

Questions for Professors Erussard and Tinkler

1. What was the specific assignment?

How much are the visions of the gods and of the Germanic culture reported in the Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson and the "Germania" of Tacitus reflected in the "Saga of the Volsungs?" Please base your commentary on the story of Sigurd's life, from the point when his birth is foretold by his dying father in chapter 11 to the moment of his funeral in chapter 33. How can you tell that this story was already central to the culture, even before it was recorded in a 13th century manuscript?

2. How does the assignment fit with the goals of your course?

The purpose of the course is to familiarize students with a civilization that has often been misrepresented in popular culture. The close reading of the texts required for the essay allows students to appreciate the symbolic depth of the legends that form the basis of the culture.

3. Why does this student's essay stand out for you as strong writing?

Cecelia's prose is consistently elegant, precise and most graceful. Her essay is insightful and reveals a very careful reading of the sources and a sensitive awareness of the cultural meaning of the artifacts.

Questions for Cecelia Lefurgy

1. How did you go about completing this essay? What steps did you follow?

Before beginning the essay, I went through the texts for the assignment and underlined passages that were relevant to the themes that I planned to write about. I used colored pens to differentiate between sections, but post-it notes work just as well. Armed with an arsenal of textual evidence, writing the actual essay was much easier. I tied together what I had found in the reading to the lecture material, and the essay came together. I also found it very helpful to begin the essay at least a week before it was due. This way I was able to write without being under pressure, and it also gave me a few days to print the paper out and forget about it. By giving myself distance from the essay, it became easier to proofread and to find things that were unclear or inconsistent.

2. What was the most challenging aspect of this essay assignment?

A great deal of content was available for the essay, and choosing only the strongest facets was challenging. Personally, I find that the most difficult parts of any essay are the introduction and conclusion. Professor Errusard suggested that I start writing the body of the essay and go back to introduction afterward, and to try to incorporate a new idea into the conclusion.

3. How does this essay connect to your work in the course as a whole?

A large part of the course involved dispelling misconceptions about the Viking Age. Popular culture presents images of only a small part of early Scandinavian civilization,

and examining stories from the oral and written tradition allows for a more accurate depiction.

4. What is the most important thing you learned from doing this essay?

Since a goal of the course was to see beyond the misrepresentations of popular culture, one of the first things we learned was that Vikings did not really wear the two-horned helmets. I was devastated. The image of the bloodthirsty warrior wearing that amazing helmet at the head of an ornate ship was what drew me to take the course to begin with. Luckily, reading and interpreting aspects of early Germanic civilization through the stories and mythology restored my admiration for the culture.