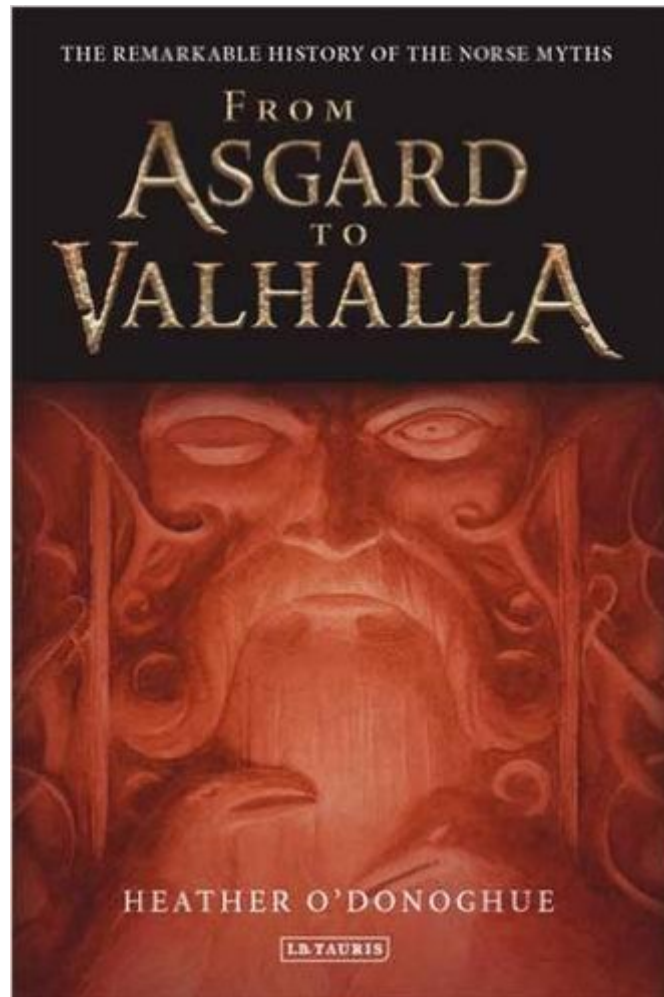


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From Asgard To Valhalla: The Remarkable History Of The Norse Myths



Synopsis

This is the first book to show how the Norse myths have resonated from era to era: from Viking-age stories of ice and fire to the epic poetry of Beowulf; and from Wagner's Ring to Marvel Comics' Mighty Thor. Heather O'Donoghue considers the wider contexts of Norse mythology, including its origins, medieval expression and reception in post-medieval societies right up to the present. From Asgard to Valhalla is a book that will intrigue and delight anyone with an interest in how the Norse myths have so profoundly shaped the western cultural heritage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book represents an attempt to trace the influence of Norse myth in popular and artistic culture from the Middle Ages until the present. Over all, I think the book is pretty good. The first section of the book attempts to provide an overview of Norse myth and does a pretty good job, though the coverage is overly simplistic. The survey is not that of a mythologist but just an attempt to provide some sort of basic foundation for the rest of the book. The second portion is an attempt to look at the influence of Norse myth on other areas of Western culture, with a special focus on the English-speaking world. The first chapter looks at the influence of the Danelaw and Danish settlements in England and it provides a lot of very interesting food for thought. Then we see a discussion of Romanic-era influences, followed by a chapter "The Rise of Racism." Here is where the book starts to go off course, subtly at first, and eventually with greater decisiveness. In particular the tendency to see von List as being a racist (when his writings and actions were clear that he was in favor of tribalism and insisting that all peoples should look to their own roots, additionally

supporting efforts by some in the Jewish community to further Kabbalistic studies) is the beginning of the end of a reasonably objective overview. From here, the tendency to confuse tribalism with racism, and racism with nationalism continues to snowball. The descriptions of Asatru, Forn Sed, etc. are tainted by this confusion. I will admit that Norse Paganism has its problem folk (not just racists either), but the inability to explore the inner logic regarding these groups is somewhat troubling.

From Asgard to Valhalla is an intriguing survey of the history of Norse mythology and its impact on culture, history, politics, literature and art from the early middle ages to modern day. O'Donoghue traces the mythology from the history of its creation and preservation to its later employment by the early romantic movement, its politicization by nationalist, racist and fascist movements, and its imaginative manifestation in modern culture, literature and art. She does an excellent job of summing up Norse mythology for those unfamiliar with it and, for the most part, writes in an engaging and entertaining style. Especially delightful (with one major exception, detailed below) is Chapter 8 where she covers creative representations of the myths in modern culture, tracing its influence on modern poets, heavy-metal musicians and science-fiction and fantasy writers. However there are two things which mar this otherwise well done study. First is the rushed feeling of the text. Some of the subjects she touches upon could have used a bit more treatment. This is, of course, inevitable in a survey of this sort, but weighing in as it does at 200 pages of large type, further development here and there would not seem excessive. In addition, at times her asides become the main subject and the original subject is lost and never followed up upon. I don't know if this text was part of some tenure track necessity, but some more development and editing would probably have made a good text a better one. The second and most troubling aspect of the book is O'Donoghue's simplistic treatment of the neopagan movement inspired by Germanic culture, Heathenry, of which this reviewer, after a fashion, counts himself as a member.

The author is obviously a Christian with a condescending attitude towards Norse religion, culture, and mythology - for she continuously characterizes the Norse mythology/religion as something less than Christianity, as well as crediting Christianity for almost every instance of peace, kindness, beauty, etc. of the Norse. This is a person of blind-faith, seeing none of the horrors rendered by her faith, Christianity - so, apparently she has very limited sight. Examples: Choosing peace instead of taking revenge is "a quasi-Christian resolution" as though none other than a Christian can make such a choice. The blending of Norse-Scandinavian and Christian art and motifs are characterized

as: "making a doctrinal point about relationships between the two belief systems, paganism and Christianity" as though it were a Christian advertising for leaving ones faith for Christianity. Not mentioned, is the possibility that some people embraced both, or even fought back against Christianity. After describing several artifacts bearing both Norse and Christian motifs she concludes: "This is plainly a Christian context..." - apparently a ruse. As she suggest: "It is interesting that early medieval commentators of the Bible regularly proposed ingenious parallels between the events and characters of the Old Testament and those of the New, and tempting to think that this way of giving validity to the Old Testament for Christians provided a model for recuperating the old faith and its attendant mythology.

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