

Course Outline
General Education/ Area C4

Name of Course: German 141 **Germanic Mythology and Legend**

Fall 2012
MWF 12-12:50
Mariposa 2030
class call number: 85246

Instructor: Dr. Marjorie D. Wade
Office: Mariposa 2021
Office phone: 278-5508 (no voice mail)
mdwade@csus.edu
Office Hours: WF 11-11:50; MW 5-5:30

Catalogue Description: Exploration of Germanic myth and legend and their impact on art and literature.
Readings in English. No German language requirement. 3 units

Course Description: German 141 is an introductory course in Germanic mythology which provides an overview of the beliefs and religious practices of the pre-Christian Germanic tribes and documents the afterlife of many of these myths into the 21st century.

Books to be purchased: Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*.
(Penguin Books) 1971
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/tacitus1.html>

Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*,
trans. Jean Young, (Univ. of California Press)1964

H. R. Ellis Davidson,
Gods and Myths of Northern Europe.
(Penguin Books) 1964

The Saga of the Volsungs, trans. Jesse L Byock.
(University of California Press) 1990

The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America.
trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson.
(Penguin Books) 1965

No prerequisites: You do not need to know German for this course.
All discussions and readings will be in English.

Course requirements include regular lecture attendance, timely fulfillment of reading assignments and participation in discussions. Each student is required to write a research paper (minimum length of 5 pages with at least 3 published references) on a selected topic, which is then presented in class. Research project will be evaluated with regard to depth of understanding and thoroughness of research as well as the oral presentation. (Research project will be waived in classes which have enrollment larger than 30 students.) German 141 fulfills the requirements for General Education, Category C 4 and may be taken for credit by German majors/minors.

Attendance: Instructors have the right to administratively remove any student who, during the first two weeks of instruction, fails to attend any two class meetings (for courses that meet two or more times a week), or one class meeting (for courses that meet once a week). It is therefore especially important that students contact instructors in advance regarding absences during the add/drop period. However, do not assume instructors will turn in official drops. It is the responsibility of each student to officially drop any scheduled courses he or she is not attending. Failure to do so will result in penalty grades ("WU" or "F").

Exams: There are periodic announced and unannounced quizzes on the reading material and lectures, a one-hour test on each of the following dates:
September 28., 2012 on the Germanic world, the gods and myths
November 2, 2012 on the heroic legends
November 30, 2012 on the historical legends
The final exam is scheduled for Friday, December 14th at 10:15 in Mariposa 2030.

Grades: Grades will be determined on attendance and quality of classroom participation (25%), and on the grades of the three tests (75%). In an effort to be fair to all students, there will be no make-up tests.
Grading Scale: 90-100% =A, 80-89% =B, 70-79% =C, 60-69% = D, less than 60% F

Learning Objectives:

1. Develop a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the heritage of the German-speaking cultures as it relates to our contemporary world and an appreciation for the richness and diversity of the natural and human community. Students should be able to explain the historical and cultural significance of the pre-Christian culture and compare it to modern Western values.
2. Read and discuss the Germanic myths and legends and document the changes and social transformations that took place as the Germanic tribes converted to Christianity and adapted to a new philosophy of life.
3. Compare and contrast the changing perceptions of nature and the world by the Germanic peoples as they interacted with their neighbors and accepted Christianity. The philosophy and religion of the Northern peoples will be compared with the dramatically different outlook of the Mediterranean cultures and other world religions. Fundamental differences in the cultures that looked to a female, rather than male, creator, will be considered and religions revering female deities--sun goddesses, earth goddesses, and warrior goddesses--will be discussed. The considerable impact of Germanic myth and legend on European art and literature and on Western culture will be examined.
4. Develop library research skills in accessing information on different topics and develop appropriate analytic skills and writing abilities through individual research assignments, note taking, and participation in classroom discussion.

The course focuses on the ideas and values of the rich variety of Germanic peoples, as we know them from their literatures and their religious beliefs. Whereas much of the continental pre-

Christian literature was suppressed by the Christian missionaries, writings from the Scandinavian sources have preserved much of the common tradition of the Germanic peoples. Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth century Edda, an invaluable treatise written as a handbook for poets, provides us a unique source of information about the pagan gods of the North.

The Germanic peoples, who eventually settled in northern Europe, brought their native culture with its social and ethical values and imprinted their attitudes and customs on Western civilization. All nature was perceived as animated. All of nature was believed to be imbued with spirits and personality. The myths represent the collective imagination of the Germanic peoples, changing then with time and circumstances. As the pagan beliefs of these early peoples were adapted to the new Christian philosophy, they formed the very foundation of Western society.

The slow acceptance of the Christian religion led to dramatic clashes of values between the new philosophy with the old heroic ethic. The slow process of Christianization continued from the third century through the eleventh, when the Icelanders became the last of the Germanic peoples to officially accept the new Christian faith. Despite its unfamiliarity to most Americans, the Northern heritage is common to our English-language world. Firmly fixed in our language are four days of our week, named after the Germanic gods: Tuesday for the god Tiu, Wednesday for Wotan, Thursday for Thor, Friday for the goddess Freyja. Familiarity with the stories and legends of the Germanic past offers a deeper understanding and appreciation of our contemporary culture.

Class discussions explore the significance of the differences in the opposing religions. The unforgiving pessimism of paganism fared poorly against the Christian message of love, hope and eternal life. The old beliefs could not survive unchanged. The changes in the faith of the Germanic cultures are studied in the context of the historical, economic, social and cultural perspectives. Class discussions explore the comparative ethics and religious beliefs and practices with those of their Celtic and Roman neighbors. Comparisons with the myths of Greece and Rome, lend familiar perspective to class discussions.

Whereas the written form of the myths and legends are in themselves magnificent literature, they also provide us with the themes that permeate the painting, sculpture, architecture and literature of Western civilization. Countless literary masterpieces have been inspired by the rich mythology of our heritage. Many great writers and artists--among others, Chaucer, Carlyle, Ibsen, and Wagner--have been inspired by the stories of the northern gods and heroes. Their works cannot be fully appreciated without some knowledge of myth and legend. Class discussions explore modern man's need to be aware of his roots with the functions of the ancient oral traditions.

This course was designed to make available to non-German speaking students an understanding of the great cultural contribution made to our Western civilization by the Germanic peoples, who inhabited most of central and Western Europe. From these ancestors of the English, the Germans and the Scandinavians, we have inherited our modern civilization.

The widely differing Germanic tribes from the East Germanic tribes offer a broad and diverse field of study in comparisons among similar yet different cultures. Attention is given to the strong impact of the Roman tradition, so esteemed by the Germanic peoples, and the growing influence of the Roman Church over the literary and cultural development of these peoples.

The slow process of Christianization and education of the pagan North provides a rich study of its civilizing of the Germanic ethic. The contrasts of the pagan heroic values with the Christian philosophy of love; revenge giving way to an ethic of forgiveness, the social organization of the family clan and tribe is absorbed into the universal Christian community. Out of these opposing philosophies evolves our Western culture.

Myth, as primitive religion and man's earliest explanation of science, saga as primitive history, presents vivid portraits of all aspects of society. The images of the goddesses of Germanic mythology can be traced through art and literature. Brunhild, Odin's favorite valkyrie, inspiration for Richard Wagner's "Walküre", becomes "demythologized" within the context of the Christian society and appears in Grimm's folktale as the heroine of "Sleeping Beauty".

The vivid portraits of the women figures in the Scandinavian sagas are of epic proportions and receive special attention in class discussions and reports. The female character is always a pivotal figure in creating movement and action in this genre. The active roles of the women in the Icelandic sagas may be reflected the strong voice of women in present day Icelandic society. Comparisons are discussed in class of the respective roles of both literary and historical women-in Iceland, in the continental Germanic countries, and in the U. S.

Our reading and class discussions develop an understanding of the roots of our society and strive for an appreciation for the diversity of the human community.

TOPICS AND READINGS

Week	Topic	Readings

I	Introduction to Mythology "The Germanic World"	Davidson, pp. 9-14 Tacitus, <i>Germania</i> , pp.101-141
II	Cosmogony Æsir and Vanir Creation Myths in World Mythology	Snorri pp. 29-68 Davidson pp. 25-28, 92-139, 190-202
III	Odin Warrior gods	Snorri pp. 26-28; 48-49; 51-55; 65-66; 81-89; 101-111 Davidson pp. 48-72
IV	Thor Loki and the Giants Trickster Figures in American Indian Legends	Snorri pp. 97-111; 68-80 Davidson pp. 32-35, 73-91, 163-182
V	Gods of Peace and Plenty Gods of the Dead Other gods and goddesses	<i>Elder Edda</i> , pp. 3-12 (handout)
	FIRST HOUR TEST	(Friday, September 28)
VI	Baldr and the Ragnarök	Snorri pp. 80-93 Davidson pp. 35-38, 182-189, 202-210
VII	Elves and Spirits Sources for Germanic Mythology Greece and Rome	Davidson, pp. 14-24 Snorri pp. 7-28

- VIII The Study of Myth Davidson pp 140-162
 From Gods to Heroes ***Volsunga Saga***
- IX The Heroic Epic in Antiquity and the Middle Ages ***Volsunga Saga***
 The Brynhild/Sigurd Legends Snorri pp. 110-122
- X ***The Volsunga Saga, Saga of the Volsungs,*** ***Volsunga Saga***

SECOND HOUR TEST (Friday, November 2)

- XI Legends of the Nibelungen
 The Study of Legend ***The Vinland Sagas***
 The "Discovery of America"
- XII Conversion of the "Germanen"
 Paganism to Christianity Davidson pp 211-223
 The Vinland Sagas
- XIII The Vikings video
 Viking Art
 Mythological themes in Folktale and Ballad
 Richard Wagner: ***Der Ring des Nibelungen*** and its Sources
- XIV ***The Icelandic Saga, Beowulf***
- XV. Discussion and readings on Later Literature and Art
 Myth and Legend in Carlyle,
 Heroes and Hero Worship
 Christiansen, ***Folktales of Norway***
 Crichton, ***Eaters of the Dead***

THIRD TEST (Friday, November 30)

- XVI. Concluding Ibsen, ***The Vikings of Helgeland***
 Discussion Tolkien, ***Lord of the Rings,***
 Simarillion
 Wagner, ***Ring of the Nibelung***
 Clark, ***2001: A Space Odyssey***
 Ranke, ***Folktales of Germany***