

Tomten

A Christmas Poem by Viktor Rydberg

INTRODUCTION

The Christmas poem, Tomten, by Viktor Rydberg is one of the most popular ones in Finland and Sweden. I recall having to learn this in grade school; each student was assigned some verses so we could recite the full poem by heart in class. During Christmas it was often read in the radio.

This text of the poem is shown in Swedish, English and Finnish. You can listen to the traditional recital in Swedish, see a movie in Swedish with English subtitles and listen to it in a song in Finnish. The pictures used here of Tomten are from "Tonttula" in the village of Larsmo in Finland, between Karleby and Jakobstad.

I have included a relationship list showing how Viktor Rydberg is one of our distant cousins.

Tomte

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A **tomte**, **nisse** or **tomtenisse** (Sweden) or **tonttu** (Finland) is a humanoid mythical creature of Scandinavian folklore. The tomte or nisse was believed to take care of a farmer's home and children and protect them from misfortune, in particular at night, when the housefolk were asleep.

The tomte/nisse was often imagined as a small, elderly man (size varies from a few inches to about half the height of an adult man), often with a full beard; dressed in the everyday clothing of a farmer.

The Swedish name *tomte* is derived from a place of residence and area of influence: the house lot or *tomt*. *Nisse* is the common name in Norwegian, Danish and the Scanian dialect in southernmost Sweden; it is a nickname for Nils, and its usage in folklore comes from expressions such as *Nisse god dräng* ("Nisse good lad", cf. [Robin Goodfellow](#)).

Lars Granholm
Adamstown, MD 21710
December 2012

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Rydberg

Viktor Rydberg

Abraham Viktor Rydberg (December 18, 1828 – September 21, 1895) was a Swedish writer and a member of the Swedish Academy, 1877-1895. "Primarily a classical idealist", Viktor Rydberg has been described as "Sweden's last Romantic" and by 1859 was "generally regarded in the first rank of Swedish novelists."

Rydberg in 1876



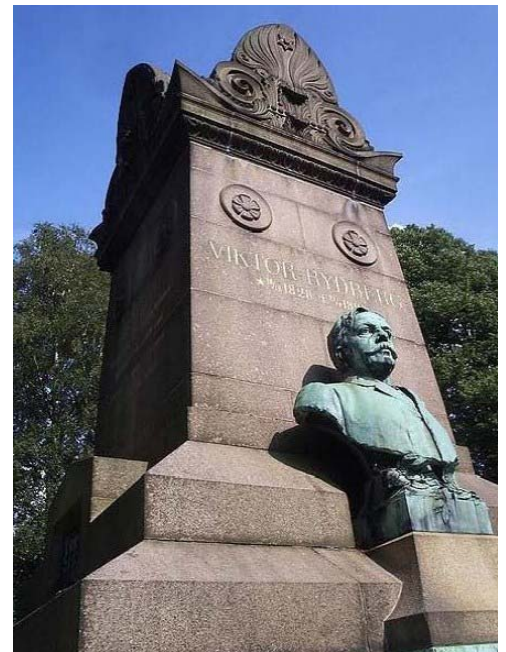
Viktor Rydberg was of humble parentage. One biographer notes that: "He had a hard struggle to satisfy the thirst for learning which was a leading passion of his life, but he finally attained distinction in several fields of scholarship." The son of a soldier turned prison guard, Johann Rydberg, and a midwife, Hedvig Düker. Viktor Rydberg had two brothers and three sisters. In 1834 his mother died during a cholera epidemic. Her death broke the spirit of his father, who yielded to hypochondria and alcoholism, contributing towards his loss of employment and the family's apartment, forcing authorities to board young Viktor out to a series of foster homes, one of which burnt down, further traumatizing the youth.

Despite his economic status, Rydberg was recognized for his talents. From 1838 to 1847, Rydberg attended grammar school, and studied law at the

University in Lund from 1851 to 1852. Due to financial reasons his university studies ended after one year, without a degree. Afterward, he took a job as a private tutor. In 1855, he was offered work at the *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, a newspaper in Göteborg, where he would remain employed for more than 20 years. It was during this time that his first novels saw print. He soon became a central figure of late Romanticism in Sweden, and Sweden's most famous living author.

Throughout his adult life, Rydberg was active in politics. In 1859, he wrote a pamphlet on national defense, which inspired the "Sharpshooter's movement", a voluntary militia of some political importance during the 1860s. In 1870, he took a controversial pro-German stance during the Franco-Prussian War. Representing the traditional economic system of Sweden, from 1870 to 1872, Rydberg was a member of the Swedish Parliament as a supporter of the Peasant's Party.

Rydberg grave in Gothenburg



Original Swedish text

TOMTEN

Viktor Rydberg



Midvinternattens köld är hård,
stjärnorna gnistra och glimma.
Alla sova i enslig gård
djupt under midnattstimma.
Månen vandrar sin tysta ban,
snön lyser vit på fur och gran,
snön lyser vit på taken.
Endast tomten är vaken.



Står där så grå vid ladgårdsdörr,
grå mot den vita driva,
tittar, som många vintrar förr,
upp emot månens skiva,
tittar mot skogen, där gran och fur
drar kring gården sin dunkla mur,
grubblar, fast ej det lär båta,
över en underlig gåta.



För sin hand genom skägg och hår,
skakar huvud och hätta ---
»nej, den gåtan är alltför svår,
nej, jag gissar ej detta» ---
slår, som han plägar, inom kort
slika spörjande tankar bort,
går att ordna och pyssla,
går att sköta sin syssla.



Går till visthus och redskapshus,
känner på alla låsen ---
korna drömma vid månens ljus
sommardrömmar i båsen;
glömsk av sele och pisk och töm
Pålle i stallet har ock en dröm:
krubban han lutar över
fylls av doftande klöver; ---



Går till stängslet för lamm och får,
ser, hur de sova där inne;
går till hönsen, där tuppen står
stolt på sin högsta pinne;
Karo i hundbots halm mår gott,
vaknar och viftar svansen smått,
Karo sin tomte känner,
de äro gode vänner.



Tomten smyger sig sist att se
husbondfolket det kära,
länge och väl han märkt, att de
hålla hans flit i ära;
barnens kammar han sen på tå
nalkas att se de söta små,
ingen må det förtycka:
det är hans största lycka.



Så har han sett dem, far och son,
ren genom många leder
slumra som barn; men varifrån
kommo de väl hit neder?
Släkte följde på släkte snart,
blomstrade, åldrades, gick --- men vart?
Gåtan, som icke låter
gissa sig, kom så åter!



Tomten vandrar till ladans loft:
där har han bo och fäste
högt på skullen i höets doft,
nära vid svalans näste;
nu är väl svalans boning tom,
men till våren med blad och blom
kommer hon nog tillbaka,
följd av sin näpna maka.



Då har hon alltid att kvittra om
månget ett färdeminne,
intet likväl om gåtan, som
rör sig i tomtens sinne.
Genom en springa i ladans vägg
lyser månen på gubbens skägg,
strimman på skägget blänker,
tomten grubblar och tänker.



Tyst är skogen och nejden all,
livet där ute är fruset,
blott från fjärran av forsens fall
höres helt sakta bruset.
Tomten lyssnar och, halvt i dröm,
tycker sig höra tidens ström,
undrar, varthän den skall fara,
undrar, var källan må vara.



Midvinternattens köld är hård,
stjärnorna gnistra och glimma.
Alla sova i enslig gård
gott intill morgontimma.
Månen sänker sin tysta ban,
snön lyser vit på fur och gran,
snön lyser vit på taken.
Endast tomten är vaken.

Swedish traditional recital

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=832EH7HE1bw>



Tomten

Movie about Tomten in Swedish with English subtitles

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rJ0Ec-jYg8>



The image shows a YouTube video player interface. The video is titled "Robin Goodfellow / Tomten by Viktor Rydberg". The video player shows a black and white film still of an elderly man with glasses, wearing a dark suit and a bow tie, looking down. English subtitles are overlaid on the video: "Midwinter's nightly frost is hard — Brightly the stars are beaming;". Below the video player, the channel name "Ulwencreutz" is displayed with a profile picture of a car and a subscriber count of 14. The video has 6,810 views, 15 likes, and 0 dislikes. The upload date is "Dec 20, 2010". A description states: "with English subtitles by Lars Ulwencreutz. Translation made by Anna Krook 1926." There is a link to buy the music on eMusic.

Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —
Brightly the stars are beaming;

01:36 / 11:24

Robin Goodfellow / Tomten by Viktor Rydberg

Ulwencreutz · 49 videos

6,810

15 0

Like

About Share Add to

Uploaded on Dec 20, 2010
with English subtitles by Lars Ulwencreutz. Translation made by Anna Krook 1926.

Buy "Tomten" on
eMusic
Artist

English text

Tomten by Viktor Rydberg

Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —
Brightly the stars are beaming;
Fast asleep is the lonely Yard,
All, at midnight, are dreaming.
Clear is the moon, and the snow-drifts shine,
Glistening white, on fir and pine,
Covers on rooflets making.
None but tomten is waking.

Grey, he stands by the byre-door,
Grey, in the snow appearing;
Looks, as ever he did before,
Up, at the moonlight peering;
Looks at the wood, where the pine and fir
Stand round the farm, and never stir;
Broods on an unavailing
Riddle, forever failing;

Runs his hand through his hair and beard —
Gravely, his head a-shaking —
»Harder riddle I never heard,
Vainly, my head I'm breaking. « —
Chasing, then, as his wont for aye,
Such unsolvable things away,
Tomten trips, without hustling,
Now, about duty bustling.

Goes to the larder and tool-house fine,
Every padlock trying —
See! by moonlight, in stalls, the kine,
Dreaming of summer, are lying;
Heedless of harness and whip and team,
Polle, stabled, has too a dream:
Manger and crib, all over,
Fill with sweet-smelling clover.

Tomten goes to the lambs and sheep —
See! they are all a-dreaming!
Goes to the hens, where the cock will sleep,
Perched, with vanity teeming;
Karo, in kennel, so brave and hale,
Wakes up and gladly wags his tail;
Karo, he knows his brother-
Watchmen, they love each other.

Lastly, Tomten will steal to see
The masterfolks, loved so dearly;
Long have they liked his industry,
Now, they honor him, clearly;
Stealing on tiptoe, soon he nears
Nursery cots, the little dears;
None must grudge him the pleasure;
This is his greatest treasure.

Thus he has seen them, sire and son,
Endless numbers of races;
Whence are they coming, one by one,
All the slumbering faces?
Mortals succeeding mortals, there,
Flourished, and aged, and went — but where?
Oh, this riddle, revolving,
He will never cease solving!

Tomten goes to the hay-shed loft,
There, is his haunt and hollow,
Deep in the sweet-smelling hay, aloft,
Near the nest of the swallow;
Empty, now, is the swallow's nest,
But when spring is in blossom dressed,
She for home will be yearning,
Will, with her mate, be returning.

Then she'll twitter, and sing, and chat
Much of her airy travel,
Nothing, though, of the riddle that
Tomten can never unravel.
Through a chink in the hay-shed wall,
Lustrous moonbeams on Tomten fall,
There, on his beard, they're blinking,
Tomten's brooding and thinking.

Mute is the world, is nature all,
Life is so frozen and dreary;
From afar, but the rapids' call,
Murmuring, sounds so weary.
Tomten listens, half in a dream,
Fancies he hears the vital stream,
Wonders whither it's going,
Whence its waters are flowing.

Midwinter's nightly frost is hard —
Brightly the stars are beaming.
Fast asleep is the lonely Yard,
All till morn will be dreaming.
Faint is the moon; and the snow-drifts shine,
Glistening white on fir and pine,
Covers on rooflets making.
None but tomten is waking.

Finnish song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VDckHzvlaE>



For information about the poster below and other Rydberg's "Tomten" items see <http://tomtenposter.com/index.html>



Finnish text

Pakkasyö on, ja leiskuen
pohja loimuja viskoo.
Kansa kartanon hiljaisen
yösydänuntaan kiskoo.
Ääneti kuu käy kulkuaan,
puissa lunta on valkeanaan,
kattojen päällä on lunta.
Tonttu ei vaan saa unta.

Ladosta tulee, hankeen jää
harmaana uksen suuhun,
vanhaan tapaansa tirkistää
kohti taivasta kuuhun;
katsoo metsää, min hongat on
tuulensuojana kartanon,
mietti vi suuntaan sataan
ainaista ongelmataan.

Partaa sivellen aprikoi,
puistaa päätä ja hasta –
tätä ymmärtää ei voi,
»ei, tää pulma on vasta;» –
heittää tapaansa järkevään
taas jo pois nämä vaivat pään,
lähtee toimiin ja työhön,
lähtee puuhiinsa yöhön.

Aitat ja puodit tarkastain,
lukkoja koittaa nyttyin, –
lehmät ne lehdoista näkee vain
unta kahleissa kyttyin;
suitset ja siimat ei selkään soi
ruunan, mi myöskin unelmoi:
torkkuu vasten seinää,
haassa se puree heinää.

Lammasten luo käy karsinaan,
makuulla tapaa ne ukko;
kanat jo katsoo, pienallaan
istuu ylinnä kukko;
kopissa Vahti hyvin voi,
herää ja häntää liehakoi,
tonttu harmajanuttu
Vahdille kyllä on tuttu.

Puikkii ukko jo tupahan,
siellä on isäntäväki,
tontulle arvoa antavan
näiden jo aikaa näki;
varpain hiipivi lasten luo,
nähdäkseen sulot pienet nuo,
ken sitä kummeksis juuri:
hälle se riemu on suuri.

Isän ja pojan on nähnyt hän
puhki polvien monten
nukkuvan lasna; mut mistähän
tie oli avutonten?
Polvet polvien tietämiin
nousi, vanheni, läks, – mihin niin?
Ongelma, josta halaa
selkoa, noin taas palaa!

Latoon, parvelle pyrkii vaan,
siellä hän pitää majaa:
pääskyn naapuri suovallaan
on liki räystäään rajaa;
vaikka pääsky nyt poissa on,
keväällä tuoksuun tuomiston
kyllä se saapuu varmaan
seurassa puolison armaan.

Silloin aina se sirkuttaa
monta muistoa tieltä,
ei toki tunne ongelmaa,
näin joka kiusaa mieltä.
Seinän raosta loistaa kuu,
ukon partahan kumottuu,
liikkuu parta ja hulmaa,
tonttu se miettii pulmaa.

Vaiti metsä on, alla jään
kaikki elämä makaa,
koski kuohuvi yksinään,
humuten metsän takaa.
Tonttu puoleksi unissaan
ajan virtaa on kuulevinaan,
tuumii, minne se vienee,
missä sen lähde lienee.

Pakkasyö on, ja leiskuen
pohja loimuja viskoo.
Kansa kartanon hiljaisen
aamuhun unta kiskoo.
Ääneti kuu käy laskemaan,
puissa lunta on valkeanaan,
kattojen päällä on lunta.
Tonttu ei vaan saa unta.

Viktor Rydberg is the Half 11th cousin 5 times removed of Lars Erik Granholm

