**NORD 339 (2023/24 T1)**

**NORSE MYTHOLOGY**

**Term 1:** Tuesday / Thursday 15:30 - 17:00 Buchanan A 104

**Acknowledgement**

UBC’s Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. Musqueam traditional sites exist throughout the area now occupied by UBC buildings. Please visit the UBC Vancouver Aboriginal Portal https://aboriginal.ubc.ca/ to learn more about the history of Aboriginal presence on the locations of the Vancouver and Okanagan campuses and about the UBC programs and research that support Aboriginal communities and organizations.

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**Office hours**: Thursday 11:15 - 12:30 or by appointment

**Welcome to NORD 339**

This course is designed for students with little or no background knowledge in Norse mythology. After an introduction to the necessary historical context (the development of early Scandinavian/Northern Germanic societies, the lead-up to the so-called Viking Age, and the settlement of Iceland), we will be focussing on key texts written and/or compiled roughly two centuries after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, followed by a discussion of modern literary, cinematic, religious, and political appropriations of Norse mythology.

It is essential that students are fully aware of the implications of the fact that there are virtually no “original” textual documents. Almost everything we will read about Nordic gods, giants, and trolls, or about the beginning of the world and its destruction, was written in post-pagan times, frequently with very specific religious or political agendas. Norse mythology is to a considerable extent an observer construct, a highly revealing and successful instance of cultural packaging that continues to this day. Problems of content (“What are these myths about?”) and methodology (”How can they be analyzed?”) therefore cannot be separated from issues of distortion (“How and with what agenda in mind did early Christian observers, German Romantics, or Nazi mystics view these myths?”). These concerns are reflected in the principal learning outcomes:

Learning outcomes (LO) for the mythology portion:

**LO1** *What are these myths about?* Describe the major features of Old Norse

mythology within their climatic, historical and political contexts.

**LO2** *How can we analyze them?* Apply chief interpretive theories to analyze

the function of myth-telling and the relationship between myth and history in the old Scandinavian world

**LO3** *Why can’t we trust the “original” versions?* Discuss the difficulties arising from the

condemnation and/or appropriation of primarily oral pagan myths by literate Christian observers

**LO4** *What use were they later put to?* Identify and assess the religious, nationalist, and racist

driving later appropriations of Norse mythology (referred to in the course as ‘relay

station’)

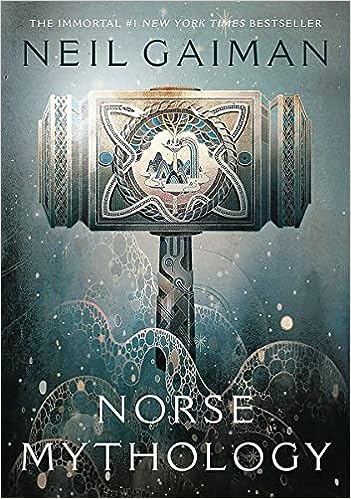
**LO5** *How do they appear today?* Analyze contemporary media, cultural and social

phenomena in light of the materials studied.

**Reading Material**:

The book will be available at the UBC Bookstore (but you may get it cheaper elsewhere):

Neil Gaiman, *Norse Mythology* (Norton)



Students should bookmark/save/print out this online text:

*Völuspá*  (“Prophecy of the Seeress”)

[The Poetic Edda: Voluspo](https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm)

**Also, bookmark this:**

[**https://sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/index.htm**](https://sacred-texts.com/neu/pre/index.htm)

**(we will be reading short excerpts)**

**NORD 339 Course overview**

**Tuesday, 5 September UBC Orientation Day. No class.**

**Thursday. 7 September** **Course introduction I: Who refashioned these myths?**

Introduction to the course. Important past influences (“relay stations”). Linguistic and terminological essentials (e.g., relationship between “Germanic,” “German,” “Old Norse,” and “Scandinavian. ” Formalities.

**Tuesday, 12 September Course Introduction II: Who told these myths?**

From Proto-Indo-European over Germanic to Norse,

Viking and Icelandic.

Prepare: Who were the Proto-Indo-Europeans (PIE)? When

and where did they live?

**Thursday, 14 September The Origin and Structure of “Middle Earth”:**

**From *ginnungagap t*o Asgard**

Goals: (i) Understand Norse creation myths as troublesome

texts that (a) distort the orally communicated tales they profess to record, and (b) are caught in the tension between obvious Christian influences and the retention of pagan components. (ii) Apply comparison between Norse and other creation myths (e.g., Greek, Babylonian). (iii) Relate spatial configuration to racial boundaries

Read:

Gaiman, *Norse Mythology*, 27-41 (“Before the Beginning” and

“Yggdrasil”)

**Also read “*Völuspá”* stanzas1-20**

[The Poetic Edda: Voluspo](https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm)

(don’t worry about the many names, though some will be familiar)

**Tuesday, 19 September** **The Origin and Structure of “Middle Earth” continued**

**Thursday, 21**  **September** **Old Norse K-pop: Snorri’s Achievement**

Snorri Sturluson has a problem: He wants the Norse gods to be *real*, but they cannot be real *gods*.

Goal: Analyze the various techniques used by Snorri that allow him to ascribe a certain historical reality to the Old Norse gods without committing blasphemy

Prepare: Snorri Sturluson

**Tuesday, 26 September** **The Great God Odin**

He’s complicated. Think twice before you kneel to him.

Read:

Gaiman, *Norse Mythology*, 43-47 (“Mimir’s Head”); 69-83 (“Master

Builder”); 125-151 (“Mead of the Poets”)

**Thursday, 28 September Valhalla and the Valkyries**

Read:

VALHALLA material (Canvas Files)

**Tuesday, 3 October The Aesir-Vanir War I**

**A Case Study in the Forensics of Mythology (Historical)**

Read:

AESIR-VANIR material (Canvas Files)

Goal: Apply competing explanations of the Aesir-Vanir war

as an example for two fundamentally different explanations of the role of mythology. Is the “war” a reflection, however distorted, of historical events (e.g., the invasion of Indo-European warrior societies), or is it the Norse variant of a distinct way of organizing reality?

**Carefully read “*Völuspá”* stanzas21-27**

[The Poetic Edda: Voluspo](https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm)

**Thursday, 5 October The Aesir-Vanir War II continued**

A Case Study in the Forensics of Mythology (Functional)

**Tuesday, 10 October Exam 1**

**Thursday, 12 October**  **“Make-up Monday.” NORD 339 canceled**

Thursday, October 12, 2023 has been designated

as a “Make-up Monday” for the Term 1 academic schedule. Classes normally scheduled for Thursday, October 12 are canceled, and will be replaced by classes normally scheduled on a Monday.

**Tuesday, 17 October** **Gods and Giants**

Read:

Gaiman, *Norse Mythology* 107-123 (“Freya’s Unusual

Wedding’); 179-197 (“Apples of Immortality”);199-209 (“Story

of Gerd and Frey”)

**Thursday, 19 October Gods and Giants continued**

**Tuesday, 24 October Special beings I: What is a Troll?**

A discussion of the origins, characteristics and functions of

the various “races” that feature prominently in Old Norse mythology (trolls, giants, frost giants, elves, dwarves).

Read:

TROLL material (Canvas files)

**Thursday, 26 October** **Special beings II: What is a (Germanic) dragon?**

Read:

DRAGON material (Canvas Files)

**Tuesday, 31 October**  **Special beings: What is a berserk?**

Read:

BERSERK material (Canvas files)

**Thursday, 2 November** **No Brains but useful: Thor**

Read:

Gaiman, *Norse Mythology* 49-67 (“Treasure of the Gods”); 91-106

(“Children of Loki”); 153-177 (“Thor's Journey to the Land of the

Giants”); 211-228 (“Hymir and Thor’s Fishing Expedition”)

**Tuesday, 7 November** **Clever and destructive: Loki**

**Thursday, 9 November No class.**

**Tuesday, 14 November**  **UBC Midterm break. No class.**

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**Thursday, 16 November Test 2**

**Tuesday, 21 November “Some Say the World will end in Fire”:**

***Ragnarökh* and the End of All Things I**

Read:

Gaiman, *Norse Mythology* 229-end (“The Death of Balder”, “The Last Days of Loki”, “Ragnarok”)

**Also read “*Völuspá”* stanzas27-65 (end)**

[The Poetic Edda: Voluspo](https://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/poe/poe03.htm)

**Thursday, 23 November** ***Ragnarökh* II**

**Tuesday, 28 November *Ragnarökh* III**

**Thursday, 30 November “Grimm’s Gamble”: Odin’s Dark Afterlife**

Goal: Focusing on the legend of the “Wild Hunt” (a.k.a. “Furious Host”), we analyze (i) Jakob Grimm’s transfer of methods developed in diachronic linguistics to the study of evolution of myths, and (ii) the use of Norse mythology in Grimm’s Pan-Germanic Mythology for the purpose of modern European nation-building.

Prepare: (i) Jacob Grimm (ii) “The Wild Hunt” (aka “The Furious Host”)

**Tuesday, 5 December Tolkien and Old Norse Mythology**

Read:

TOLKIEN material (Canvas file)

**Thursday. 7 December Final session (TOPIC TBA)**

**Final exam Date t.b.a.**

**Evaluation**

**In-class exam 1 30%**

**In-class exam 2 30%**

**Final Exam or Term Paper 40%**

There is no participation mark in this class. However, the instructor reserves the right to raise the overall grade in cases of superior in-class work.

**Details**

**In-class exams**

Initial quiz section will count for less (around 20%-30%) of the mark followed by an essay (choice of topics) of 450 words each. SEE GERM 305 sample test below.

***Notes*:** Instructor will post notes on Canvas after (almost) every class. The notes are the basis for all exams. *Names* that appear on the notes need to be memorized; otherwise, not.

**Final exam**

The format of the final exam is similar to that of the in-class exams. The quiz section will count for less (around 15%) and there will be two essays of 450 words each. For the second essay, students may choose a more independent and open topic.

**Term paper**

Papers should be no less than 12 and no more than 15 double-spaced pages in length. If necessary, use MLA or Chicago citation guidelines (see <http://www.liunet.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citation.htm> ). Students opting for the term paper **must present the instructor with a three-page draft outlining methodology and the basic thesis as well as the main sources by late November.** The term paper is due on the date of the final exam (t.b.a.) or four days prior to the end of the exam period, whichever is later.

Students must propose a topic themselves, following these guidelines.

1. I do not provide topics. You must come up with your own.
2. The topic must be related to SCAN 335.. You can add other material (Scandinavian or not), but the paper must at least in part deal with in-class material.
3. The topic must be original. No rehash of in-class discussions.

**All requests concerning the final exam (e.g., rescheduling due to illness or university activities) must be directed to Academic Advising. *All* cases of plagiarism (see** <http://www.vpacademic.ubc.ca/integrity/policies.htm> **) will be forwarded to the Dean’s Office.**

**University and Course Policies**

**Academic Integrity**

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or cheating may result in a mark of zero on the assignment or exam and more serious consequences may apply when the matter is referred to the Office of the Dean. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences. A more detailed description of academic integrity, including the University’s policies and procedures, may be found in the **UBC Calendar: Student Conduct and Discipline**.

<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,0,0>

**Academic Concessions**

Under UBC’s academic concession policy (http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm? tree=3,329,0,0), students seeking academic concession for any of three reasons: conflicting responsibilities; medical circumstances; and compassionate grounds, would take the following steps. If you miss marked coursework for the first time (assignment, exam, presentation, participation in class) and the course is still in-progress, please submit a Student Self-Declaration as soon as possible.

<https://www.arts.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2019/10/Student-Self-Declaration-Form-1.6-Arts.pdf>

If this is not the first time that you have requested concession or if classes are over, you are required to fill out the Arts Academic Advising’s online academic concession form, so that an advisor can evaluate your concession case.

**Academic Accommodation**

Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the Centre for Accessibility (previously known as Access & Diversity). The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy LR7: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre for Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

**Class Preparedness**

For every class you are expected to have required reading and/or due assignments completed, and are ready to participate in discussions. If you require additional audio/visual equipment for a presentation or project in class, please notify me through email at least 3 business days before the class so that I can reserve the equipment.

**Respectful Classroom Environment**

Effective learning depends on all of us being comfortable interacting informally with each other about subjects that can sometimes get heated. That makes what is important in every college classroom especially important for us: that the classroom should be a comfortable environment in which everyone feels welcome and respected. This means thinking about the things we say, not perpetuating stereotypes, and apologizing if we say something we didn't mean. It also means contacting me if something happens in our class discussions or on the Course Blog that makes you uncomfortable - or if you believe your own words or actions have made someone else in the class feel uncomfortable - so that we can talk about how to make things better.

**Academic Freedom**

The classroom is a place for the open discussion of ideas and issues. The points of view expressed by the instructor represent a professional perspective of media history, theory and contemporary issues, and you and your peers are expected to contribute. However, if at any time you wish to further discuss an issue taken up from class, or do not feel comfortable to engage, please feel free to contact the Instructor.

**Early Alert**

We participate in the Early Alert Program which helps me support students who are facing difficulties that are interfering with school. If you are feeling stressed, please notify the TA or one of the instructors and indicate that you would like assistance. While we are not trained to help with personal problems, we can get you help from people who can assist you. Any information that they receive from you or us is strictly confidential and is in the interest of your academic success and wellbeing. For more information, please visit EarlyAlert. Course Bibliography.

**This syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor**

**This is what NORD 339 in-class exams will look like.**

**GERM 305 / Test 2**

**Tuesday, March 21 / 11:00 - 12:20**

***Double-space all answers.* Leave a margin. All answers must be in the booklet. Do not leave the room during the exam unless you have completed and handed in the exam. Sign the attendance sheet as it is passed around.**

**I Short answers [20]**

1. *Who* was… (be precise: “Nazi science dude” doesn't cut it). (4)

(i) Friedrich Sertüner (ii) Leonardo Conti (iii) Theodor Morell (iv) Bernhard Rust

2. *What* was…. (4)

(i) Benzedrine (ii) Temmler Works (iii) The “T4 Program” (iv) The “White Rose”

2. Give *two* examples of how the Nazis’ *positive eugenics*. (2)

3. According to Nazi racial science, *certain races prefer certain drugs*. Give *two*

examples. (2)

4. The *Schlieffen Plan*: (i) Why was it necessary? (ii) What is the basic outline? (3)

5. Name *one* way in which the Nazis tried to keep women out of universities. (1)

6. Name *one* way in which Nazi officials were planning *to change the pension system*. (1)

7. Give *two* likely reasons why the meme took hold that Nazi Germany had used

*testosterone* to create “super soldiers”. (2)

8. PR question: How/where did you hear about GERM 305? (1) (Answer after essay).

**II. Write an essay of *no less than 400 words* on one of these topics. [30]**

(1) Easy, but the answer requires a few military details. Pervitin appears to be the ideal solution to a specific German military problem. Explain.

(2) We discussed a remarkable parallel between the dangers of taking Pervitin and the basic logic underlying the Third Reich’s attitude toward the elderly. Discuss the parallel and show how the Pervitin example can be used to show how the logic of Nazi thinking about health and *Leistung* (performance) leads toward senicide.

(3) Hitler’s personal drug use is frequently talked about--maybe too frequently. Discuss the possible reasons for, as well as the dangers of, this very popular topic. In what particular context may his drug use have been of importance? Why? And what was it about Hitler that may have made him predisposed to drugs?

(4) Very generally speaking, German students (not all, but many) started out as the avantgarde of Nazism. Why? After a while though, students (many, but not all) became apathetic. Why? How did the regime try to nazify campus life, and how did students react?