

# 1

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019



### Slenderman and Online Mythology

Podcast with **Vivian Asimos** (4 February 2019).

Interviewed by **Ross Downing**.

Transcribed by **Helen Bradstock**.

Audio and transcript available at:

<http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

**Ross Downing (RD):** My name is [Ross Downing](#), and I'm interviewing soon-to-be [Dr Vivian Asimos](#)

**Vivian Asimos (VA):** Oh my gosh!

**RD:** *We're at the [Belfast conference](#), at Queens. Yes. So Vivian has a BA from South Florida University, an MA from Edinburgh and is currently doing a PhD in Durham, with a project that's entitled "Slenderman mythos: a neo-structuralist analysis of an online mythology". And it's supervised by [Jonathan Miles Watson](#). She has a forthcoming article in *Implicit Religion* on the term implicit mythology in relevance to the study of video games. She also runs a podcast called "Religion in Popular Culture". Welcome.*

**VA:** Thank you.

**RD:** *So, yes. We are going to talk today about what you have just basically talked about today – which is the [Slenderman](#). Can you explain briefly what the Slenderman is?*

**VA:** The Slenderman is a monster. So he is typically seen as a tall man in a suit – but there are small kind-of shifts to him. He lingers in the background of photographs, is said to make children disappear. He's got very inhuman characteristics to him. And is most commonly seen without a face, although there are kind-of shifts in how he appears from image to image, and story to story. Because the nature of the stories is it's a mass communal story-telling. So you get lots of people all telling the story in their own creative way. So you get lots of different variants. It started in 2009 and – very uncharacteristic of an online anything – it's still kicking around. Not quite as much as it probably was in other years, but it's still heavily present. I still hear jokes every so often, when I'm trying to not

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. "Slenderman and Online Mythology", *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

## 2

### Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

focus on my work, where they will make a joke about the Slenderman. So it's still being kicked around. People still recognise it, despite how long it's been, which is very uncharacteristic. Which is why I find it so interesting, you know: why has it still lingered, essentially?

**RD:** *And it's not just another one of these on line things either, because it's had real life connections. And is one of those few things from [Creepypasta/Nosleep](#)-type world that has actually been made into a movie right now.*

**VA:** Yes, it's coming out soon – unfortunately not properly timed for me to actually write about it in the thesis, funnily enough. But it's coming out soon. And there is a bit of research on the Slenderman in academia that has happened before, but very few. And most of them centre on the [2014 Wisconsin stabbings](#). They make those stabbings basically the central focus of their research. But, basically, what that's doing is taking away everything that that story is doing for the community which first started it. They very much kind-of don't like that action. They don't like actual, physical, real-world violence. So I decided to take a completely different approach, where I don't talk about it. I don't approach them about it. And I just simply talk about: “What is this doing for you? Let's talk about your community as it is, and as you understand it.” And that approach really hasn't been taken with Creepypasta or the Slenderman, more specifically, before.

**RD:** *Yes it's a really rich mine of data. I think you find that quite often when there is a real-world tragedy or something that grabs headlines: academics will focus on that to feed the monster, instead of looking at the richness of what lies behind it. Because often, when there's a tragedy, it's a peripheral thing. Is that the case there, or?*

**VA:** Yes, I mean I have been known to compare – probably an over-exaggeration, I will admit – but I have been known to compare getting questions about the stabbings as if I was presenting a paper on British Muslims in Durham. And I got the question about, “Well, what about ISIS?” Which suddenly everyone kind-of shrinks back from, and goes “Oh it's not like it at all.” But it is. Because that's basically a community group saying, “That action, and those people, do not represent us.” And yet you're making them represent that community. It's also a big problem that you see in popular culture in general, that it's always kind-of blamed for the bad things in society. I mean, we had it with rock and roll and now it's video games and the online environment. And who knows when it's going to be replaced by the next element of popular culture, that's going to be blamed for all of the bad things? So it's just another element. But I think it's more important for popular culture to be seen as a positive force as well as, you know, other things, as well.

## 3

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

**RD:** *Why do you think it's such an enduring tale? And, for instance, why would someone want to make that into a film? A horror film?*

**VA:** It's really interesting, because there's a lot of Creepypastas that came before. A lot very similar, but very structured, as far as, not . . . I'm a structuralist in the way that I approach my study: kind-of following [Lévi-Strauss](#), but kind of shifting slightly. So, not that kind of structured, but structured in the way of how people approach the narrative is slightly different. In the sense that a lot of the Creepypastas that came before, so things like [Candle Cove](#) – which is where I should probably explain for people who haven't spent the last four years of their life embedded in this – basically Candle Cove is this story of a bunch of people kind-of discovering that they remembered a TV show from when they were kids called Candle Cove, that doesn't actually exist. But it was a very staged narrative of people kind-of purposely posting, in order to remember this thing, in order to unfold the narrative the way they wanted the narrative to unfold. So it's not quite as spontaneous as the Slenderman was. That wasn't staged. That was definitely people kind of grabbing onto something random and really building on it. Then you things like “Ben Drowned”, which is a story of a haunted Nintendo cartridge of the game the [Majora's Mask](#) – the [Zelda](#) game. And that is, again, it's just a person posting a story which was then shared around. And that was a Creepypasta. But again, you only have one person telling a story. You don't have the communal kind of co-creation. And what's interesting about the Slenderman is, while there was a Creepypasta community that existed before him, he didn't really arise or get that community around him. He ended up drawing in a lot of other people. So as the story spread to other areas online, it actually started to spread to other community groups as well. So it started on a forum thread. But then one of the users on the forum thread wanted to make web videos in order to tell his side of the story. So he posted the link to a YouTube channel on the forum thread, and kind of posted those things. But suddenly it's not just the forum members that are looking at those videos – and this is the [Marble Hornet](#) stories. And those became some people's initial introduction to the Slenderman. To give away my age a little bit, I was an undergrad when I was first introduced to the Slenderman and it was through Marble Hornets, which was still coming out at the time. It was one of my friends saying, “You have to watch this! This is so creepy!” And of course I'd never heard of it before. My friend had clearly not known the background before Marble Hornets. Then there was a video game that came out. And now they're a new introduction for people. Now you've got gamers that are into this story and now they're discovering it for the first time. And so you kind of have this building of new community members. But it's based on, basically, individual creativity. So, on the forum thread it started with one person posting and then another person was like, “Oh, that's a cool idea!” and then took a little bit of that idea, shifted it a little bit to fit their own creativity, and posted. And that continued to go on. That led to a guy for Marble Hornets creating that. Another person looks at that web video and says, “I like

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. “Slenderman and Online Mythology”, *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

## 4

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

that idea.” Makes his own web video that is also similar to the Slenderman. And now suddenly you've got multitudes of web videos that are telling the story. Then another guy says, “I like that, but I’m a video game designer, so I'm going to make a video game based on what I see in this. And so suddenly you have a bunch of different individual creativity that is all contributing to the same narrative. And it's all seen as authentic. And it's all seen as part of the canon, essentially. So nobody is ousted from being . . . you know, “Oh, that's not right!” Everyone's included in it, and it makes this kind of impromptu community, which is really fascinating.

**RD:** *It sounds a bit Darwinist as well. You know like, if there's a really cool riff or variant on the story, the best ideas become naturally more popular and used, or applied to something. And to be able to trace that in live time, I think, is quite an exciting set of data to be able to work with.*

**VA:** It definitely draws on kind-of common threads seen in old mythology and folklore, and that kind of stuff. You see these connective threads. He's always in the forest, for instance. Which is where a lot of the evil fairies lurk. And, in fact, some of the fake connections to old folklore of the Slenderman compared him to fairies that were in German folklore or Scottish folklore. And they actually had names for him – so it [Der Grossman](#) in German. I'm sorry for my improper pronunciation on that one! But it was somebody basically posted saying, “Oh, I heard about this, but he has the name Der Grossman and it was from my Grandmother who was German. And this is how she told me about, “Be careful of the Black Forest. And there’s this fairy that steals children.” So you get this kind-of connecting to the common elements that freak you out, essentially. It’s kind-of always there in the back of, you know, all myths and folklore. They definitely grabbed it knowingly, that this was. “Oh I know that that freaks me out so I'll combine that with this other thing that I see.” And now we've got this whole new element.

**RD:** *Well, as a case study, and being able to see that and see how – not to get into you know psychology too much – but the cognitive aspect, and the means of how something goes literally viral, as if it is like a virus idea that takes over people and is used, applied, and it takes over their own creativity. Like you say, if someone’s a game designer doing a movie or something like that. I think this has broad social applications. Because if we see in your work . . . if we can see that as an example there, we can apply that to how other online religions are developing. Because these are also, in a way, brainwashing people. Because no-one can get away from the internet. If you are drawn to [The Matrix](#) because you love the films, and then you're a little bit spiritually interested and, you know, people are doing a [Matrix religion](#), it seems almost like certain people are being led down that . . .*

**VA:** There's a bit of an issue with that, in the sense that, first of all I don't like the term “viral” –

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. “Slenderman and Online Mythology”, *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

## 5

**Podcast Transcript**

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

which, I know! Sorry for being the person who's like, "I don't like that term!" But it tends to be associated, I think, with popular culture and particularly the internet, because of the sense that it makes it feel like it's something that happens *to* you. But I think what's most demonstrated by not only my case study, but a lot of other people's case studies, that happen online, is that it's people actually taking control. So it's not that something's taking control of them, it's them taking this and saying, "I'm going to put my own creativity on this." And it's an agency that I think the word viral strips away. And I think connected to that is the sense of . . . . Particularly in the academic study of religion, I think that it's very easy to look at the big kind of . . . I don't know how to put this. Like, basically, you look at the things that you can clearly point to and say "That's a religion. And I'm going to talk about that." And with hyperreal religions, things like [Jediism](#): that's something that's happening with people going, "That's pop culture becoming a religion, I'll talk about that." And I think it's really important to talk about . . . . I don't want to . . . I *do* think it has its place. However, what's missing, then, is the middle ground. So you have the people who aren't interested in popular culture at all. And then you have these extreme interested members. But you don't have to write Jediism on a census record to have Star Wars mean something to you. And there's a really weird middle ground. So for me, what I've always found fascinating about the study of religion in general – even when I wasn't doing pop culture – and what I've really grabbed onto in pop cultural studies, is that grey area between religion and non-religion. Where it's incredibly hyper-meaningful, and might be religion, but might not be all at the same time. Where is that cross-section? What is religion? When you look at it that way. . . . And basically, what it ends up being is: when does something go from hyper-meaningful to banal, or backwards? When is it something that you have on in the background, because you think it's fun, and when is it something that you think about constantly, you're reminded of in your everyday life, and you get tattoos of it, and you think about it? My Masters was on the Legend of Zelda, the video game. And there was somebody who had a tattoo of the [Triforce](#) on their arm. And they told me . . . . So for people, I guess, who don't know: the Triforce is three triangles and they're made up of the ideas of power, wisdom and courage, which is found in the world. But, basically, the myth ends up being that essentially the perfect person who can touch this item from the gods, the Triforce, is someone who has equal parts power, wisdom and courage. So this person, when they had the tattoo they described it as a way as whenever something . . . they were having an issue in life, or maybe they were starting to get angry about something that they felt they shouldn't get angry about, or you know when you have those times in life? And they would look at it and they would remember about how the ideal person has power wisdom and courage. Now they would never put [Hylia](#) on a census record, associate themselves with that kind of religion. But that's interesting. That's them changing their identity and their way of living in this world, based on a video game that they played. That's what I find interesting.

# 6

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

**RD:** *And this materially allows Religious Studies scholars to talk about the meaning of religion, sui generis, or the theory of religion: how does it work? What is it? Can we say that it is one thing, or that it is separate from culture? And with the internet you've got these online cultures now. It's almost like the internet is as a weird a concept, as slippery a concept as religion is. To put these things together, online religion, or religiosity online, or non-religion on line, it's . . .*

**VA:** It gets very tricky, very fast!

**RD:** *Right. Sure.*

**VA:** Which is why I think I'm almost more solid by being in an incredibly grey area! Because I can be like, "Well, I don't know!" But it's very fascinating in that sense. And I think it really demonstrates how the public . . . I talked about this, I guess, in my talk: the way that Slenderman mythology is built of religious literacy. And I think there's often, there's this almost implicit thought that the public is very religiously illiterate. And yet in 2009, somewhere on a comedy forum post was talking about the concept of a [tulpa](#) – which, I don't know about anyone else, but I didn't know what a tulpa was in 2009. So the fact that . . . I mean, that's an incredible knowledge that's right there. And then they're using it in this way of, basically, perpetuating an online myth.

**RD:** *Yes. I mean it's like organic plebeians, non-scholars, organically working with Religious Studies, or Religious Studies questions.*

**VA:** Exactly.

**RD:** *And trying to make sense of these things. I mean that's one of the nice things, I suppose, about the internet, that it can actually produce. But one of the things in connection to that, I think it was a phrase "apophatic theology" that you mentioned in your talk. And I feel stupid, but I'm not really sure what that means. It sounds Greek!*

**VA:** You shouldn't feel stupid. I learned about it while doing that research. So, I'm not a theologian by any stretch of the imagination. So it was new being in a theological section, trying to read up on this very . . . breadth of theological discourse of apophatic theology. Which is, I think the Greek for . . . there's a less Greek version . . . but it's just "negative theology". Which is, basically, that the human brain or mind – I'm not sure which way they see it – cannot properly know God, or know what God is, or how God thinks, or anything about God. So, essentially, what that's doing is kind-of saying, "Well, we can't really know this, because it's too beyond us, it's too supernatural, it's too other-worldly.

Which I think in a very Christian context – at least from the bits that I read, I'm sure some theologian

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. "Slenderman and Online Mythology", *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

## 7

**Podcast Transcript**

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

might disagree with me, but whatever – at least the small bits that I read, the theological stance on it is almost slightly positive, in the sense of being like: “Oh, God is so beyond us! But we'll just leave it to him”, kind-of-a-thing. And to see it twisted. . . . So, in the Slenderman stuff they start talking about how the Slenderman is beyond our comprehension. And he doesn't change from image to image – it's that we see him differently because our human mind cannot actually comprehend of him. And suddenly you have that kind of negative theology, but on a monster who steals children and causes violence! And so, suddenly, this whole idea is completely twisted to a different way of understanding, which I find really fascinating. So, suddenly, it's not “Oh, it's all great.” It's an “Oh shit!” – Oh sorry! Can I say that?

**RD:** (Laughs) *I think so!*

**VA:** (Laughs) I'm not on my own podcast anymore! But it is kind of like that moment. And it's . . . I compare it to [Lovecraft's](#) idea of Cosmic Fear, with his [ancient ones](#) and [Cthulu](#) and stuff, it's also very Non-Euclidean geometry. And how we can't actually see him. We can't actually comprehend of his full figure, because it's not of us.

**RD:** *It sounds very Judaic to me. You know, like the burning bush and the Holy Spirit, the way that theological texts in Judaism have talked about how God is there, but he's like a disembodied voice, or something. And the other thing with Judaism as well is the theology. I mean it has a really rich, perhaps one of the ultimate theology religions. And this idea that, you know, you wrestle with God to try and understand him. And it's a constant battle with faith. I think that ties in here with these people inventing something, talking about the supernatural or the numinous. But what struck me is that these people aren't wrestling with God, they're wrestling with the Devil. It's a theology about a devil, right?*

**VA:** Yes.

**RD:** *And that's really weird!*

**VA:** It is! That's what I find so interesting about it. Because it's not something that you see all the time. And yet it makes sense, in a way. There is this kind of sense of “good versus evil”. But in a lot of these stories there's not the good. There's just the “versus evil”! And there's very few of the stories that actually mentioned religion in any way. Or at least the religion that people would conceive of . . . your big “isms” in the world. And one of them was directly talking about Christianity, in a sense that in order to escape the Slenderman they ran into a church. But they still got him. Because the whole idea is that there is no safety, not even in religion, not even in Christianity. This can still get you. Which is a very almost atheistic understanding of religion. And yet, they're so knowledgeable about these

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. “Slenderman and Online Mythology”, *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>

# 8

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

different kind of religious concepts and theologies. And it's that knowledge that, I think, makes it so good. (Laughs) It makes it such a good myth because it's not just kind-of a good story, it's a good story founded on real fears, and ideas, and concepts, and theories that people struggle with on a regular basis.

**RD:** *Right. And it's willing suspension of disbelief. You know, I think you mentioned that on . . . was it Creepypasta or [Nosleep](#), one of these forums. What they call, technically, a sub on Reddit.*

**VA:** Yes. I think I know what you're talking about, No Sleep had it, yes.

**RD:** Ok so what was the quote, now?

**VA:** It was a rule on . . .

**RD:** “Everything is true here, even if it's not.”

**VA:** Yeah it's a rule on the subreddit. So you have to post in character. Which, basically, means you have to post as if the story's true. And all the stories are in first person. So it's all: “This really happened to me”; this is my experience. But they're all very crazy. And you know the same kind of idea: monsters, and weird deaths, and people disappearing, and, you know, horror that you would find. . . . But it's all in first person, and it's all talked about as if . . . And all of that also extends to the comments. So you can't just say, “Oh that was a really good story.” You have to be like, “Oh, are you ok?” And, “Update us with this.” And, “Have you looked into this aspect?” You have to talk about it as if it's really happening. And in their rules on the site it's about that. They say “Everything is true here, even if it isn't.”

**RD:** *Wow.*

**VA:** Which I think is just the best way to sum up most of Creepypasta communication. Which is this in-character way of talking.

**RD:** *It seems almost like when people are participating in this, and they're writing, it sounds almost like a ritual. You go back to the classic [Durkheim](#) or something, where if we're talking about, maybe this as a myth – you referred to that in your articles, mythology and myth – and if that's a ritual, you know, by participating in this, “I'm willing to . . . We know it's not real, but by this ritual we're somehow engaging with this myth.” So it reinforces the power of the myth. And everyone can share in that. It's very much a strong community vibe there. So it feels almost like . . . it does almost what religions do.*

**Citation Info:** Asimos, Vivian and Ross Dowling. 2019. “Slenderman and Online Mythology”, *The Religious Studies Project (Podcast Transcript)*. 4 February 2019. Transcribed by Helen Bradstock. Version 1.1, 13 January 2019. Available at: <http://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/slenderman-and-online-mythology/>



## 9

**Podcast Transcript**

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

**VA:** Yes. It's a sense of embodiment – I always feel weird talking about that, because anytime I see embodiment in anything else, they keep talk about actual bodies. But it's like, “Well, but you can also embody something just sitting in front of your computer!” Because this is what's happening. They're embodying it in their online speech. But yes, there's quite a lot of kind-of twisting of these things. And I tend to not like to use the word religion, like: “This is a religious thing.” But I do find that a lot of the communities – and not just the Creepypasta communities, but some of the other pop culture groups that I end up doing side-projects or other research with – tend to use religious language, but not the word religion. So I went to a fan convention which I was supposed to get stuff on horror video games for my thesis and it didn't work out. But while I was there, they kept talking about the travel there as if it was a pilgrimage. So they're using that language. And some of them even used the word pilgrimage and yet if I was to say, “This is a religion.” They'd be like, “Oh no it's not!” Which is where I think that grey area is very important, where they're able to use some of the language. I don't know if they would use the word ritual? That might be one step too much. But they use the word myth very openly. And I don't know if that's because of the common parlance of the word myth having been quite destroyed, in a way that ritual really hasn't happened yet. So maybe that's why they're more comfortable using it. But then some people are more comfortable using pilgrimage, which hasn't quite gotten to that point. So it's interesting to see that they use certain aspects that they're comfortable with, but certain that they're not.

**RD:** *Well there's this . . . . If we see that as a kind of almost a religion, or doing what a religious community does, one of the eighteenth or nineteenth century-type ways of seeing or theorising religion is somehow helping a community. It's quite [Freudian](#), I suppose: helping people cope, relieve stress, heal, that kind of thing. Do you think that this community is . . . Are people helping each other, or are they trolling each other? What's going on? Are they just playing around and they don't really care about each other?*

**VA:** It's hard to tell with the kind of older forums, because obviously that's a lot more of a historical study than an anthropological one. Because if I'm looking back at something that happened in 2009 it's hard to chase these people back up and say, “Well what were you thinking almost 10 years ago?” They're not going to remember, even if I could find them. So that's more of a guessing game. But I think for them, very early on, it was a community exercise of just . . . it was fun, but it was an exercise of “You know”. Especially very early on it was, “I know the Slenderman.” And I see that, and someone else might not see it, and I'm “in the know”, because I've seen it and I know it. And it ends up kind-of combining people together in that aspect. Later on, the horror story telling online has shifted. And it's still in the middle of shifting, which is where my research has gotten this very strange

# 10

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

. . . . I wish I could end on a more solid, “And this is it!” note. But it hasn't quite gotten there yet. It's shifted to the much less free expression. That sounds like it's negative. I don't mean it in that way, but in the sense that there's not as much of the community involvement. There's a lot more attachment to author, which there wasn't earlier on. And that's not to say that that's a bad thing. It's just shifting things.

**RD:** *It's moulding the whole . . .*

**VA:** Yes. And as the internet evolves, obviously these groups were going to evolve. It's just the nature of things. They were the ones that I was able to talk to the most. Because they were the ones currently doing things. So when I talked to them there was a lot more emphasis on what the process of story writing was doing for them. And a lot of it was help. A lot of it was talking about . . . quite a few of them talked about trauma that they experienced much earlier on in their life. And how writing horror actually helped them cope. Because essentially, and this is my theory on it – they didn't say this directly, so I'm not going to put words into their mouth, this is my theory – is that it's because they now have the agency over the trauma. They're not in control of the violent actions. And one person even said that it keeps them from having violent actions against themselves, through writing.

**RD:** *Right.*

**VA:** And this is where, when I'm coming back to the whole thing with the stabbings, and how everyone kind-of centres this discussion on it, they're completely missing that out.

**RD:** *Yes, that data . . .*

**VA:** They're missing out these people that need this, in a sense, in a very positive way. And the fact that I very much expected – as a woman, going to do research online – to be kind-of hit with a lot of very negative attacks. It never happened. I went into the community. They were hesitant at first, but only because they didn't want me to be writing anything negative about them. They didn't want me to be writing this article about, “Look how terrible this community is!” So they were very hesitant at first. And I had to, basically, give them my PhD proposal again. Essentially, really laid it out to them, really explained exactly what I'm doing and how I'm doing it. Suddenly they opened up. And they opened up very openly! The very first one I got after that was someone telling me about childhood trauma and abuse. And so that was an immediate opening up.

**RD:** Fantastic!

# 11

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

**VA:** Yes. And they're all very supportive. And I think that's because of the fact that they all recognise it for what it is – which is this sense of help. And “If you need this help, I'm going to help you get better at this thing that helps you.”

**RD:** *Right.*

**VA:** And so, it's a very kind community. It's probably one of the kindest I've been to and done research with – despite what they're talking about, and what I read when I'm not talking to them! Which is fascinating! But yes, it's definitely a very beneficial practice, I think, for people.

**RD:** *It definitely . . . . Even though just to lay it out and say, “There's this thing called Slenderman.” Most people would say “Well, that's not really religion” But what you just said there, that's what the Scientologists do in [clearing](#). So you tell the auditor your trauma, and then you relive it enough times to desensitise yourself. So that you're free of what you've been through. And these people are doing that for each other, themselves, and using Slenderman as that vehicle to release pressure, I suppose.*

**VA:** Yes. There's a lot of similarity, I think. And that's where again, this grey area. . . . I like to say that this Slenderman really lives in grey areas. That's where he thrives is in these grey areas. And that's it. It's the grey area between religion and non-religion. None of these people that I talk to would ever say, “Oh yes. This is religious to me.” And I would never say that they said that, by any means. But the way they use it is very similar to the way that other people use religion. The way they talk about it is sometimes very similar – not all the time but sometimes – especially when they're playing and they're in character, they're embodying it. Suddenly it takes on this other . . . now it stretches a little bit further into it. And that's what's so . . . . It's almost like they're playing with religion, in that sense. And that's where these kinds of religious concepts that build the myth, like apophatic theology, like the tulpa, building it using these religious concepts. They're, essentially, not just playing with the Slenderman and making it better. They're also going: “Well, let's talk about tulpas! What do you think about tulpas? Let's play with this idea a bit. Let's stretch this idea. Is this something that's cool?” And essentially playing with religion. (Laughs).

**RD:** *That statement had a satisfying finality. I think you've nailed it, there! So thank you, Vivian Asimos.*

**VA:** Thank you for having me.

# 12

## Podcast Transcript

Version 1.1, 13 January 2019

If you spot any errors in this transcription, please let us know at [editors@religiousstudiesproject.com](mailto:editors@religiousstudiesproject.com). If you would be willing to help with transcribing the Religious Studies Project archive, or know of any sources of funding for the broader [transcription project](#), please get in touch. Thanks for reading.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- NonCommercial- NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. The views expressed in podcasts are the views of the individual contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROJECT or the British Association for the Study of Religions.