,” said Zīle. “The spirit does not perish — it just flies off to other spheres ” (Austriņš 1931: IV 215). This, seemingly, unimportant phrase from the literary character shows that Austriņš was able to identify theosophists in the society of his time and had also gained a certain insight into their teachings.

In his works, Austriņš has mentioned many concepts used by occultists. For example, *adept*<sup>1</sup>, one of the most often used concepts in the lexicon of theosophists (Austriņš 1931: IV 137). As the writer has used it with a humorous touch, we can conclude that he treated esotericism sceptically. This attitude has also been expressed in the story *Salnēnos* (In Salnēni), where Austriņš expresses his critical evaluation of the spiritualist séances of intellectuals: “[The intelligentsia] wants to rise into the spheres immediately, forget about yesterday and some even want to almost unload it from their possessions” (Austriņš 1931: IV 486).

Even though esotericism was not able to take over the writer’s world of thoughts, its ideas were not foreign to him, including the idea about *akasha* — information layers, which encircle the Earth and encompass all of the thoughts of people who have lived in various eras, which only the highly developed spiritually are able to uncover. In the story *Peklē* (In Hell), Austriņš has noted: “I wonder whether a person living in a city where some famous battle has taken place, or where some great artist lived in his time, is able to *guess the intentions of this former great artist or leader in battle? Maybe they just fly round about and live right here* [Italics mine – A.S.] like owls in some old church tower, where the priest still holds church services, without being able to predict that in the quiet, suddenly, the tower’s bells begin to be rung by some invisible hand... to a huge fire... Here, you could easily dream of the end of the world” (Austriņš 1931: IV 32).

In the character of Kalders (in the story *Peklē* (In Hell)) the author provides an example of a typical characteristic at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, that initially, the Theosophists and socialists worked together. As can be seen from the history of theosophy, occultist interest centres were also gathering places for socialists, for example, in Ascona (Switzerland), where turn of the century free thinkers gathered at the initiative of theosophists, and *adepts* of the teachings of Karl Marx, including Vladimir Ulyanov (Lenin) also stayed there. Bearing this historical peculiarity in mind, we can better understand Austriņš’ character, the socialist Kalders with his pathetically uttered words: “... this is an obligation for all of us ... to do all in our power to *wake the consciousness* of society [Italics mine

1 Explanation provided by H. Blavatsky about what an adept is, see Blavatskaya, E. P. Teosofsky slovar (Moskva: Sfera, 1994) 28.

– A.S.] and a lively spirit, respect for science and education, so that it is possible to *tear down that old house of God and build a new one in its place. Homo homini deus! The person is the person's God!*" (Austriņš 1931: IV 23-24). "To wake the consciousness" — socialists and theosophists too popularized their ideas with this challenge at the turn of the century. Whereas, theosophists and socialists tried to achieve this challenge of tearing down the old house of God and building a new one, as each knew how. Socialists turned against religion as the opium of the people, but theosophists offered to replace Christianity with esotericism.

As the influence of Theosophy has been expressed the most strikingly in the creative work of Andrei Bely, the contact of the Russian symbolist with Latvian writers is particularly significant. Viktors Eglītis and Kārlis Jēkabsons (1879–1946) met Bely in St. Petersburg, whereas, Andrejs Kurcijs (1884–1959) met him when Bely "visited Rīga on the way to Berlin" (Sproģe 106). They also had indirect contact: Bely's novel *Peterburg* (St. Petersburg) was read by Kārlis Krūza (1884–1960) (Sproģe 85) and Janis Jansons-Brauns (1872–1917) criticized Latvian poets that they accept "Bely's hate for the *mob*" (Sproģe 118), while Jānis Sudrabkalns (1894–1975) considered Bely to be among the "constellation of Russian poets" (Sproģe 121).

Whereas Austriņš, who did not even try to "get close to the Russian modernist elite of the time" (Sproģe 182), has, of all the Latvian writers, portrayed St. Petersburg the most extensively, and then in quite unusual images, for example, "the imagined city" (Austriņš 1929: II, 240) and "the foggy labyrinth" (Austriņš 1931: IV, 39). Bely has also used such images in his novel *St. Petersburg*. At the base of the novel's concept is the idea that thought can create the material, respectively, the absolute power of the will creates real objects. This idea is not Bely's invention. Blavatsky wrote: "How God creates, so can man create as well" (Blavatsky 62). One of the foundation stones of Bely's symbolism is theurgy. The writer is able to create just like God: with his thoughts and with his will, the artist creates an alternative universe. Bely, in his novel *St. Petersburg*, calls this process "mozgovaya igra" — a mind game (Bely 42).

*Fog* is the dominating symbol in Bely's novel *St. Petersburg*. Astral material is like fog, like shadow, and it continually changes its image. To understand why the city fog portrayed by Bely appears here, then is lost in the shadow, one should note Theosophical Society's leader Annie Besant's (1847–1933) paper *Man and His Bodies* (1896), which describes the astral world changing its image continually. One of the characters in Bely's novel is reading this book. This allows us to understand another nuance: why one set of images is continually replaced by other images in

the novel *St. Petersburg*. They are astral beings, which continually transform the existing extremely active thought in 1905 at the physical existence level.

In Austriņš' portrayal as well, fog transcends the boundaries of real natural phenomena — that is “... the fog labyrinth, where not only Dostoevsky, Vrubel, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Komisarzevsky, but hundreds of their foolish worshippers, and thousands of those for whom their little room is too narrow and have no earth underfoot, wander like ghosts” (Austriņš 1929: II 240-241). The metaphor *fog labyrinth* is interwoven several times in Austriņš' works. For example, in the story *Nemiers*, the main hero Krams, obsessed with thoughts about death, ruminates: “God knows, whether I will still get out of this fog labyrinth alive?” (Austriņš 1931: IV 39). An identical semantic meaning for this metaphor has also been preserved in the poem *Necilvēks* [Monster] (Austriņš 1929: III 42).

The metaphor *fog labyrinth* is so peculiar that the question unwittingly arises about its motivating source. It would not be out of place to provide a reminder that the labyrinth is a symbol favoured by theosophists. This has been used successfully by Bely, who, in his novel *Serebrenny golub* (Silvery Pigeon) describes the sinking of the soul into an illusory labyrinth of matter, from which one can get out, only by following a call (*zov*), which leads one into the real spiritual world.

Even though Austriņš has used theosophical symbols and metaphors merely as striking means of expression, it still proves the influence of Theosophy in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Latvian literature and illustrates how artists adopted the metaphors and symbols of Theosophy, without becoming Blavatsky's followers themselves.

### **The Influence of Agni Yoga/Living Ethics**

Countless world writers, painters and composers, who were attracted by attempts to combine the popular idea of evolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the understanding of the cyclical process of the world in Eastern religions were carried away by Blavatsky's teachings. Latvia is also no exception in this respect, and this took place due to a new branch of Theosophy called Agni Yoga/Living Ethics<sup>1</sup>, which was started by Russian artist Nicholas Roerich (1847–1947) and his wife Helena Roerich (1879–1955). On the base of the ontology, cosmogony and anthropology developed by Blavatsky, they created their theosophical system, which included elements of ethics and psychology. On commencing their activities, the Roerichs established small groups of people sharing their views in various countries around the world,

---

1 For more about the history of the Agni Yoga/Living Ethics group see Stasulane, A. “Theosophy of the Roerichs: Agni Yoga or Living Ethics.” *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*. Eds. Olav Hammer, Michael Rothstein (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013): 193-216.

where the movement's first centres gradually developed. Rīga had a special role in the development of the network of theosophical groups, as one of the first groups of Roerich followers in the world formed here<sup>1</sup>, and became the Baltic region's theosophical centre in the 1920s and 1930s.

Agni Yoga/Living Ethics has influenced the world of Latvian artists in various degrees: some adopted theosophical ideas without any sort of critical approach; others did some sifting and reworked these ideas; some artists had only read a few theosophical articles, from which they gained some idea; others found out about the new ideas through their circle of friends, without even suspecting that they were theosophical ideas.

The most direct influence on Latvian literature of Theosophy expressed itself in the creative work of Rihards Rudzītis (1898–1960). When he accepted the Latvian Roerich Society's<sup>2</sup> offer to translate Living Ethics text books, "a rapid drawing together to the spiritual world of Nicholas Roerich" took place (Viese 16). The poet became one of the most active members of the society: "A sincere friendship was established between Rihards Rudzītis and the Roerichs. Over the years, the poet was sent about 400 letters from Roerich family members and their secretary — rich material for the biographies of Nicholas, Helena and their sons Svyatoslav and George and the history of the Friends of the Roerich Museum Society" (Viese 17).

Agni Yoga/Living Ethics became very popular in Latvian cultural circles when the work of the society was directed by (1936–1940) Rudzītis. He was truly carried away by Roerich's teachings which inspired him. Roerichs declared that his teachings had been received from the Teacher or Mahatma, who Rudzītis called the Master and to whom a poem *Meistara dārza ziedi* (Flowers in the Master's Garden) was dedicated. The fact that Rudzītis gained the impulse for this poem specifically in the theosophical paraphrases, is confirmed by the title of the poem alone. It is a rephrasing of *Listy sada Morii*<sup>3</sup> (The Leaves of Morya's Garden) which is the title of Roerich's collection of poems. Roerich left such a deep impression on Rudzītis that more than one of his poems can be referred to as a paraphrasing of the theosophical.

---

1 Cf. Melton, Gordon J. (ed.) 2001. *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. New York: Gale Group, 1318.

2 At that time, its name was the Roerich Museum's Friends' Society.

3 In every circle of the evolutionary spiral, one Teacher or Mahatma (Manu or the Teacher of Teachers, the Highest Spiritual Being or the Hierarch) makes known what is absolutely necessary for humanity's development, who accepts responsibility for a certain evolutionary cycle. *Morya* is one of H. Blavatsky's mahatmas, who theosophists avoided calling by the person's name, which is why that mahatma was most frequently referred to as either *Master*, *Maître*, *Hozain*, or even *Master M*.

According to Roerich's ideas, the source of everything is Divine Origin (Highest Awareness, Cosmic Consciousness), from which flow (emanate) billions of the so-called monads. Taking root in matter, firstly in mineral, then plant and animal form, these monads reach a person at the level of consciousness, in this way the Universe moves towards perfection. Dressing up this idea in the images of poetry, Rudzītis wrote: "A plant wants to become a bird, which embraces distance, / A bird, a human — the older brother, / To grow deeper into eternity" (Rudzītis 59).

The Mother of the World has been designated a particularly important role in Roerich's teachings. Regarding the Mother of the World as the Highest reality, Rudzītis composed a poem, *The Mother of the World* (Rudzītis 59). In reading works by Rudzītis, one should bear in mind that in 1924, when Venus, namely, the Mother of the World's star, came closer to the Earth briefly, Roerich announced the beginning of the new era of the Great Mother of the World's daughter. In this era, the female has been entrusted with a special mission, to expedite the evolution of the world.<sup>1</sup> Having adopted this idea, Rudzītis wrote essays about the crucial role of the mother in the future destiny of the world (Rudzītis 51).

### Concluding Remarks

It should be acknowledged that there is very little information about the arrival of the idea of esotericism in Latvia. It may even seem that this problem is insoluble, as there is a lack of documentary evidence. However, in researching the biographies of Latvian writers and poets and analyzing their work, we can develop a mosaic which illustrates the presence of Western esotericism in Latvian culture. Furthermore, some of the fragments of this mosaic are quite striking.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, writers searching for new means of expression found a source of inspiration in esotericism, gaining metaphors and symbols from it. There is no doubt that the influence of esotericism on the creative work of writers must be looked at in different ways: some adopted esoteric ideas without a critical approach, others did some sifting and reworked them, while others, having read a few esoteric texts or having heard something about it, just got some idea or image.

Rudzītis' broad correspondence with the Roerichs shows that the poet tapped

---

1 The idea about the female's special mission in the facilitation of evolution is closely connected to the role which Roerich allocated to his wife (the Mother of Agni Yoga) in ensuring the evolution of all of humanity. The spirituality of 20th century humanity has slid down to such a low level that as fire energy approached the Earth, someone was needed, who could transform the highest cosmic energy in a way that humanity would be able to receive them. This had been achieved by Helena Roerich, who had saved the world in this way.

into what could be called, theosophical ideas from the primary source, while other Latvian artists adopted Roerich's ideas indirectly. However, in both cases Latvian writers, poets and artists perceived (and also continue to perceive) Theosophy very seriously, like religious philosophy. Helena Blavatsky's ideas, which are particularly actively popularized by the followers of Nicholas Roerich in today's Latvia, are echoed in the creative work of several writers, for example, Rainis, Anna Brigadere, Marina Kosteņecka and Lija Brīdaka. In what way and how deeply Theosophy has become rooted in their creative work is an interesting question and has been researched very little in the history of Latvian literature. As the creative work of creative personalities cannot be divided off from its world view, namely, the artist's world view is reflected directly in their creative work independently of the author's own will, it would be timely for contemporary art and literature historians to focus greater attention on the connection of authors with Western esotericism. Thus, the creative work of Latvian writers, which has been affected by theosophical ideas, could, for example, be reassessed and better understood by delving more deeply into the history of the Roerich movement.

### Works Cited

- Austrīņš, Antons. *Kopoti raksti*. I-VIII sēj. Rīga: J. Rozes apgāds, 1929–1934.
- Hanegraaff, Wouter J. "Esotericism." *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006. 336-340.
- Sproģe, Ludmila and Vāvere, Vera. *Latviešu modernisma aizsākumi un krievu literatūras "sudraba laikmets"*. Rīga: Zinātne, 2002.
- Gills, Nikandrs, "Raudives balsis: Konstantīns Raudive un parapsiholoģijas pasaule," *Filosofija* 3 (2002): 97-121.
- Carlson M. *"No Religion Higher than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Blavatsky, Helena. *Isis Unveiled*. Vol. 1. New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877.
- Bely, Andrei. *Sochineniya*. Tom 1. Moskva: Hudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990.
- Viese, Saulcerīte. "Ceļā uz Daiļi Labo." Rudzītis, Rihards. *Sirds, steidzies pret rītu*. Rīga: Uguns, 1995. 5-9.
- Rudzītis, Rihards. *Sirds, steidzies pret rītu*. Rīga: Uguns, 1995.