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

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“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
      - 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
      - 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)

- 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
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

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revised Paranormal Belief Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 = Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 = Uncertain</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The soul continues to exist through the body after death.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Some individuals are able to levitate (lift) objects through mental force.</td>
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<td>4. Black cats can bring bad luck.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Your mind or soul can leave your body and travel (astral projection).</td>
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<td>6. The abominable snowman of Tibet exists.</td>
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<td>7. Astrology is a way to accurately predict the future.</td>
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<td>8. There is a devil.</td>
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<td>9. Psychokinesis, the movement of objects through psychic powers, does exist.</td>
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<td>10. Witches do exist.</td>
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<td>11. If you break a mirror, you will have bad luck.</td>
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<td>12. Drinking altered states, such as sleep or trances, the spirit can leave the body.</td>
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<td>14. The horoscope accurately tells a personal future.</td>
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<td>15. Believe in God</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. A person’s thoughts can influence the movement of a physical object.</td>
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<td>17. Through the use of formulas and incantations, it is possible to cast spells on persons.</td>
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<td>18. The number “13” is unlucky.</td>
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<td>19. Reincarnation does occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. There is life on other planets.</td>
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<td>21. Some psychics can accurately predict the future.</td>
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<td>22. There is a heaven and a hell.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Mind reading is not possible.</td>
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<td>24. There are actual cases of witchcraft.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. It is possible to communicate with the dead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Some people have an unexplained ability to predict the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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); Predestination = Mean of Items (7, 14, 21, 26).

Tobacyk (2004)

What do you think?
Thank you....