

# NORSE MYTHOLOGY

Monday, October 26, 2020

10:00 AM – NOON

Online Class

When we think of the mythologies and epics that inform Western Civilization, we typically think of Greek myths and texts like the *Odyssey*. But this lecture will look north rather than south to understand the foundations of Western literary culture. The English language derives not directly from Latin and Greek, but rather from a Germanic ancestor, and has more in common with Old Norse. Indeed, although England was a Roman colony and is still marked by the technologies and architectures of the Roman Empire, it shares the weather, gods and culture of the Norsemen, who also invaded, colonized and inhabited parts of the island—and who stayed, whereas the Romans left.

Therefore, instead of Zeus and Hera, we will talk about Thor and Freyja; Asgard rather than Mount Olympus; and Ragnarok instead of Hades. The stories of Norse myth are fascinating and strange—the sky is made from a god's skull, and humans grow from his armpits—but they are also mediated through the lens of a Christianity recently come to Iceland. In fact, much of what we know about Norse mythology comes from Christian author Snorri Sturluson's 13<sup>th</sup> C *Prose Edda*, which gives us not only a list of Norse gods and goddesses, but also stories of the origins and destructions of these gods and their world. We will talk about the all-knowing one-eyed Odin and his pet ravens, Thor's battle with the trickster Loki's son, the world-circling Midgard Serpent, and the goddess Frigg's beautiful son Baldr, killed by mistletoe.



As context to these stories of the north, we will think about Norse culture as part of the North Atlantic, through the sculptures of the Inuit artist Abraham Anghik Ruben, who melds totemic and shamanic images shared by Viking and Inuit cultures. These two cultures, rarely thought of together, share climate, animal populations, and sometimes hunting and fishing practices. Ruben's work draws on elements of both cultures, asking us to think about northern mythologies in a more global way.

Questions? Contact Jo Ann Shea at 262-554-8081 or email [joaz44@hotmail.com](mailto:joaz44@hotmail.com)

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Members:\$7 Guests:\$14

Register by October 18, 2020

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Check # \_\_\_\_\_

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The campus is still closed to the general public: Please **mail** checks payable to UW-Parkside/ALL or register online with a **Credit card (click here to pay with card)**. Once your registration is complete you will receive a confirmation email. Then a few days before the class, you will receive an email reminder with the link and instructions on how to join the class.



Dana Oswald is Associate Professor of Literatures and Languages, and is a specialist on Old and Middle English literatures. Her current research is on women's medicine in early medieval England. She is a long-time student of mythologies and monsters, as is clear from her first book-length project, titled *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*. She teaches courses on early British Literature, the History of the English Language, and Epic and Mythology.