

Because I've grown fairly frustrated with the sheer, unrelenting and at times caricatured misrepresentation of Norse mythology, folklore and culture everywhere in pop culture, I've decided to make my own reference material about what things are *actually* true there. And because this is the internet, you get to suffer the throes of enlightenment right along with me. Be honored, for you have been chosen!

I was ready to make this a fully referenced post, but then I found out that most of the scholarly material I hunted down piecemeal on the internet has already been consolidated [here](#). I'll try to remember to link any material from elsewhere.

I'll go a fair bit beyond the stuff we find in the Eddas, like things from the sagas, and things from archaeological and anthropological sources, etc., like the ongoing reconstruction of languages from prehistoric Europe, for example. This is because there is a certain amount of context that has been consistently ignored by everyone interpreting or adapting Norse culture and myth, which has made pretty much every portrayal of anything Norse or Germanic faulty in the last 100 years, but especially since 2000 onwards. The beliefs, virtues and customs of the people, in particular, have been completely overlooked.

That being said, most of what people 'know' about Norse Mythology (especially people who only saw Marvel movies and played God of War 2018) is objectively wrong as well, even if you just read the Poetic Edda.

And so, without further ado.

Gods, Giants and Everything Neither

The Gods are giants.

Yes, really.

But they are not *jotnar*.

Jotun does not mean giant, it means *devourer*. Jotnar is the plural of that.

In fact, very few of the jotnar *anywhere* are portrayed as gigantic. And when they are gigantic - it's either an illusion (Utgard-Loki) or the gods involved are also gigantic, i.e. Thor can fish Jormungandr out of the sea and carry Aegir's cauldron upside down as a hat, a cauldron big enough to sate all the gods, including Thor whose drinking horn is connected to the sea in one poem, leading to him drinking so much the sea level drops. Bottom line, the Aesir (and presumably Vanir) are as gigantic as the gods in other mythologies (i.e. Fionn mac Cumhail,

Bran the Blessed and all his kind, all the Tuatha de Danaan, hell even *Arthur* in the original British folklore was a giant).

There were no Gods of [Insert Domain Here]. Original Germanic and Norse beliefs were a blend of animism (i.e. everything has a soul, like in Shinto or Finnish/Sami), and ancestor worship (the elves were never anything else than *ancestor spirits*). So Frey, Tyr, Thor (never mind these are all just epithets, like one would use for fae, see a theme?) are just the Revered Ancestors that ended up most prominent in their culture. That's why every god is a god of 'insert a whole list of things here'. People are complex and multidimensional, and a competent man (and leader) was expected to know how to do a lot of useful stuff.

After all, kings had absolute power but were *elected*.

Crucial Cultural Components

Boys, uncles and joint rule

Joint rule between brothers, or a father and son, or son and uncle, were common. For this reason, Marvel's Thor movie has one thing going for it - it does make sense that Odin would see Thor crowned, but still remain in charge himself, even without the Odinsleep plot device.

More relevant to this topic, the relationship between a boy and his uncle was *very* important in germanic-norse culture. For this reason, Thor traveling with Loki would not only be considered acceptable, it would be *expected*.

Especially when a certain half of that pair needed plausible deniability for being away from the capital and, thus, unable to break yet more things (no, it's not Thor I'm talking about here).

Flyting

A flyting was a shit talking context, plain and simple. The aim was to single someone out during a feast and talk as much shit as you could about them for the amusement of everyone else. The other guy was not expected to defend himself (because the one talking shit was expected to keep it to real stuff, however badly exaggerated). Instead, the target was expected to keep his cool and give as good as he got. Whoever failed first became the laughing stock, which is why disengaging from the contest (ignoring the guy) was better than getting defensive.

That said, because the shit flung around was still expected to be *real*, even if badly exaggerated, this becomes very important context that isn't generally taken into consideration when interpreting the Lokasenna. Nobody would actually believe Odin is anything but a straight man, for example, if this wasn't glossed over every single time (see below).

The Soul and Its Parts

The most ubiquitous sources (which God of War 2018 used) say the Norse believed there were 4 parts. There is, however, evidence to suggest there were in fact eight

1. Önd-Spirit
2. Sál-Soul
3. Minni-Memory (Munin)
4. Hugr-Mind/Thoughts (Hugin)
5. Hamr-Skin/Outer form
6. Hamingja-Luck/Fortune
7. Fylgja-Follower/Protective spirit
8. Ódr-Frenzy/Inspiration/Passion/Poetry

So their view was more like that of Egypt, though not named or interpreted quite the same.

Reincarnation

It is and has always been a thing in Germanic/Norse culture, dating back to the European farmers of the Neolithics, well before even the Indo-European mix-up. Not *all* the parts above reincarnated though, or at least, not all in the same *world*.

The old people of Europe (Norse and others) practiced something called burial mounds, where they interred their most famous and infamous family members, which became deified over time and are treated as a moral authority. Most critical to this discussion, however, is that those burial mounds are always intended to be temporary. But they don't only serve as a spot for *utisetá* ('sitting out', where you meditate on top of the mound at night and communicate with the spirits there).

In the eddas, Odin and others use meditation or galdr (incantation magic) to summon ancestor ghosts to cast invulnerability and other spells on them, and give them cool artefacts. However, in the culture itself that Snorri (and Christians in general) did their best to stamp out, you're also supposed to breach the mound at some point after a few generations (full moon and/or midday sex may or may not be involved) so that the Ancestor spirit can be reincarnated in your bloodline. It wasn't strange to wait for years before naming your kid, so you could figure out which ancestor he might be based on his talents and behaviour. A fun event was the May Festival, when the best man and woman of the area became May King and May Queen, and generally got married and produced a kid just as Summer became Winter later that year.

Incidentally, Newgrange in Ireland was designed so that the sun reached the very center of its main chamber at a very specific time in the year. Not strictly a Norse thing, but as (one of) the oldest buildings *anywhere*, I thought it might be relevant.

Long Life and Immortality

This is more of a common sense extrapolation on my part, but when someone lives forever (or damn near it), they eventually master however many skills and trades they put their mind to. In this context, it makes sense that natural inborn powers, or size, would be the deciding factors in confrontations and decision-making in all the myths about giants and gods. When you're every bit as good at the spear as the other guy, but he's three times your size and can chew boulders, it makes sense that you'd beat a tactical retreat and come up with a trick instead. So when Thor goes full giant size against Utgard-Loki but his illusion still dwarfs him, of course he'd run away and try to bash his head in while he was asleep. Granted, 'bash first and introduce yourself later' isn't the best look either, but again, Jotun means devourer).

Asgard

Asgard is just one of at least *three* heavens we know of, the others being Gimle and Vidblainn, which in turn are not all the afterlife (i.e. Hel, Ran's Hall, Sindri's Hall, etc., there are a LOT of possible afterlives in Germanic-Norse culture). It's unclear if this means there are more than nine realms, or if two or more of the places on that list are there by mistake. Certainly, some people believe the trolls, at least, would have their own Heim somewhere instead of, say, Niflheim.

Individuals vs. Pop Culture Doppelgangers

(not going through all of them, only the ones that are misrepresented most consistently).

Thor

Is a big, brawny *redhead*. Physique would look more like Farnese Hercules than modern-day bodybuilders (i.e. extremely thick lat muscles, narrow waist is for chumps). Has long hair and full beard.

Deified Heracles figure or equivalent (if not the same person). In the Eddas, he's the ultimate good guy, the god most benign to mankind. He introduced agriculture and went around destroying jotnar to make space for humanity, which is why he was perpetually late to God events. He's the most powerful being alive, even without Mjolnir (in fact, it might seem that losing Megingjord, his belt, would cripple him a lot more).

Thor lives in Thrudheim (Hall of Strength, though 'truda' also means 'hard work' and 'sweat of one's brow' in some European languages). Thrudheim is a hall in Asgard. He is married to Sif, whose hair (which Loki cuts and has replacements made or else) is an allegory for the harvest. Magni and Modi are his sons, though Magni is apparently son of a Jotunn woman Jarnsaxa (incidentally, germanic-norse culture allowed polygamy, or at least concubines).

He's also the one god that nobody fucks with and has no patience for tricksters, much less liars. For this reason, he's the only one who can call out Loki as the liar he is during a **flyting** without losing face (more on this below).

Was close buddies with Earendil (yes, really, he's an actual guy, though the proper name in Britain is Earendel, and in Norse it's Aurvandil) and made a star from his toe.

Apparently, Thor has a rock embedded in his forehead from when he smashed Hrungrnir's head.

He travels around with Loki, who is his **uncle**. Most of his adventures away from Asgard read like classical hero fairy tales, rather than god myths, which makes sense if you go with the Icelandic scholars' translations where his belt is only there to keep him man-sized.

Perhaps the most important thing here is that the Cult of Thor predates the appearance of that of Odin by thousands of years. An (the?) oldest version of the name Thor found written anywhere is 'thun(o)raz' or 'thun(a)raz' which means thunder. But the word Thor is the result of language drift originating from *tiwaz* which means *God*. *Tiwaz* itself is a cognate (alternate version basically) of Dyeus or Diawas, which is the first half of Dyeus Phter, which means

Father Sky. These names and their associated holy symbols have been found to date all the way back to the stone age, predating even Mycaenean Greece, which itself predates classical Greece by about 600-1000 years, depending on how far back to its beginning you look.

Essentially, **Thor and Tyr are the same person**, and *that* person is the actual Father of everything, if indeed there even is one (more on that below). Thor may also, in fact, be the equivalent of the Greek Ouranos if you go back long enough. In fact (though this is my extrapolation, so take it how you will), one of his oldest names is Tonaros, and if you consider that the languages were more guttural, and people tended to lose a lot of letters and sounds from words, especially in writing, it's not hard to see how Tonaros would have become Toranos and eventually Ouranos further south (Ouranos is pronounced 'oh-raw-naws' not 'your anus', **very important!**).

A LOT was changed and lost over time (using the Greeks as comparison again, there is no actual evidence that Heracles was bisexual, that's a purely Classical Greece revision, and a very tenuous one at that if you really look into it, most of the claims about Greek sexuality have been debunked, no matter how much Hollywood pretends otherwise).

Odin

Odin is a title, meaning the 'frenzied one.' His real name is **Vidrir** (part of the initial Ymir-killing triffecta with Lothur and Hoenir. Ve (Hoenir) means either 'wish' or 'will' and Vili (Lothur) means holy and/or priest.

Eddas portray Odin as the King of all the Gods, the Allfather (interpretations vary), an old man who goes round collecting knowledge (and tricking Jotnun intellectual rivals into deadly games of trivia whenever he can) and has something of a hate-relationship with Freyja (who is NOT his wife Frigg). Thor is his son by Jord (Gaea) but *apparently* not his heir, that's actually Baldr who he has with Frigg. He steals **back** the mead of Poetry (the 'back' is **very important**).

Odin inherited a lot of the attributes of Thor/Tyr as his cult rose to prominence. The Havamal is, I think, just the most obvious part.

He is neither a coward nor afraid of death. Nowhere in *any* writing is Odin afraid to put his life on the line, he does it many times, whether in trivia games or in his bet with Freya that a follower of his isn't a bad host (in which she cheats). Also, when Ragnarok comes, he's the first at the head of the Host to charge in battle against the 'wolf'.

However, germanic-norse culture DOES have a concept roughly translated as *joyful defiance*. Which, in a culture where volvas predicted your fate at the drop of a hat, meant to live the fullest life you could and try to kick a bad fate in the teeth because you're a bloody adult that don't need no hand held or someone to tell you how to live your life. Additionally, before Snorri, it was fairly well understood that Ragnarok was a *cyclical* event (most of the myths were, they were tied to the cycle of the night sky, astronomy, each god had their own constellations). In this context, Odin's eternal quest to 'avert' Ragnarok is his quest to stop the cycle of extinction.

Conclusion: Odin literally spends his entire life trying to [defeat the fermi paradox](#). The fact he is denigrated for this in pop culture today is something I find rather dishonest. Since he's gone but we're doing better than ever, maybe he even succeeded.

Odin's cult appears to have emerged only after the Bronze Age, which may explain pretty much every inconsistency in his character in the Eddas - it's hard to think that the person who recited the Havamal is the same as the tricksome wanderer of the other poems, never mind the extremely dangerous and seemingly capricious person in the Sagas or Gestas that even beats his favorite conquering king to death at one point, by bashing him over the head with his staff.

Basically, as with all religious syncretism, Odin took over most of the King attributes of Tyr/Thor. Possibly because the King, as a symbol of the realm's wholeness, couldn't afford to be physically imperfect any more than any other flaw, as was the case with Tyr after he lost his hand. Compare with Nuada in Irish mythology.

That said, a very important thing that nobody knows, unfortunately, is that Allfather is language drift from Alfǫðr, which [certain scholars believe has been mistranslated](#) - apparently, it could actually mean 'all *orderer*'. Considering that Odin rose to prominence during the Bronze Age Collapse, it's not hard to see why - anyone capable of carving a demesne and culture in that mess would be deified. That's how Jamshid and Krishna made it too.

Finally, in the context of burial mounds mentioned above, Odin naming a son Thor could just be an attempt to return the mighty ancestor god to the world (or otherwise gain legitimacy) by having the dead god reincarnate into your bloodline (see the May Festival and Newgrange again).

Loki

'Loki' means either fire or knot, but nobody knows for sure. His father, 'farbauti', means 'dangerous striker' or 'sudden striker'. Laufey is his *mother* and her name *may* mean leaf or leafy. For these reasons, he is generally considered an allegory for the forest fires that start after lightning strikes.

Loki's real name is Fenrir.

Yes, really. The *wolf's* name is Fenrisulfr, which means Fenrir's wolf.

In the Eddas, he is the blood-brother of Odin and thus Thor's uncle. Thor, in turn, may or may not have been his keeper, meant to keep him on a short leash and away from Asgard. Considering what happens with Baldr and the Lokasenna, this can be widely considered as a wise move.

Any claims that he went around fucking animals are tenuous at best. In Germanic/Norse culture, shapeshifting has never meant anything else but tossing your mind into an animal, that's one of the few things GRRM transposed correctly into his own world. In this vein, Loki borrowed 'skins' in this way, like when he borrows Freyja's 'feather cloak' (note - kennings are idioms used in place of the real word for the purposes of poetry) to see where Mjolnir got to. Or when he and Heimdall both 'take the forms' of seals to fight over Freyja's necklace in the Arctic. I have trouble seeing Loki remain in the mare that lures Svadilfari away, especially since Sleipnir is just a metaphor for the winds Odin/Thor rides with their chariot.

Loki is *initially* an agent of chaos, but eventually becomes an objective malicious force. He is not some misunderstood abuse victim, he caused a lot of trouble because it was funny, barely weasled his way out of it *almost* every time, usually it was because Odin kept endorsing his rules-lawyering (because he actually *did* his part of the **blood-brother** vow) and Loki turned around and got Baldr murdered despite that for the incredible reason of 'because why not?' This eventually went to his head and he actually bragged about murdering Baldr (and Hodr by extension, since the poor guy got the blame beforehand) and got tied up so at least the world could enjoy whatever time was left before the next extinction event. His punishment was cruel and unusual, and a good debate could be had over whether he actually deserves Sigyn's devotion.

Likening Loki to Prometheus is a reach, to put it mildly (and this is before we try to figure out if Snorri was adding his own stuff there to enforce the parallel). It's not impossible that Snorri

demonised him more than he actually was, to have the devil in there, but I have trouble thinking of any occasion where Loki did mankind any direct favors like Prometheus did.

That said, if people wonder why he *seemed* to get the better of everyone in the Lokasenna, that's because it is a flyting (see above) and he was lying more than half the time, which Odin, as his blood brother and host, was obligated to gloss over as long as it stayed at words. Everyone stopped flyting back, including Odin, because dismissal was better than getting defensive. Then Thor arrives and he, as Loki's eternal keeper, is the one who can call him out on lying and be believed, so Loki finally backs down after Thor threatens him with Mjolnir for the third time. He'd already admitted to killing Baldr though, so he finally got his comeuppance.

Where were the Jotnar in the War?

Jotun means devourer, as said before. They are neither Aesir nor Vanir, and in fact it's difficult to say where the Jotnar stand relative to them. Whatever it is, it's not a particularly flattering look. In fact, their behaviour and attempts to 'get one over' the Gods is what I would expect from war profiteers. Swindling them out of war reparations, stealing artefacts to demand their best women in payment, stealing the women outright, even stealing and plundering *inborn powers* (metaphors or not).

The jotnar didn't participate in the Aesir-Vanir war (which the Vanir technically *won*) but they earned the moniker 'devourer' somehow, which sounds (to me at least) like a third nation raiding both sides and otherwise being exploitative to everybody. It's unlikely that they were benign or honorable. People talk a lot about how the Aesir weasled out of the deal with the wall builder, but these are the same people who tried to take advantage of a war-torn nation and did a number of other nasty shit before and after that, like steal the mead of poetry despite not being able to use it (I might make this its own post later). Three dwarves (or possible elves) killed Kvasir, but the giants stole the mead later just so nobody else could have it.

Magic and How to Completely Miss the Point

Seidr doesn't mean magic. It's a specific *approach* to practicing a specific *kind* of magic called orlog (fate). And this approach can be summarised as 'they couldn't make suppositories so they used sticks instead.' See, the ancient people knew more about herbs and mushrooms than we do, and among those things were consciousness-altering mixtures. But because the best ones were poisonous if ingested, they figured out other ways to get them into their brains.

The witch's broomstick is a motif originating with the 'staff riding' of volvas, and that staff wasn't ridden horizontally, but vertically from a raised platform so they could get several good hours in the trance, thus allowing them to do divination for the whole village at once and go home.

Thus, for a man to practice seidr, the only mucosa comparable in utility to the volva's vagina was the one in the anus.

This is why Loki called Odin unmanly, because for all *everyone hearing the oral poem* knew, the only way he could have practiced seidr was to fuck himself on Gungnir's blunt end.

Since Loki is a big fat liar, I think it's more likely Odin either figured out the same potions can also be absorbed through the armpit (if at lower efficacy) or he did outright stab himself through some place with his spear to inject the stuff directly into his bloodstream, and spent nine days in a trance so he only had to do it once.

The many forms of Norse and Germanic magic include galdr (incantation), spa (divination), rune magic, necromancy (shamanism), potion making (herbalism), utiseta (sitting meditation), arsgang (walking meditation), shapeshifting (skinchanging), staves (magic symbols, extremely wide utility from just etching lines into and from various things) and many derivatives thereof. All of which were completely free of any stigma and were practiced by both men and women, if they got someone to teach them.

Or if they happened to be near a henbane bush when it caught fire.

Various Trivia

- Yggdrassil might actually mean Tree of Knowledge.
- Yggdrassil might be a metaphor (kenning) for humanity.
- Sleipnir may be a metaphor for the four winds (or eight, depending on what count you use)
- Hlidskjalf, Odin's throne, seems to be the Sun. Why Freyr gets to sit on it in that one poem is up for debate.
- Heimdallr may be a name for the Firmament / Night Sky, and is assumed by some to be a title of Tyr, at least before he turned into Thor (see below). If this is true, he is the

universe that perceives itself, and the scale at which Norse cosmology worked is much vaster than we assume, rivaling the Vedic and Hindu one.

- Heimdallr was the 'whitest of the gods', sorry Idris Elba, you're a great actor but Marvel's original portrayal of a light-skinned redhead was more on point. Admittedly, some people say 'whitest' is supposed to mean 'most virtuous' but every claim to that effect seems based on personal preference
- Heimdall is described as 'son of nine mothers.' Scholars explain this as the offspring of the nine wave spirits, the daughters of Aegir. But I'm personally more inclined towards 'reincarnation'
- There was a certain concept called 'wulthuz' in Germanic-Norse culture, which means 'glory.' The term referred to a manifest attribute of kingship, like the 'farr' of the Middle East. In writing, this is usually described along the lines of 'the sun shines out of his face.' NOT as a metaphor.