

Chapter Title: The Truth Is Out There

Book Title: The Troll Inside You

Book Subtitle: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North

Book Author(s): Ármann Jakobsson

Published by: Punctum Books. (2017)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.2354003.6>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.



Punctum Books is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Troll Inside You*

The Truth Is Out There

THE PARANORMAL IN THE SAGAS can be regarded as a construction, both social as well as literary. It serves a narratological function, although narratives of the paranormal may still represent an actual belief system which existed outside of the texts. This belief system is certainly dominated in some way by Christianity, but parts of it may have pre-dated the advent of Christianity in the North only to then co-exist alongside the hegemonic Christian faith,¹⁴ adapted to it to some degree though without becoming a part of its official ideology.

Despite pretence, the paranormal is primarily located within the human psyche. Thus, rather than venturing beyond the human mind, a more insightful exploration of the paranormal might begin by rather venturing towards and even into it. In such a venture one cannot dismiss the personal insights and experiences of simply being human. The premise of the humanities, which used to be taken for granted but has become more easily ignored in an age dominated by other disciplines, is that when it comes to the human, subjectivity is compulsory. The researcher can thus and perhaps must use their own insights and partly merge with their subject as they study the actions, experiences, and expressions of other humans. Some of the methods of the traditional humanities, literary analysis among them, predate the scientific revolution of the modern age, but when it comes to the human mind and its products, they still offer opportunities unparalleled by outside scrutiny.¹⁵

An acknowledgement of the fact that the paranormal is located within the human psyche is in this case coupled

with another perhaps somewhat surprising premise: that all gods and monsters are essentially human. They are in various ways, and to various degrees, our doubles, and all texts about the paranormal are in some way also fundamentally concerned with humanity.¹⁶ While the paranormal is always essentially occult and other, it often functions like a mirror to those who encounter it, a threatening and eerie path to some deeper understanding of the self. Since the term troll was used broadly in medieval Iceland and is one of the common terms used to describe a sorcerer or the undead, the troll may be regarded as a representative of the paranormal in general. The troll externalises danger and becomes in narrative that truth which is out there,¹⁷ but in this study, the focus is no less directed towards the recesses of the mind, as we slowly approach the rationale of magic.¹⁸

The term *paranormal* is fitting precisely because to the average reader it will not suggest the Middle Ages, and thus it cannot be taken for granted, dismissed as a traditional or conventional term that can be safely deployed without intense scrutiny.¹⁹ The word is also preferable to terms such as *supernatural*, more easily and frequently connected with the Middle Ages, because it does not immediately establish the notion that the unknown phenomenon encountered is somehow above or beyond the world of the humans who encounter it. Furthermore the stem *normal* in the former is preferable to the latter's *natural* since the focus here is fixed upon human experience, and on human society, rather than nature if it is envisioned, as it often is in the modern world, as all that is distinct from humanity. This term also draws attention to the idea of the norms of human existence. Thus using the term may assist us in the task of challenging the idea of the normal. In addition, working from the *normal* places more focus and primacy on the individual observer as a single living being; in contrast to the natural sciences, which, though founded on observation, are centred upon empiricism, which tradi-

tionally encourages the insignificance of the individuality of the observer.²⁰

This study is thus focused primarily on paranormal encounters, not on the paranormal for its own sake, allowing for the moment for the existence of paranormal activity in the real world, but mainly exploring the experience of the humans who apparently encounter it. However, this is only one part of the focus. The other is on language; in this case on the semiotics of the paranormal. When the paranormal is encountered in a written text, it has not only been experienced but also framed within language. The language of the paranormal is essential when concentrating on the paranormal as it is related through written sources. This focus, on human experience and semiotics of the paranormal, will provide a method to study paranormal encounters outside of any cultural or geographic constraints. However, paranormal activity will also be considered within the framework of class, gender, and time, and there is an acceptance of the mutability of the paranormal and its relationship with chaos and control. Before venturing further into the medieval corpus, it is necessary to say a few words about those traditions which modern scholarship is based on but to which it is also, in a sense, opposed. A swift departure from the premises they offer is one of the foundations of this study.

