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"Blood has been spilt on that spot": exploring the relationship between the supernatural and the library and information sciences.

LOCKERBIE, H., BAXTER, G.

2018



**ROBERT GORDON
UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN**

“Blood has been spilt on that spot”

Exploring the relationship between the
supernatural and the library and
information sciences

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What we're going to talk about...

- Libraries & Librarians in Supernatural Culture
- Haunted Libraries
- Classifying the Supernatural
- Cataloguing the Supernatural
- Selecting & Acquiring the Supernatural
- Information Seeking Behaviour related to the Supernatural
- Future research plans

Libraries and the Supernatural

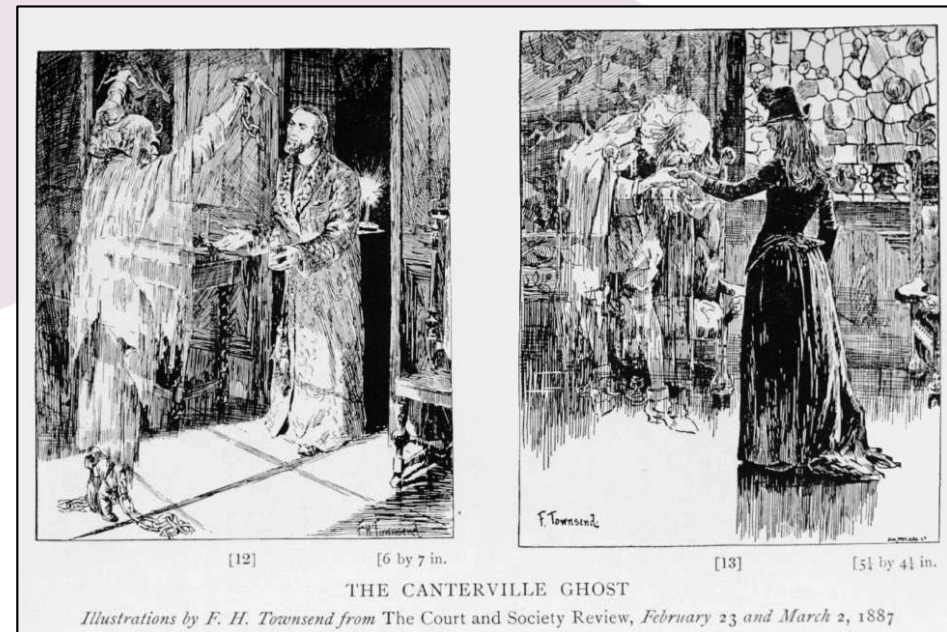


“You’re right, no human being would stack books like this.”

Dr. Peter Venkman, *Ghostbusters*, 1984

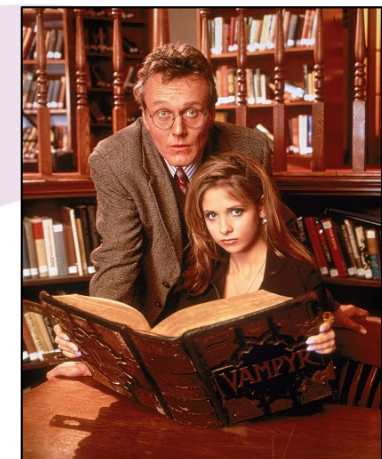
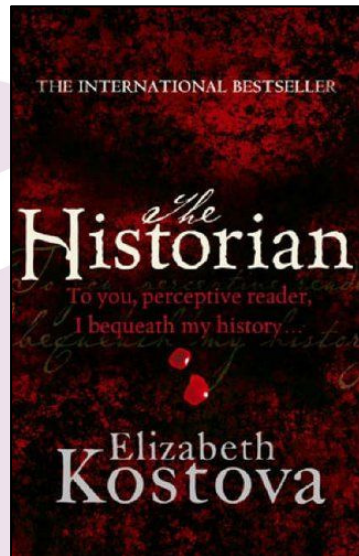
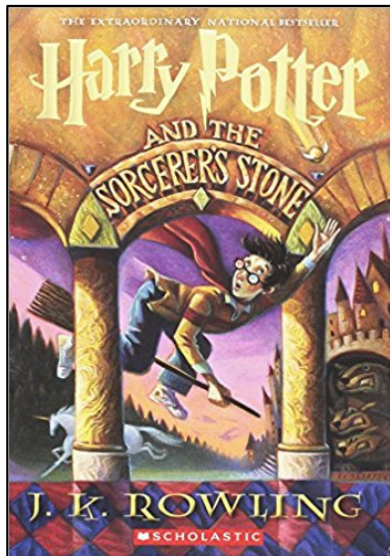
“Blood has been spilt on that spot”

The Canterville Ghost, Oscar Wilde, 1887



Librarians and the Supernatural

“middle aged, female, unattractive, single...antisocial” King 1990



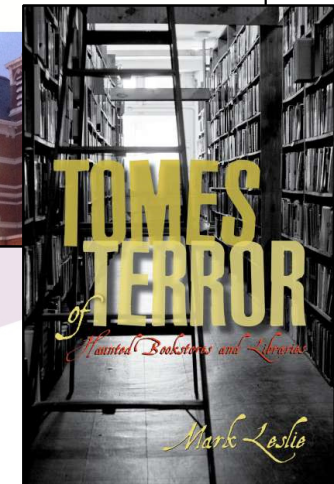
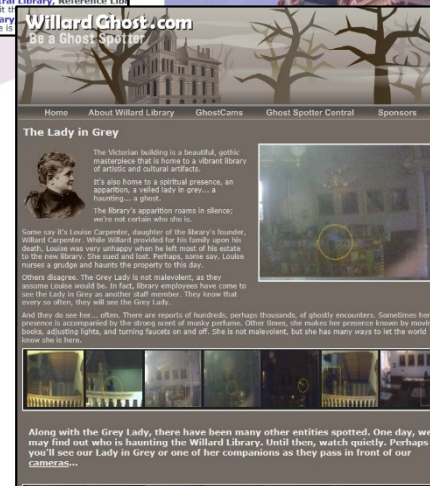
Haunted Libraries

Two broad types:

- 1) Buildings with a 'reputation', but little paranormal activity
- 2) Buildings where paranormal activity is experienced regularly

"Libraries offer such dynamic mental and sensual stimulation that if haunts are truly evidence for postmortem survival, I can't imagine anywhere else I'd rather spend my earthly afterlife than in a library"
(Eberhart, 2007)

Some libraries openly embrace their haunted reputations, to attract visitors and new patrons



Classifying the Supernatural

- Dewey Decimal Classification

- **100 philosophy & psychology**

- **130 parapsychology & occultism**

- **130 Parapsychology & occultism**
 - **131 Parapsychological and occult methods for achieving well-being, happiness, success**
 - 132 No longer used—formerly Mental derangements
 - **133 Specific topics in parapsychology & occultism**
 - 134 No longer used—formerly Mesmerism & Clairvoyance
 - **135 Dreams & mysteries**
 - 136 No longer used—formerly Mental characteristics
 - **137 Divinatory graphology**
 - **138 Physiognomy**
 - **139 Phrenology**

- Library of Congress

- **BF Psychology**

- **1001-1389 parapsychology**

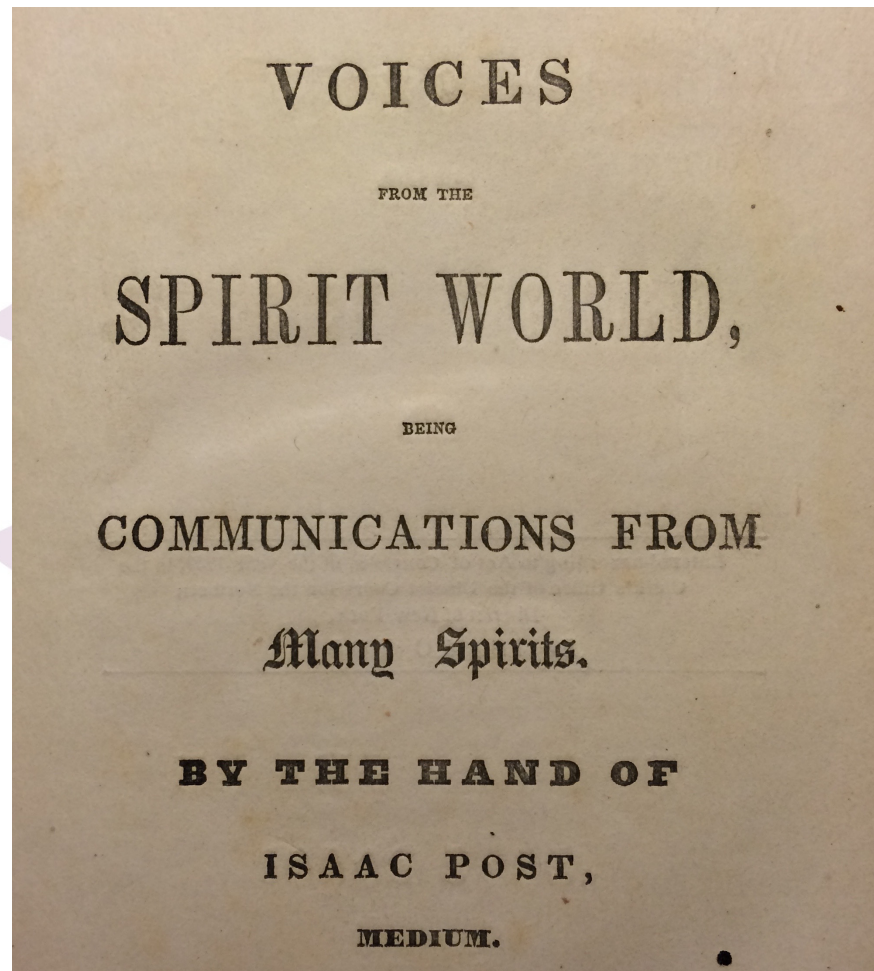
- 1001-1045 Psychic research. Psychology of the conscious
 - 1048-1108 Hallucinations. Sleep. Dreaming. Visions.
 - 1111-1156 Hypnotism. Suggestion. Mesmerism. Subliminal projection
 - 1161-1171 Telepathy. Mind reading. Thought transference
 - 1228-1389 Spiritualism (including mediumship, spirit messages, clairvoyance)

- **1404-2055 Occult Sciences**

- 1444-1486.....Ghosts. Apparitions. Hauntings
 - 1501-1562.....Demonology. Satanism. Possession
 - 1562.5-1584....Witchcraft
 - 1585-1623.....Magic. Hermetics. Necromancy
 - 1651-1729.....Astrology
 - 1745-1779.....Oracles. Sibyls. Divinations
 - 1783-1815.....Seers. Prophets. Prophecies
 - 1845-1891.....Fortune-telling
 - 2050-2055.....Human-alien encounters. Contact between humans and extraterrestrials.



Cataloguing of the Supernatural



“enter a communication presented as having been received from a spirit under the heading for the spirit (see 22.14)”

*Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules
2nd ed.*

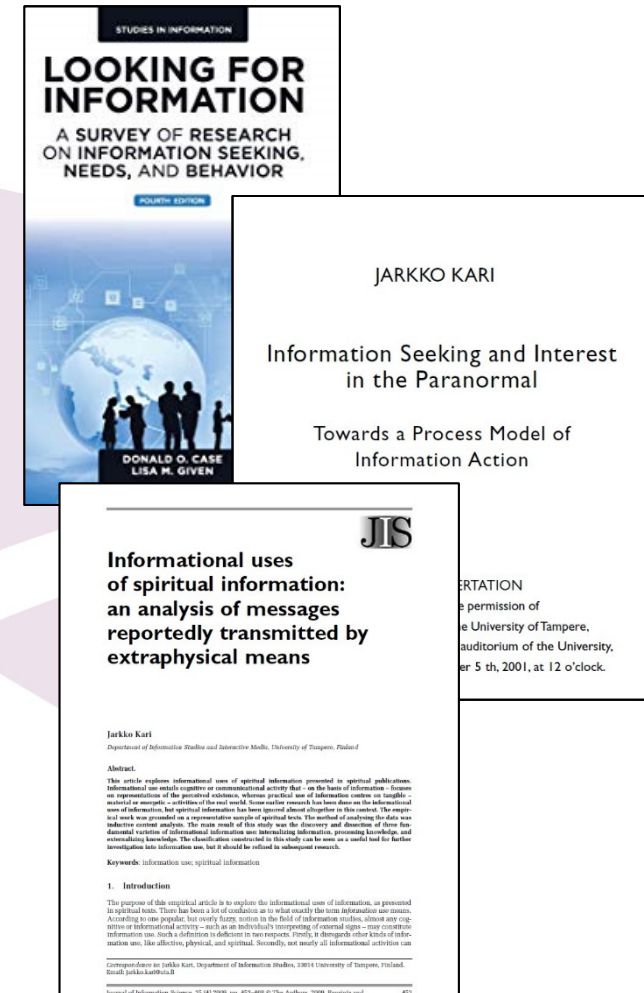


Selection & Acquisition of Supernatural Materials

- Popular subject area in public libraries – but potentially underrepresented?
 - Professional literature sought to address this
- Role of bias in collection development
- Should resources which cover the supernatural even be in library collections?
 - Kruk and Lonergan are sceptics
 - *“The reader has no guarantee that books in the library will make him wiser or more knowledgeable. His common sense might be assaulted. Readers who respect public libraries and assume that libraries are still ‘temples of knowledge’ may be shocked to find there books propagating the most bizarre ideas.”* Kruk (2001, p.353)

Information Seeking Behaviour and the Supernatural

- Previous research is limited, largely to that conducted by Jarkko Kari in Finland
- Two main threads to Kari's work:-
 - 1) **Information seeking of paranormalists (1995-2001)**
 - survey of 399 Finnish paranormalists
 - interviews with 16 Finnish paranormalists
 - based on Dervin's sense-making theory
 - 2) **Informational uses of spiritual information (2007-2011)**
 - content analysis of a corpus of 109 Finnish-language spiritual texts, published between 1940s and 2000s



Information Seeking Behaviour of Paranormalists: Scope for Future Research? (1)

Paranormal information seeking in everyday life: the paranormal in information action

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Introduction

The purpose of this licentiate's study is to examine information action (needs, seeking and use) in the context of paranormal information (information about the paranormal or information supposedly acquired by paranormal means) in a particular situation, as experienced by people who are interested in the supernatural. The central aspects of the research are its focus on the individual, situation, message and process, which should amount to a holistic picture of information action. The study is primarily theory-driven, and its conceptual framework is grounded upon David's sense-making theory. The basic elements, which are situation, gap (need) and use, are enhanced by two new elements, construction (seeking) and barrier. This is done in an effort to develop a theory of information action that is more concrete and unambiguous than the original sense-making theory. The main objective of the study at hand, however, is to analyse the content of information action, rather than its structure. The research is qualitative and somewhat exploratory by its nature. The data is constituted by 20 memo-protocol type text interviews which were conducted in Finland in 1991. Right now, the material is being coded for analysis.

Points of departure

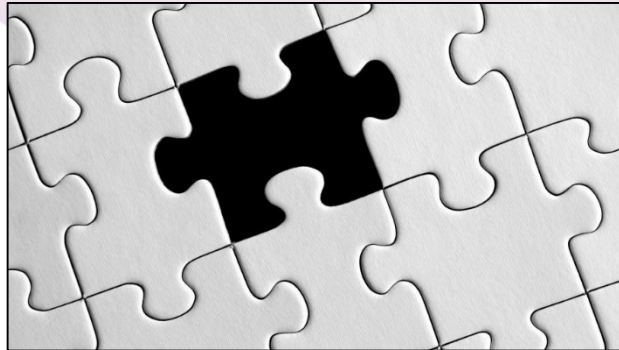
During the last couple of decades, it has been noted that interest in paranormal or supernatural phenomena has grown substantially in America and Europe (Hines, 1994). Today interest and belief in paranormal phenomena is remarkably common (Parsons, 1992; Spindle et al., 1992) – perhaps even more common than ever before (see Griffin, 1993). The figures on the share of believers in the paranormal vary, but on the basis of several surveys, it can be said that well over half of population believes in the existence of paranormal phenomena (Hilchmann, 1992). Paranormal beliefs are universal, which suggests that they are very important to the human being (Schmuckler, 1997). It would strike one as natural then that supernatural experiences and interest in these would tend to arouse in people a need to know more about these phenomena.

I call information relating to paranormal phenomena *paranormal information*. Little is known about how this information is manifested in information action, that is, in information needs, seeking and use. Nevertheless the title of a leader by Truman Kenworthy – "Need for information is growing" (Kenworthy, 1992) – tells us something. From the viewpoint of scientific research, paranormal information is like a black box, the scientific community is aware of it, but scholars either believe it or they lack the courage to take a look what is inside. This is why hardly anything at all is known about the relationship between paranormal phenomena and information action, or, to put it differently, between paranormal information and everyday life. As far as I know, my master's thesis, *Paranormal information seeking in everyday life – part I* (Kari, 1995), was the first and apparently still the only scientific study in the world that examines paranormal information in information action. That study merely succeeded in scratching the surface of the phenomena in question, so that there is an obvious need for further research.

My licentiate thesis in preparation is a continuation of my master's thesis. These two studies are meant to complement each other. Being a survey, the purpose of my master's thesis was to map the general features of needs and seeking of paranormal information. On the other hand, with the help of my licentiate thesis, which is based on interview material, I hope to "penetrate the surface" and to discover ways to interpret the results of my earlier study.

The current study looks at information action in the context of paranormal phenomena. In practice, this means examining needs, seeking and use of paranormal information in a particular situation, as experienced by people who are interested in the supernatural. The features that centrally characterise my study are its focus on the individual, situation, and process, which, taken together, should amount to a holistic picture of information action. Special attention is paid to the meanings that are given to paranormal information in everyday action. This is facilitated by taking Brenda David's sense-making theory (see e.g. David, 1992) as a meta-theory or a background theory for my study.

Outline of a theory



- Kari's research conducted in mid-1990s
- Studied amateur paranormalists in Finland only
- Conducted as widespread public access to the Internet was only just emerging
- Main information sources cited by paranormalists were 'other beings' (normal or paranormal), their 'own thinking', and books/documents

Information Seeking Behaviour of Paranormalists: Scope for Future Research? (2)

Table 2

Revised Paranormal Belief Scale

Please put a number next to each item to indicate how much you agree or disagree with that item. Use the numbers as indicated below. There are no right or wrong answers. This is a sample of your own beliefs and attitudes. Thank you.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Moderately Disagree 3=Slightly Disagree
4=Uncertain 5=Slightly Agree 6=Moderately Agree 7=Strongly Agree

1. The soul continues to exist though the body may die.
2. Some individuals are able to levitate (lift) objects through mental forces.
3. Black magic really exists.
4. Black cats can bring bad luck.
5. Your mind or soul can leave your body and travel (astral projection).
6. The abominable snowman of Tibet exists.
7. Astrology is a way to accurately predict the future.
8. There is a devil.
9. Psychokinesis, the movement of objects through psychic powers, does exist.
10. Witches do exist.
11. If you break a mirror, you will have bad luck.
12. During altered states, such as sleep or trances, the spirit can leave the body.
13. The Loch Ness monster of Scotland exists.
14. The horoscope accurately tells a person's future.
15. I believe in God
16. A person's thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object.
17. Through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons.
18. The number "13" is unlucky.
19. Reincarnation does occur.
20. There is life on other planets.
21. Some psychics can accurately predict the future.
22. There is a heaven and a hell.
23. Mind reading is not possible.
24. There are actual cases of witchcraft.
25. It is possible to communicate with the dead.
26. Some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future.

Note. Item 23 is reverse scored. Traditional Religious Belief = Mean of Items (1, 8, 15, 22);
Psi = Mean of Items (2, 9, 16, 23); Witchcraft = Mean of Items (3, 10, 17, 24);
Superstition = Mean of Items (4, 11, 18); Spiritualism = Mean of Items (5, 12, 19, 25)
Extraordinary Life Forms = Mean of Items (6, 13, 20); Precognition = Mean of Items (7, 14, 21, 26).

Tobacyk (2004)

Potential research questions could include:

- Reasons for seeking information relating to the supernatural
- Preferred sources of such information
- Preferred information formats
- Methods of searching for information
- Ways in which information is stored and organised
- Preferred mechanisms for sharing information..., etc., etc.

Methods might include:

- Online survey – potentially incorporating Tobacyk's Paranormal Belief Scale
- One-on-one interviews
- Discussion/focus groups

What do you think?

Thank you....



The Canterville Ghost, Oscar Wilde, 1887.
Spanish edition, Anaya Publishers, 2012;
illustration by Miguel Navia.