Andrew S.: You're tuned in to 90.7 FM KALX Berkeley. I'm your host, Andrew Saintsing, and this is The Graduates, the interview talk show where we speak to UC Berkeley graduate students about their work here on campus and around the world. Today, I'm joined by Adam Carl of the Scandinavian Department.

How are you doing today, Adam?

Adam Carl: I'm doing great. How are you doing?

Andrew S.: Doing pretty well. So, Adam, I brought you on today, because I saw that you are interested in Norse mythology. I guess I'd just like to know more about how you came to Norse mythology and what you're doing here on campus with it.

Adam Carl: Yeah, that's a really good question, and that's the first thing that people always ask me. "Why are you in the Scandinavian Department? Are you Scandinavian?" And I'm not, but I think I have to go with Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit and The Fellowship of the Ring, into The Two Towers. My family's not terribly religious, but those are the closest things we have to holy books, and my mom can attest to this. We had the extended editions of everything, and now we have it of The Hobbit too. We'd read all the books and we're watch all the movies every Christmas.

Andrew S.: In a day?

Adam Carl: Well, not in a day.

Andrew S.: Okay.

Adam Carl: But in the course of December, whenever you have time. I owe it to Tolkien, and he was a professor too.

Andrew S.: What was it ... He started The Hobbit, because he was grading somebody's paper and just wrote the first sentence, and then that was how the first book was born? Is that right?

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: Is that the story?.

Adam Carl: That's the folklore, yeah.

Andrew S.: Yeah.

Adam Carl: I guess I wanted to be Tolkien. I wanted to study Old Norse. If you listen to Rohirrim, Viggo Mortensen, when he's playing Aragorn in The Two Towers, will say a couple lines in

Old English, and all Tolkien did was rebrand that Old English into "Rohirrim." Air quotes there, and it's the same language. You can hear the influence.

Andrew S.: Have you written anything like Tolkien?

Adam Carl: No, but a lot of people in my program are. He wrote it very late, so maybe I will too.

Andrew S.: Right. You have to wait for the inspiration.

Adam Carl: Exactly, for that one really bad paper.

Now I'm here, I'm studying Old Norse, which is very close to modern Icelandic. It's a lot of fun. It's the language of the Vikings.

Andrew S.: Old Norse wasn't written in Latin script, right? Did you have to learn the Runic alphabet?

Adam Carl: Here's the dirty secret. I haven't learned runes. I'm the only person in the department who still hasn't. I can get by if I have the transliteration. I know what they do, but I haven't memorized it.

Andrew S.: How do you get by with it?

Adam Carl: Well, because they did write in Latin script.

Andrew S.: I feel like they saw the Latin script after Christianization-

Adam Carl: That's true.

Andrew S.: ... of Scandinavia?

Adam Carl: Yep.

Andrew S.: They wrote in runes all before that time?

Adam Carl: Yep.

Andrew S.: You basically just read what was written after Christianization.

Adam Carl: Exactly, yeah. There are archeologists who will study the runes and will go out into the field and start digging stuff up. Most of that stuff is in a museum by now, because Scandinavia pays for that sort of research. Everything's pretty much locked away. We already know about it. There aren't a whole lot of new discoveries to come out. That is starting to change with other technology that's coming out, but if you look at the Runic

scripts, it has a lot of cross marks and a lot of vertical slashes, and you can tell that this alphabet is meant to be carved into things, whether it's wood or stone.

Some people even think that there were clay tablets that you could Etch A Sketch away and then rewrite, so you could write, "We need milk," in runes and then erase it the next day. It was a carving alphabet. And then when Christianity came through ... In Iceland, it's a really nice, easy date. We just round to about 1000 AD. After that happened, people started writing not just in Latin, but in the vernacular, in Old Norse, and they started writing down things that their grandparents were telling them, or their parents.

These are the sagas or some of the folk tales that we have coming out of the Medieval North. It's really a whole lot of nostalgia, but it's reliable. This is where the folklore part of my research comes in. We can trust what people tell us, maybe not 100% accurately, but people don't get things horribly wrong.

Andrew S.: This is post-Christianization, so these are Christian people.

Adam Carl: Yeah, Christian people writing about their Pagan ancestors.

Andrew S.: I assume there's some bias and some change to some of these stories, right?

Adam Carl: Totally, but not as much as you'd think, and typically only in areas of religious worship or ritual. Certain things will be made more demonic from a Christian perspective than they probably actually were, but we do have some really reliable records. We have a book called Landnamabok, the "land-taking book," where people were settling Iceland. There weren't any natives there. It's not like there was an indigenous population that got colonized. It's one of the few cases in the history of humanity where nobody was on the island when new people arrived. The institutional memory, the oral history, the stories that people were telling, it was so accurate that they remembered who their grandfather was, where the person landed, and how the whole farm developed from there. We have records going back 200 years before writing.

Andrew S.: Are Icelandic people just notoriously factual?

Adam Carl: That is the stereotype even in the Middle Ages. They're known as the record keepers, repository of ancient knowledge, if you will. There were embellishments, but people, for a really long time, discounted two sagas that we have that say that a guy named Erik the Red and Leif Erikson, his son, went to a really weird place that they called Vinland. It was past Greenland. Historians for a really long time said, "Oh no, that's a legendary place. That doesn't exist." And then we found Viking ruins in Newfoundland, in pretty much the exact place that the sagas tell us where they would be. Discount the trolls, take out the dragons, there's always a little bit of truth underneath.

Andrew S.: Have you read all the sagas?

Adam Carl: All the popular ones, I'm going to say.

Andrew S.: Okay.

Adam Carl: Some of the unpopular ones. The largest amount of non-Latin stuff that we have coming out of Medieval Europe is in Old Norse. There are a couple of reasons why we think that might be. A lot of it has to do with nostalgia, worrying about what your Pagan ancestors were doing. Were they in Hell? Were they in Heaven? They didn't convert. They needed to work that out and say, "Oh no, they were noble Pagans. They were following Christ. They just didn't know his name." That sort of stuff. There's a lot of nostalgia on the one hand, but also having these redemption narratives for their ancestors. You can't trust that as much.

Andrew S.: That's interesting, that people in Iceland wanted to make it look like their ancestors were following Christ, even though they didn't know who Christ was. I've always noticed that there's a lot of parallels in Norse mythology stories between their stories and Christian stories. Like Odin hangs himself on a tree for three days. Do you think those stories are the product of people trying to reimagine Norse mythology in a more Christian light? Do you think a lot of these Norse myths are altered in that way?

Adam Carl: I don't know if they're altered in that way, but I do think you're on to something there, where you can imagine the new convert talking to someone who hasn't converted yet. Let's say right around 999 in Iceland, and they're talking about which God is better. Are you going to pick Christ or are you going to pick Odin? The Odin guy goes, "Hey, my God hung on a tree and gave us all this runic knowledge, went into a trance state, saw the afterlife, came back and gifted this to us." And you can one up that by saying, "Oh yeah? My God Christ died for us and came back to life."

Andrew S.: You're saying that the Odin story of hanging on a tree arose completely likely independently of the Christian story?

Adam Carl: Yeah, that could be. I think that's the easiest explanation, if we're using Occam's Razor. But the reason that that one got preserved and not a whole bunch of other stories about him, that's because there was comparison to Christianity.

Andrew S.: I'm really interested in what you think about modern interpretations of Norse mythology. Does Thor of Marvel Comics at all look like Thor of purely Scandinavian mythology?

Adam Carl: No, and I'm fine with that.

Andrew S.: Yeah?

Adam Carl: That's how I'm going to answer that. And I'll say why no, and then I'll say why I'm fine with it later. Thor, in the mythology as we're given him in both the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda, should have red hair. He should-

Andrew S.: Is that your ...

Adam Carl: Yeah, he should be ginger. That's baseline. Similarly, Loki should be very fair and blonde. He's a smooth talker. He's not the devious, jet black, slicked back hair. He's not a greaser. They're doing, I would argue, a little bit more of a Christ/Satan dynamic there, or the good and the evil, the light and the dark, and that's fine. The other thing is that Thor, in the poetry, is kind of an idiot.

Andrew S.: I've noticed that. He just runs around with his hammer, right? Just swinging at stuff.

Adam Carl: Yeah. Whether he should or not, he's going to go and smack something.

Andrew S.: That's interesting, that this would be a God. Do you think the Norse or Scandinavian people were actually worshiping this God, or they had a sense of humor about him, or ...?

Adam Carl: That could be true, because people have a sense of humor about their own religion now. Depending on which direction that humor goes, that depends on the person. Yeah, we have a lot of archeological evidence that people were worshiping Thor. We actually have a couple prayers that might be post-Christian, so there's some syncretic tradition going on there. John Lindow has a whole article, he's from Berkeley, just retired, about maybe some pleas to Thor for help.

Yeah, we have ... This is a fun story. We have, in Denmark, an archeological find with three different molds for, I think it's iron. You pour in the molten iron and you get jewelry out, and there's one that looks exactly like Mjölnir, like Thor's hammer, and on the far right side ... Mjölnir's on the far left side. On the far right side, there's a cross. In between, there's a design that could go either way. It looks kind of like a hammer, kind of like a cross, and as far as we can tell, Christianity and Paganism co-existed. At least enough for the smith to make money off of both sides, right?

Andrew S.: Like in Ireland or ...

Adam Carl: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Andrew S.: I guess people did worship Thor, so then why does he seem like such a, I guess, terrible person?

Adam Carl: Well, think about it this way. You've got lots of Gods to choose from. Your own God doesn't have to do everything.

Andrew S.: Right.

Adam Carl: Thor can be an idiot, because you have Odin to do all the poetry and all the scheming behind the scenes.

Andrew S.: Right.

Adam Carl: Thor can really just be the guy who goes out and hits stuff. We also have some sense from the archeological finds, like the hammer, the cast of the hammer, that suggest that Thor was more a man of the people. He was the folk hero, the rural hero. If you're a farmer, you're going to worship Thor. And if you're in the king's court, or if you're part of the jarldom, the upper class, the aristocratic side of things, you're probably going to worship Odin. There seemed to be a socioeconomic difference between the two, and you might imagine that if the upper class were the ones writing the books later, they'd poke fun at the peasants' Gods, right?

Andrew S.: Right. That's fair.

Adam Carl: Like, "Ha ha, Thor, that idiot. Doesn't know court poetry. Ha ha." Yeah.

Andrew S.: Actually, the newest Thor movie had an interesting take. It's about Thor seeing some of the more problematic moments of Odin's past, which is interesting to me, because Odin has some sketchy moments, right?

Adam Carl: He's a total pervert. To even say that, there's a translation of an insult that translates to, "Pervert," and it's spot on.

Andrew S.: Interesting. Wait, so someone was insulting Odin?

Adam Carl: Yeah, it's Loki, because of course it is. Yeah.

Andrew S.: Another thing that I've noticed, right? Thor is running around just smashing things with his hammer. He's specifically smashing a certain group, the enemies of the Gods, which actually come off like not totally bad guys all the time, right?

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: You sympathize with them in a lot of cases.

Adam Carl: I don't know if the Medieval audience would have, but I think-

Andrew S.: Right, yeah.

Adam Carl: We totally can see that there's some colonial stuff going on there.

Andrew S.: We have interpretations of these stories. Do you think these are completely different from how Medieval audiences would've interpreted the stories they're telling?

Adam Carl: I think they've got to be.

Andrew S.: Yeah?

Adam Carl: If we're going to be really good historians, everything has a context, and this is the school of thought that came out of Berkeley, so toeing the party line here. You can't read a text in isolation. You have to know who wrote it. You have to know what the target audience was, what the major political things were. If you take the song, "War, huh, what is it good for," and you apply that to any war, it starts to lose some of that timeliness. It might pick up different kinds of timeliness and it might have different impacts, but it's always going to be pointing backwards towards Vietnam, calling on that rhetoric for it.

I think, and this is where I can segue into that, I think it's okay that Marvel's doing its own thing. I think it's doing it really well, because we have to be aware of the thousand year history between when the Vikings stopped worshiping the Pagan Gods, and what as human beings who are alive today have to deal with. There's a history that they didn't know about that we do.

Andrew S.: Do you study new interpretations of Thor? Does that factor in at all? Do you study current retellings?

Adam Carl: Yeah, totally.

Andrew S.: You're trying to parse out what's the modern influence? What's the Medieval portion of it? What's Christian influence?

Adam Carl: Yeah, to some degree.

Andrew S.: Yeah? You're ...

Adam Carl: You can't really separate things out, because then you're ignoring parts of the work, but you can identify certain things that are stylistically in line with the Medieval, and so, just like in academia, you can always tack an -ism on to anything. We call this Medievalism, so it's not Medieval, but it's trying to be like the Medieval. Game of Thrones has a very particular Medievalism. It's dark, gritty. It's plague ridden, rape everywhere terribleness,

and it's just throwing all of life's terrible things at you, and that's not what the Middle Ages were like. People lived. People are people. They're decent no matter what, and they do some terrible things sometimes.

But then you have the flip side, like Lord of the Rings, to bring it full circle here. Which is totally invested in the escapist fantasy, the idea that it was a simpler and better time. You don't have industrialization. You don't have neo-Nazi groups running around, and those are both types of Medievalism. You can start identifying who's picking up what, what they're going to do with it. It keeps you from being that person in the movie theater like, "Thor didn't do that!" That's not the point.

Andrew S.: We talk about the colonial element of these stories, where Thor is running around just slaughtering a group of people, basically.

Adam Carl: Right, I shouldn't be laughing at that. Sorry.

Andrew S.: Right, yeah.

Adam Carl: It's a fantasy world. It's giants. I prefer trolls as the translation, but ...

Andrew S.: Right. Should we read them as people? Should we find this colonial element, or should we read, "The Gods are there to protect the people from elements of nature?"

Adam Carl: Right, right. I have two thoughts on that. One is aimed at how you should treat the Medieval works, and the other's aimed at how we should retell them. I don't think it makes any sense to yell at people who are dead for a thousand years and say, "You should've known better. You should've known what colonialism could've done. You should've known what gender politics should be like. You should've had egalitarian freedom." We can't do that. It's a totally different time. These ideas weren't in place. The events that led to our ideas of these concepts didn't happen.

On the one hand, I don't find that productive. And this is what I tell my undergrad students too, because I tend to teach courses on Vikings and gender or Vikings and Orientalism. That's a cool intersection there.

Andrew S.: Interesting, yeah.

Adam Carl: Because if you're centered in Rome and you're looking North, there are a bunch of weird Pagans who kind of look like they have civilization. It looks an awful lot like how Asia's treated today, so it works. But I do find it productive to read the Medieval text to get a new sense, like a human experiment. What did they do? What were the contexts? Is there anything we can learn from that? And one of the things that's really productive is they had multiple genders. It's a spectrum, and you don't think of that when you think of big, manly, hyper-masculine Vikings, right?

Andrew S.: Right.

Adam Carl: That's our conception of them, but there was a sliding scale. You could be hyper-masculine and own a farm, and then go out and wield weapons. And you could be a woman and do that. You could put on chain mail. You could get out a sword. You could go kill people as though you were a man. You could own property, but that meant that you couldn't deal with any of the feminine side of things.

Andrew S.: Interesting.

Adam Carl: There was a middle ground, where you could practice magic, and magic is very feminine gendered. You're not feminine or masculine if you're moving from one end of the spectrum to the other. You can't quite own property, but you can't quite be in the women's quarters. But you do have a ritual magical realm, and then you have the feminine, which is producing home-spun cloth, sequestered but in charge of the domestic sphere. Women had the keys to the whole house, if they were upper class women. And people can move along these lines pretty freely.

And each came with benefits and downsides, but it wasn't a utopia, because you did want to be hyper-masculine. That's how you had the most political and economic agency, but for religious stuff, you definitely wanted to be on the more feminine side of things. It's not really material benefit, and that's our criticism that we could have, but if I'm talking to, let's say, my family members about non-binary or about transgender people, like, "This is totally unnatural. There are two genders, two sexes," I can point to these texts and say, "Well, the Vikings didn't see it that way." If anyone would have, they would have, right?

Andrew S.: Yeah.

Adam Carl: As a human experiment, we can point to it and say, "Things that we know of didn't have to be this way."

Andrew S.: There were multiple categories. There wasn't just a binary, but you're saying you had to fall into one of the categories still?

Adam Carl: Right, right. Society is still going to put its constraints on you. Carol Clover, also from Berkeley, wrote a whole big long article about this. She made her career out of that article. She's also retired now, unfortunately, but she's still around. She has an office.

Andrew S.: Odin and Loki, in the myths, I guess I would say Odin comes up as hyper-masculine, right? He's the Allfather. He's in charge of everything. He's about as high as you can get.

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: But he's also practicing magic, right?

Adam Carl: Exactly.

Andrew S.: He occupies two categories, right?

Adam Carl: I'm so glad that you've read this stuff, because this is nice. Yeah, and because he's the head of the Pantheon, he can get away with it. He has the best of both worlds. If you're a woman and you want to compete with Odin, you're going to lose. If you're a man and you want to compete with Odin, you're going to lose. He just wins at everything, whether fairly or unfairly, that's beside the point. He's going to win. It's just where that creepy pervert side comes in, because he has his way with everybody, whether it's consensual or not.

On the flip side, and I think this is where you're heading, right? Loki?

Andrew S.: Right, there's the whole myth where he basically mothers Odin's horse, right?

Adam Carl: Which is awesome. Yeah.

Andrew S.: Yeah.

Adam Carl: Neo-Nazis don't talk about that part. Yeah. He not only shape shifts into an animal. He shape shifts genders and that's not the weird part, right? He is now female sexed enough to give birth, and then reverts back to his human male form, and then has children, sires children as a man. He's got the worst of both worlds in some ways, because all of his children are monsters.

Andrew S.: Interesting.

Adam Carl: But it's not because he goes back and forth on the spectrum, because Odin does that too. There's a positive end and there's a negative end to this, and it's completely agnostic to that spectrum.

Andrew S.: Why does Loki get the short end of the stick?

Adam Carl: He's half-giant.

Andrew S.: Oh, I see.

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: He can't really be one of the Gods.

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: All right.

Adam Carl: He and Odin apparently took a blood bond, so they're technically blood brothers. This is where Marvel gets it wrong.

Andrew S.: Right, yeah. I've always thought, "They're not ... He's not Thor's brother."

Adam Carl: We joke sometimes in the department that we need a stamp that says, "Marvel's not myth." Stamp, for the exams. But yeah, Loki keeps trying to get into the in crowd. He tries to be one of the Æsir, one of the Gods, and they never quite accept him.

Andrew S.: Is that what drives him to end the world?

Adam Carl: Yeah, a little bit. And it would, right?

Andrew S.: Yeah. Wow, just a little nicety and they would've all survived.

Adam Carl: Right, right.

Andrew S.: Cool. We've been talking all about these Norse mythologies and Medieval history, but before we started this interview, you actually told me that this isn't even the main focus of your dissertation anymore, which I was a little surprised to hear. What actually is your dissertation about now?

Adam Carl: Well, that's still in the works. I should have it figured out by now, but this is a pretty common trajectory. People get hooked by the Medieval and the Vikings, and then our graduate students tend to find cool stuff in the modern period, and that's true for me too. One of my favorite authors, everybody should go out and read her. Her name is Selma Lagerlöf. She was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize in Literature. She's Swedish, and she was pushing back up against all these realist novels that I really hate. I don't really need to see what flowers are in the jug of the dining room table of this bourgeois home. I don't care. Give me the trolls, and that's exactly what Selma Lagerlöf does.

She goes back, she reads all these Icelandic sagas, the myths, and she starts pulling on those and retelling them in turn-of-the-century 1900s. She was known as the great Swedish storyteller, so she's really captured my imagination now.

Andrew S.: She's writing novels or ...?

Adam Carl: Yeah, novels and short stories. Not really poetry. She tried that and didn't really get published.

Andrew S.: Are there a collection of failed poems?

Adam Carl: They're in some of her letters.

Andrew S.: Okay.

Adam Carl: Yeah, I just got the chance to read some of them.

Andrew S.: Were they ... They weren't that great or ...?

Adam Carl: I mean, I kind of love her, so ...

Andrew S.: Oh, okay. So-

Adam Carl: They should not have been the first thing she published, that's true.

Andrew S.: Okay. From what I somewhat know about Scandinavian literature, Ibsen, right?

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: She's rebelling against that whole tradition?

Adam Carl: Yeah. They're contemporaries, but because she was a woman, she got into writing a little bit later. She had a career as a schoolteacher, and Ibsen was already writing his plays and his novels and stuff like that, long before Selma Lageröf got her first book published. But they're contemporaries, and that's the realism I'm talking about.

Andrew S.: Right. Is she Scandinavian Tolkien? Do people know her that well?

Adam Carl: Definitely in Swedish, because she's on the currency.

Andrew S.: Oh, really?

Adam Carl: I forget which bill she's on, but yeah.

Andrew S.: Wait.

Adam Carl: And she has a fantastic hat. You should look it up some time.

Andrew S.: Interesting.

Adam Carl: Yeah, so she's celebrated still to this day, and people all across the world probably know Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Adventures through Sweden. It's a little tiny kid, who gets shrunk down to the size of an elf, and gets on the back of a goose and flies all throughout Sweden. I didn't know this was internationally known until some of my international students from Asia were in my class and were like, "Oh, I read this as a kid." What?

Andrew S.: What? Cool.

Adam Carl: But it's a really good fairy tale.

Andrew S.: Okay, I have to look into this. Selma Lagerlöf.

Adam Carl: Yeah, L-A-G-E-R-L, and an O umlaut, F.

Andrew S.: What exactly do you do with the works? Do you read this as a person who's studying literature, or do you read it as a person who's studying history?

Adam Carl: A little bit of both.

Andrew S.: Okay.

Adam Carl: Yeah. I think our modernists tend to be more on the literature side of things. But I do have my folklore background from Ohio State, and that has trained me to treat literature as history. The thing that folklorists always do is we treat text like it's an object and objects like it's a text. Archeologists hate us for that, and literature people hate us for that, but it's productive. I like it.

I like looking through Selma Lagerlöf's stuff, all of the things that she's ever written, trying to pull out things in her history, things in her life, and one of the things that I noticed for a seminar paper I just wrote was that she has a whole outline for how to teach kids. She's mainly writing for kids, and you can read her novels and her short stories as a pedagogical portfolio. "Here's how kids learn. Here's how they don't. These are all the ways in which teachers are failing their kids right now, and I'm going to do better through fiction."

Andrew S.: Cool.

Adam Carl: And that's awesome too. Learning can be fun. That was her whole shtick before we even had words for that.

Andrew S.: You have to know what is going on in Swedish education for that?

Adam Carl: Yeah.

Andrew S.: How do you even tackle that?

Adam Carl: Yeah, that's a good question. That's where the history comes in, because you can go to newspapers. You can look at editorials, just like you can today, and you can get the local school issues that people are talking about. Those are all digitized, because Scandinavia has boatloads of government money to archive the stuff and then research it. One thing that our country should probably work on. Norway has all the oil money, so anything you ever want from Norway is probably recorded and digitized at this point. Sweden's second behind them, so you can go there. Or a lot of her letters were preserved, so I went through and I read those. She outlines what she's trying to do, even down to certain passages as she's drafting. She's like, "That didn't work. Maybe this will."

Andrew S.: Who's she writing these letters to?

Adam Carl: Everyone. It was the email of the day or text messaging.

Andrew S.: She's just letting people know.

Adam Carl: And I should also mention, because it's important, she's probably the first lesbian writer to win a Nobel Prize as well.

Andrew S.: Interesting. Did people know? Was she out?

Adam Carl: It was a lot easier to be a lesbian than a gay person at that time, because you could just be two elderly women living together.

Andrew S.: Right.

Adam Carl: That happens.

Andrew S.: Okay, so it wasn't a topic of discussion.

Adam Carl: Yeah, but the thing that surprised me was, in her letters to everybody, she would talk about Miss Elkan, and that was her girlfriend. She'd just mention that casually, like, "Oh, they're going to Italy this month." Or, "Oh, they're visiting Palestine."

Andrew S.: Cool.

Adam Carl: So it seems like people knew. They just assumed they were really good friends. They didn't know they were really good friends.

Andrew S.: Wait, when did she live?

Adam Carl: Oh boy, I should have this memorized. Normally I have my reading list, and I can just glance down and look at it. I think she was born in 1855 or maybe 1860, somewhere in there. And Swedish authors tend to live a really long time, so she died in 1930-something, but she lived through World War I and was a strong advocate for pacifism all throughout it.

Andrew S.: Did Sweden fight in World War I?

Adam Carl: No, no. It wasn't for humanitarian reasons really. They got beaten up by Russia. They didn't really have a military to fight with at that point.

Andrew S.: Everyone was perfectly fine with pacifism in Sweden.

Adam Carl: Yeah, exactly.

Andrew S.: There any other myths you want to talk about? You ever feel like you read all these Norse myths, and then you want to start talking to somebody, and then you just sense, "Oh, they're not that into it." So you just feel like, "Ah, all right?"

Adam Carl: I feel like I have the opposite problem, where I'm just so excited that somebody knows them that I can't help myself from talking about it. And I think too it's different, because I have the whole program behind me, where people are like, "What? You can study that?" And I think there's a hook there in a way that, if you're just interested in it, people are like, "Oh yeah, well that's your interest," right?

Andrew S.: Yeah.

Adam Carl: It's not like, "That's a career option?"

Andrew S.: Right. How did you say, "I'm going to study Norse mythology for a career?"

Adam Carl: Well, I was really lucky. My mom studied Medieval literature in college at Ohio State and graduated with an English major, so she was totally sympathetic to the whole thing. And my dad was an electrical engineer and was pretty up front about the fact that he did that for monetary reasons. He could get a career in that. Still hear undergrads telling me that today. And then hated it so much that he switched to be a microbiologist.

Andrew S.: Interesting.

Adam Carl: And that was always his dream was to help people and study medicine and health, so I think he was pretty used to the idea that you have to do what you love. You can't just

follow the money. And I got really lucky in that respect. I know a lot of Berkeley students don't have that luxury of, if not support, just ambivalence about career options, but I do think that that's selling not only the PhD in general but the humanities short, because we gain so many skills. I'm teaching. I've taught, I guess what, four years now? Pretty much autonomously.

I can choose what kind of reading and composition course I teach. I have to hit certain milestones there. I'm about to teach an elective where I don't really have any course goal. It's just teaching the culture and the literature however I feel like. And those are really good public speaking skills. That's classroom management that totally would transfer to a workplace. I'm seeing how university administration works. I'm getting language skills. There's a lot of good reasons to go into a graduate program that are not just for the study of the thing. It just so happens I'm studying Vikings. Not bad.

Andrew S.: It's pretty cool. Pretty cool way to spend your time.

Adam Carl: Yeah, and I know that a lot of people worry there's beyond academia here, and people trying to teach us how to be professional. And I think a lot of that has to do with the background of some students coming in, if they're not from working class backgrounds, professionalization's a really good idea.

Andrew S.: Right.

Adam Carl: You can't show up in a hoodie to every workplace. Maybe in the Bay Area, but even then. That is important, but it's not like we're divorced. It's not like we are the ivory tower. We don't have to be. If we see ourselves that way, yeah, we're going to stay that way and not be marketable, but we're learning a lot of things that are applicable.

Andrew S.: You're tuned in to 90.7 FM KALX Berkeley, and this is The Graduates. I'm your host, Andrew Saintsing, joined by Adam Carl of the Scandinavian Department.

Well, it's been really great to have you here. Thank you so much for agreeing to come in and talk about your studies and your plans for the future. Thanks so much.

Adam Carl: Thank you for all of your really specific questions and getting past some of those content related things into the transmission. I really appreciate that. You brought a good amount of knowledge that I'm not used to, so thank you.

Andrew S.: No, it was a lot of fun. I really enjoy talking mythologies of any kind and seeing more of their context in the world.

Adam Carl: Yeah, well thank you for having this kind of podcast, so that people, not just in Berkeley, but my family members out in Ohio or in Florida, they can listen. I really appreciate that.

Andrew S.: Yeah.