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Book Review - All Things Cease to Appear

by Revd Brian Talbot

Elizabeth Brundage (2016, 2017) All Things Cease to Appear (London: Riverrun (Quercus Editions Ltd) 402 pages £8.19 (Amazon)

Would you read a book that mentions Swedenborg 25 times? Would you read a book which mentions *Heaven and Hell* twice, including its full title *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen*?

I first heard about this book from a member of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies in January. Andrew also mentioned that it



has been made into a film by Netflix and comes out on Friday 30th April, starring Amanda Seyfried, who I know from *Mamma Mia!* (2008), *Letters to Juliet* (2010) and *Mama Mia: Here We Go Again!* (2018), and James Norton, who I know from *McMafia* (2018). Needless to say that I have made a note on my calendar. It will be interesting to see how close the movie represents the book.

I'm not going to give too much of the story-line away, but part of it involves a couple of college art history lecturers talking about an American painter called George Inness (1825-1894) and Swedenborg's influence on him. Inness was a Swedenborgian, a baptised New-Churchman, so one of us! One of his paintings *The Valley of the Shadow of Death* (1867) is mentioned in the book and well worth a look on the internet. It consists of a view from a cave through the dark sky to a cross-like moon.

One of the art historians is enthusiastically Swedenborgian, (Floyd DeBeers) while the other (George Clare) is a superficial, lascivious sceptic. The former lends the latter a copy of *Heaven and Hell*. The former says, "Swedenborg takes us beyond death. Heaven and hell and, yes, angels, too – what he calls the hidden things of heaven and hell". He also says, "I think it's more about love than fear – the light of the Lord. We're unusual beings because we have a soul that never dies. Swedenborg opens the portal to the spirit world. His account confirms the Lord's promise: Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live." DeBeers even dresses up as Swedenborg for a Halloween party!

The latter Art Historian (George Clare) regards Swedenborg as "that nutcase" and his claims to "having the ability to communicate with angels and spirits read like the rant of a person with an undiagnosed mental disorder". To the latter "Swedenborg's account of heaven and hell reads like an awful drugstore novel. ... Heaven and hell, angels, that stuff's kind of a stretch for me."

The character, DeBeers, is a different type of Swedenborgian from me, because I don't organise séances nor attend them. Admittedly it was a very successful séance in that sceptical George Clare saw his favourite cousin and then fled the séance. I've never understood why some mediums need a darkened room? Theresa Caputo, the so-called *Long Island Medium* – the TV series of the same name has run for 14 seasons! – seems to obtain convincing results without being in a darkened room! I could name other mediums who do not need a darkened room.

In my booklet *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Swedenborgians – Long over-due conflict resolution* (Sydney: Swedenborg Lending Library and Enquiry Centre, 2000) I suggested we need to re-look at our beliefs about spiritualism. I haven't changed my mind since then.