

NECROLOG

This month, we survey the profoundly fortean life of a romantic catastrophist and 'hamacologist' who came back from the dead to live as a modern shaman...

HAN KLOOSTERMAN

Han Kloosterman's geological career commenced with his dissertation *Le Volcanisme de la région d'Agde, Hérault, France* (Utrecht, 1959) and thrived with his alluvial prospecting – cassiterite, diamonds and gold – for mining companies in West Africa and Brazil. In this period, he published in professional journals and adopted a catastrophist perspective, supporting the view that Earth history is punctuated by violent discontinuities. His first foray into catastrophism was a "revelation" he had during a trip down the Jamanxim River in 1973, when he discovered the contours of a giant caldera. He founded, edited and published the ephemeral journal *Catastrophist Geology* (1975-1978).

He was arrested in the Netherlands in 1961 for evasion of military service and interned in an army base. He went absent without leave, crossing the border into Germany, boarding a train to Switzerland and flying thence to Dakar. At the risk of being traced, he flew on to Rio de Janeiro with money borrowed from the Dutch consulate and remained in exile for 12 years, without a passport, until his offence had expired. When geological work dried up in 1983, Kloosterman returned to the Netherlands, where he took courses on parapsychology, hypnosis and Mesmerism.

As the world's sole living 'hamacologist', he argued that the use of native American hammocks never leads to pressure ulcers – because the weight of the body is distributed over a much larger surface than on a mattress – and that their design cannot have been a chance discovery, as it was based on the ellipsoid. He defended this position at an exhibition in the Netherlands on the cultural history of the hammock which he organised in 1992. He slept on a hammock



wherever he could, notably in his own home.

Arguably the pivotal event in Kloosterman's life was his miraculous 'return from the dead'. In 1993, he was diagnosed with terminal throat cancer and, having disposed of all his books and papers, he travelled back to Rio de Janeiro in order to die there in the company of his ex-wife and three children. Four months on, he had lost 77lb (35kg), but the disease had gone into remission and to the astonishment of his doctors he was soon tumour-free. He soon recognised psychosomatic origins of the cancer in his unemployment, divorce and self-censorship, but this was of little practical help, as the destruction of his official documents prior to his 'death' prevented him from leaving Brazil until 1999.

Kloosterman spent three months convalescing among a coastal group of Guaraní, surviving on an exceedingly meager Brazilian state pension. His life took a dramatic turn

in 1998, when someone presented him with a copy of Walter Alvarez's book *T. rex and the Crater of Doom* (1997). According to Alvarez, a carbon-rich layer found in 1985 by Wendy Wolbach at the boundary between the Cretaceous and the Tertiary periods demonstrated that a global conflagration – caused by an asteroid impact – had contributed to the demise of the dinosaurs. This reminded Kloosterman of the Usselo horizon, a similar sooty, charcoal-rich layer in the late-glacial Allerød stage of northwest Europe, which he had interpreted – as early as 1977 – in terms of a *Weltbrand* associated with the extinction of the Pleistocene megafauna. Finding that neither Alvarez nor Wolbach had heard of Usselo, the insight prompted Kloosterman to fly to Holland the next year to start a new geological project – the catastrophic end of the last glacial period.

Until his death, Kloosterman busied himself networking,

collecting literature and geological samples of the Usselo layer both from Arizona and 12 sites in northwest Europe and studying the direction of tektite falls. His research received a boost in 2005, when the American scientists Firestone and West integrated the Usselo horizon into their model of a cometary impact over North America – a potent hypothesis that remains the focus of intense research and debate. From 2003 onwards, Kloosterman also compiled a database on catastrophist mythology, which – apart from deluges and fires – focused on collapse of the sky and the *axis mundi*, overturning of the Earth, pole shift and inversion of the Sun's movement. In this set of motifs he saw evidence for the late Peter Warlow's theory that the Earth has repeatedly toppled over in the fashion of a tippe top, modified by Stig Flodmark's demonstration that only the crust and mantle will turn over, leaving the core in its original place. One such inversion arguably occurred around the same time as the Allerød conflagration. Kloosterman perceived a growing schism between a new orthodoxy of catastrophists who will only accept impact scenarios and more extreme ones who also consider Earth inversions.

With this work and his *Catastrophist Manifesto* (2007), Kloosterman ranked as the only professional Dutch scientist promoting secular catastrophism – secular indeed, as he despised Christianity: in dating, he preferred the abbreviations 'BC' (before censorship) and 'AD' (*anno diaboli*). With dignity, he resigned himself to his inexorable banishment to what he often called the 'lunatic fringe' of science.

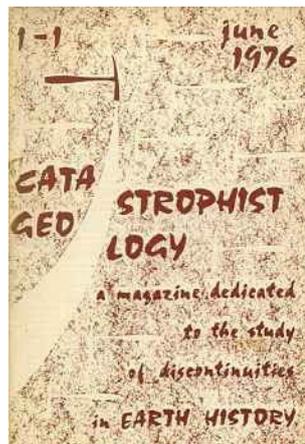
Two early losses inspired longstanding interests. A Jewish girl called Froukje van Leeuwen had been one of his classmates in primary school in Utrecht.



The discovery that her sudden disappearance had been due to her deportation to Sobibor waxed into indomitable philosemitism, a trait which frequently caused Kloosterman to fall out with others. Similarly, when Kloosterman learned that Mary Saydee, a winsome Kru girl he had dated in Liberia, had been kidnapped by a secret society to be sacrificed to the sea god, the result was a scholarly fascination with human sacrifice, including anthropophagy.

Kloosterman became a passionate vegetarian during a trip to India in the late 1970s. This happened quite impulsively; he discovered his motivation only a year afterwards – as a protest against the gods which allow us to be born on a cruel planet with food-chains. Mastering seven or eight European languages, he qualified as a polyglot. Tragically, chemotherapy cost him all his teeth and he developed a speech impediment as a result. He was an avid compiler of research notes, which he filed in shoeboxes, a bibliophile and a voracious reader. He encouraged the free selfless sharing of bibliographic references and ideas. Among his friends was Simon Vinkenoog, Poet Laureate of the Netherlands (2004), while he enjoyed personal meetings with Arthur Koestler, Jacques Vallée, Guy Lyon Playfair and other ‘alternative’ thinkers. With some delight he noted that his ideas regarding the Earth’s overturnings were too extreme even for Andrew Collins and Robert Schoch.

Among the myriad unorthodox opinions he championed – some untenable, some frivolous, some original – were the suggestions that the boomerang was a divine invention; that the Wise Old Goat is seen perusing the Internet in a comic strip of Rupert Bear from the 1920s; that tapeworms, not humans, top the food chain; that the Indo-European language is fictitious (a view he later retracted), unlike many of his own free-style etymological connections between global languages; that the persecution of witches and werewolves only gained traction after the Middle Ages because at that time not enough Jews remained west of Warsaw; that the



late 20th century had its own witch-hunt in women’s false accusations of sexual abuse by their fathers obtained under hypnosis; that it was under collective hypnosis that the Germans could commit their atrocities during the Nazi regime; that anti-Zionism is simply a disguised reincarnation of anti-Semitism; that Christianity and Islam are not religions, but control systems; that life evolves through ‘psycho-Lamarckism’ instead of Darwinian evolution, meaning adaptations supervised by spiritual entities; that the academic system of peer review is tantamount to the censorship of the erstwhile *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, while the anonymity preserved in it was based on the hooded judges of the Inquisition, an invitation to corruption; that the academies of science need the equivalent of a Freedom of Information Act for the benefit of science historians; that the second half of the 20th century

saw the apparent return of animal speech, such as in chimpanzees, dolphins and parrots, and the arrival of animal painting; that the higher self or *alter ego* of each of us determines the plot of our lives; and that a scientifically advanced civilisation had existed during the Ice Age. Far out though some of these contentions may seem, Kloosterman remained a lifelong critical thinker who would refuse to offer advice on anything and always recommended a healthy dose of scepticism.

Kloosterman made no secret of his belief that he was destined to become a latter-day shaman, failing which he was at least a prophet. This conviction serves as an underlying template binding many strands of his life together.

First, he would compare the remarkable ‘resurrection’ following many months on his ‘deathbed’ to the symbolic calling and initiation of many a shaman. During the depression that immediately preceded the disease, his body had felt like an aggregate of seven separate fragments instead of a single whole – a description reminiscent of the classic shamanic *rite de passage* of dismemberment. The cancer was only one in a long series of serious ailments, including 28 cases of malaria, six bouts of amoebic dysentery, leishmaniasis and bilharzia. Kloosterman would often flippantly remark that he had ‘already died’.

Second, he claimed to draw energy from heavenly bodies. When stricken with malaria in 1969, he was flown to a nearby hospital in

a Cessna aircraft, which crashed into the Amazonian rainforest due to engine failure. Forced to walk back to civilisation, he felt that the disease had suddenly lifted when the magical interplay of sunlight with the river communicated such to him spiritually. Back in rainy Holland, he practised solar yoga for six years, gazing directly at the Sun for one or two hours.

Third, he preferred to live a simple life, close to the wilderness, as a primitive outside observer of the Western world. While his survival of the Dutch hunger winter (1944-1945) as a child had trained him to live on little food, his many years prospecting and his sojourn among the Guaraní had taught him to sleep rough in a hammock or sleeping bag without the benefit of a tent. Upon his return to Europe, Kloosterman prided himself on being a professional vagabond, hitchhiking across 10 European countries for three months and refraining from personal hygiene.

Fourth, he was the recipient of a range of spontaneous paranormal experiences: the chloroform used in a tonsillectomy at the age of six induced an out-of-body experience, of which he had many more in middle age. In 1962, he experienced X-ray vision, seeing people’s skulls through their heads and their entire lifelines, from birth to death. During his three-month tour of Europe, he sensed the guidance of a personal ‘daemon’, who would communicate a positive answer to any raised question by an involuntary shaking of his shoulders, not unlike the ‘sign’ of Socrates. And following a dream in which a she-bear had saved his life, he came to view the bear as a sort of shamanic ‘familiar’ and erected a home altar to pay homage to it.

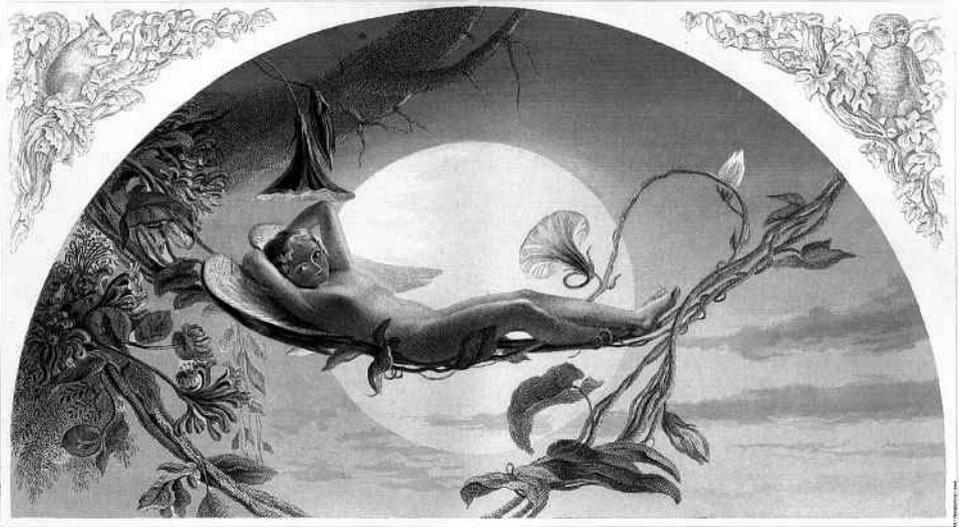
Fifth, he cultivated a deep, active interest in the spiritual world, fostering his animistic outlook on life. He frequently experimented with psychotropic and especially hallucinogenic substances, including ayahuasca, marijuana and fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*). On an intellectual level, he embarked on the psychological studies mentioned above with a special emphasis on the notions of a ‘guardian angel’ or ‘higher self’, reincarnation, and the

consciousness and conscience of animals other than humans. He developed the theory that a 'materialist coup' had occurred in 1860, which purged the sciences of all catastrophist elements, banished the Romantic movement to the margins of society and stripped Mesmerism of all spiritual and paranormal elements, which it had hitherto embraced, including the full range of altered states of consciousness.

Sixth, Kloosterman's prophetic efforts are perhaps best gleaned in the many Persian quatrains he composed since the 1990s in no less than six languages – of which he claimed the Italian ones to have been directly dictated by a muse, as he did not speak Italian; this would happen after an hour of Venus-gazing in the evening or during a hypnopompic state in the morning, when he would see the verse inscribed in fat black letters on a large whiteboard. Entirely in the style of Omar Khayám's *Rubaiyat*, the verses convey the cynical message that immoral, manipulative gods designed life on this 'science-fiction planet' of food-chains in the fashion of a concentration camp, a farm or a school. Fort's words "we are property" found a sympathetic ear with our poet. Even Kloosterman's disinclination to put pen to paper, other than for poetry, can be seen in the light of mystics such as Pythagoras and Parmenides, who were loath to write.

People close to Kloosterman often described him as a 'man of coincidences'. I myself was introduced to him by two people in different countries who did not know each other. Weeks after my first meeting with Kloosterman, my wife and I bumped into him in the Louvre, although we had at no point discussed each other's travel plans. It seems only fitting, then, that Kloosterman gave up the ghost on the day of the closest supermoon since 1948, while a double rainbow was photographed over the funeral building just before his final dispatch.

Johan Bert Kloosterman, geologist and mineralogist, born Nijmegen 9 July 1931; died Amsterdam 14 Nov 2016, aged 85. Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

A FAILED FAIRY RESCUE

It is my favourite *true* fairy story. An Irishman is stolen by the fairies, who leave a fake body in his place. His family are oblivious, believing that he has died. After the body is buried, the father has a dream. The son appears in his sleep and explains that he has, in fact, been kidnapped by the Sidhe (the Irish fairies). To rescue him the father must come to the cross of Glendalough (Tipperary, not County Wicklow) at midnight on Midsummer Night's Eve with some whisky, a black-hafted knife and a number of trusted companions. He is to wait till he sees his son mounted on a passing fairy horse. Then, the father and his friends must surround the son's horse and cut off the enchanted creature's right ear: only then will the father be able to rescue his flesh and blood from an eternity in fairyland.

The father and companions gather, but the spell does not work: one of the father's companions had, unbeknownst to the father, murdered three men. This cursed individual prevents the rescue party from seeing the fairies as they pass, and the son is lost for ever.

I call this story 'true' because the events described, at least those we can test historically, did actually take place. In 1837, a young man named Keating, from Newcastle in Tipperary, died. He was buried, but his father subsequently had a dream. In that dream the

son asked his father to be rescued from the fairies on midnight on 24 June at the cross at Glendalough: he also gave instructions to bring friends, whisky and a black-hafted knife. The father, understandably, distraught, but believing in the power of the fairies to spirit away humans, gathered his neighbours together: a dead body was often claimed to

be a fairy substitute corpse.

Some 1,200 locals assembled at the cross as darkness fell on 24 June 1837 to restore the boy to his family. The hosting of the Sidhe did not show, though, and the inconvenient fact of the triple-murderer was revealed in a subsequent dream.

1,200 locals! It is a useful reminder that fairy beliefs were not just fireside chatter in Ireland two centuries ago. Many Irish men and women were prepared to act on these beliefs.

This was not paganism, in that

it elided perfectly into rural Catholicism.

But nor was it 'merely' a rag-tag of mild superstitions hung out to dry on the line of Christian belief. What should we call these beliefs? Evans-Wentz wrote, in 1911, of 'the fairy faith'. It is an expression that irritates many Irish historians, some of whom are ignorant of or indifferent to stories like the one above. But weren't the Keatings and their neighbours partaking in a faith of sorts at midnight on 24 June 1837 as the Sidhe, they believed, rode by?

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

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