

Special Issue

Seen and Unseen: The Folklore of Secrecy

Message from the Guest Editor

The notion of what is seen but not well understood without esoteric knowledge—as well as what is unseen and only detectable and comprehended by the initiated few. These legends, cryptic memes, cryptid claims, wonder tales, and beliefs of fantastical, magical, occult, and political intrigue have shaped visions of the ancient as well as the modern world. We face today not only new vectors of so-called disinformation and potentially dangerous consequences of divergent and disruptive beliefs, but also vivid creations and traditions of speculative mystery of baleful or benign intent. It is not simply that visible hopes and anxieties of everyday life and divisive politics are driving the invention and proliferation of popular lore; we also have the role of a vital invisible world. Pervasive memes of apocalyptic spiritual forces, rising belief in ghosts, newsworthy regional legends (the release of Tamamo-no-Ma in Japan from the killing stone), and boosts to socio-political action because of supernatural belief (Huldufólk lore nurturing environmentalism in Iceland) stimulate and renew the living matrix of contemporary folklore of the unseen or the obscurely understood.

Guest Editor

Dr. Jason Harris

Department of English, College of Liberal Arts, Texas A&M University,
College Station, TX, USA

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Editorial Office
MDPI, Grosspeteranlage 5
4052 Basel, Switzerland
Tel: +41 61 683 77 34
humanities@mdpi.com

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Editor-in-Chief

Prof. Dr. Albrecht Classen

Department of German Studies, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
85721, USA

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