

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a dispute concerning the common origins of the languages of mankind 1911-12

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This article is about the notions of history and language of a Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (née Sigurd Asp, 1870-1946), and the Swedish writer August Strindberg (1849-1912), and their interaction. Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg knew each other from Paris, where both lived in the 1890s. In the 1910s they both published books and articles on their respective linguistic views. According to both of them, the languages of mankind had a common origin. Strindberg had a more traditional view, as according to him Hebrew was the original language of the world. For Wettenhovi-Aspa, the original language was Finnish. These ideas may seem eccentric, but I argue that they both reflect the intellectual currents of their own time and are connected with a long tradition as well.

Introduction

On 30 January 1912, the newspaper *Åbo Underrättelser* in Turku, Finland, published an article entitled 'Language strife between August Strindberg and S. Wetterhoff-Asp: a letter from Strindberg and an open one from Mr. W.-A.'¹ To the readers of *Åbo Underrättelser* the term *language strife* in the headline probably at first brought to mind the prolonged political conflict concerning the status of the Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland. However, this was something very different: the famous Swedish author and the contemporarily well-known Finnish artist were debating on which was the seminal language of mankind, from which all other languages generated. The editors of *Åbo Underrättelser* presented the debate as a curiosity

- 1 'En språkstrid mellan August Strindberg och S. Wetterhoff-Asp. Ett brev från Strindberg och ett öppet dito från hr W.-A.' All translations are by the author, unless noted otherwise. *Åbo Underrättelser* is a Swedish-language newspaper in Turku, founded in 1824. Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa at that time resided in the Hotel Saima in Turku, where he stayed for long periods in the years 1910-12 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 195-8, 208-13).

interesting enough to be published, but made clear that they were not at all convinced of the adequacy of the views of the debaters (*Åbo Underrättelser* 1912).

The article was a response to Strindberg's writing in the Swedish newspaper *Afton-Tidningen* a week earlier, in which he made public a challenge he had made in a private letter to Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa.² He asked Wettenhovi-Aspa and his associates Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä to send him ten difficult Finnish words, which he promised to derive from Hebrew and Greek. This was in order to prove the seminal status of those languages in comparison to Finnish (SV 71: 192–4; Brev 7891, XX: 202–4).³

At this stage the discussion had been going on for a couple of months, both in private letters and in the pages of periodicals and newspapers. Besides Wettenhovi-Aspa,⁴ Strindberg corresponded with Elias Lönnqvist

- 2 The letter, dated 23 December 1911, was actually addressed to Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, but in this article I will use his Finnicized and best known surname Wettenhovi-Aspa, which he started to use in 1910s. Originally his name was Georg Sigurd Asp, in which he added his maternal name Wetterhoff in the 1890s. In 1911–12 he experimented with Finnicized names and released some articles with the names S. W. Aspa-Haapets and Vedenhovilinnan Aspa-Haapets, just before starting to use the name Wettenhovi-Aspa. The name Wettenhovi-Aspa is not a translation, but rather based on similar appearance. For some reason, he didn't make it official until 1939.
- 3 Strindberg's works are cited from the standard edition *Nationalupplagan av August Strindbergs Samlade verk* (1981–2013), abbreviated here as SV, followed by volume and page number. Strindberg's letters are cited from *August Strindbergs brev I–XXII* (1948–2001), abbreviated here as Brev, followed by letter number, volume number and page number. Letters sent to Strindberg are cited from the Royal Library (Stockholm), Manuscript Department, The Nordic Museum's Strindberg Collection, with the signum SgNM, initials of the correspondent, and date, when appropriate.
- 4 Five of Strindberg's letters to Wettenhovi-Aspa have survived to be published in *August Strindbergs brev*, dated 2 and 18 December 1894, 21 and 23 November 1900, and 23 December 1911 (Brev 3014, X: 316; Brev 3036, X: 334; Brev 4410, XIII: 338; Brev 4414, XIII: 340; Brev 7891, XX: 202–3). It has been reported that in the beginning of the 1970s there still existed a bundle of letters from Strindberg in the villa of Wettenhovi-Aspa in Karjalohja, Finland, which then was a summer resort for Finnish artists (see Lintinen 1982). It is probable that those letters were not the published ones, according to the given provenance and details of the published letters in *August Strindbergs brev*. A significant part of Wettenhovi-Aspa's estate and archives were destroyed or went missing after his death. The surviving manuscript material was donated to Turku University

and Theodor Finnilä, who were inspired both by Strindberg's writings on languages, and Wettenhovi-Aspa's Strindberg-influenced newspaper articles published in the summer and autumn of 1911 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a-f). Theodor Finnilä (1868-1920), a lieutenant from Vaasa, Finland, did not publish any works of his own. His long letters to Strindberg reflect a dedication to comparative language studies (SgNM: TF). It has been suggested that he financed some of Wettenhovi-Aspa's publications. He also gave a lecture with Wettenhovi-Aspa in Turku, Finland in 1912 on an occasion which he had financed (Bok-Fyren⁵ 1915: 4; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 208-9, 253-4). Elias Lönnqvist (1875-1949) was a station master at Kuurila railway station, Finland, who later published his views on 'Finnish as a key to all civilized languages' in two books (Lönnqvist 1931, 1945; *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1962). Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä became acquainted with each other during the year 1911 (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911).

Strindberg's first studies in languages, published in his Blue Books in 1908 (*En blå bok, En ny blå bok*, SV 66-7), had already gained some attention in Finland. His original views on language history, and in particular the Finnish and Swedish languages, were presented and reviewed in Finnish newspapers, and also in then-popular political satire magazines. In the summer of 1911 Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa began a series of articles inspired by Strindberg's *Världs-Språkens Rötter* (The Roots of the World Languages),⁶ published by *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Uusi Suometar*, major Finnish newspapers at that time. In the series of six articles, four in Swedish and two in Finnish, he introduced his own ideas to the public rather than Strindberg's. Wettenhovi-Aspa emphasized the role of Finnish as an ancient language which was older than any other language in the world, and had generated all other languages (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a-f).

Library, as Wettenhovi-Aspa had wished in his will, as late as in the 1980s.

See Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 384-400. Wettenhovi-Aspa's, Finnilä's and Lönnqvist's letters to Strindberg are preserved by the Royal Library of Sweden (SgNM: SWA, TF, EL).

- 5 Bok-Fyren, Spex and Sepia were Rafael Lindqvist's (1867-1952) pseudonyms. He was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Fyren* from 1904 until 1922, known for his Svecoman and right-wing opinions. Wettenhovi-Aspa drew caricatures and magazine covers for *Fyren* regularly from 1898 until 1909, and sporadically also later (Pitkälä 2010: 12, 79, *passim*).
- 6 The English translations for the titles of Strindberg's language studies are by Freddie Rokem (2002).

In this article I will examine the debate between Strindberg and Wettenhovi-Aspa in 1911–12 within its contemporary and historical context. Although their ideas on languages seem to have been eccentric and marginal, they are part of a broader contemporary intellectual current, and connected with a long tradition as well. I argue that Strindberg had a decisive influence on his Finnish correspondents, especially Wettenhovi-Aspa, when they pursued their investigations concerning languages and history from the 1910s onwards.

A thorough analysis of the correspondence of Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist, however, requires more than one article. Their known mutual correspondence between December 1911 and April 1912 consists of over forty letters, from postcards to long etymological vocabularies and manuscript excerpts. They also sent books to each other and referred in their letters to a wide range of linguistic and historical literature. Their discussion was also extended to the public sphere, as Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg referred to the correspondence in their articles, and the debate was also commented on and reported in the newspapers.

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa hasn't been much investigated.⁷ Art historians have neglected his works until recently, and his writings have not been taken seriously as historical sources. They have been seen as eccentric, or ridiculous and even shameful works, which deserve to be forgotten. Because there is very little information available in English about Wettenhovi-Aspa, and because he isn't a well-known person (even in Finland), and in order to understand the nature of his literary activities, it is necessary to provide a short biographical survey. It is also necessary to examine the roots of his ideas, in order to understand in which kind of context the investigated debate took place, as well as his acquaintance with Strindberg, which originated in Paris in the 1890s.

7 Halén and Tukkinen (1984) is still the only full biography of Wettenhovi-Aspa. I will use this biography as a reference, although it often doesn't mention its sources, as it does provide a view to the course of life of Wettenhovi-Aspa. It also contains some oral history, which is not otherwise available, because the interviewees are deceased. See also Pitkälä 2010.

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa: from an artist to a Fenno-Egyptologist

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, originally a painter, sculptor and caricaturist, but later also an inventor, writer and social activist, has mostly been remembered for his ideas about the past of the Finns. These ideas have been introduced to the public over the decades in many periodicals and newspapers as a quaint curiosity of the past. Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that most languages had their origins in Finnish. He was also the father of so-called 'Fenno-Egyptology'. In this theory he claimed that the ancient Egyptian language and culture were of Finnish origin. Wettenhovi-Aspa's activities during the years were so multifarious that it is unnecessary to detail all of them here. He was active in many fields, and apart from art he was an amateur in all of them. When he died in 1946, the Finnish newspapers commented on how remarkable and curious his life was in its entirety, and his personality was seen as perhaps more interesting than any single activity in his life (Halén and Tukkinen 1984; Pitkälä 2010: 1-18).

Wettenhovi-Aspa's notion of the Finnish language as the original language of the world was based on etymologies he conceived of himself. For example, in 1935 he explained some English and Irish place-names as follows:

Highfinnish: "TUONEN-KALLIO" = stone of death... became:
"D'ONE'-GALL" = (ab ovo cemetery) now city in Ireland. ...

The particular Finnish DEVIL: "PERKELE" has seemingly once caused disturbance also in Britain, because in all cases: "Berkeley"-castle in Gloucestershire has been named after this Fenno-celtic devil.

Highfinnish: PERKELE = the headmaster of devils

English: BERKELE-Y Castle.

Because the meaning of the Finnish word "Perkele" = "devil" in
English: Berkeley = devil's (castle) was early forgotten, even a Bishop, George Berkeley, without the least suspicion bore the devilish name. And after all – why is it not possible for a Finnish devil to be an English Bishop – since a forestgoblin – "Waldteufel" has been a waltz composer in Austria? (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935c: 24)⁸

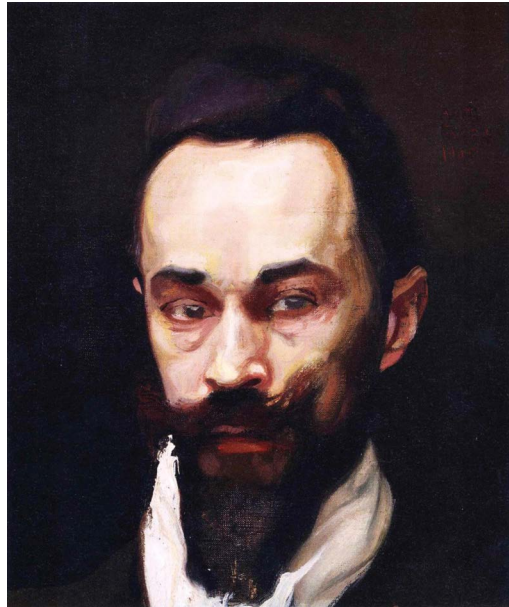
8 This citation reproduces the orthography adopted in the original publication.

Wettenhovi-Aspa's etymologies and puns aren't always easy, or even possible, to translate but he published many writings also in other languages than Finnish, explaining the meanings of his etymologies (see e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a, 1935a, 1935c). The quotation above, for example, was originally published in English. For most contemporaries, many of these etymologies were either comic or just ridiculous, although he had some supporters as well. Wettenhovi-Aspa himself was Swedish-speaking, and it has been reported that according to the composer Jean Sibelius, who knew Wettenhovi-Aspa personally, his theories were mostly based on his poor skills in the Finnish language (Jalas 1981: 60–1; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 206, 290).

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa was born in Helsinki in 1870. His father was Georg Asp (1834–1901), Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the University of Helsinki. His mother, Mathilda Wetterhoff (1840–1920) was a teacher of gymnastics. As a somewhat troubled twelve-year-old he was sent to a boarding school in the little Danish town of Christiansfeld, Northern Schleswig, which then was a part of the state of Prussia. At the age of sixteen he moved to Copenhagen to study painting and sculpture, first in Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi (Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts) from 1886 to 1887, and then from 1891 to 1892 as a pupil of Kristian Zahrtmann and Peder Severin Krøyer at Kunstnernes Frie Studieskoler (Free Art Schools). In 1891, he made his debut in Finland and left in 1892 for Paris, supported by a grant (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 20–33, 37, 65; Halén 2007: 464–5; Pitkälä 2010: 4–5). In the 1890s and at the beginning of the 1900s Wettenhovi-Aspa took part in various exhibitions in the Nordic countries, Germany and France (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 51–2, 89, *passim*; Pitkälä 2010: 5–12).

In Paris Wettenhovi-Aspa studied sculpture with the Finnish sculptor Ville Vallgren (1855–1940) as a personal teacher, took part in various *salons* and wrote some art criticism for the Swedish-language newspapers of Finland. Of the *salons* the most important was the Salon de la Rose+Croix, hosted by Joséphin Péladan, where Wettenhovi-Aspa and Vallgren were both invited to participate in the spring of 1893. He exhibited a relief depicting the maiden Aino from the *Kalevala*. Both Strindberg and Wettenhovi-Aspa admired Péladan who was a controversial art critic, writer and novelist (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927; Pitkälä 2010: 5–7; Johnsson 2015: 275–7). Strindberg acknowledged his admiration in his letters, in which he also called Péladan *maître* ('master') and *prophète* ('prophet') (Brev S584 XXII: 172; Brev S607, XXII: 190–1). According to Strindberg, Péladan was the father of the

whole symbolist movement. Péladan's ideas combined Catholicism, symbolism, mysticism and occultism. He admired the Orient and had adopted the title of *Sâr Mérodack* (King Mérodack or King Marduk) from the ancient Chaldeans. In his *salon* one was only allowed to present certain subjects in sculptures and paintings. The emphasis was on mythological, mystic, oriental and allegorical motifs, and, for example, still lives, landscapes, contemporary subjects and history painting were forbidden (Sarajas-Korte 1966: 10, 43–5, 84–7;



Portrait of the artist S. Wettenhovi-Aspa by Antti Favén (1882-1948), 1905, oil on canvas, 39 × 33,5 cm. Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.

Chaitow 2018). The Finnish painter Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905) wrote in a letter that Wettenhovi-Aspa was ‘the leading lunatic’ among the artists in *Rose+Croix* (Edelfelt 1893).⁹ Edelfelt thought that Péladan’s *salon* was decadent and that his Finnish fellow artists should avoid this new movement. Edelfelt, who was sixteen years older than Wettenhovi-Aspa, and already an established and esteemed artist, disapproved of Péladan and his *salon*, which he saw as a decadent combination of narcotics, Theosophy, spiritualism, sexual abnormality and Catholicism (Sarajas-Korte 1966: 88).¹⁰

In December 1894, a Finnish journalist and theatre critic Axel Berndtson (1858–1937) wrote an article in *Nya Pressen*, a Swedish-language newspaper in Finland. In his article ‘Bref från Paris. – Strindberg. – “Fadern” á *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre*’ (A letter from Paris. – Strindberg. – “The Father” – At the *Théâtre*

9 ‘På Rose & Croix har Sigurd Asp första rummet som galning ...’. Albert Edelfelt to his mother Alexandra Edelfelt on Good Friday in [18]93 (Edelfelt 1893).

10 ‘Sar Péladanismen och allt detta morfinförsvagade, teosofiska, spiritistiska, sexuellt abnormal, katolicismen från Chat Noir – det tror jag ej på.’ Albert Edelfelt to the painter Axel Gallén 19.9.1894, cited in Sarajas-Korte 1966: 88.

de l'Oeuvre) he interviewed Strindberg mainly about his play *The Father* (1887) and its final rehearsal in Paris. Berndtson was about to leave when Strindberg wanted to show him his paintings, mentioning Wettenhovi-Aspa, who back then still used his original name Sigurd Asp:

Then I stood up to thank him for the natural and warm welcome, when he grabbed the lamp and uttered: 'No, first you have to see my paintings. Of course I'm not as revolutionary as your fellow countryman Sigurd Asp, because that boy is ahead of us all, but it can be interesting to see how a self-taught writer paints. I have recently sold ten pieces of work in Sweden.' (Berndtson 1894)¹¹

In the cited paragraph, Strindberg emphasizes that he is uneducated as a painter, but that seems to be a positive quality rather than negative.¹² Strindberg also describes Wettenhovi-Aspa as a revolutionary painter, 'ahead of us all', which one could be tempted to interpret as irony. However, at the time Wettenhovi-Aspa was a young and maybe even promising artist, associated with Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix, and gaining attention in other exhibitions as well (Pitkälä 2010: 5–8). In December 1894 Strindberg told Wettenhovi-Aspa in a letter, that he had read his play manuscript, 'which is as slipshod and immature as your visual arts are mature' (Brev 3014, X: 316).

Wettenhovi-Aspa reported later that he had met Strindberg in August 1894 at Café de Versailles, where the Finnish sculptor Ville Vallgren had introduced them to each other (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 5–14). Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote several autobiographical articles and a book related to August Strindberg and the times in the 1890s when they socialized in Paris. In 1927, he released a memoir entitled *Jutelmia ja muistelmia 1890-luvun Parisista ja August Strindbergin Inferno-vuosista* (Stories and Reminiscences

- 11 'Därpå reste jag mig för att tacka för det okonstlade, förekommande sätt hvarpå han mottagit mig, då han grep tag i lampan och utbrast: Nej, först skall ni se på mina taflor. Jag är visserligen ej lika revolutionär som er landsman Sigurd Asp, ty den pojken är före oss alla, men det kan ju ha sitt intresse att se hur en literatör för en olärd pensel. Jag har nyligen sålt tio stycken i Sverige' (Berndtson 1894). The article was signed only with the initials A.B., but according to what Anna Kortelainen reports about Berndtson, it's most probable that the article is written by him (see Kortelainen 2001: 531, *passim*). I have found no personal connection between Berndtson and Wettenhovi-Aspa.
- 12 Strindberg's art was connected to his occult thought, see Lahelma 2018: 67–92.

of Paris in the 1890s and August Strindberg's Inferno Years).¹³ It was later also translated into German under the title *August Strindberg intim* (1936).¹⁴ The book was in fact Wettenhovi-Aspa's memoirs from his youth, although large parts of the book consist of informal recollections and stories about Strindberg intended for the general public (Pitkälä 2010: 28).

Wettenhovi-Aspa returned to Finland in 1895 with his French wife Marie Sophie 'Divina' Paillard (1861–1915). In Helsinki Wettenhovi-Aspa organized several 'free exhibitions' with other Finnish artists between 1896 and 1903. One of these exhibitions was also presented in other Nordic capitals during the years 1900–1 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 65–81, 85–95, 106–24, 140–1; Pitkälä 2010: 8–9). These exhibitions were protests against the art establishment and the academy. There was no jury to decide on what could be exhibited. It is obvious that the exhibitions were inspired by the Danish movement *Den frie Udstilling* (The Free Exhibition), which began in 1891, opposing the conservative Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. *Den frie Udstilling* had its own pavilion in Copenhagen, designed by J. F. Willumsen and inspired by Egyptian and Greek temples. The movement and gallery

- 13 Wettenhovi-Aspa's extensive original manuscript 'August Strindbergs Pariserinferno skildrat av en som var med' (August Strindberg's Parisian Inferno as Told by an Eyewitness) can be found at National Archives of Finland, Helsinki. Excerpts from the book were published in *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, *Stockholms Dagblad*, *Julkvällen – Publicistklubbens jultidning* (Stockholm) and *Åbo Underrättelser* (Turku), between the years 1927–32, but the book was never released in Swedish (see Pitkälä 2010: 1–XV for bibliographical details). In Strindberg studies only the published excerpts in Swedish, and the German translation from 1936 are usually cited, and they have been generally treated as somewhat unreliable sources. However, e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa's account of Strindberg's encounter with Alexandre Dumas' *fiils* in December 1894 has been considered credible (see e.g. Meyer 1985: 312). In my investigations Wettenhovi-Aspa has in general proved to be a far more reliable source than for instance the biographers Harry Halén and Tauno Tukkinen have believed. It seems that Wettenhovi-Aspa's imaginative writings and sometimes grandiose style have made both his contemporaries and future generations exaggeratedly suspicious of what even he tells us about his own life. He may in his memoirs present Strindberg as a closer friend to him than he perhaps was, but their acquaintance and interaction are unquestionable.
- 14 According to Walter Berendsohn, a German-speaking Strindberg researcher, the translation is very poor and made by an uneducated person (Berendsohn 1946: 88). Both the Finnish and the German translations are made by somebody other than the author himself (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 58).

still exist. Wettenhovi-Aspa's 'Free Exhibition from Finland' (Den frie Udstilling fra Finland) was presented there in 1900–1. Already Kunstneres Frie Studieskoler and Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix had gone against the mainstream and academic art (Pitkälä 2010: 5–10; Scavenius 1991: 7–34, 53–9, 75–8). This is important, as Wettenhovi-Aspa was already an anti-academic as an artist, and this attitude followed him into his literary works. He also argued publicly with art critics throughout his early career, which didn't help him to achieve a lasting position on the Finnish art scene.

Besides art, Wettenhovi-Aspa was engaged in numerous other activities, beginning in the year 1900 with a compilation of poems entitled *Pro Patria*.¹⁵ He also released a critical book about Russia and its emperor Nicholas II in France in 1905 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1905), and published political caricatures on the same subject in some prominent magazines, such as *Jugend* (Munich), *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Paris), and *Ravnen* (Copenhagen).¹⁶ Because of this kind of suspicious political activity he lived in exile, mostly in France, during the years 1904–8 (Pitkälä 2010: 9–13; Halén and Tukkinen 1984: 141–76).

Wettenhovi-Aspa recalled that he began to investigate languages seriously in 1910 (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 10; 1927: 267; see also ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911; SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911). He reported that he had already compared Finnish and ancient Egyptian languages in Paris in the 1890s, when he examined the Egyptian collections of the Louvre for a painting representing Cleopatra. Then he had noted similarities between Finnish and Egyptian; the words *meri* ('the sea'), *puna* ('red') and *sini* ('blue') for example, and Kemet, the ancient name of Egypt, which was similar to the Finnish place name Kemi.¹⁷ He recalled that he had then discussed languages and

15 *Pro Patria* included a poem dedicated to Strindberg, dated in Paris 1895, in which Wettenhovi-Aspa praised Strindberg's independence and courage and his critical attitude towards academics (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1900: 27).

16 I have found signed caricatures from e.g. *L'Assiette au Beurre* (Paris) no. 201, 1905; *Ravnen* (Copenhagen) 19/1906; *Jugend* (Munich) 42/1908. Wettenhovi-Aspa reported later that he had made many anonymous drawings during those years, in addition for e.g. *Lustige Blätter* (Berlin) and *Karbasen* (Stockholm) (Pitkälä 2010: 11).

17 The place name Kemi had already interested Olof Rudbeck the Elder in his *Atlantica* in the seventeenth century. He associated it with the Homeric Cimmerians, who had according to him given the name Kimmi (Kemi) to the town and river in northern Finland (Anttila 2015: 154). In Daniel Juslenius's *Aboa vetus et*

the similarities between Finnish and ancient Egyptian with Strindberg, who had tried to convince him of worthlessness of both the Finnish language and the interpretations of modern Egyptologists. Wettenhovi-Aspa reports that he had back then decided to study further the Egyptian language in the future (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 9–10; 1927: 261–5).

It is notable that in the contemporary art scene Egypt, and the Orient in general, were popular topics and sources of influence for artists, who at the same time were interested in Theosophy, Swedenborg and many kinds of esoteric movements. Finnish artists were discovering the *Kalevala* and conceived the Finnish national romantic movement in the arts. Thus both orientalist, religious and national features were present in the intellectual atmosphere of the time (see Kokkinen 2019; Lahelma 2020; Sarajas-Korte 1966). Wettenhovi-Aspa later combined these elements in his literary works, which were also very close to Theosophy in some aspects. Wettenhovi-Aspa wasn't a committed theosophist himself, but he emphasized the nature of the Finnish language and the *Kalevala* as the source of a secret wisdom, which had been preserved in the Finnish forests. He later also wrote articles for some Finnish theosophically-oriented magazines, *Sunnuntai* and *Ihminen* (Pitkälä 2010: 89–116).

Wettenhovi-Aspa's views on history and languages were influenced by Gothicist historians of the past, such as Olof Rudbeck (1630–1702) and Daniel Juslenius (1676–1752). They had also aspired to prove etymologically that Swedish, or in Juslenius's case, respectively Finnish, was the oldest surviving language in the world, or at least very close to the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek. The Swedes were presented as descendants of the ancient Goths. Swedish Gothicist historians from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries emphasized the great and glorious past of the nation, which had been forgotten (Urpilainen 1993: 11–12, 33–4; see also Juslenius 1700/2005). This was typical in seventeenth-century Europe, and similar investigations were published, for example, in the Netherlands and Italy, where scholars aspired to prove their languages to be closely related to the biblical languages, and their respective nations to be the descendants of Japheth, Noah's son (Olender 1994: 5–25). Wettenhovi-Aspa didn't always

nova (1700) the connection between Kemi and Cimmerians was to prove that both Finns and Swedes were descendants of the ancient Cimmerians, who had invented writing (Juslenius 1700/2005: 142).

refer to his historical predecessors, even when citing them, but mentions them in his early writings in an appreciative manner (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911e).

August Strindberg's language studies and their impact in Finland

August Strindberg had become interested in languages when he was working as an assistant in Kungliga biblioteket (The Royal Library), Stockholm, in the years 1875–80. Back then he had arranged the collections of Chinese and Japanese literature for various Swedish libraries. For instance, he arranged the Nordenskiöld Japanese Library, which has been considered a major project. He had also studied some Mongolian. However, he abandoned these kinds of linguistic activities to concentrate on writing fiction (Rohnström 1971: 290–2, 303; Bennich-Björkman 2007: 13–17, *passim*).

Strindberg's language studies at the beginning of the twentieth century were connected with his occult ideas and interest in the natural sciences which he had studied, especially in the 1890s. He had a conception of the common origin of all matter and a monistic view of the unity of both chemical elements and languages. In his opinion in chemistry the elements could be transformed into each other, and when it came to languages, they too were all related to each other, and of the same origin. These views were influenced by the monistic philosophy of Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) (SV 35: 25–44; Brev 7889, XX: 200; Regnell 2009: 36–7, 41–54; Pitkälä 2010: 31–4, 45–51; Johnsson 2015: 219–20, 225–6). According to Strindberg, it wasn't necessary to classify languages, as 'everything can be found everywhere' (SV 66: 841).¹⁸ Freddie Rokem has described Strindberg's language studies as an alchemical dream, in which Hebrew transforms 'into the gold from which all languages stem' (Rokem 2002: 55).

In his later language studies Strindberg argued that all languages had their origins in Hebrew. In these studies he ignored the views of contemporary linguistics, phonetic laws and the existence of dialects. Strindberg ceased writing fiction and started investigating dictionaries and comparing languages. In his book *Bibliska egennamn med ordfränder i klassiska och levande språk* (Proper Names in the Bible with Related Words in Classical and Living Languages, 1910) he reported that he had even read a dictionary

18 'Jag kan således icke finna något berättigat i att isolera och indela språken, då allt återfinnes i alla.'



Portrait of August Strindberg by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, Paris 1894, pastel and pencil on paper, 49,5 × 34 cm. Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki.

of Hebrew from cover to cover (SV 69: 14). By means of his self-made method he managed to find surprising similarities between very different languages (Balbierz 2005; Jonsson 1999: 1093–8).

Strindberg's studies on languages were based on auditory perception; on how words of different languages sounded. He was looking for similarities, but unlike Wettenhovi-Aspa, he did not usually build historical narratives around his etymologies. In Hebrew he saw the most perfect language, in which the words and the things they described corresponded. His approach was also musical. He described for example the Hebrew word *zippor*, 'a bird, as bird-like by nature', as one could almost hear a bird singing when seeing or hearing the word (SV 66: 13).

Jan Balbierz discusses Strindberg's language studies as an anti-rational and anti-positivistic alternative discipline. In the name of his scientific revolution Strindberg approaches ideas of man, language, nature and God preceding the Enlightenment. According to Balbierz Strindberg's ideas of language and his methods originated from the Middle Ages and baroque science. At the same time he participates in the modernist discussion by creating etymologies, playing with words and emphasizing their phonetic qualities at the expense of their meaning. Strindberg seeks to find the 'Hebrew' in all languages, which, according to Balbierz, approaches Ferdinand de Saussure's aspirations to describe *la langue*, the unchangeable and objective qualities of language (Balbierz 2005: 28–9, 46–8; Pitkälä 2010: 49).

The first hints of Strindberg's interest in languages were published in the second part of his four-part work of prose entitled *En blå bok* (The Blue Book, 1908–12). *En blå bok* was a sort of collage of short fragments of various kinds of text from fictional passages to chapters of more factual appearance, concerning, for example, the science, religion and mathematics of the ancient Assyrians.¹⁹ The second part of the book, *En ny blå bok* (The New Blue Book, 1908) contained the chapter 'Finska Ungerska-Mandschuiska Japanska' (Finnish Hungarian-Manchu Japanese, SV 66: 837–45) in which Strindberg listed Finnish words and translated them into Swedish, arguing that Finnish words originated from all over the world and that Finnish was 'the real Esperanto'.²⁰ Strindberg also wrote a few pages about the Finnish

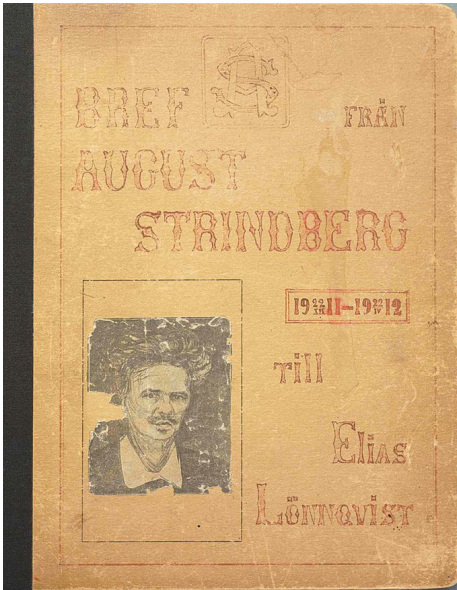
19 See the indices for *En blå bok*: SV 67: 1725–35.

20 'Däremot synes ordförrådet i finskan vara hämtat ur alla världens språk, vilket gör finskan till ett sannskyldigt esperanto' (SV 66: 837).

language in his first book entirely dedicated to language comparisons, *Bibliska egennamn*, which he released in 1910 (SV 69: 72–5).

Strindberg had adopted the basic idea of his language studies – Hebrew as the common origin of the languages of mankind – from Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) (Berendsohn 1946: 34; Lagercrantz 1979: 445–6; Meyer 1985: 546; Jonsson 1999: 1093–4; Rokem 2002: 45–6). In Swedenborg’s thinking also two aspects of baroque literary ideas of a universal language were united: the search for the original language and an idea of a mathematical language of science. Swedenborg’s writings articulated both a theory of the seminal status of Hebrew and a theory that the original language still existed in China. For Swedenborg the search for the original language was connected to a wider philosophical and teleological conception of the world (Siukonen 2000: 63–74). Swedenborg was influenced by the famous Gothicist historian in Sweden, Olof Rudbeck the Elder (1630–1702), whose magnum opus *Atlantica sive Manheim* (1679–1702) connected the history of the Swedish Empire to biblical history, explaining that Noah’s son Japheth had come to Sweden after the Flood (Jonsson 1999: 1093–4; Siukonen 2000: 12; Anttila 2015: 143–51). Strindberg also studied Chinese as well as Hebrew in his writings concerning languages in 1910–12. He was interested in Swedenborg in particular in the 1890s while living in Paris. Later he dedicated the first part of *En blå bok* to Swedenborg (Lagercrantz 1979: 392–3; Siukonen 2000: 94).

Strindberg’s views had already come to public attention in Finland by 1908. The Swedish-language humorous magazine *Fyren* cited his book on 11 July 1908 and advised him to buy a Finnish-Swedish-Russian dictionary to see the real origins of Finnish (Spex 1908). More commentaries and reviews followed. For example, the writer Kyösti Wilkuna presented Strindberg’s book *Bibliska egennamn* to the readers of *Uusi Suometar* and wrote that it was a pity that Strindberg didn’t know Finnish any better. According to Wilkuna, Strindberg could have proved Finnish to be a dialect of Greek with his method, as Wilkuna then humorously presented some similar words he had found from those languages (Wilkuna 1910). Rolf Nordenstreng reviewed *Modersmålets anor* (The Origins of the Mother Tongue) in a more serious style in the periodical *Finsk Tidskrift*. He mentioned also some of Strindberg’s etymologies concerning the Finnish language, but was more interested in Strindberg’s views on bringing some Icelandic vocabulary into Swedish, and in criticising Strindberg’s methods (Nordenstreng 1910: 365–9).



Cover of Elias Lönnqvist's personal book binding containing letters from Strindberg, with Strindberg's initials replicated from the signet he used in his correspondence, and with Edvard Munch's famous Strindberg portrait, as a pasted up clipping. The newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* mentioned in an article in 1962 that the volume with Strindberg's letters then belonged to the Finnish publisher Bertel Appelberg (1890–1977) who had bought them from the bookseller Elis Tegengren in Helsinki (*Hufvudstadsbladet* 1962). The Royal Library of Sweden finally acquired the letters from an antiquarian bookseller in Oslo, Norway in 2005. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgKB 2005/63.

Aspa before the 1910s, and it is probable that he then started his language studies in interaction with Strindberg. Wettenhovi-Aspa recalled later that he became aware of Strindberg's language studies when Strindberg sent him his new book *Bibliska egennamn* in 1910. That could have been the first impulse for Wettenhovi-Aspa's own linguistic speculations (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 10; 1927: 267; 1936: 260).

According to Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä had all begun their investigations influenced by his *En ny blå bok*, where Strindberg had provocatively argued that the Finnish language had nothing of its own (SV 71: 192). This may be the case at least with two of the three Finns, as Lönnqvist told Strindberg in a letter that he had commenced his language studies by acquiring Strindberg's *Världs-Språkens Rötter* after reading Wettenhovi-Aspa's article concerning the book in July, 1911 (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911).

Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that he had begun his language comparisons before Strindberg and that he had in fact introduced the idea of investigating the origins of language to his Swedish friend in Paris in the 1890s (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 261–72). There is however no evidence of any particular interest in languages by Wettenhovi-

The 'language strife' of Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg

In March 1911 Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote a long letter to the Swedish writer Verner von Heidenstam, seeking for support in publishing his studies in Sweden (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911). In his letter Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote that he had begun to seriously study 'languages of the Stone Age' about a year ago, and had found interesting connections between different languages and the Finnish language. He said that he had already produced a comparative vocabulary consisting of 10,000 words. Strindberg's language studies he mentions only in a passing remark, stating that 'Strindberg's hypothesis of Jews as primeval people' is wrong.²¹ Wettenhovi-Aspa asked Heidenstam for help in finding someone from Sweden to edit his manuscripts and to find some journal in Stockholm to publish them.²² According to Wettenhovi-Aspa Finnish newspapers or periodicals would reject his writings on the subject. However, he managed to actually publish six articles in prominent Finnish newspapers later in the same year, including virtually all the material he had sent to Heidenstam.

The letter is one of the earliest sources of Wettenhovi-Aspa's thinking concerning history and languages. It also proves that Wettenhovi-Aspa had independent aspirations to publish his studies before his newspaper articles concerning Strindberg's views, and the correspondence between Strindberg, Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä at the end of 1911 and the beginning of 1912. There is no further evidence of connections between Heidenstam and Wettenhovi-Aspa, and the letter did not lead to the intended publications in Sweden.

Wettenhovi-Aspa's investigations were already known in Helsinki in the spring of 1911. In April the humorous magazine *Fyren* told its readers

21 'Strindbergs hypothes om Judarna som urfolk är minst sagt löjlig, så mycket jag än håller af honom som fenomen. Lifvet började vid Equatorn och icke i Palestina' (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911).

22 Wettenhovi-Aspa writes to Heidenstam that he asks his help, because he doesn't know anyone in Sweden. Actually he had many Swedish friends and acquaintances, and even family, as his mother had moved to Stockholm with his two siblings in 1891 (Halén and Tukkinen 1984: *passim*). The formalities and style Wettenhovi-Aspa used in his letter suggest that he had probably never met Heidenstam. One possible motive to approach Heidenstam might have been his status as Strindberg's antagonist in the contemporary public arena (ÖA, Brev: SWA 1.3.1911).

that Wettenhovi-Aspa was writing a big dictionary called ‘Finnish – every nation’s mother tongue’ (Culex 1911). In June he took orders in advance at an artists’ gathering in a restaurant in Helsinki for a forthcoming book concerning the status of the Finnish language in world history (Pitkälä 2010: 59).

Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his investigations on languages for the first time in 1911 when *Hufoudstadsbladet*, the leading Swedish-language newspaper in Finland, had asked him to write a review of Strindberg’s new book *Världs-Språkens Rötter* (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 11). He didn’t write the usual newspaper review, but a series of six articles in which he introduced his own ideas to the public rather than Strindberg’s. *Världs-Språkens Rötter* was the third of Strindberg’s contributions to language studies, and in it he continued his comparative linguistics in vocabularies of languages such as Hebrew, Sanskrit and Chinese. In his articles Wettenhovi-Aspa opposed Strindberg’s view that Hebrew was the original language. Wettenhovi-Aspa saw Hebrew merely as the remnants of the original biblical language, which had been destroyed in Babel. According to him, the Finnish language had survived Babel and subsequent ‘Indo-Germanic transitions’²³, and thus it was the oldest surviving and most seminal language in the world (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a–f).

Inspired by contemporary archaeological excavations Wettenhovi-Aspa placed the original home of mankind in Java, which he saw as the lost paradise. There had lived the *Maa-laji* people (that is ‘Earth-species’ in Finnish, referring to the Malays) who once had to disperse all over the world because of overpopulation. Wettenhovi-Aspa called the original language *fenno-maa-lajiska* and believed that it had been very close to the modern Finnish language. Of this original language he found remains in Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit and especially Egyptian. According to him, the *Maa-laji* people had over the centuries wandered to Stone Age Europe through India and Egypt and finally settled in Finland. He also referred to *fingalliska* (‘Fingallian’) forefathers, who had lived in ancient Europe, referring to the character *Fingal* in Celtic mythology (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a).

In his articles Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his own contribution to the discussion about ‘the roots of the languages of the world’ evoked by the title of Strindberg’s book. Strindberg’s views provided a starting point for

23 ‘[I]ndogermaniska förskjutningar’ (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a).

the articles and Wettenhovi-Aspa's own speculation, but he didn't refer to Strindberg more than a few times in his articles. Wettenhovi-Aspa used the vocabularies in Strindberg's book, as he admitted, for example, that he hadn't a Hebrew dictionary of his own. Thus he offered his own explanations for Strindberg's vocabulary examples, emphasizing the originality of the Finnish and Sámi languages (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1911a-f).

The comparisons with ancient Egyptian words were Wettenhovi-Aspa's own innovation, as Strindberg wasn't interested in Egyptian. Strindberg wrote to Elias Lönnqvist that it was useless to investigate Egyptian because it was in fact Hebrew, as all the other languages were (Brev 8043, XX: 299). *En ny blå bok* had contained a chapter about hieroglyphs, but Strindberg's views followed Athanasius Kircher's (1602–80) on this subject, considering hieroglyphs as esoteric and allegorical ideograms reflecting the Platonic world of ideas. Strindberg denied the modern interpretation of hieroglyphs in which they were understood as an alphabet and ideograms at the same



With his letter to Verner von Heidenstam Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (on the right) sent a photograph of himself, 'for identification', and the fellow artist Sergei Wlasoff (1859–1924), to whose address in Helsinki he asked for reply, and who was also in the letter described as a 'passionate supporter' of Wettenhovi-Aspa's theories. Wlasoff was serving as an artillery officer in Sveaborg until 1917. Verner von Heidenstams arkiv, Övralidsarkivet, Linköping City Library.



Theodor Finnilä sent his *carte de visite*, dated 'Helsingfors 1906' on the reverse, to August Strindberg with his letter of 15 December 1911. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

time. Strindberg thought that hieroglyphs were solely ideograms and that they were used in writing Greek (Troy 1999: 1092–3; Balbierz 2005: 27–8, 38–41). In contrast, Wetenhovi-Aspa built his investigations on the views and interpretations of modern Egyptology, which he accepted. On the other hand, he didn't appreciate the modern Egyptologists and Assyriologists very greatly, either, as he wrote to Strindberg about the 'Bible babble of the "scientific" humbug'²⁴ which was to be opposed by him and Strindberg (SgNM: SWA, 14.12.1911). Wetenhovi-Aspa referred to the current 'Bibel und Babel' debate, which had begun when Friedrich Delitzsch and other Assyriologists had started to emphasize the impact of Babylonian mythology and folklore on the Old Testament.

According to Strindberg the Assyriologists, along with modern philologists, were thus heading towards paganism and perverted science (Balbierz 2005: 41).

Wetenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist, Finnilä and Strindberg carried out a correspondence with each other in 1911–12, discussing Finnish, Hebrew and other languages, and etymology (SgNM: TF, EL, SWA, Brev 7862, 7876, 7878, 7879, 7888, 7889, 7891, 8020, 8023, 8043, 8054, XX: 181, 190–3, 198–204, 284–6, 298–9, 308–9). The discussion was often very detailed. Only two longer private letters between Wetenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg have

24 'Har Du lust att utslunga ett anathema öfver den "vetenskapliga" humbugens Bibel babbel, och lägga kronan på Ditt lifsverk – så är jag gärna med därom' (SgNM: SWA, 14.12.1911).

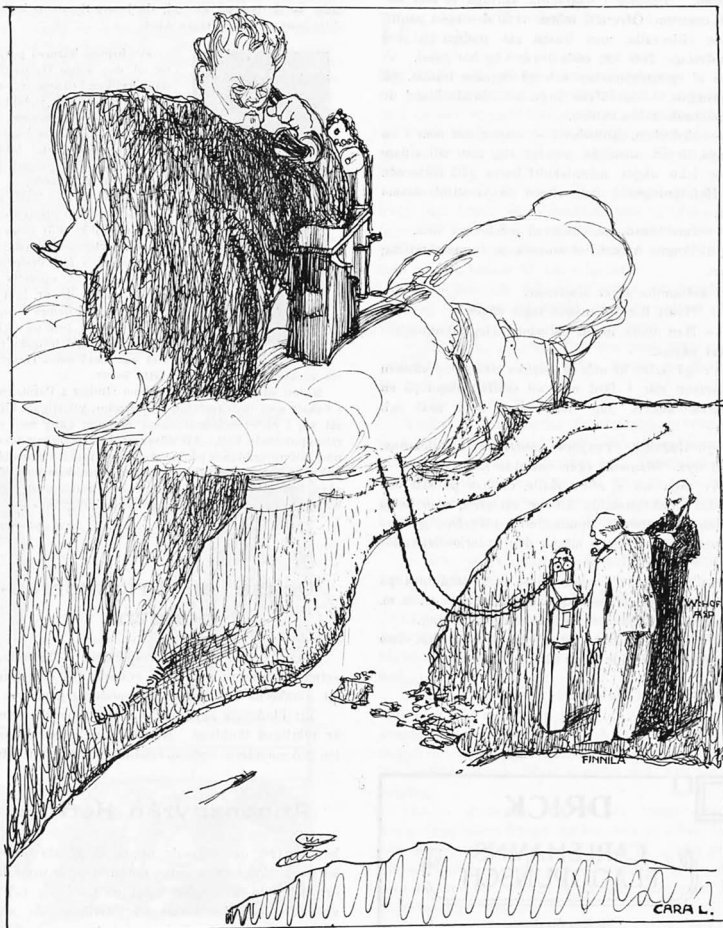
survived from this correspondence, and there perhaps never was much more. Wettenhovi-Aspa recalls that he finally withdrew from the friendly debate when he became aware of Strindberg's illness, and that Strindberg was corresponding and debating also with Finnilä and Lönnqvist (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1927: 267–8). However, Wettenhovi-Aspa was present also in Lönnqvist's and Finnilä's letters. Lönnqvist reported to Strindberg about Wettenhovi-Aspa's writings in Finnish newspapers and mediated Wettenhovi-Aspa's views to Strindberg with Finnilä, although they had many ideas of their own, too.

Strindberg on the other hand told Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist and Finnilä to keep in touch with each other, as he didn't want to repeat his views and detailed etymological vocabularies to each of them individually (Brev 7889, XX: 200; Brev 7891, XX: 202). To some extent it is thus possible to read Strindberg's letters as if they were written to all three Finns together.

The motive for the correspondence was to draw Strindberg's attention to the Finnish language. Theodor Finnilä was the first of the Finns to approach Strindberg. He sent Strindberg a Finnish–Swedish dictionary with his first two letters and proposed to him a series of lectures in Finland, Russia and the Baltics.²⁵ At that time he was organising some lectures with Wettenhovi-Aspa in Finland, and they had also planned some kind of tour in the Nordic countries as well. Finnilä also offered Strindberg his assistance in the Finnish and Russian languages (SgNM: TF, 1.12.1911, 2.12.1911). Strindberg replied by sending his book *Kina och Japan* (China and Japan, SV 70) and a short letter as an answer to Finnilä's letters (Brev 7862, XX: 181). In the subsequent longer letters Strindberg also sent him sixteen pages of etymological comparisons concerning Finnish language, the *Kalevala*, Chinese and Assyrian (SLSA 432). Lönnqvist also received some etymological manuscripts from Strindberg (SgKB 2005/63). Strindberg wasn't at all convinced of the importance of Finnish. He explained that Finnish seems to be the key to all languages, as do all the other languages as well, because everything can be found everywhere. Strindberg stressed this monistic principle

25 Strindberg had several Finnish dictionaries and grammars in his library (Lindström 1977: 112, 116, 119, 121, 122, 138). In March 1912, he purchased the *Kalevala* in Karl Collán's Swedish translation (see commentaries in Brev 8023, XX: 286), probably inspired by his Finnish correspondence. To Finnilä (SLSA 432) and Lönnqvist (SgKB 2005/63) he sent etymological speculations discussing the proper names in the *Kalevala*.

Språkforskare ...



Språkforskaren Finnilä: — Hallå! Å' de' Agust? D' ä' Tiddi — tjänare Agust! Nu har jag det! Jo... härledningan af vårt *älska!* Det kommer helt enkelt från det finska *älä sinä - kah!* Som betyder: *låt bli - nåh!* Ett utrop, som helt naturligt undslapp de urfinska töserna, då de i tiden ansattes af de älskogs-kranka -venska inkräktarne!!

Språkforskaren Strindberg: — Hm... jag håller mera på hebreiskan. Roten till *älska* är hebreiskans *el-schadai* = gud! Afguda — älska! Jag tycker din härledning är litet sökt...

Språkforskaren Finnilä: — Sökt!? En liten eliminering och kontrahering är väl den naturligaste sak i världen!

‘‘Philologists’’, a caricature by Cara L., alias Carolus Lindberg (1889–1955), with philologists Strindberg and Finnilä explaining the Swedish verb *älska* (‘love’) with factitious Finnish and Hebrew etymologies. Wetenhovi-Aspa (W:hof Asp) is depicted as an *éminence grise* next to Finnilä. *Fyren* 51-2, 30.12.1911.

several times to his Finnish correspondents (Brev 7888, XX: 199; Brev 7889, XX: 200; Brev 8043, XX: 299).

Strindberg described the debate in his article for *Afton-Tidningen*, a Swedish newspaper, and described a dream he had had in a febrile delirium in which he leafed through a dictionary of all languages with Wettenhovi-Aspa.²⁶ According to Strindberg, the debate had been lively but friendly. In his article Strindberg published a challenge to the three Finns (SV 71: 192–4). The article was reproduced by the Finnish newspapers *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Dagens Tidning*, and also published in a Finnish translation by the newspaper *Suomi* (Strindberg 1912a–c). The humorous magazine *Fyren* also cited and commented on the article during the same week (Sepia 1912). *Fyren* had followed Strindberg's and the three Finns' debate from the beginning, and also mocked Wettenhovi-Aspa's articles in 1911 (Sepia 1911).

Strindberg asked Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist to send ten difficult Finnish words, which he promised to explain with etymologies of Greek and Hebrew. Wettenhovi-Aspa published Strindberg's letter and his answer in *Åbo Underrättelser* in January 1912. Strindberg's challenge and Wettenhovi-Aspa's answer²⁷ were noted also in other Finnish newspapers (see e.g. *Hufvudstadsbladet* 1912). However, Strindberg didn't reply to Wettenhovi-Aspa, at least not in public. Elias Lönnqvist sent Strindberg a long list of Finnish one-syllable words as a contribution to his challenge (SgNM: EL, 25.2.1912). Strindberg replied soon with six pages of etymological explanations, but he discussed only some of the words Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa had given in their replies. Strindberg connected for example the words *juo / joi / juon* (conjugations of the Finnish verb *juoda*, 'to

26 Possibly a reference to Catherine the Great's *Linguarum totius orbis vocabularia comparativa* (St. Petersburg 1787–9), a comparative dictionary of c. 200 languages, compiled by Peter Simon Pallas, which Strindberg recommended to Wettenhovi-Aspa and Finnilä in his letters. According to him it proved the common origins of all languages (Brev 7888, XX: 199; Brev 7891, XX: 202; see also SV 69: 9). In July 1911 Strindberg had asked his publisher Karl Börjesson for the book, but Börjesson hadn't managed to find it for him (Brev 7704, XX: 78). Wettenhovi-Aspa also mentioned the dictionary in his books, but it is possible that he actually never even saw it (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a: 13; Pitkälä 2010: 47–9; Balbierz 2005: 30–1).

27 Wettenhovi-Aspa answered with the words *kuu* ('moon'), *maa* ('earth'), *mies* ('man'), *tar* ('woman'), *pää* ('head'), *luu* ('bone'), *puu* ('tree'), *suu* ('mouth'), *laa* (*laaja*) ('wide', 'root for spreading'), and *ko* (*koko*) ('whole', 'root for gathering') (*Åbo Underrättelser* 1912).

gini (armen)		Verb.	
gini (Holl)			
jöi = drack	Möi = sålde	Toi = klinga!	Toi = ferma, kau
jöi = blef kvar	Myi = di	Tuo = tillät!	Toi = kunde
x) oinosjöi = dricka	Myö = sålde	Toi = åt/äta)	Toi = förde
jiä = bli kvar	Myy = di	Pyö = äter	Tuo = för
Loi = skapade	Nai = gifte sig	Taa = för	Käy = gåi
Loi = slog	Nai = gifte sig	Toi = hantade	Eli = simmas
Luo = skapar	* Lai = fick	Tuo = hantade	* Sui = tröskas
Lyö = slår	Toi = klingade	Tee = gör!	Sui = tröskade.

An excerpt from Elias Lönnqvist letter to Strindberg with Finnish verbs. Strindberg has made remarks with pencil and underlinings with red pencil. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgNM: EL, 25.2.1912.

drink: 'he drinks' / 'he drank' / 'I drink') with the Greek word *oinos* ('wine'), the Hebrew word *yayin* ('wine'), *vinum* in Latin and finally the words *gini* in Armenian and *gin* in Dutch and other modern languages. According to Strindberg some of the ancestors of the Finns thus had lived in a wine-producing area (SgKB 2005/63: February 1912).

The debate was short-lived, because Strindberg's illness was beginning to affect his ability to participate. Before his death on 14 May 1912, he continued to carry out some private correspondence on the topic. He wrote to Lönnqvist that he was too ill and tired to debate (Brev 8043, XX: 298), but continued to send him etymological speculations and references to literature. In March 1912 Strindberg asked his publisher Karl Börjesson to send a copy of his *Kinesiska språkets härkomst* (The Source of the Chinese Language) to each of 'his three adepts' who had 'invented the Finnish language'²⁸ (Strindberg 2016:²⁹ letter Sg126, 134). Lönnqvist thanked him for

28 'Herr Börjesson, Var snäll att sända ex till: Sigurd Wetterhof Asp: Hotel de Commerce, Helsingfors. Kapten Theodor Finnilä: Berggatan. Hfors. Herr Elias Lönnqvist. Kuurila Finland. Mina tre adeptter, som uppträckt Finska språket – en gång för alla! Eder AugSg.'

29 Strindberg 2016 contains 131 letters, supplementing *August Strindbergs brev* I–XXII.

Juon (Fin): Dricka; Oinos (gr) af Oinos = Vin;
 Vin heter på hebreiska Yim, Yajim, som är
 Latinets Vin-nam eller ^{ett af sina} och J = J och V resda
 ogeneradt.
 # Finnen synes således haft ~~ett~~ ^{ett af sina} urhem i etc
 Vinland der Vin hetat Yajim eller Oinos.
 Jains (gr) betyder Värma, Muntra och är
 troligen från en af Vinets egenskaper.
 Gini är Armeniska namnet på Vin = Jims
 och Gini (Holl) är Vin, Brånvin (Genevra). ^(heb ofun. heterot)

Strindberg replied to Lönnqvist's letter from 25 February by presenting etymologies for some Finnish words, here explaining the connections with the Finnish word for drinking, and Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Armenian, and Dutch words for wine, among other words. Royal Library of Sweden, Stockholm, SgKB 2005/63: February 1912.

the book on his and Wettenhovi-Aspa's behalf with a postcard (SgNM: EL, 27.3.1912). From Strindberg's point of view Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnilä and Lönnqvist seemed to be more his followers than his opponents.

When Lönnqvist asked for help in publishing his and Wettenhovi-Aspa's investigations, Strindberg answered that he couldn't help financially at the moment, but perhaps in the future. He didn't promise anything, though, and also mentioned that their theories needed to be discussed further and revised (SgNM: EL, 18.12.1911; Brev 7889, XX: 200). Strindberg was interested in the views of his Finnish acquaintances, although he emphasized the seminal status of Hebrew instead of Finnish. It also seems that the correspondence with Finnilä, Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa enabled Strindberg to discuss languages with like-minded people, which perhaps wasn't otherwise possible. Strindberg had said in his letter to the publisher Karl Börjesson that the three Finns were his adepts. Maybe the shared view of the common origins of all languages was after all more important than the question of the seminal language.

After the debate

For Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, the activity in studying languages and history which began with the debate of 1911–12, continued for the rest of his life. In 1915 he released a book called *Finlands Gyllene Bok* (The Golden Book of Finland), which was translated into Finnish in the same year (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a–b). The book was actually a political pamphlet, which was written against a book called *Svenskt i Finland* (Swedishness/Swedish Culture in Finland). This book was a collection of articles produced by a Swedish-speaking students' Pan-Germanistic movement, which represented the Swedish-speaking minority as Germans, and as such superior to the Finns (*Svenskt i Finland* 1914; Klinge 1972: 53–4, 107–8).

As *Svenskt i Finland* emphasized the Swedish origin of Finnish civilization, Wettenhovi-Aspa – a Swedish-speaking Finn himself – turned the whole thing upside down, arguing that all languages had their origins in Finnish and also that the Swedish-speaking Finns should be grateful to the Finnophones for all valuable things in their culture. In fact the whole of western civilization was influenced by the Finns, who had created the ancient civilizations in Egypt and Crete. This kind of opinion can be seen as a bizarre and extremist manifestation of Fennomania, a Finnish nationalist movement, which started in the first half of the nineteenth century, demanding official recognition for the Finnish language and culture. Some Swedish-speaking Finns saw this as a threat, as Swedish had been the official language in the Grand Duchy of Finland, and their opposition was called the Svecomans. The book which Wettenhovi-Aspa opposed, *Svenskt i Finland*, represented one current in the Svecoman ideological tradition. The strife between Fennomans and Svecomans was politically more complicated, especially in relation to Russia, which favoured the Fennomans (Pitkälä 2010: 59–88). Besides language politics, there was also another aspect of Wettenhovi-Aspa's book, which emphasized the holy nature of the Finnish language and the wisdom of the *Kalevala*, which Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed to be the only peaceful epic of the world. The statement was made in 1915, during the First World War (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1915a, 1915b).

After 1915 Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his ideas about the Finnish language and history and the *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic, in several articles in Finnish newspapers and periodicals both in Swedish and in Finnish. In the 1930s Wettenhovi-Aspa published two books, which can be considered as his principal works concerning the Finnish language and the history

of the Finns. The first one was *Kalevala ja Egypti* (1935b).³⁰ It was a visually impressive book with many illustrations. The book contained comparisons between ancient Egyptian mythology and the *Kalevala*. Wettenhovi-Aspa also presents his etymological evidence here and there, but it is not as important here as in many of his other writings. Some of his mythological comparisons were later admired for their imaginative inventiveness, although his conclusions that the Finns had actually once lived in Egypt have not gained much acceptance. Wettenhovi-Aspa also attacked in his book established Fenno-Ugric linguistics and comparative folkloristics which were at the time eagerly investigating Germanic influences in Finnish language and folklore. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa these aspirations were both unjustified and unpatriotic (see e.g. Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935b: 69–74). The other book released that year by Wettenhovi-Aspa was intended for the international public and was entitled *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt. Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen* (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1935a).

Wettenhovi-Aspa and Strindberg were representatives of a larger cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This cultural movement was characterised by an interest in Oriental cultures and religions, which manifested both in arts and religious and intellectual movements such as Theosophy. It was also a counter-cultural movement against contemporary utilitarian rationalism and positivistic aspirations. At the same time, especially in small countries like Finland and Sweden, an interest in building nationality by investigating and inventing ancient national myth emerged. These interests were combined in particular in Wettenhovi-Aspa's texts. Strindberg wrote both about the Hebrew origins of modern languages and the history of Sweden, but he didn't combine these ideas into a nationalist narrative.

Both Wettenhovi-Aspa's and Strindberg's ideas on the origin of languages had been influenced by the same kind of intellectual context. They had both lived in Paris in the 1890s, where Swedenborg's ideas, theosophical ideas of the unity of divinities and mythological texts and the interests in Oriental and ancient Egyptian and Assyrian culture converged, and on the

30 *Kalevala ja Egypti. Suomen kultainen kirja II. Riemujuhlaulkaisu Kalevalan sata-vuotispäiväksi 28/II 1835–28/II 1935* (The Kalevala and Egypt. The golden book of Finland II. A jubilee publication for the centenary of The Kalevala 28.2.1835–28.2.1935).

other hand the culture of the Nordic countries was seen as pure and uncorrupted, and inspirational by both local artists and, for example, Swedish and Finnish artists as well.

Other important influences came from history. In the seventeenth century it was common in Europe to represent one's language as the original one, or as close to Hebrew, Greek and Latin as possible. In Sweden this historiographical movement was called Gothicism – the history of the Swedish Empire was to be derived from the Bible, and the Swedish were to be shown as a chosen people in order to legitimate the empire. In Finland and the Academy of Turku there were also Gothicist aspirations to etymologically prove that Finnish was very close to the biblical languages (Urpilainen 1993: 141–2).

August Strindberg's books on languages received mostly negative responses from critics in the newspapers and periodicals at the time they were released (Kretz and Ralph 2009: 267–70). However, in Finland they were noticed by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, Elias Lönnqvist and Theodor Finnilä, and others too (see Pitkälä 2010: 3). Strindberg's example was important for all of them, even if his Finnish adepts didn't follow exactly the same path. Lönnqvist and Wettenhovi-Aspa pursued their investigations for decades, until the 1940s. In 1945 Lönnqvist persisted in starting his book citing Strindberg's language studies from 1910–11 (Lönnqvist 1945: 13–14). One of Wettenhovi-Aspa's last articles, in 1942, was about Strindberg. In it Wettenhovi-Aspa continued to admire Strindberg's originality and wrote that he was ahead of his time with many of his ideas concerning arts and sciences (Wettenhovi-Aspa 1942).

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