

# SPIRITS AND GHOSTS

## *Fervor and Infatuation in Contemporary Norway*

ON SUNDAYS in Norway nowadays the churches are nearly empty. Although most modern Norwegians will identify themselves as Evangelical Lutherans, the country has gradually grown very secular and agnostic during the 21st century. Belief in the Christian God, statistics reveal, has declined. Norway's Humanist Association, an atheist group, even recently ran a national campaign relating God to trolls and Santa Claus as a way to promote the idea that religion is superstition and about to die out completely, as Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud predicted it would.

Not so. Instead, faith and the need to experience and express religious feelings and spirituality have taken an entirely different track. Ghosts and spirits are filling the void. Paranormal phenomena are increasing throughout Norway. A steadily growing number of people are seeking advice about an acceleration of mystical happenings which defy physical laws. Forces that can't be seen or understood impact daily life, many Norwegians claim. Although ghosts have been around for centuries the focus on them is going through a resurgence throughout this Scandinavian country.

A group of teenage science students travel around one especially haunted region near the town of Moss tracing ghosts with electronic meters and

regularly posting videos of their discoveries on the Internet. Recently, staff members at a tourist agency in Moss described weird happenings such as strange odors, inexplicable noises and the movement of objects, especially travel brochures. The workers noted the German brochures were always inexplicably shifted to the front of the display, although there were few German speaking visitors. Plumbers and electricians checked out the building and found nothing amiss. The situation became so strange that the employees grew fearful. A clairvoyant was consulted. She determined the source of the trouble was the spirit of a German soldier who had been lingering on the premises since working there during World War II. After the building was spiritually cleansed, the activity ceased and peace was restored.

Perhaps an ingrained thirst, the primal longing for spiritual support, is leading to this resurgence of Pagan pre-Christian beliefs around the country. The Lutheran Church has recently developed a liturgy of ghosts to help parishioners cleanse their homes of unwanted spiritual presences. Norway's Royal Family has even become involved. One princess has begun to assist people in reaching out to the spirit world.

A television program, *The Power of Spirits*, airs each Sunday and draws at least a half million viewers, a huge percentage of the country's total population of five million. The show's host, Tom Stromnaess, says "All of this is for real concerning forces that can't be seen or understood." Mr. Stromnaess tells of visiting many sites where paranormal energies are actively at work. He speaks of hundreds of viewers who contact him for help in dealing with haunted homes or workplaces and says that "All of these people can't be crazy." There is a great demand for the services of professional mediums who can earn 800 Norwegian Kroner, about \$98 per hour, for ghost cleansing and spirit communication.

The courts in Norway became involved recently when a homebuyer in the town of Vinstra complained that

he was duped into buying a haunted house and should have been notified about the annoying ghosts. The judge was unmoved though, ruling against the alleged mystical events being a defect in the property. The plaintiff did not receive a refund.

Interest in ghosts and the occult is so strong that in November 2015 Oslo hosted its first "Alternative Expo," including hundreds of practitioners of alternative faiths and various metaphysical topics. Perhaps it is because of the starkness of Norway's long, dark winters which necessitate a focus on the practicalities of survival, but most of the spirit visitors don't seem particularly benevolent. At best they resemble playful but spiteful poltergeists, at worst they appear rather sinister.

—CATIE SALTMARSH

