Department of Central, Eastern and Northern European Studies

CENS 202 001: Great Works of Literature from Central, Eastern and Northern Europe

Nordic Narratives of Nature and Culture

University of British Columbia
CENES: Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies

Summer 2026 T1 (3 cred)

Mon/Wed | 2 pm-3.30 pm LIFE 2214

Contact

Instructor: Dr. Karin Filipsson
Office Hour: Fridays 9.30-10.30 am or by appointment.
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Land Acknowledgement
UBC's campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.

Course Description & Structure of Course
This course investigates representations of nature and animals in Northern European film, literature and art, and explores themes like the Nordic child in children's literature like Astrid Lindgren's *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*, indigenous activism, trolls as eco-warriors, and fairy tales. Through fiction, film, and theories of gender, race, and social justice, this course tackles questions such as: What can an ecocritical perspective teach us about ourselves in relation to nature in today's world?

There are no prerequisites for this course. Readings and discussion will be in English.

Each session will follow a variation of the following structure: 1. An introduction to the session with a short lecture on key historical or intellectual background required for discussion. 2. Structured group work in which students work collaboratively to generate answers to a series of questions about course material and engage in guided discussion about material. 3. A guided, open discussion in which students share their findings with the course. 4. Wrap-up lecture with comments about how daily discussion relates to upcoming lectures/course work.

Course Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to

- **describe** select developments in the social, economic, and cultural history informing central and parts of European literary cultures
- **discuss**, **analyze**, and **interpret** representative texts from these eras and various geographic locations with a thematic and analytic focus on nature
- **describe**, **discuss**, **analyze**, and **interpret** written and visual material using standard tools of literary and visual analysis

Consult the schedule below for detailed outcomes affiliated with each unit of the course.

Grade Breakdown*

Participation	15%
Learning Journals	25%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Project	35%
Proposal	10%

Grading Scale

A+ (90-100%);	A (85-89);	A- (80-84);
B+ (76-79);	B (72-75);	B- (68-71);
C+ (64-67);	C (60-63);	C- (55-59);
D (50-54);	F (0-49)	

***Note**: You must receive a passing grade for each component to receive a passing grade in the course.

Reading Materials (provided in LOCR or on Canvas). Parts of the following works:

1. Astrid Lindgren. *Ronia the Robber's Daughter*
2. Tove Jansson. *Moominland in Winter*
3. Tove Jansson. *The Summer Book.*
4. HC Andersen. *Fairy Tales.*

5. Linnea Axelsson. *Aednan.*
6. Risto Isomäki. *Sands of Sarasvati.*
7. Frida Nilsson. *The Ice Sea Pirates.*
8. Sigbjørn Skåden.*Notes from a Backwoods Sámi Core*.

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Additional materials will be provided on our Course Reserves/Canvas Site

Participation (15%)
An ideal setting for the course is achieved when we are all present, prepared, and eager to engage the material in our class. Engagement takes place differently for different people: being engaged can take place by responding to class discussions, contributing in small group discussions, asking for clarification, agreeing with the point someone makes in class, respectfully challenging a point someone made in class, etc. Some people are more vocal during class discussions and others will be more vocal in small group discussions. The point here is that you will have different venues in which you can contribute your ideas and, as such, are expected to engage on some level regularly throughout our course.

One of the main aspirations of the course will be to help you develop communication skills on complex topics. To this end, I will develop material and prepare exercises, which will facilitate the development of such skills; however, the activities don't work without *your* contribution. Meaning, even though you may not be a vocal participant in other contexts, think of our class as a perfect venue in which you can practice being more vocal.

What does it mean to be prepared? You will succeed in our class by reading the material for the days on which it is assigned. Reading, for our purposes, is not a passive activity: take notes about things you found engaging, confusing, illuminating, frustrating in a given text. Those notes (in the margins, on printouts, in note-books) will come in handy when you are asked to tell your classmates about your reading experience. Being prepared also means that you should bring the text to class in some fashion (hard copy or digital). As for attendance, you will succeed in the course by attending regularly and being on time for class sessions in person or online (through live stream or recorded lectures).

Learning Journals (25 %)
You will complete regular discussion posts on canvas which will guide your reading progress in our class. These are designed to make sure that you are following the reading schedule. They are also educational tools that help you think critically about the material covered.

Midterm Exam (15 %) and Final Project (35 %) and Proposal (10%)
You will complete a timed, midterm exam online. You will complete either a written assignment or a creative response as part of your final project. These assignments will give you a chance to showcase your thinking on critical matters pertaining to the texts and ideas we address in our course. You will receive prompts for these papers with detailed specifications ahead of deadline.

All assignments are assessed on 1) command of content and concepts developed in the course; 2) the quality of humanistic analysis and argument presented in the assignment; 3) the efficacy of communication in the finished product.

Inclusive Course
You will effectively learn in an inclusive space that continues to challenge you intellectually. I will strive to foster such a space in the classroom and in online forums used for class. Most of all, *YOU* are required to contribute to the shaping of such an inclusive and intellectually stimulating setting by honoring the diverse backgrounds, statuses, and experiences of your fellow students. Please communicate to me any concerns or needs that immediately relate to your learning in this regard.

Communication
Communication is essential for your success in our course. I will send you regular updates about class via email and

will post to our Canvas site. For this reason, you should regularly (i.e., daily) check your official UBC email account and our Canvas site for important announcements about our course.

If you send me an email, please use the standard format for addressing faculty or standards employed in professional communication. I will respond to your email within one or two business days.

Academic Accommodation
If you require any accommodation that can improve your experience in and facilitate success in the classroom, please reach out to me. Moreover, be sure to consult the Vancouver Academic Calendar, which provides helpful information about the services to which you have access as UBC student. For more info: http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,34,0,0. Here is an excerpt from the Calendar:

> The University of British Columbia recognizes its moral and legal duty to provide academic accommodation. The University must remove barriers and provide opportunities to students with a disability, enabling them to access university services, programs, and facilities and to be welcomed as participating members of the University community. The University's goal is to ensure fair and consistent treatment of all students, including students with a disability, in accordance with their distinct needs and in a manner consistent with academic principles.

The UBC Centre for Accessibility can provide accommodations that enable successful classroom experiences for students with accessibility needs. For more information, visit: https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/centre-for-accessibility.

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 if the matter is referred to the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

I'd be happy to discuss this with you in more detail. You can also find more info about UBC's official academic integrity policy here: http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0.

Technology/Other Distractions/Food in the Classroom
Technology has enhanced academic life tremendously and continues to impact our work! I love technology as much as you do. It can be a great asset to your experience in our class. To this end, you might like to take notes on laptops or tablets and might like to consult resources during class. However, technology can be distracting and can negatively impact your learning and that of your fellow students. Please refrain from texting and other distracting communication, which includes working with materials not required for course, online shopping, and completing assignments for another class.

Personal and Intellectual Support for Learning

UBC provides a number of services to help students succeed in learning and being in our campus community. This includes services on topics such as academics, money, immigration, health and wellbeing. You can find out more information about various programs following this link: https://students.ubc.ca/support. If you feel comfortable, reach out to me. I can try to provide additional information about available resources.

Copyright

All materials of this course (course handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the Course Instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. I do not permit students to record classes.

Nordic Studies and Modern European Studies @UBC

You can complement the work you do in our course by enrolling in other courses offered in Nordic studies in the Modern European Studies Program, or other coursework in the Department of Central, Eastern, and Northern European Studies. We offer exciting minors and majors in language and culture studies, as well as interdisciplinary studies. For more information about these programs, check out the department website (cenes.ubc.ca) or reach out to me! I'd be glad to put you in touch with the advisors for these programs.

ChatGPT and AI Use

Students cannot (and should not) use AI to create graded content for the course. This includes copying and pasting or rewriting ChatGPT-generated content.

Students who use ChatGPT for graded work to any degree beyond brainstorming must disclose to the instructor how exactly AI technologies have been involved in the process in a short-written statement (~1 page) submitted with graded work. Students will be evaluated primarily on the portion of work they generated. Failure to appropriately disclose use of AI crosses the line into academic misconduct.

AI technology is not yet terribly effective in writing in the humanities. It is too vague, it invents citations that don't exist, and it consistently looks like a bot wrote your essay and not a human being.

COURSE SCHEDULE

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND CLASSES

The dates are found below and are **subject to change**:

Week 1 Introduction	Read for Class	Work in Class
Sep 9	Syllabus	Introduction to Course Why Narratives of Nature? Reading Literature
Module 1 The Nordic child	**Read for Class**	**Work in Class**
Week 2	Astrid Lindgren: Ronia the Robber's Daughter Chapters 1-2. 2) Greg Garrard: Ecocriticism. Chapter 1. Beginnings.	Discussion of the Nordic Child
Week 3.	Marie Öhman: Traditional storytelling and new environmentalism in Astrid Lindgren's Ronia the Robber's Daughter. 2) Åsa Nilsson-Skåve: An Ecocritical Reading of Ronia, The Robber's Daughter.	Discussion of readings

Module 2. The Moomin Trolls and Elements of Nature	**Read for Class**	**Work in Class**
Week 4.	Tove Jansson. The Morning Swim, The Magic Forest, Moolight (The Summer Book). 2) Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska: "Making Kin in Moominvalley: An Ecocritical Reading of Tove Jansson's Moomin Books."	. Discussion of readings
Week 5.	Tove Jansson. The snowed-up drawing-room (Moomin land Midwinter). 2) Nancy Lyman Huse: "Equal to Life: Tove Jansson's Moomin trolls." 3) Garrard. Ecocriticism. Chapter 3. Wilderness.	Discussion of readings
Module 3. Indigenous Perspectives and The Snow Queen	**Read for Class**	**Work in Class**
Week 6.	Linnea Axelsson: Ædnan. 2) Petra Broomans: "Migration and Loss of Identity in Linnea Axelsson's Ædnan." 3) Sigbjørn Skåden: Notes from a Backwoods Saami Core.4) Paula Henrikson: Arms and the Men: Linnea Axelsson's Ædnan and the Epic Tradition	Discussion of readings
Week 7.	HC Andersen: The Snow Queen. 2) Garrard: Ecocriticism. Chapter 7. Indigeneity. OPTIONAL: Watch Disney's Frozen I and II.	Discussion of readings
Module 4. Trolls as Eco-Warriors	**Read for Class**	**Work in Class**
Week 8.	Ida Moen Johnson: "Queer Species in Moominvalley: A Post humanist Reading of Tove Jansson's Moomin Books."	
Week 9.	Nina Goga: Chapter 9. Interspecies encounters Nordic Narratives of Nature and the Environment.	Discussion of readings
Week 10.	**BREAK**	

Module 5. Nordic Climate Fiction	**Read for Class**	**Work in Class**
Week 11.	1) Frida Nilsson: The Ice Pirates Chapter 1. Miki, Chapter 2. Iron Apple, Chapter 3. The Cormorant that came back. Midterm exam online Wed Nov 18	

Week 12	GUEST LECTURES	MANDATORY

Week 13.	2) Nina Goga: Children's Literature as an Exercise in Ecological Thinking (In Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures: Nordic Dialogues). 3) Lykke Guanio-Uluru: Climate Fiction in Nordic Landscapes. 2) Garrard: Ecocriticism. Chapter 5. Apocalypse.
Week 14.	Last day of class Mon Dec 7.