



Scandinavian American Cultural and Historical Foundation

NORDIC SPIRIT NEWSLETTER

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21st Annual Nordic Spirit Symposium

Magic, Creatures and Legends

A Journey into Nordic Folklore

February 7 & 8, 2020

Cal Lutheran Campus, Thousand Oaks

There were dragons in old Scandinavia—you can see them peeking out from the eaves of Stave Churches, gobbling Runes on granite stones, or writhing over the surfaces of bowls and broaches—and there were other creatures—giants, spirits good and bad, and strange, mischievous creatures that inhabited the forests, lakes, and seas around the countries—also trolls—those misshapen creatures with hairy bodies, big ears, and even bigger noses, looking like the tormented memory of mastodons that once roamed the forests and fields—and ghosts, too.

The stories long told in front of hearths, around campfires, and even in sermons in churches are vast and varied, and are increasingly the subject of study. The Nordic Spirit Symposium will host prominent scholars in the field who will bring the latest insights into “Magic, Creatures and Legends” through story, analysis, painting, and song; how to recognize these supernatural creatures, what to do when one encounters them, how to understand the thin veil between reality and the ghostly, and what spells to use when one hears a twig crack in the woods or glimpses a shadow among the rocks behind you.

The 21st annual Nordic Spirit symposium will treat the intriguing and fascinating topic of *Magic, Creatures and Legends: A Journey into Nordic Folklore*. The annual symposia, co-sponsored by SACHF and Cal Lutheran University and made possible by generous grants from the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation and the Norway House Foundation in San Francisco, continue **the time-honored spirit of a symposium, combining eating, music, convivial conversation, and entertainment to enhance the pleasure of learning.**

The event will begin with a reception 5:30 PM Friday, Feb. 7, at the Scandinavian Center and will continue with the program in Samuelson Chapel at 7 PM. Saturday the program will continue at 9 AM in the Chapel. Lunch will be available for advance purchase. The symposium will conclude with dinner and entertainment Saturday evening.

Distinguished presenters include Terry Gunnell, Ph.D., Professor of Folkloristics, University of Iceland, Reykjavik; Ulf Palmenfelt, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, Gotland Campus, Visby, Sweden; Timothy Tangherlini, Ph.D., Professor of Folklore, Scandinavian Section, UCLA; Thomas DuBois, Ph.D., Halls-Bascom Professor of Scandinavian Studies and Folklore, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Ann-Marita Garsed, Norwegian singer, songwriter, storyteller and performer based in Los Angeles; and Ernst F. Tonsing, Professor Emeritus of Religion and Greek, Cal Lutheran University.

MAGIC, CREATURES and LEGENDS

Riders on the Storm; Riders at the Door: The Nordic Legends of the Wild Ride by Terry Gunnell

This lecture, a blend of academic discussion and storytelling, will introduce the main types of Nordic legend associated with the Wild Ride, noting the differences between the more southerly types (mainly Swedish and Danish) telling of a single rider chasing a supernatural woman, and those more northerly legends in which the ride, made up of a mixture of troll-like beings and the dead, is commonly led by a female figure. Some attention will also be given to the way this migratory legend also had to change when it came to Iceland, largely because of local beliefs relating to the size of trolls and whether more than one could fit into a house. As the lecture will show, these were not merely legends, but were based on ancient active beliefs about groups of supernatural riders who would take over farms at Yuletide, killing or stealing anyone who got in their way. Equally important to remember is that these beliefs were manifested in the widespread Nordic traditions of groups of disguised men who went around farms at the same time, demanding food and drink. The legend gave character to the tradition, and the tradition gave credence to the legend.

Essential and Optional Magic in Finnish Daily Life: The Logic of Spells and Incantations in the Era before Magic Denial by Thomas DuBois

Dr. DuBois will speak on the uses of magic in daily life in agrarian Finland: the things people generally had spells for, the things they turned to more adept workers in magic to address, and the things that were considered reprehensible or unwise to manipulate magically. Like other Nordic peoples, Finns had lots of spells for different things. Because some of the earliest collectors of Finnish folklore—like Elias Lönnrot—were doctors, they took particular interest in magical spells, particularly as related to healing. But being good at magic also meant that one might be suspected of doing ill—particularly if a neighbor, or a neighbor's cow, suddenly took ill or other misfortune hit people in the locale. So the person adept in magic was always both a valued resource and a potential danger in the eyes of others. And at the same time, suspecting others of malicious magic did not mean that one did not occasionally practice magic as well: various forms of magic were as ubiquitous to nineteenth-century Finnish life as cellphones are to the life of Finns of today. And understanding the uses and limits of magic was a key part of living a proper life.

Folk Legends as Cultural Tools for Exploring the Boundaries of Reality by Ulf Palmenfelt

Narratives are cultural machines that help us to create meaning in our sometimes incoherent and potentially chaotic experiences of everyday life by ordering them chronologically and causally. Folk legends constitute a subgroup of narrative that specializes in exploring the elusive border land between the known and the unknown, between the natural and the supernatural. In this talk Dr. Palmenfelt will discuss how some attitudes to life, society, and morality are expressed, communicated, and negotiated in Swedish folk legends about supernatural beings. Special attention will be given to the interdependence between the legends and regional and social factors in the Swedish farming society. With the *vättar*, the little people under the earth, humans had to develop a friendly neighborhood, just as with their human neighbors. The *nisse*, living in the barn, secretly regulated the distribution of luck within the village. The *skogsrå*, the forest spirit, controlled everything that took place within her territory, just like the mermaid did in her water realm. And deep inside the forests or in the mountains lived the *trolls* who were as ugly, as evil, and as stupid as the people in the next parish.

The Priest and the Devil in the Nordic Countries by Terry Gunnell

This lecture, once again a blend of academic discussion and storytelling, will discuss the migratory legends of the Nordic countries telling of a close relationship existing between a number of famous Lutheran clerics of the past and the Devil, the clerics in question being commonly seen as magicians (many of whom had learned at the so-called “Black School”). As the lecture will note, the legends in question tend to be somewhat humorous, telling how the cleric, with the help of his magical “Black Book” regularly managed to cheat not only the Devil but a number of other unsavoury characters. Interestingly enough, in spite of their magical powers and study with the Devil, these figures are rarely shown as going to Hell. They are essentially protectors of their parishioners, fighting fire with fire, rather than making any evident use of the Bible (unless it comes in handy as a physical weapon). A key question here is how and why such legends should have come into being, and why they take a different form in Scotland (where they are not linked to clerics but rather land-owners.)

The World of John Bauer by Ernst F. Tonsing

John Bauer was one of Scandinavia's greatest illustrators of folk tales. His images are immediately recognized and greatly beloved. Bauer painted in a nationalistic style in a romantic blend of Italian Renaissance and Sami cultures, stirring into that mixture the ancient Scandinavian Viking art which was being rediscovered in the late nineteenth century. John Bauer's tragically short life will be reviewed, along with his unforgettable visions of elegant princesses and princes, stately elks, befuddled giants, and curious—even cuddly—trolls.

How to Find and Identify Supernatural Creatures: Notes from Work with the Danish Troll Security Agency by Timothy Tangherlini

Over the past thirty years, Dr. Tangherlini has worked closely with various Danish institutions on devising tools for understanding the immense folklore collections created over the past two centuries. In this wide ranging talk, he will describe several of the computational tools we have developed to describe the shifting landscape of belief that characterizes rural life in Denmark during a period of great changes in social organization, economic activity, and technologies of transportation and production. In the course of the talk, he will explore the dominant supernatural beings, from the wet and wild merfolk, to the dangerous basilisks, serpents and water horses, to the more peaceful hidden folk, to the mischievous and occasionally homicidal *nisse*. He will explain both the conceptual locus of these beings as well as the roles they play in the belief world of rural Danes. Dr. Tangherlini will explore some of the motivations for stories describing encounters with these creatures, and conclude by interrogating some of the beliefs surrounding witchcraft.

Scandinavian Folk Songs, Tales and Legends – A Musical Journey through the Centuries by Ann-Marita Garsed

Nordic folk legends and mythical creatures have been depicted in a number of traditional folk songs throughout the centuries. And in many of these stories, the supernatural world and the human world meet when the music of one is being heard by the other, whether it be the shape shifting Water Spirit, or *nøkken*, luring people into the water by the mournful sound of his harp, or *fossegrimen* playing his fiddle by the waterfall, or *huldra* calling her animals home or humans into peril with her sweet singing voice. Singer, songwriter, storyteller, and performer Ann-Marita Garsed was born and raised on the West Coast of



Norway, an area steeped in traditional Norwegian culture and folklore, where she heard the stories of *huldra*, *nøkken* and *nisser* from an early age, and learned *kulokk* - herding calls - to call the cows home. For her Nordic Spirit Symposium performance, Ann-Marita will be sharing some of these stories and various songs from her extensive repertoire of Norwegian and

Swedish folk songs, as well as some of her own original songs based on real-life stories of Scandinavian immigrants in the United States.

Local Sounds, Local Legends: Sámi Ways of Commemorating Beings and Places by Thomas DuBois

Through a distinctive vocal music tradition variously called *luohti*, *vuelie*, *leud*, or *joik*, Sami people express relationships between themselves and others around them—be these people, animals, supernatural entities or places. The sounds and possible words of a *joik* recall the characteristics and nature of a particular being and potentially suggest one or more stories that a person may know and share regarding the entity *joiked*. In a highly mobile, migratory culture, *joiks* thus become a very concrete way of keeping in touch with others, even if they may be far away. They are a way of communicating about relationships and of telling stories about others, even if the stories may not be enunciated at a particular moment. In this talk, Dr. DuBois will introduce some of the workings of the *joik* genre, past and present.

Information: scandinaviancenter.org

SACHF Scholarship Fund

SACHF has awarded scholarships to two deserving Cal Lutheran Scandinavian-American students; the most recent was awarded during the Feb. 2019 symposium. To fund continuation of this program, a SACHF Scholarship Fund has been established. Your tax deductible donations to this fund will help fund further scholarships. Checks may be payable to SACHF and mailed to SACHF, Scandinavian Center, 60 West Olsen Road #2600, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

Scandinavian Festival
April 4-5, 2020 10 am – 5 pm

**SCANDINAVIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL
AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATION**
Scandinavian Center at CLU
60 W. Olsen Rd #2600
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360



**Magic, Creatures and Legends:
A Journey into Nordic Folklore**

Nordic Spirit Symposium
Feb. 7-8, 2020

Scandinaviancenter.org

Reservation deadline for Saturday Lunch and Dinner: January 29, 2020

| | General Admission | Quantity | SACHF Members | Quantity | Students CLU Faculty/Staff | Quantity | Total |
|---|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Friday Gala Reception | \$15 | | \$15 | | \$15 | | \$ |
| Friday & Saturday Program | \$65 (\$60 by Jan. 20) | | \$50 (\$45 by Jan. 20) | | Free registration | | \$ |
| Friday Program Only | \$25 (\$20 by Jan. 20) | | \$20 | | Free registration | | \$ |
| Saturday Program Only | \$50 (\$45 by Jan. 20) | | \$40 (\$35 by Jan. 20) | | Free registration | | \$ |
| Saturday Luncheon <i>(limited seating; tax & service included)</i> | \$15 | | \$15 | | \$15 | | \$ |
| Saturday Dinner <i>(limited seating; tax & service included)</i> Dinner Choice: ___ Beef ___ Salmon ___ Vegetarian | \$40 | | \$40 | | \$40 | | \$ |
| The Works: Programs, Meals & Reception | \$135 (\$130 by Jan. 20) | | \$120 (\$115 by Jan. 20) | | \$70 (Meals & Reception) | | \$ |
| Please enroll me (us) as SACHF members, \$40 per individual, \$60 household | | | | | | | \$ |
| Enclosed is my check payable to Scandinavian American Cultural & Historical Foundation or SACHF | | | | | | | \$ |

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Mail to: Nordic Spirit Symposium, c/o H. Rockstad, 1227 Tierra Drive, Thousand Oaks, CA 91362-2251

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