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**The Influence of Norse Mythology  
on Contemporary Fantasy Literature**

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Master's degree in Literature and Civilisation*

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## **Dedications**

With utmost gratitude, all the praise to Allah the Almighty for blessing me with courage and determination to complete this work, despite all distractions and hardships.

This honest work is dedicated to my parents, for always being there throughout my academic and personal journey of growth. Thank you for your efforts raising me and guiding me down the right path.

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## **Abstract**

This research examines how Norse mythology influences modern fantasy works, demonstrating how old myths, beliefs and cosmologies are adapted, reinterpreted, and woven into modern stories. Norse mythology remains a source of inspiration for writers across different eras and medias due to its epic tales of gods, giants, and apocalyptic prophecies. By analyzing key works by authors such as J.R.R Tolkien and Neil Gaiman, this study investigates how the Norse mythological structures inform world-building, characters, and narrative motifs. It also considers how these reinterpretations reflect modern societal concerns, cultural identity and the human fascination with the myth as a narrative tool. This work aims to trace the transmission of mythic elements from their original cultural context to their reinterpretation in modern literature; while also considering the cultural, psychological, and literary functions these myths serve in contemporary settings. This research uses mythological criticism, intertextuality, and reception theory in the process of analyzing how Norse mythology is adapted to voice modern issues, values and narrative styles. This study focuses on the dynamic relation between myth and fantasy, highlighting Norse mythology as a constantly evolving framework for storytelling, rather than a linear historical asset.

**Keywords:** Norse mythology, contemporary fantasy, mythological criticism, intertextuality, narrative archetypes, cultural adaptation, literary influence.

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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

Before history was written, it was told. From campfires of ancient tribes to luxurious castles, across centuries and generations, humans have always preserved their existence through stories. Throughout history, these stories played a double role of being a preserved ancestral knowledge and wisdom across cultures, shaping their identities and beliefs, and a way of entertainment through storytelling.

These stories became a heritage that was passed down generations through traditional rituals such as the Aztec New Fire Ceremony, written guidelines in The Egyptian *Book of the dead* discussing the afterlife, and the spoken instructions of the Celtic Bardic Schools focusing on the oral tradition and poem memorization carrying a set of survival instructions, entertaining tales, and ancestral knowledge and wisdom. These sets of persistent traditions gradually evolved to finally become known as mythology.

Mythology reflects anxieties, cultures, set of beliefs and identities of societies across the globe. Mythology changes with the locations. Different mythologies exist across many cultures, from the African mythology, Aztec mythology, to Asian mythology. Among these numerous mythologies, one mythology truly stands out the most for its rich tapestry of gods, heroes, epic battles and stories of the universe. Norse mythology's uniqueness relies on its exploration of aspects of fate, heroism, the cycle of life and death, through a collection of oral traditions of the Viking age, passed on inside the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda. Norse mythology allows for a new perspective on how people are influenced by their environment, explorations, and shared beliefs in long-existing prophecies.

Recent decades show that Norse mythology witnessed a revival in popular culture, influencing diverse media forms of literature, cinema, to video games. The interest did not stem from superficial visits to ancient tales, but rather proof that mythology survived and influenced cultural structures. Works like J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, Marvel's *Thor*, and Santa Monica's *God of War* series, all illustrate how Norse myths influence and proceed to inspire modern interests in these works. Unlike many other tales that have faded through history, Norse tales managed to maintain their relevance throughout centuries, inspiring more than culture and influencing fantasy as a narrative template.

Due to the growing presence of Norse mythology in modern works, whether in movies, games, and even novels, this research takes interest in exploring the influence of Norse mythology on contemporary fantasy literature by investigating four main questions around the subject:

1-How are the most prominent elements of Norse mythology adapted and reinterpreted in modern fantasy literature to fit contemporary contexts?

2-What is the cultural and literary significance of Norse mythology in shaping the fantasy genre?

3-How do adaptations of Norse mythology influence storytelling beyond literature, particularly in film, television and video games?

This investigation is predicated *on* three main hypotheses:

1- Modern fantasy works adapt Norse mythology's archetypal elements such as Ragnarök, deities, and prophecies to mirror modern anxieties about identity and societal change, while staying true to their mythic essence.

- 2- Norse mythology's structured narratives in apocalyptic scenarios, complex heroes and immersive universes, function as a mold for modern fantasy works
- 3- The survival of Norse mythology depends on modern fantasy's adaptation of these original tales of gods, prophecies, and realms, by repurposing them to suit modern times, while preserving their mythic core.

This research was a result of multiple points of interest in the subject from different perspectives. Santa Monica's *God of War* 2018 and *Ragnarök* series sparked my personal passion, this studio's games served as proper introduction to Norse mythology. Depictions of Norse gods from Odin, Loki, Thor, Freya, Týr, to other characters such as Mimir, Brok and Sindri, provide an astonishing experience throughout the games. Norse locations such as the Midgard alongside the Nine Realms, allowed for a phenomenal environmental depiction, from the peaks of Jötunheim to the scorching lava rivers of Muspelheim, giving the player both an amazing visual and emotional experience of these legendary realms.

Norse mythology is not only a culture or a set of beliefs, but a bridge linking between modern society and the ancient era, which inspires an academic work around the topic that goes beyond gaming. The vast themes of destiny, character development, deities' conflicts, and prophecies like Ragnarök, made this research an academic journey that is enjoyable and interesting.

Analyzing these tales allowed for a new perspective on how Norse mythology, with its collection of myths, continues to influence modern fantasy from literature, games to movies. This influence allowed for a connection between Norse mythology and modern fantasy, which made it an interesting point of academic investigation.

This research aims to provide a comparative analysis of the selected works, arguing that Norse mythology takes a role of a foundational source of inspiration for contemporary fantasy, by providing themes, characters and settings that are constantly reinterpreted to make sense to the modern audience. These adaptations do not only preserve these Norse myths but also assist in evolving fantasy as a genre and expanding it into new media outlets.

In order to achieve the end result, this research work will be dissected into three chapters: The first chapter provides an overview of mythology as a general concept, then Norse mythology specifically, its cultural and literary significance throughout different time periods, from The Viking Age to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, followed by its influence on the evolution of fantasy literature spending from the Medieval to the Modern Era, concluding the chapter with a case study of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

The second chapter sets the theoretical foundations of the study, including three main mythological theories, from Joseph Campbell's Monomyth as model, Claude Lévi-Strauss's Structuralism and Northrop Frye's recurring motifs. Adaptation theories are also discussed, from Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding, Linda Hutcheon's view on adaptations as interpretations, and Roland Barthes's approach of myth as an ideology, as well as justifying the selected works from literary works by Tolkien, movies such as Marvel's *Thor* and games like Santa Monica's *God of War* as subjects of analysis.

Finally, the third and last chapter analyze the selected works and identifies how Norse mythological elements such as characters in Odin, Loki and Thor, themes of apocalypse such

Ragnarök; and settings that are intrinsic in Norse mythology, are repurposed and transformed to reflect modern anxieties, sense of identity, and intellectual reflections. Additionally, the chapter aims to investigate how these new adaptations affected both popular culture and fantasy as a genre.

# **Chapter One:**

# **Literature Review**

## Chapter One: Literature Review

### 1.1 Introduction

Norse mythology's impact on modern fantasy works is based upon the ancient stories that have been handed down throughout history across generations of societies, thus shaping how modern storytelling systems operate. The opening chapter provides the necessary historical and literary backgrounds in order to see the influence of Norse mythology. A comprehensive literature review is required in order to set a definition for what mythology broadly, and Norse mythology in particular, following the evolution of fantasy literature through different stops in history, and then concluding the chapter with a case study of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of The Ring*, an author with subliminal Nordic touches in his viral works. These parts of the chapter provide the foundation to investigate how the collection of Nordic deities, themes and beliefs made their way into modern fantasy by highlighting its influence on modern narrative structures and thematic content.

Mythology, across history, has fully served as a tool to reflect human society, mirroring the standards, beliefs, and everyday life of various societies across different nations. Norse mythology, as one of the prominent mythologies, stood out among the rest for its rich tales of gods, giants, deities and apocalyptic scenarios as well as tackling subjects of fate, destiny, and the cycle of life and death. Norse mythology, since it is based on the oral traditions of the Viking Age through two main works being the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda, offer a lens in which a society is influenced by factors of their struggle, sailings through unpredictable weather and Ragnarök.

## **1.2 Defining Mythology and Norse Mythology**

The connection between people and mythology have always existed across the span of human history. On a global scale, numerous societies all around the world have shared the attachment to a certain mythology, a belief in a set of religious-like values and practices. Norse mythology existed throughout the Nordic region, what are nowadays Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark.

In order to fully grasp what mythology stands for, this chapter aims to introduce and dives into what mythology is as a whole, in order to showcase the cultural and narrative concept which Norse mythology represents, followed by an examination on how fantasy literary works has changed and adapted as a reaction to Norse mythology, then ending the chapter with a case study of J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

### **1.2.1 Mythology**

Mythology is a reflection of a certain society's beliefs when it comes to making sense of the surroundings, the understanding of how things make sense and why do one tackle this worldview. These sets of myths include beliefs in gods and often concepts that are spiritual and intellectual. Mythology represents the accumulated beliefs of a whole nation, the societal and functioning systems of the people within a region, from cultural traditions, rituals to personal beliefs.

The term mythology consists of two parts: “myth” and “ology”. In order to fully grasp the meaning of the word, it is best to understand each one individually:

**a. Myth:**

The word myth originates from the Greek term “mythos”, it refers to a story, a tale, a narrative that was passed through generations through text or speech. Myth is a representation of beliefs and culture and how it is reflected into a certain society. These myths revolve around beliefs of deities, prophecies and spiritual concepts.

**b. Ology:**

“Ology” is a suffix from Greek origins, from the word “logia” that means the “study of”. The suffix Ology is used widely across different academic zones, for example “Anthropology”, a focused study on human societies, or “Psychology” which is the study of the human’s mind and thoughts and his behaviors.

**c. Mythology:**

Mythology is the result of combining both words. Mythology as a word represents the collection of cultural and religious myths of a certain culture. The word also can mean “Mythology” as an academic field of research that takes interest in exploring myths, symbolism and their origins.

Providing both perspectives of the components of the word mythology allows for a better understanding for the term mythology as a whole. Numerous scholars have discussed the nature of mythology, from John Frederick Nims, Edith Hamilton, and Robert Graves. They all provided a view of what Mythology stands for.

### **1.2.2 Norse Mythology**

Norse mythology is one of the prominent mythologies that still captivates many researchers and readers on a global scale. The origin of Norse mythology dates back to the Viking Era around 800-1050 CE, documented in two original sources, the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda. Norse Mythology, with its collection of gods in Odin and his sons Loki and Thor, shows Ragnarök as an apocalyptic end to the universe. It discusses themes of fate, life and death, and the interactions between gods and other beings, from monsters to ordinary people. These factors distinguish the Norse mythology from the rest and make it appealing to the readers.

#### ***The Prose Edda***

*The Prose Edda* by Snorri Sturluson was compiled around 1220 CE, discussing religious Christian proses of Nordic stories, highlighting key figures in gods like Odin and his sons Thor and Loki. The Prose Edda also tackles events like the Ragnarök. This work deals with godly figures and how they went about. The sections that stand out the most are the parts where it narrates the creation of the world by Ymir's body in Gylfaginning, the first section of the Prose Edda that tackles a discussion between Gylfi, a curious Swedish king looking for wisdom and three divine figures in High, Just-As-High and Third, who is to be Odin in disguise, these three figures narrate the Nordic mythology and beliefs. This part starts in Ginnungagap, better known as the primordial void, where fire from the realm of fire Muspell and ice from the extremely freezing Niflheim make contact, resulting in the existence of the giant Ymir. Afterwards, Snorri highlighted how Odin and his brothers being Vili and Vé, kill the giant Ymir, then use his corpse to create the world where his flesh forms the earth itself, his blood fills the seas, his bones serve as mountains, and finally his skull as the sky (21). From these remnants of Ymir, these gods made Midgard for humans, and

Asgard for gods like themselves, thus forming the Nine Worlds, all connected together by Yggdrasil, the world-tree.

Even beyond Gylfaginning, the Prose Edda includes *Skaldskaparmál*, which serves as a guide for poetic expressions, and *Háttatalas* an illustration for verse structures. Snorri, who is an Icelandic scholar, wrote in a Christianity-heavy era about these traditions, in order to save these tales and deities as more of historical figures rather than gods, despite living amongst a Christianized society.

### ***The Poetic Edda***

*The Poetic Edda* is a collection of unknown poems in 13<sup>th</sup> century kept and collected in the Codex Regius, a single long manuscript that contains around thirty poems, where each section is given to a mythological being such as gods and heroes. It is speculated that it perhaps was composed of skalds, who are Viking poet-historians around the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Poetic Edda highlights the rawness of the Viking Era tales. Poems often discuss Ragnarök, the apocalyptic end of the world in poems like *Völuspá* also known as The Seeress's Prophecy, a narrative told by *Völva* also known as a seeress. These tales in the Poetic Edda revolve around the creation of the world, from Ginnungagap all the way to Ragnarök, where it is destined, that Odin gets defeated by Fenrir (22), where Thor and Jörmungandr kill each other (23) and the whole world burns, only to be renewed slightly.

Other poems such as the *Hávamál*, offer wisdom attributed to Odin, and *Þrymskviða*, a comedic story of Thor trying to get retrieve his stolen hammer, where him and Loki disguise themselves as Freya and a maid, in an attempt to cover up that made the giant Thrym question Freya's eyes (244). The diversity highlighted shows the vast selection of tones and topics within

the Poetic Edda, from epic prophecies to playful narratives. The atmospheric tone and the captivating tales inspire many apocalyptic fantasy works to come. The Poetic Edda's intense rawness, pure mythical roots help distinguishing it from the Prose Edda's clear structure, by doing so, it allows for a flow of emotional tales that stimulates the imagination due to its vivid imagery. These tales are well preserved through decades and centuries and continue to influence what storytelling has become later on.

### **1.3 Perspectives on Mythological Tales**

Mythological tales have been interpreted through numerous scholarly lenses, reflecting their complex cultural significances. This section examines key perspectives of John F. Nims' analysis of mythological origins, Edith Hamilton's view of myths as explanation and entertainment, and Robert Graves' exploration of social and existential functions. All these works combined reveal myths as being both cultural artifacts and frameworks for understanding human existence.

#### **1.3.1 Nim's perspective on Where Mythology's Tales Originated**

John Frederick Nims provides a perspective on mythology's poetic touches and how poets contribute to personifying the unknown in his book *Western Wind: An Introduction to Poetry*:

We still like to make up stories, just as our ancestors did, which use personification to explain the great forces of our existence. Such stories, which explain how the world began or where the sun goes when it sets, we call myths. Mythology is a natural product of the symbolizing mind;

poets, when not making up myths of their own, are still commanding ancient ones (Nims43)

Nims expresses that these myths burst out from the mind itself, creating what could be tales that serve as an attempt to make sense of the surroundings from gods, myths, and heroes of that time. Nims' "symbolizing mind" and contributions of poets demonstrates both the creativity and imagination field from where a mythology originates, proposing a connection between both the processes of creating myths and expressing art.

### **1.3.2 Hamilton on Mythology for Explanation and Entertainment**

Edith Hamilton's view covers a broader lens, arguing that these myths serve as a tool of entertainment and an instrument for explaining the surroundings:

Greek mythology is largely made up of stories about gods and goddesses, but it must not be read as a kind of Greek Bible, an account of the Greek religion. According to the most modern idea, a real myth has nothing to do with religion. It is an explanation of something in nature: how, for instance, anything and everything came into existence; men, animals, this or that tree or flower... Myths are early science; the result of men's first trying to explain what they saw around them. But there are so many so-called myths that

explain nothing at all. These tales are pure entertainment, the sort of thing people would tell one another on a long winter evening... but religion is here, too (Hamilton 19)

Hamilton sees myths as "early science", since it tries to make sense of natural phenomena, questions that revolve around the origin of the being and the religious celestial cycles. Hamilton had two ways of looking into myths, as an entertainment method and an explanatory tool. This double view serves as a scope that provides a view that these tales and myths are not only for entertainment but could also be a tool for questioning and making sense of questions that transcend the normal beings. Hamilton's differentiation between myths being an explanation and myths as entertainment exposes the numerous natures of these tales and how they are able to please the human's cognitive desires and the need for distractions from reality.

### **1.3.3 Graves' Social and Existential Functions of Mythology**

Robert Graves dealt with mythology in his 1968 book *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* as a social and explanatory functioning tool to answer deep profound questions:

Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true... Myth has two main functions. The first is to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as: 'who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death?'... The second function of myth is to justify an

existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs. (Graves v)

Graves, like Hamilton, also had a dual view on the function of mythology, he sees it as an explanatory tool for answering fundamental questions about the creation, mortality of the beings, and the destiny of the individual. Graves also see mythology as a means to explain the already existing social orders, and how one positions himself under the umbrella of mythology and social beliefs and customs. Graves determined to show myth's function in defending social norms and customs points out its impact in influencing and keeping the cultural identity as one.

These set of definitions allow for shaping up a perspective that mythology is a narrative set of systems that aims to make sense of the incomprehensible. Nims saw it as a poetic tool which highlights its creative capabilities, Hamilton tackled it as a scientific/entertaining asset, shedding the light on how it flexible, and Graves pointed out the existential and social weights it holds in when it comes to trying to figure out the unknown, and how it is a tool to force the already existing social roles.

#### **1.4 Norse mythology as a cultural and Literary Phenomenon**

Norse mythology's presence has been documented across different periods of time, from the Viking age, the Medieval age, the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Romanticism all the way to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. This constant existence helped Norse mythology to become a solid reference and inspiration in literature. This part discusses how Norse mythology became such an inspiration for modern story writing and telling.

##### **1.4.1 The Viking Age**

The Viking age was a period of time within 793-1066 CE, where Norse mythology was at its prime. It thrived due to it being the basis of the living traditions at that time, and how it was implemented into the everyday life culture of the people. Hilda Ellis Davidson (1964) discussed the Norse mythology as a cultural bond, gathering and making one of all the warriors, seafarers, and even the normal farmers through the united beliefs in Odin's sharpness and wisdom, Thor being the protector, and the prophecy of Ragnarök being an inevitable incoming event. Evidence was found through rune stones and carvings depicting Thor's hammer Mjolnir, and other symbols from the time highlight the role of these beliefs on an everyday basis. Even after death, many clues are found in Nordic burial practices, which hints to beliefs of the afterlife,

#### **1.4.2 The Medieval Age**

The medieval Age was around 100-1300 CE, it contributed in changing the nature of mythology from being an oral tradition practiced by many, to a written form through books, and scrolls. This swap from oral to written allowed mythology to stay documented, meaning that it will not be forgotten or lost in oral traditions. The swap also saved mythology during the Scandinavian Christianization movements.

The Prose Edda painted the gods and the holy being as historical figures, while the Poetic Edda maintained its existence through oral traditions. These circumstances helped the Norse mythology survive and thrive through the Medieval Age. Somehow, this wave of Christianization helped in the process of preserving these myths. Snorri, among other scholars, wrote during Christianity's reign, contributed with works that showed the Nordic gods as old heroes or rulers. This process made sure to keep hints of Norse mythology, even during these extreme times.

#### **1.4.3 Middle Ages and Renaissance**

The Middle Ages and Renaissance period were around 1300- 1700 CE, known as one of the roughest periods for the Norse mythology. At that time the ruling of the Greco-Roman epics and tales was ramping all across Europe, getting the interest of the European scholars. The Nordic tales were kept safe in manuscripts that remained as somewhat of a relic, which saw nearly no movement or interest beyond the Nordic region. The Christian wave thought of these beliefs as pagan myths that should not be pushed forward. In Contrast, this suppression allowed the Norse mythology to be kept safe and protected within a limited geo-location, thus avoiding any attempts of oppression by the Christians, which only made it stand out for itself for being authentic and keeping its identity as original despite all the changing factors around it. At that time, Nordic thinkers and writers contributed to guarding these texts, making sure they make it somewhere else safely and passed through future generations.

#### **1.4.4 Romantic Revival**

The Romantic Movement around the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries took inspiration in the Norse mythology tales, and gave it new dramatic form, adding emotions and drama to those mythical works, taking inspiration by the gods, heroes, settings and beliefs and giving it a new Romanticized taste, transforming the Norse mythology into European pieces of work. Writes such as Thomas Gray's *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin*, brought Norse myths to the English readers. After, Richard Wagner wrote *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, a work that was influenced by Nordic elements, especially the Völsunga. The rawness of the Norse mythology attracted the Romantic writers due to the clear display of emotions of the gods, in their conversations and their journeys.

#### **1.4.5 The 20th and 21st Century**

The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century only further proved how solid was the Norse mythology as a literary and cultural inspiration. Numerous media such as J.R.R Tolkien's Middle-earth, took inspiration in characters like Odin and reflected it into Gandalf, linking the Norse mythology to modern fantasy. Furthermore, Norse myths were used a character in the 1962 Comics Marvel's Thor, in novels such as Neil Gaiman's 2001 *American Gods*, and even video games in Santa Monica's *God of War* 2018 and the sequel Ragnarök. Movies also took part in being influenced by Norse mythology, in films such as 2017 Thor: Ragnarök and TV series such as Vikings 2013-2021. These constant inspirations by media that came centuries later prove that Norse mythology is an inspiration to nowadays and future products. The products based on Norse mythology differ from one to another, direct adaptations of Nordic figures in Marvel's Thor, and the *God of War* games. Other adaptations made the representation subtle; Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Gaiman's *American Gods*.

## **1.5 The Evolution of Fantasy Literature as a Genre**

Fantasy literature is a genre of literature that relies on imaginary worlds, events and aspects based on legends. Fantasy literature, like any other literature, also evolved and shifted over the centuries. The flexible nature of Fantasy literature allowed for the adaptation of the Norse mythology's gods, themes and beliefs. Fantasy literature passed the oral form and traditions into more of a custom genre, a genre that allows for more change and acceptance towards something new. This part highlights the development of fantasy literature through four periods, the Medieval era, the Romantic Era, the Victorian Era and the Modern Era.

### **1.5.1 The Medieval Era**

The Medieval Era between 500-1500 CE saw the rise of Epic poems such as *Beowulf* around 800-1500 CE, mixing religion with history and myth, thus reflecting Norse influences. The Story's Grendel, a giant monster, one of the three antagonists of *Beowulf* takes inspirations by Norse Giants. Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* deals with themes of chivalry and magical settings, such as realms, lining up with the Norse tales. The Medieval Era with its knights and mythical elements such as dragons, magical swords, and heroic figures, all share the same features between Norse mythology and fantasy literature. Beyond Grendel, *Beowulf* displays elements of Norse influences in its sense of fate, the representation of a hero's journey while being a warrior that often fights monsters and goes through new environments and challenges constantly.

### **1.5.2 The Romantic Era**

With the rise of the Romantic Era 1750-1850, scholars dealt with gods such as Odin, Thor and Loki from a different perspective. New Romantic adaptations sought to add a new flare of drama and emotion to these fantasy works, marking the first attempts towards using the same myths to shape up new imaginary settings and stories. Despite modern fantasy being at its start, this period produced authors like William Morris, whose works such as *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* linked between the Romantic and Victorian eras. Storytellers like Lord Dunsany, whose works were inspired heavily by Norse Mythology. This allowed fantasy to be more exploratory of Nordic traditions and myths.

### **1.5.3 The Victorian Era**

The Victorian Era 1837-1901 CE served as clarity point for the Fantasy genre, authors at the time too inspiration by myths from the Nordic region, William Morris's *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung* 1876, tells the story of Sigurd and Ragnarök, implementing vivid imagery to build a setting of fantasy while maintaining the original touch. This link between the Victorian Era and the Norse roots helped with the skyrocketing of the genre at that time. William Morris's importance relies on his telling of Nordic tales such as *Völsunga*, where he discussed elements of tragedy, emotional expression and world building. These works later influence fantasy writers such as Tolkien. The Victorian era's focus on folkloric tales and mythology allowed for the development of fantasy later in history.

#### **1.5.4 The Modern Era**

The Modern Era, from 1900-Present day is where fantasy really took a widespread existence in various media outputs, from comics, books, films videos games, and even theatre acts, Norse mythology is highlighted as the main influencer for said adaptations. J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* 1954-1955, took inspiration from Nordic themes, ideas and characters. Gandalf in the books share the same Odin-like wisdom, the old wise man with the white beard. Later on, Marvel's Thor comic in 1962 took inspiration and adapted the character Thor. Movies and films also took a turn in using these gods for movies, Thor: Ragnarök is a 2017 movie that made Thor and his brother Loki as main characters in the movie, where Odin makes an appearance too. Video games also took part in taking these myths and providing a journey through a video game discovering and seeing these gods in Santa Monica's *God of War* 2018 and the sequel Ragnarök.

Fantasy literature evolved and changed throughout these different times but stayed true to the original content offering new themes, emotions and character development in the Fantasy works.

## **1.6 Case study of J.R.R Tolkien**

J.R.R Tolkien is considered as one of the prominent writers of fantasy literature; his book *The Lord of the Rings* 1954-1955 is a fantasy-based piece of work where he implemented elements from Norse mythology's themes, character traits, and cultural beliefs. Tolkien took inspiration from the original texts of the Prose Edda and Poetic Edda to influence his world-building in Middle-earth. Tolkien infused these assets into his work to craft a fantasy world that covers all aspects of fantasy as a genre, demonstrating the Norse mythology role in influencing said works, from characters, settings and motifs.

### **1.6.1 Norse Mythical Traditions in Tolkien's Characters**

Tolkien's characters in his book *The Lord of the Rings* take inspiration from Norse gods. Gandalf in the novel, is depicted as a white bearded, large, cloaked wizard, somehow referencing Odin who sacrifices his eye to seek wisdom and infinite knowledge and stays on Yggdrasil for more runes. Similarly, Gandalf takes the Balrog for a deadly fight, where he loses his life, and then gets reincarnated as Gandalf the White. Gandalf is depicted as the wise old man with a silver beard (Tolkien 295), holding wide knowledge of magic, history and wisdom, a mentor and a protector for his people, he is compassionate and looks for the better good of everyone surrounding him.

In Contrast, Odin is known for being manipulative, a master of deceive, with the nickname the Allfather, ruling all over the nine realms and beyond, knowing every little detail that occurs at

any time, his obsession with knowledge cost him his own eye, only cementing the extends he would go to get what he wants. Other characters also fit within the Nordic themes, the dwarves of Middle-earth, are known for their superior craftsmanship, wild fighting spirit, reflect the Norse myths Dyerger.

### **1.6.2 Apocalyptic Themes in Ragnarök and The War of the Ring**

Tolkien's *the Lord of the Rings* and the original Norse tales share equal apocalyptic prophecies in the Poetic Edda. In the Poetic Edda, Ragnarök looms over the tales as a brutal end of times war where gods fall, and everything cease to exist. Similarly in *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron is depicted as the ultimate evil where the end battle takes place. Sauron perishes forever after the events of *The War of the Ring* where he is defeated and the world heals from his evil.

Ragnarök in contrast offers a tragic myth, where accepting the incoming end and demise in inevitable. The distinction between them is important, Tolkien's version of Ragnarök is hopeful and optimistic, despite the events, a happy ending is achieved. While *God of War's* Ragnarök is darker and more terrifying, and end where everything is wiped out, even gods perish.

This contrast highlights that the adaptations of these themes, motifs and legacies, does not mean they all should end the same way, fantasy literature offers more endings that change from one tale to another, avoiding the repetitive and expected ending for the reader.

### **1.6.3 Middle-earth's Settings and Norse Mythical Geography**

The Setting in Tolkien's Middle-earth takes huge inspiration from the mythical elements of the Norse mythos. Both settings share the same imaginary, fantasy elements, from Middle-earth to the Nine Realms. First, the Nine Realms holds Asgard, the home of the Aesir gods such as Odin, Thor, Loki, while Middle-earth, has Valinor, a home for the god-like figures the Valar. The Nine Realms has a realm for humans called Midgard, while Middle-earth hosts them in the main continent where, men, elves, and even hobbits share everyday life in that world.

Furthermore, the overall structures of both worlds share the architecture structures such as wide halls, vast spaces, and mythical locations such as temples and mythical locations such as the Yggdrasil. The Misty Mountains shows the harsh giant lands of Jötunheim. Mirkwood, reflects the Norse tales with darkness and monsters inside dangerous forests. Middle-earth does not contain a physical resemblance for Yggdrasil, but more of a conceptual structure in the White Tree of Gondor, focusing more on the symbolism behind it, rather than the physical aspect.

Tolkien's use of elements of fantasy inspired by Norse mythology helped push the genre of fantasy literature into a higher reach level, thus influencing future works and perhaps open the gates for new interpretation and adaptations for these works through a more enhanced depictions and integration of Nordic elements. This case study showcases Norse mythology's vastness, providing themes, motifs and characters that shaped Norse mythology itself, and also influencing writers to infuse these elements into new fantasy works throughout the rest of history.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This literature review tackled Norse mythology's historical and literary contexts so its impact on modern fantasy works would be easier to trace and understand. Additionally, it eases the transition to the following theoretical and analytical chapters. This first chapter tackled mythology

as a whole, then Norse mythology by itself, providing a door for exploring the origins of the numerous gods, beliefs and themes present in these Nordic tales. This exploration of the evolution of fantasy literature through Tolkien's work reveals the deep roots of Norse mythology in fantasy works. Combining both the old tales with and the modern storytelling showcases that they are strongly connected, which allows to preserve these myths in literary works despite time moving on.

**Chapter Two:**

**The Mythological**

**Theory**

**and Adaptation**

**Theories**

## **Chapter Two: The Mythological Theory and Adaptation Theories**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Norse mythology had a vast influence on contemporary fantasy literature, as highlighted in the previous chapter, but in order to fully grasp how these old tales are reimagined and repurposed to modern context, a theoretical approach is required. Norse Mythology contains a vast arsenal of mythical motifs, tales of gods preserved in the two original sources, the Prose Edda and Poetic Edda. These two provide a source of inspiration for fantasy works such as Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001), the *Thor* (2011 and 2017) movies, and Santa Monica's *God of War* (2018) and the sequel *Ragnarök*. This chapter offers a conceptual and theoretical view to discuss how Norse characters such as Odin, Loki, and Thor, themes such as Ragnarök, and settings like the Nine Realms and the Yggdrasil are transformed and repurposed into a new fantasy and a new way to tell these stories within a cultural frame.

### **2.2 Main Mythological Theories for Analysis**

In order to trace how these tales got repurposed is the use of mythological theories. This chapter will discuss Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, Claude Lévi-Strauss's Structuralism, and Northrop Frye's Mythopoeics. These three theories explore the Norse mythology's doomsday plots, mythical tales, and contradictions within forces, helping to understand myths as a narrative. This theoretical approach is suitable for dissecting fantasy's fascination with epic tales of gods and captivating outcomes.

### 2.2.1 Campbell's Monomyth

Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is a work in comparative mythology where Campbell expresses that myths often resemble a monomyth, a hero's linear progression throughout his journey. It starts with the protagonist leaving his home, where he faces challenges and difficulties along the road, and then comes back home from his journey, usually wiser, and a changed individual, more mature, with a lesson learned. In the *Prose Edda*, Thor clashes with Hrungrir, a Jötunn, or a giant, where they fight and Thor comes out victorious, hence his nickname the giant-slayer. In the *Poetic Edda*, Odin hangs himself on Yggdrasil, seeking knowledge and wisdom, pretending to be a wise counselor.

Norse mythology's heroic elements often do not respect the monomythic structure; Thor and his battle with Hrungrir is simply a heroic favor rather than a whole journey. Another example is Odin hanging himself on Yggdrasil; it is indeed a journey for seeking wisdom and knowledge, but it is missing Odin returning home, instead, Odin is left there. This imbalance between the two patterns makes Norse Mythology predictable, yet the outcome varies each time.

Norse myths generally have a dreadful conclusion. In Ragnarök, Thor and Odin die, and the universe ignites and perishes, with only an insignificant change of a rebirth happening. This dark tone makes Norse tales stand out from the rest. Fantasy literature uses this negative aura, the hopelessness, to come up with captivating tales. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo's voyage to achieving his task of destroying the One Ring follows perfectly Campbell's steps. Frodo leaves the region of Shire, then afterwards, he overcomes Sauron's army and then leaves Middle-earth at

the end. Campbell's monomyth tackles how Nordic tales give fantasy a hero's voyage with gloomy, more intense emotional events.

### **2.2.2 Lévi-Strauss's Structuralism**

Claude Lévi-Strauss's work *Structural Anthropology* published in 1963, addresses myths as ways to resolve tensions between contrasted beliefs by showing these conflicts. Norse mythology contains many of these contradictions. "In the Poetic Edda, Loki's foolish antics spark a fierce verbal clash with his so-called 'father', where the two of them confront each other in a wild verbal exchange where Loki insults Odin, who retaliates with threats of violence, vowing to decapitate Loki's head off with his hammer."

Oppositions in order Odin's ruling and Loki's free spirit are evident. In the *Prose Edda*, Thor lays his hammer on any disorder that might come from the giants' end. Ragnarök depicts the cycle of life and death, with life overcoming death, as all the gods fall, yet a new world is reborn. This highlights the opposition in destruction against creation. These conflicts and contradictions make mythology a destination for new exploration for readers who enjoy the flexible nature of Norse Mythology. Fantasy usually uses these contradictions to drive deep, rich storytelling, often seeking solutions for these problems, or raising the tensions for drama, or even taking the outcome to new destinations that correspond with modern issues.

### **2.2.3 Frye's Mythopoeitics**

According to Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), myths are narrative devices that are used constantly in literature, these include tools and motifs such as creation of the universe, challenges, and apocalyptic world-ending occurrences (141). Frye also identifies classic characters and literary means that are recurrent in storytelling. Norse Mythology presents these patterns in a

clear manner. The *Prose Edda's* Gylfaginning explains the origin of the universe being from Ymir, a total creation narrative. Ragnarök resembles the world-ending apocalyptic narrative, with gods fighting to their destiny and deities perishing. Freya, a goddess of love, fertility, and the daughter of Njörðr, introduces the pattern of love and discord. Norse gods fit perfectly to Frye's models, Odin being the wise old god, Thor as the strong hero, and Loki for being wild.

Fantasy literature uses these patterns to show their mythic traits in mythical or even romantic contexts. These patterns allow fantasy to recite deep stories, discussing many themes and ideas that can be expanded themselves. In *God of War*, the destined pattern of Ragnarök fuels Kratos and Atreus's war against Odin, giving the players control over destiny-changing decisions and a chance to change the whole system of beliefs that Norse Mythology set itself upon. Frye's presentation of these patterns reveals how Norse Mythology offers fantasy already made molds to shape itself, a way for fantasy to change these patterns for the sake of the modern readers and their reaction to said changing events.

### **2.3 Frameworks for Cultural and Literary Adaptation**

Alongside the mythological theories, Cultural and literary adaptation theories are crucial for understanding how Norse myths are spun into a modern work for modern contexts. This section uses Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model, Linda Hutcheon's theories on adaptation, and Roland Barthes's concept of myth as ideology to demonstrate how Norse mythology changed through time, settings, and cultural factors. These frameworks highlight the interaction of dedication to old sources and innovation for global audiences, mirrored in the transformation of gods into more widely accepted characters, doomsday scenarios into possible solutions, and mythical environments into vivid surroundings.

### 2.3.1 Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding Model

Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist, offered the encoding/decoding model in 1973. It provided further understanding of how Norse mythology is translated across cultural contexts. Hall argues that the original texts are encoded with a specific meaning by the author; then afterwards, the readers or listeners decode it in a manner that might or might not get to the intended message behind the coding. Using Hall's model, the *Prose Edda* encoded the Nordic myths and narrative in Gylfaginning, showing Odin and Thor as figures of paganism to be pushed to the Christian perspective.

Modern fantasy re-encodes these tales for more worldwide coverage, avoiding religious charges. *God of War* encodes Ragnarök as a tragedy that could be avoided, prioritizing the current actions taken rather than waiting for the ultimate doomsday, and players decode it through the game story events.

The *Thor* movies encode Thor as a superhero, which is a common practice in moviemaking; his Hammer Mjölfnir serves as a symbol of Justice, decoded by the movie viewers as a myth first, and a symbolic figure of justice through that character. Hall's model shows the adaptation process as a shift from the unshakable view of these myths into more of an entertainment asset for the viewers, formed by cultural norms such as the focus on the self in individualism, reflecting oneself into these characters, thus playing into the whole adaptation process. Readers can decode modern works differently, some readers might see Thor as a hero that is more enjoyable as he is, other readers might not like the change and adaptation of a classical character, with new traits and more modern touch.

### **2.3.2 Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation**

Linda Hutcheon's book entitled *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) defines the process of adaptation as purposefully reinterpreting a piece of work. Hutcheon, in her book, argues that adaptations resemble the process of putting out new meaning on top of original texts, while keeping the originality of the text's essence. Hutcheon highlights the process of adaptation as being a repetition with change and as an engagement with the source. Norse mythology with its both Eddas offers a valuable source of reinterpretations. Thor, being a giant slayer open to new fantasies, his brother Loki's Odin-like trickery, and the Nine Realms settings, all open the doors for new works that reinterpret these into new adaptations.

In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the author subliminally adapts Odin's wisdom into Gandalf, thus proving Hutcheon's theory that he used the unique myth being Odin and reinterpreted it into Gandalf hence why both figures share some of the characteristics, and also, Ragnarök's doomsday is reinterpreted into the Ring's War at the demise of Sauron.

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* preserves Odin as Mr. Wednesday, keeping his one-eyed looks, but putting him in America's religious decay, showing modern-day spiritual themes. Santa Monica's *God of War* adapts the giant tree as a hub to travel across the Nine Realms, keeping the functioning role of the tree while providing an experience for the players of the game. Hutcheon's theory of Adaptation highlights that traces of Norse mythology stay familiar across the works, but the narrative and storytelling, the existential questions, and psychological wonderings change and evolve to meet what fantasy is up to nowadays.

### **2.3.3 Roland Barthes's Myth as an Ideology**

Roland Barthes's book *Mythologies* (1957) puts myth as a form of an ideological communication process, which changes the way the world is interpreted. Barthes discusses the

original myths and how they transform historical past into universal truths, which directly influences the audience's overall perceptions. Norse mythology in its original form encoded the Viking's values of honor, tradition, fate, and hardships through gods such as Thor being a symbol of these tough times, and tales like Ragnarök.

In modern fantasy, these tales are re-encoded to mirror modern views. Gaiman's *American Gods* illustrates Odin as a declining god, making him rely on human belief, naturalizing a religious global perspective where divinity relies fully on cultural significance, aligning with Barthes's idea of myth being a reflection of modern values of societies. The Norse god Odin becomes the interest for new myth about the old beliefs.

The *Thor* movies portray Asgard as being a sci-fi utopia and Thor as a democratic hero, pushing American beliefs of individualism and fairness into Norse mythology, making the latter an instrument for Hollywood's ideological narrative that often pushes agendas and specific trending topics at a certain time. Barthes's theory demonstrates that Norse mythology is repurposed to convey contemporary values, pushing secularism, individuality while saving its appeal, pushing its heavy ideological impact to various audiences of fantasy literature.

#### **2.4 How Norse Mythological Elements are Repurposed for Modern Audience**

Norse mythology made its way to modern era for to its legendary tales, apocalyptic prophecies and astonishing universe. Modern fantasy adapted these myths through humanizing the deities, envisioning different outcomes to Ragnarök and rebuilding the mythic settings of the universe. These factors therefore contribute in supplying modern fantasy with more inspired works.

### **2.4.1 The Transformation of Deities: From Gods to Relatable Figures**

Fantasy gives these deities a human-like spin in order to make them relatable to everyday humans, which helps them connect. In *American Gods*, Odin is Mr. Wednesday, a malicious old man who constantly needs the belief of ordinary humans to feed his nature. This aligns with Barthes's idea that myths do indeed mirror modern values in a way, like being skeptical of religion, putting Odin in the middle of a universe that does not believe in his godhood. His sons, Loki and Thor, also take another perspective.

In the *Thor* movies, Loki's playfulness becomes envy and hatred, and Thor's mightiness becomes a hilarious heroism, adding many funny moments and interaction in order to fit the viewers' desire for relatable characters. Fantasy in this case, preserves these gods' main traits, of them being gods, and their power and abilities; however, it makes them more like human beings in their interactions and what happens to them across the movie.

Similarly, *God of War*'s Kratos, originally being a Greek god is humanized by his experience as a father of Atreus. His interactions differ from one character to another. His portrayal of emotion in the game, from rage, acceptance, regret and fury, somehow makes him more relatable as a human being, rather than a mighty god.

### **2.4.2 Reimagining Ragnarök: Unavoidable Doom or a Narrative Possibility**

The main theme in Norse mythology is Ragnarök, where it all ends. An apocalyptic world-destroying battle where everyone dies eventually, portraying the dark nature of destiny in Norse mythology and how everyone is willing to accept it no matter what, fully believing that nothing will change the outcome of said demise. However, in *God of War: Ragnarök*, the concept of Ragnarök is challenged by Kratos and Atreus, where they go on a journey throughout Ragnarök

Events, giving the players a first-hand experience of the events represented in a video game. In the movie *Thor: Ragnarök*, it turns the concept of Ragnarök into an event where Asgard falls, but Thor was able to save his people, shifting the events from inevitable demise to a positive ending, something that the audiences appreciated.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* uses Ragnarök's pattern; Frodo's quest finishes with Sauron being gone, and his threat is no more. However, the elves depart, reflecting a loss with a touch of optimism. These shifts in events go in pairs with Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, making the Ragnarök epic feel the same but adding modern plot twists such as the possibility of change or a lurking solution somewhere, making these myths suit the modern need for positive relatable stories where everyone is happy. This change mirrors modern emotions that lean towards hope and avoid gloomy endings. The concept of being able to alter fate and control the ending of a story is widely favored by the modern audience, since it gives a feeling of control rather than helplessness.

### **2.4.3 Mythical Locations: The Nine Realms in Fantasy Worlds**

Norse mythology got a wide range of settings. The Nine Worlds themselves hold different biomes with the World-tree centering them. These places tie the whole universe together. Fantasy allows the audience to explore these locations differently. In *God of War*, Yggdrasil becomes a tool of travel each time the player needs to swap realms; for example, if a player wants to go from Alfheim to Midgard, or any location, the player has to enter Yggdrasil in order to change realms. This experience attracted many players and fans of Norse mythology towards the game, allowing them to explore these realms at the pace they want.

The *Thor* movies depict Asgard as a futuristic city where everything is bright and shiny, stimulating the movie viewers who are into flashy visuals, and those who had the same vision of what Asgard would look like. *American Gods* uses Yggdrasil as a metaphor for belief rather than an actual tree that exists. These different aspects make Norse settings from old, eerie, mythical locations, into places where games are taking place, or movies or even novels that have a new spin on the themes, reflecting the Mythological Theory's belief that the myths have adaptable patterns. The implementation of Yggdrasil, being a core game mechanic for travel, turns this tree into more of a means of travel, rather than a concept. Similarly, Asgard being depicted as futuristic makes it more of an ordinary place of habitat, rather than a divine place for gods and mythological beings.

#### **2.4.4 Cultural Shifts in Evolving Perspectives and Values in Adaptation**

Fantasy grabs elements from Norse mythology and uses them to keep up with modern popular culture. The general motion is moving towards people being less and less religious, with the rise of atheism and secularism. In *American Gods*, Gaiman portrays gods, even mighty ones such as Odin, losing their powers and might facing the lack of belief in them, reflecting Barthes's idea of how myths show the current values.

Another rising cultural shift embodies in the wave of focus on individualism and psychological aspects. In the popular Santa Monica's *God of War* games, for example, while allowing a huge amount of violence and thrilling clashes between the characters, the lore also dives into Kratos's internal struggles, his relationship with his son Atreus, and his grappling with his past. The focus on these god's intellectual progression and personal growth attracts the modern reader's interest in the seeing them more of relatable figure, rather than a god, and the visual demands of different media drives for adaptations. Movie fans that thrive for epic scenes are in for

a treat while watching the *Thor* movie; the locations look amazing, Asgard is depicted with the futuristic sci-fi touch, which gives these movie fans a good product to consume and an experience worthy of their time.

Book fans, on the other side, might enjoy reading works like *The Lord of the Rings* for its deep world, the atmospheric details in describing elements or even characters and locations, which gives these readers a sense of enjoyment, making the words they are reading, visualize in their minds, thus making these set of words an active world they are taking part in. Norse mythology offers these raw, unfiltered sensations that fit perfectly for fantasy adaptations. Adding more drama and emotions to these epics just makes them more enjoyable and consistently keeps the Norse myths present throughout history and pushes for its existence in the future by new means of adapting these myths into new fantasy works.

The primary fantasy works for analysis investigating how Norse mythology influenced modern fantasy literature requires a set of assets to be used as examples to show the influence in various aspects. Books, games, and movies are picked among the four key works for the chapter three's comparison: Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) by J.R.R. Tolkien, Santa Monica's *God of War* (2018) and *God of War: Ragnarök* (2022) video games, and *Thor* movies (2011 and 2017) from Marvel Studios. Each of these works is selected because they implement Norse mythology in different ways, from characters, themes, beliefs, to different interpretations and representations across these different products. They are all connected by the Mythological Theory ideas of gods, the apocalypse, struggles, and solutions.

The Adaptation theories of Stuart Hall, Linda Hutcheon, and Roland Barthes all display how Norse myth finds a way into today's time. *The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien is already a classic

icon in fantasy literature, which makes it deserve a spot in the selection. In his work, Tolkien refrains from mentioning Odin and Thor literally, but he adapts their characters and what they stand for into characters from his novel. Gandalf is the representation of Odin in the novel; he wanders around and interacts with people, just like the Allfather would do, seeking information and any bit of news.

Tolkien also uses Ragnarök as an inspiration for the One Ring, both leading to demise and destruction. Tolkien borrows from these classic Norse myths and takes inspiration into putting these assets to build his own universe with hits of Norse mythology. The impact of Norse mythology on Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is subtly implemented, but not too difficult to notice.

#### **2.4.5 God of War 2018 and Ragnarök**

Both *God of War* games by Santa Monica offer the chance to take a lens and explore Norse mythology, with depictions of events and characters that only make it solid. Gods, throughout the game, make an appearance and some are vital characters in the game. Baldur, one of Odin's sons, is the antagonist of the first game, and plays a huge role in the first game's events. His fights with Kratos and Atreus set the first game's pace and potential until his death at the end of the game.

Odin and Thor are the sequel's antagonists, with the game opening with a scene that involves them. The developers made sure to set the expectations high, and to prove that these characters are as alive as they can get, not only characters in a video game. The events of Ragnarök truly captivate the player and give the opportunity for the player to be in the driver's wheel, experiencing at first hand the premium experience of both these games. *God of War* (2018) and

*Ragnarök* are solid pieces of work that allow for an interactive journey, a chance to see these characters and hear them, perfectly aligning with the Mythological Theory's idea of myths. The ability to interact in the games is a key factor, giving the players a chance to control these characters and participate in these mythic events, serving a direct experience for the player in the universe.

#### **2.4.6 Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*: Myth in a Secular Age**

Gaiman's *American Gods* is an important work in understanding modern adaptations of Norse mythology. The general atmosphere revolves around the war between the old gods in Mr. Wednesday resembling Odin, and new gods being technology, media and futuristic assets. The work examines the concept of believing in these gods, expressing that the old myths weaken by time and the believe in them fades away with the spread of atheism and secular societies as depicted in the novel.

#### **2.4.7 Thor Movies: Myths and Movies**

Marvel Studio's *Thor* (2011) and *Thor: Ragnarök* (2017) boost Norse mythology onto the big screens around the world, in cinemas, parties, and even inside households. Thor and Loki are depicted in the movie according to the *Prose Edda* description of them. Thor with his Mjölnir and Loki with his trouble-making antics perfectly capture the essence of these characters and catapult them into the box office, reaching the global scale.

This exposure allows for Norse mythology to be spread and attracts new interested individuals as in readers, or even movie studios or game studios that might be interested in making a hit piece revolving around Norse mythology. The inclusion of Thor and other figures into Marvel's Universe indicates that these characters are included for being more of heroes rather than

the actual gods and deities. These adaptations show how storytelling is getting more flexible and moving away from restrictions set by the original works.

## **2.5 Why These Works?**

*The Lord of the Rings, American Gods, the Thor movies, and God of War* all fall under the same umbrella of Norse mythology. These works tell stories, epics, and the journeys of these deities and heroes. They reflect the beliefs of the people and highlight the ideas around myths and the importance of bringing.

and adapting these myths into new, modern settings. The works reflect the reach of Norse mythology; from the old times, Norse myths managed not only to survive but adapt to new different times across different eras.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Understanding how Norse mythology shapes modern fantasy required the use of hypotheses to argue on how the ongoing popularity came to be. This Chapter puts forward use to these works to form a Mythological Theory, works such as Joseph Campbell's, Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of conflicting powers, and Northrop Frye's tale pattern. The chapter illustrated how these said gods, themes, and prophecies help in building fantasy. These concepts illustrate why characters such as Odin, themes of doomsday, and locations such as Yggdrasil work so well in today's stories.

The adaptation theories by Stuart Hall, Linda Hutcheon, and Roland Barthes were used to describe how these Nordic tales have evolved to match contemporary works, games, and even movies. This chapter brought up the humanization of gods such as Odin being Mr. Wednesday in

*American Gods*, Thor and Loki being adapted and transformed into more friendly figures in fantasy. Even Kratos in *God of War*, despite him being tough, his emotional side shows up in his interactions with Atreus and Mimir, and him opening up and changing his stubborn thoughts.

Ragnarök switches from certain demise to a captivating playthrough where Ragnarök might be avoided. Settings in these works such as Yggdrasil bypass its limitation of belonging to a specific location but impacts world designs in games and movies.

The rising interest in Norse mythology is led by the view that these characters and gods are not a religious symbol to be praised and worshipped, but more as characters that feed the fantasy literature and carry modern ideals. These characters keep becoming more and more relatable to the audiences, the same ones that appreciate how these myths are being repurposed to fit into these modern narratives and help establish a relativity point between these gods, heroes, and locations and the normal everyday person.

**Chapter Three:**

**Comparative Analysis of**

**Norse Mythology in**

**Contemporary Fantasy**

**Literature**

## **Chapter Three: Comparative Analysis of Norse Mythology in Contemporary Fantasy Literature**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Norse mythology has been one of the most prominent mythologies on the global scale. It serves as a hub for numerous gods and beliefs. It was and still is an inspiration for many modern pieces of work, most importantly, the fantasy genre. The previous chapter allowed for the study of the influence, implementing a Mythological Theory, Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, Claude Lévi-Strauss's opposing forces, and finally Northrop Frye's patterns in tales. That chapter has highlighted that the Norse mythology's gods, such as Loki and Thor, have been adapted to become more friendly and accepted figures, allowing them to get a place in fantasy literature for future projects.

Chapter Three uses the same model to compare the works to the *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda*, by assessing how Norse characters, themes, and locations change for modern audiences. This chapter \*contain four main sections across the whole chapter. The start will discuss the transformation of Norse gods into becoming today's heroes. Afterwards, the question will revolve around how Ragnarök as a doomsday myth managed to get new modern significance in this era. Furthermore, how Norse locations such as Asgard or Midgard have been adapted and implemented into the fantasy world. Finally, the chapter will unveil the covert meanings and cultural reflections through exploring major themes, showing their evolving state, and the continuous impact of Norse mythology.

### 3.2 Characters: Norse Characters in Human Traits

The Norse gods often capture an interesting dynamic, being supernatural and above normal beings yet suffering from the same imperfections. The humanization of these gods makes them the perfect candidates for adaptations in fantasy literature. The original *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda* set the descriptions for each one of the gods. Odin is depicted as an old man who is obsessed with seeking wisdom. Loki is described as a wild individual who is unpredictable and deceiving, and Thor is depicted as a mighty god. Modern works take a new narrative style on these characters, making them suitable and relatable for modern beliefs and audiences. The process of analysis will be based on two main theoretical concepts: Joseph Campbell's recurring heroic patterns and Roland Barthes's perspective on mythology as a reflection of societal values. Through the four key works, this study will shed light on how these deities experience these adaptations, keeping their identity and getting reshaped into modern storytelling norms to attract new audiences and entertain the current one.

#### 3.2.1 Odin

Odin, the Allfather, is described in the *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda* as a god that seeks knowledge at any price, even if it costs him his own sight. Odin is a ruthless, deceiving man that is glorified by his own people. In *American Gods*, Odin is represented through Mr. Wednesday, a man that is extremely smart, but deceiving and untrustworthy. In *American Gods*, he is weak in comparison to the original version; Odin lacks human belief in his powers, thus making him weaker and more vulnerable. Barthes explored this idea, and the author reflected it greatly, in a time where there is doubt about gods and anything religious of some sort. In *The Lord of the Rings*,

Odin's sharpness and wisdom is represented through Gandalf, a wizard who uses his powers in helping others.

Modern reinterpretation of Odin offers contrasting portrayals of the character shaped by the cultural context explored. While Tolkien did not explicitly depict Odin as Gandalf in *The Lord of The Rings*, Gandalf represents a positive character being wise and an honorable wizard, while offering guidance throughout the work. Gaiman's Mr. Wednesday offers a more realistic modern view of what Odin would experience in a society lacking spiritual and religious beliefs. Santa Monica's *God of war* series portray Odin as being constantly skeptical, wary of each detail. He constantly seeks knowledge and wisdom in an attempt to escape his demise in Ragnarök. This representation reflects the modern concerns of the exploitation of power and corruption of the rulers. It stands out from Tolkien's Gandalf being righteous, and Gaiman's devastated Mr. Wednesday.

### **3.2.2 Loki**

Loki thrives in chaos; he is described in the *Poetic Edda* as a chaos-stirring god, and in *Völuspá*, he even helps in causing Ragnarök, setting the scale on how much of a wild god he is. In the *Thor* movies, he is depicted as a betrayer, backstabbing his own brother Thor and tricking Asgard as a whole, like he did in *Lokasenna*, with a tragic background, losing his own mother and positive moments, like saving his brother in *Thor: Ragnarök*. Loki's journey fits right into Campbell's idea of the hero's journey, an anti-hero in this case, and modern appreciation for characters that evolve, per Barthes. In *God of War*, Atreus is revealed to be Loki. Loki here is not evil; he first did not even know he was a god until Kratos reveals the truth and tells him about the past, telling Loki about Kratos' past and actions.

Loki accompanies Kratos throughout the whole game next to Mimir; this trio, alongside Sindri and Brok, fights Odin at the game finale. Loki is a special character, and one of the most interesting out of the rest. He constantly struggles taking sides between his giant ancestry, with his mother being a giant, and the values he obtained through his journeys and being close to his father.

Loki's discovery of his nature puts him in a position where he keeps adapting to his new godly abilities, while being indecisive between finding peace and his important role in Ragnarök. These battles he takes make him a relatable character to modern audiences, and a figure that reflects the same theme of struggle to these audiences. Loki's constant inner battles, from his stresses and difficult decisions he makes, reflect a more different and deeper representation of Loki's character than in the Norse tales or even Marvel's adaptation. Loki in the *God of War* series holds a deeper look into identity and discusses inner struggles, hardships in decision making, and a personal development through his childhood.

### **3.2.3 Thor**

Thor, the giant-slayer, is said in the *Prose Edda* to throw his hammer Mjölhnir around to push back the giants. Thor in the movies stays true to that; he equips his hammer to defeat foes, but the comedic touch is there to soften him up, further proving Campbell's pattern for audiences that seek likeable characters. *God of War* truly displays Thor's might when fighting Kratos, whose Leviathan Axe and strength exceed the roofs even among the gods, yet Thor was able to keep up throughout the fight.

Away from Thor's figure being a mighty warrior, *God of War* displays the character of Thor as being constantly sad and haunted by the loss of his sons and mother, eventually making him question his loyalty to Odin, weighing it with how Odin treats him horribly constantly

throughout his life. The portrayal adds personal depth to the character, exploring themes of grief, submission, and self-blame. This representation of Thor makes him a complex antagonist in the game, someone who struggles with his past actions, and questions his doings constantly. This contrasts his representation in the Marvel movies, where he is simply a hero that does heroic deeds for his alliance. *American Gods* deals with Thor as a background figure, a god becoming forgotten, reflecting, as per Barthes, modern values. In *The Lord of the Rings*, while Thor is not directly present, a character like Aragorn, a knight fighting in significant battles, can be seen as embodying Thor-like qualities of strength and righteousness for the audience. All these pieces of work tackle Thor from different corners, from movies and games to books.

### **3.3 Themes: Ragnarök**

In the *Poetic Edda*, *Völuspá* mentions the end of the world. Ragnarök resembles the main point in mythology's belief system; it is simply the end of all things. Gods amongst all strengths and ranks, all fall and perish in the events of Ragnarök where the world burns, and then a chance for a new one to barely start. Fantasy was able to alter the outcome of this gloomy tale to appeal to newer, more modern audiences. Lévi-Strauss's idea of myth balancing contrasts such as life/death and good/evil is used, as well as Hutcheon's method of reforming old tales for newer audiences.

#### **3.3.1 Defying Ragnarök in God of War**

According to *Völuspá* in the *Poetic Edda*, Ragnarök is inevitable; everything is written and there is nothing that can defy the outcome. It is destined for Odin to die to Fenrir, the giant wolf, and for Thor to die to Jörmungandr, the giant serpent, then right after that the world ends. *God of*

*War* maintains this confrontation of Kratos and Atreus with Odin and Thor. Atreus insists on stopping Ragnarök, where Kratos refuses to help at first, but then he finds himself leading the way into these battles, going through the events of Ragnarök and stopping it from happening, thus breaking the previous trust in beliefs.

*God of War* explores avoiding Ragnarök through characters' choices, and the understanding of the prophecy as a whole. Prophecies in *God of war* are questioned and Ragnarök being the end of the universe is avoidable and can be influenced by different factors throughout the game. Kratos's character sees an intellectual development, his doubt of these prophecies grows and he decides to help his son, which massively affects the prophecy and the outcome of Ragnarök, allowing another end for the prophecy. This highlights modern beliefs of individualism and the power of free will in paving the individual's fate.

### **3.3.2 Ragnarök in Thor and The Lord of the Rings**

During the events of the movie *Thor: Ragnarök*, Asgard falls with Thor himself fighting for his people against Hela (who is based on Hel from Norse mythology) and defeats her, taking the people left to a new place, giving hope for once again, lining up with Hutcheon's idea of using myths for optimistic goals. Lévi-Strauss's contradictions, here being order/chaos, are well represented: Hela destroys Asgard, then Thor defeats her and claims victory. The movie highlights the idea that Asgard being limited as only being a collection of structures, but rather, the people living there and their Asgardian spirit. The shift of focus on the importance of Asgard as being rooted in the people's culture and traditions. The survival of these moral through people makes Ragnarök turn into the start of something new, leaving behind the ruins of the battles.

*The Lord of the Rings* uses similar darkness in Sauron's war where an enormous battle takes place. Frodo is victorious and Middle-earth is fine once again. The victory comes at an expensive cost, the Shire gets destroyed by Saruman's soldiers, setting a new reality and changing their home, and their purity to harsh reality. Another cost is the Elves leaving Middle-earth, since their Age came to an end, where the ring got destroyed. The fantasy authors play on these scales of life/death, despair/hope to add drama to the work, setting the reader through a flow of emotions before the ending.

### **3.3.3 Fights in American Gods: Ragnarök as Cultural Conflict**

*American Gods* takes Ragnarök from its usual meaning of the end of the world for Odin (where he dies to Fenrir) and spins it into a new narrative where Odin is facing religious skepticism across the world. The conflict here surpasses the old tales of Odin against Fenrir or any old gods; the threat here is the new gods, Technology and the Media, empowered by the lack of religious belief in these gods. This new confrontation positions Odin against a new, unfamiliar enemy-the new gods-rather than other gods or usual myths. This moves Ragnarök from a battle of who is more dedicated to believing in it, to a deep concept that the readers enjoy through the death and rebirth of faiths. Odin's struggle reflects a metaphor for modern anxieties, with the fading of faith, religion, and traditional customs, Ragnarök takes shape in an altered way, giving a new lens for one's identity and beliefs.

### **3.4 Settings: Norse Places as a Fantasy Universe**

Norse mythology thrives on breathtaking places across the Nine Realms. Two main locations are prominent: Yggdrasil, the world-tree, and Asgard, the Aesir realm. Modern fantasy

literature praises these mythical locations; fantasy novels often contain and use mythical environments in the story events. Norse mythology's creativity and the captivating assets it provides make it the ideal inspiration for fantasy work, since these adaptations allow for hits of the original works and offer a new take on these already well-known locations. This part will be about comparing how these places were implemented in games, movies, and books to enrich their content.

### 3.4.1 Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil in Norse mythology represents a connecting tree for all nine realms in the universe; it represents and serves as a symbol of the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. In *God of War*, Yggdrasil serves as a traveling hub between all the realms and serves as a center point for all the realms. Kratos, Atreus, and Mimir use Yggdrasil as a portal to reach other realms throughout their journey; it becomes more of a useful tool for travel to other realms they have yet to be in. In *God of War*, Yggdrasil's is represented as a physical tree that is often referred to as the realm between realms, it functions a travelling tool for in the game between realms allowing the player to use this cosmic tree as a useful tool, and giving the tree an actual function beyond its mythical symbolism. In *American Gods*, Yggdrasil is used more as a symbol, a mythical concept rather than an actual tree as represented in *God of War*.

In *American Gods*, it does not directly serve as an integral part of the story events, but more of a background concept, usually represented while Odin exists in the modern times his flashbacks and his relation to power of his previous self in the old world. In both cases, it serves as a mythical concept in both worlds, where *God of War* explores it throughout the game events, and *American Gods* hints at it as a concept in the universe.

### 3.4.2 Asgard

Asgard is the Aesir's realm, a place dedicated for gods to live and prosper. It is one of the most known realms since Odin and most of the gods belong there. In the *Thor* movies, Asgard is depicted as a futuristic sci-fi city, serving the audience a futuristic view on how Asgard would look other than the classic description of the place as in the Eddas. This futuristic artistic style combined mythology with a more modern and futuristic touch, detaching Asgard from its old classic description of it being mythical and old, and giving it more flavor of future assets and advanced living conditions.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Middle-earth is the universe of the story; locations like Gondor and Mordor often reflect Norse mythical places like Midgard and Jötunheim, the giants' realm. *The Lord of the Rings* takes inspiration from these places, and it is well reflected in the architecture and the nature of the vast universe. Tolkien does not name the places in his novel Asgard, but readers could trace it and recognize the similarity between them. In *God of War*, Asgard can be visited, and important story events occur there; the player gets to experience Asgard, walk in its streets, and enter Odin's home, traveling through the rooms and halls, getting a first-hand look into visualizing the place.

Asgard is an explorable place in the game, where players can walk around its roads and enter various buildings. It is safe and secure from any threats, reflecting Odin's authority and strict ruling. It is also a place where other gods can be met: Heimdall the son of Odin, Sif (Thor's wife), and Thrud (Thor and Sif's daughter), where the player can talk to them and interact with them.

### **3.5 Motifs in Norse Mythology: From the Old to the Modern**

Norse Mythology is full of motifs. The *Prose Edda* and *Poetic Edda* mention numerous motifs. Thor's hammer Mjölfnir and the Norns, three goddesses who determine the destiny of both gods and humans, play a key role in the mythology. This part will highlight how these motifs are redrafted into more modern ways to fit contemporary fantasy.

#### **3.5.1 Mjölfnir: Thor's Hammer**

According to the Eddas, Thor is equipped with Mjölfnir, his iconic weapon that is made by Brokk and Sindri, a hammer that is extremely powerful. Thor uses his hammer throughout his journeys wherever he goes; his companion is always by his side to serve justice. Modern views of Mjölfnir, as in Marvel's Thor where the hammer can only be wielded by the worthy, giving access to the hammer's power only to the heroes and powerful characters.

In *God of War*, Mjölfnir accompanies Thor everywhere he goes, showing how Thor uses the hammer alongside his own strength, making him a mighty god in Norse mythology. In the game, the hammer also serves as a transportation method, where Thor literally swings the hammer and teleports himself to it, allowing him to fly away to wherever the hammer goes, or simply flicking his fingers and the hammer finds its way back to his hands, destroying whatever was in its way. Thor's Mjölfnir is one of the most recognizable mythical weapons. This gives perspectives on how Thor's hammer is used throughout different adaptations of Marvel's movies and Santa Monica's *God of War*.

### 3.5.2 The Norns and Fate

The Norns are three powerful goddesses who are sisters, Urðr, Skuld and Verðandi. They are tasked with controlling destiny and deciding one's fate. These goddesses take shelter in the Well of Urðr, a place under Yggdrasil. Modern works discuss fate as a motif in a wide variety. In Santa Monica's *God of War*, the Norns take a part in the game, where the player gets to meet and interact with them, yet challenge their predictions. Kratos and Atreus, aim to alter the outcome of these already determined prophecies when meeting the Norns and listening to what they had to say, infusing modern values of the individual's power of controlling his future, and attempting to change the destiny.

*The Lord of the Rings* by Tolkien also contains documented prophecies in the universe, but the characters' actions still play a role in affecting these prophecies. This presents the idea of personal actions in determining how prophecies end.

In Gaiman's *American Gods*, the deities still seek validation and belief in them, which means that one's belief does indeed affect these gods and their power, thus giving the same idea of belief and prophecies. These works tackle the modern views on fate and destiny, giving a lens on how fate is perceived and dealt with, from accepting these prophecies as they were told in the old times, or alter them and their outcome, to rather fit in modern fantasy's leniency towards individualism and the personal power of decision making.

### 3.5.3 Notable Significant Motifs

Norse mythology contains numerous motifs, from runes, the Jötnar to the Nine Realms.

These mythic motifs are adapted to modern times, and changed from old symbols to modern narrative tools in works like *God of War* and Marvel's *Thor*. The existence and use of these motifs shows Norse mythology's role in building world and telling stories.

#### **3.5.4 Runes**

Runes are a set of symbols that are magical and used as an alphabetic tool in Norse mythology. Runes are used for writing and telling the future of the universe, such as in Ragnarök. Runes as a motif take different shapes in adaptations.

In *God of War*, runes can be found everywhere, often found in tablets that tell the lore of the universe. In the 2018 game, Atreus only Atreus was able to decipher these runes; Kratos needed his assistance to read them to him. After, in *God of War Ragnarök*, Kratos learns how to read these runes from his own son throughout their journey, which shows the importance of these runes in Norse mythology. Tolkien created custom runes for his works such as Cirth, an alphabet that uses runes in *The Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien takes inspiration from Norse mythology's runes and uses them in his works. The consistent presence of runes in fantasy works implies their significance in portraying the magical and symbolic aspects of runes in contemporary fantasy.

#### **3.5.5 The Giants/Jötnar**

The Jötnar, commonly referred to as the Giants, have their own realm of Jötunheim. There is constant conflict between the Aesir gods and the Jötnar. In *God of war*, these Giants are a rare and can never be found, Kratos's wife Fye was herself a Giant. Fye plays a huge role in the plot of the 2018 *God of War* game, where Kratos and Atreus embark a journey through the Nine Realms to scatter her ashes in her own realm of Giants, Jötunheim. Marvel's *Thor* movies include Giants such as Surtur, who is the ruler of Muspelheim, the realm of fire. Surtur commands the fire giants

and leads them towards Asgard to destroy it in the events of Ragnarök. *The Lord of the Rings* is depicted as an elemental creature, through Troll in the mountains, and stone giants in Middle-earth. Giants are represented across all these works, in different ways, displaying their power and importance in the universe of fantasy.

### **3.5.6 The Nine Realms**

The Nine Realms in Norse mythology are worlds that are connected by Ygdrasil, the world tree. In *God of War*, the player gets to experience visiting all the Nine Realms, from Helheim, Muspelheim to Niflheim to the rest of the realms, the player gets to visit these realms and come across different types of enemies, from Elves, Ancients to Soul Eaters. The player gets to see how different these realms are from each other, with each realm staying true to its name, while visiting Muspelheim, the realm of fire, the never-ending volcanic landscapes, the extremely high temperatures, makes it a literal hell for the player to be in. Niflheim is another realm the player gets to see, the never-ending freezing horizon, the extremely icy cold winds and the bodies of frozen corpses, a realm that is haunting and captivating.

Marvel's *Thor* movies also include Muspelheim as part of the plot, where Thor gets captured and held hostage by Surur. Muspelheim here is similar to the previous depiction where fire scatters everywhere, rivers of extremely hot lava flow across the vast wasteland. The nine Realms are used in modern fantasy to allow for a basis in setting an environment for a novel and bringing the originality of these realms into modern works for audience.

## **3.6 Overview on Comparative Findings and Adaptation's Impacts**

Norse Mythology's iconic deities such Odin and both of his sons Loki and Thor, are subject to change and adaptation in many modern fantasy projects. The authors of these works expand the

view on these characters from not only being gods, but characters that are imperfect and filled with personal issues.

In *American Gods*, Odin is seen as a desperate man in Mr. Wednesday's character. Marvel's *Thor* has more comedy built in the characters, and a sense of human to what was once, a ruthless god. *God of War* gave Loki a different set of traits than other works, exploring inner problems and character development.

The changes in these characters reflect modern society's standards and passion for complex characters, building on Campbell's hero's journey. Another idea of myth as being an ideology in Barthes's theory is present in Odin reflecting fears of the lack of belief and religious tendencies in *American Gods*.

Ragnarök, as a whole, is tackled differently in modern fantasy. The original Ragnarök in old myths revolves around the destined end of the world, and an unavoidable event that expects. In modern works, Ragnarök is more flexible to change. In *God of war*, the prophecy is defied and altered to a better ending for everyone. *Thor: Ragnarök* does not see Asgard's fall as the end of Asgard, but rather, Asgard lives through the people. These narratives align with Hutcheon's Adaptation theory, keeping the same originality but altering the overall events and outcome to match the modern views.

Both Asgard and Yggdrasil are present in new adaptations with fresher perspectives. In Marvel's *Thor*, Asgard in a futuristic place, while in *God of War*, it is corrupted with Odin's strict ruling over everything in it. Yggdrasil is implemented as a game mechanic allowing the player to travel, while the movies see it as lore asset in the universe. Hall's origin of meanings gets a new understanding with the new audiences for these works.

Thor's hammer Mjölnir and the Norns are motifs displayed in both *God of War* with the Norns laying prophecies and Kratos challenging them, and Marvel's Thor use of Thor's hammer in the movie. Both motifs are strong assets for modern storytellers to implement to their works, since they still attract audiences.

The rising interest in adaptation of Norse mythology shows that these myths are there to stay in fantasy, despite all centuries, the Norse tales found a way to stay relevant and infused in modern works as dramas and new narratives. Myths constantly change with these different adaptations, yet they keep the originality and the essence of these tales in contemporary fantasy.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Chapter three of this work explored how Norse Mythology has been adapted through new modern fantasy. These adaptations changed how different characters such as Odin, Loki and Thor are imagined how mythical locations such as Yggdrasil and Asgard are redesigned in Marvel's *Thor* and Santa Monica's *God of War*, even Ragnarök changed from being a destined end of the world, to an event that could be avoided. Norse symbols like Mjölnir take a new perspective.

Norse Myths managed to stay relevant due to modern fantasy's interest in discussing subjects of intellectual struggle, character development through Norse mythology's characters. From gods changing destiny to deities finding meanings, Norse mythology kept itself rooted in modern works, achieving being relevant throughout history and shows modern fantasy as a tool of preservation for these myths, beliefs and cultural identities for future audiences.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

Mythology played a huge role in preserving human traditions and customs and passing it down to future generations in many civilizations. Mythology reflects and embodies the set of beliefs, cultures, identities, and tales that hold traditional practices and the lore of entire civilizations.

Norse mythology consistently stayed relevant throughout history, from the start of the Viking Age to modern times. This work has highlighted how the stories from the Poetic Edda and Prose Edda, still exist in contemporary fantasy. From Odin's wisdom and wit and Thor's strength, themes of fate and the inner struggle of these characters, these aspects attracted modern fantasy and made these characters more relatable for the audiences across different media, from novels, movies, to games.

This dissertation studies the presence of Norse mythology in modern narratives through three main analytical lenses. The first chapter sets a foundational examination of mythological structure, while paying attention to how these myths focus on human fragility and the predetermined prophecies of doom, the same elements that shaped the evolution of fantasy literature. The second chapter constructs the analytical framework by tackling three approaches: First, mythological theory that helps with explaining the influence of Norse figures. Afterwards, an adaptation theory which shows how these myths' nature changes across different retellings. Finally, cultural studies that connect narrative changes to overall societal shifts.

Four main pieces of work were selected, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Marvel's *Thor* movie, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* and Santa Monica's *God of War* series. These works represent the inspiration of modern fantasy reinterpretation to fit new audiences. The third chapter

deeply examined these works, unveiling how motifs of Odin's strict ruling, Ragnarök's destruction, and Yggdrasil are repurposed to express contemporary concerns. From anxieties rising within secular societies to desires and fears of loss of faith, the myths mirrored modern concerns.

Norse mythology continues to inspire fantasy since these myths somehow find their way back into fantasy works. Modern audiences enjoy these figures of gods, heroes and monsters. Fantasy works keep finding use of Norse mythology's characters and explore new perspectives for the same assets. These adaptations spread across different media, from books, games and movies; Norse mythology finds a way to get itself in fantasy works. This ability to survive through all the factors and yet still be relevant, can be clearly see in Norse mythology's old stories, getting fresh adaptations that only open the audience to more interpretations, and allows these media for more producers to be pumped to modern audiences.

The research conducted argues and proves that myths are not a thing of the past, but rather, can be found inside various fantasy works. Since contemporary literature keeps creating new perspectives into these characters, and people still show interest in the collection of tales of gods and heroic battles and world ending prophecies, Norse mythology will keep finding ways in staying relevant and surviving through adapting to change.

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Thor. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, Marvel Studios, 2011, Disney+, [www.disneyplus.com](http://www.disneyplus.com). Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Norse mythology in *God of War* series

### Appendix 1: Odin



Odin as depicted in *God of War: Ragnarök* (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).

Odin, also known as the Allfather and Lord of the Hanged, is the ruler of Asgard. Odin is depicted as an old man, with grey hair and beard and wearing jewelry, earrings and golden rings on his fingers. He is powerful and manipulative, embodying knowledge and wisdom to the extreme end, making him a villain in the series.

"Odin." *God of War Wiki*, Fandom

[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Odin](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Odin).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 2: Thor



Thor as depicted in *God of War: Ragnarök* (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).

Thor, one of Odin's sons, known as the God of Thunder, is prominent character in Norse mythology. He is depicted in the *God of War* series as a brutal, violent god. In *God of War: Ragnarök*, he faces mental struggles with grief and constant abuse by Odin, who sees him as a mindless tool for carnage and chaos at his order.

**"Thor." *God of War Wiki, Fandom,***

**[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Thor](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Thor)**

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

### Appendix 3: Mjölfnir



**Mjölfnir as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Thor's best companion, it is more than just a hammer. Mjölfnir holds memories of bloodshed and endless battles across all the realms. The hammer holds immense power, it feeds Thor raw strength and determination, pairing it with Thor's wrath makes this duo the deadliest across all the Nine realms.

*"MjölfnirThor."* *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,

[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Mj%C3%B6lnir?file=MjolnirThor.png](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Mj%C3%B6lnir?file=MjolnirThor.png).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

#### Appendix 4: Atreus/Loki



**Atreus/Loki as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Atreus in *God of War: Ragnarök* is in his adolescence, he grows both physically and mentally, maturing from the child he once was. He intellectually sets down and grows an interest in learning more about who he is and what his role is in Ragnarök.

"Atreus." *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,  
[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Atreus](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Atreus).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 5: Freya



**Freya as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Freya, also known as Frigg, is the goddess of love, war, blessings and fauna. Freya was once Odin's wife; Baldur was their son who died in the hands of Kratos in front of her in the 2018 game. Freya held a grudge against Kratos for killing her son and goes a journey of grief and healing throughout *God of War Ragnarök*.

"Freya." *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,

[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Freya](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Freya).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 6: Kratos



**Kratos as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Kratos, the god of war himself, is the protagonist in the *God of War* series. Kratos is from a Greek origin. Kratos was once a servant of Ares, the Greek god of war, Ares tricked Kratos into killing his own wife and daughter. Kratos lived with that guilt his whole life, he sought revenge from Ares and all the unjust gods, earning him the title the Gods Killer. After years, Kratos sought peace and isolation, raising his son to never repeat the mistakes he does, but that peace lasted short when Odin and Thor came knocking his door

*Kratos - GOW Ragnarök." God of War Wiki, Fandom,*  
[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Kratos?file=Kratos+GOW+Ragnarok.png](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Kratos?file=Kratos+GOW+Ragnarok.png).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 7: Leviathan Axe



**The Leviathan Axe as depicted in *God of War: Ragnarök* (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

The Leviathan Axe, crafted by Brok and Sindri, once served as a weapon for Kratos's wife Faye, now held by Kratos after her passing. Kratos uses this weapon to its fullest physical and magical power, serving both as a weapon in his armory, and a constant reminder of his late wife.

*"Leviathan Axe."* *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,  
[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Leviathan\\_Axe](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Leviathan_Axe).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 8: Brok



**Brok as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Brok, Sindri's brother and coworker, they are both craftsmen. Brok accompanies Kratos and Atreus through their journeys, improving their weapons and armors, making them stronger and survive harsher encounters. Brok stands out for his charisma and comedic personality, making him a fun character to be around.

"*Brok Profile.*" Digital image. *God of War Wiki*. Fandom.

<https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Brok?file=Brok+profile.png>.

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 9: Sindri



**Sindri as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

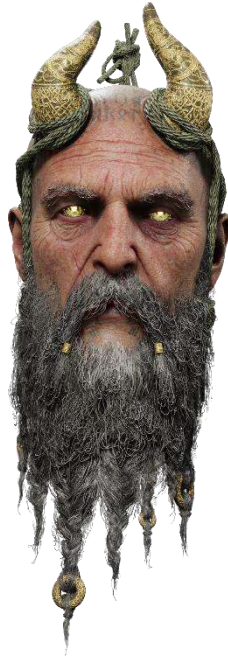
Sindri, Brok's brother and the second dwarf, he also contributes in the crafting process of different weapons and armors for Kratos and Atreus. His character's contrast with his Bork creates a fun brotherly dynamic between the two throughout the game.

*"Sindri Profile." God of War Wiki, Fandom,*

[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Sindri?file=Sindri+profile.png](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Sindri?file=Sindri+profile.png).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 10: Mimir



**Mimir as depicted in God of War: Ragnarök (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot)**

Mimir, also known as the smartest man alive, was once Odin's assistant until Odin imprisoned him as a tree on top of a mountain. Kratos and Atreus come along for the rescue, cutting his head as he told them to do, and taking it to Freya to do her magic on his severed head. Mimir accompanies Kratos and Atreus throughout both games, making him a source of knowledge and a wise figure in the adventures.

*"Mimir Lunda Notes 1." God of War Wiki, Fandom,*  
[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Mimir?file=Mimir+lunda+notes+1.png](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Mimir?file=Mimir+lunda+notes+1.png).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 11: Yggdrasil



**Yggdrasil as depicted in *God of War: Ragnarök* (Santa Monica Studio, 2022; screenshot).**

Yggdrasil, also known as the World Tree, is a tree that holds all the Nine Realms in its branches. In the game series, it serves a portal that allows the player to travel across these realms. In *God of War: Ragnarök*, it serves a house where the protagonist and the allies take shelter.

"Yggdrasil." *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,

[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Yggdrasil](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Yggdrasil).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 12: Ragnarök



### Illustration of Ragnarök by Vance Kovacs

Ragnarök is the central theme of the *God of War: Ragnarök*, the prophecy of doom starts, but unlike the unavoidable demise in the prophecy, Kratos and his allies decide to change destiny and stand up for Odin's ruling. This gives the player the change to evade a certain apocalyptic ending.

*"Ragnarök Begins by Vance Kovacs." God of War*

Wiki,Fandom,[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Ragnar%C3%B6k?file=Ragnar%C3%B6k\\_Begins\\_by\\_Vance\\_Kovacs.jpg](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/Ragnar%C3%B6k?file=Ragnar%C3%B6k_Begins_by_Vance_Kovacs.jpg).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 13: Jörmungandr



**Jörmungandr as depicted in *God of War: Ragnarök* (Santa Monica Studio, 2018; screenshot).**

Jörmungandr, also known as the World Serpent, is depicted in *God of War* series as a literal giant serpent. According to the original Norse texts, Jörmungandr is one of Loki's children. Ragnarök prophecy tells how Jörmungandr is destined to kill and die to Thor in an epic battle to death. Despite his threatening looks, Jörmungandr serves as an ally throughout both games.

"Jörmungandr." *God of War Wiki*, Fandom,  
[godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/J%C3%B6rmungandr](https://godofwar.fandom.com/wiki/J%C3%B6rmungandr).

Accessed 25 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix B: *The Lord of the Rings* Universe

### Appendix 1: *The Lord of the Rings*'s Middle-earth



**Middle-earth map by Chris Taylor**

The map shows Middle-earth as a continent with different locations. Tolkien took inspiration from Norse mythology in building his world. Some locations are similar to places in Norse mythology; Mordor can be a representation of Muspelheim from the *God of War* series with all the lava across the realm. Rohan, sitting in the middle-bottom of the map take inspiration from *God of War*'s Midgard areas.

"Middle-earth.jpg." *The One Wiki to Rule Them All*, Fandom,  
[lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Middle-earth?file=Middle-earth.jpg](https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Middle-earth?file=Middle-earth.jpg).

Accessed 26 Apr. 2025.

## Appendix 2: Gandalf



Gandalf the Grey, by [Ralph Damiani](#)

Gandalf is one of the most prominent characters in fantasy. In Tolkien's *the Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf is depicted as an old wise wizard, who has a silver beard. After Gandalf is defeated by the Balrog, he dies and gets resurrected by EruIlúvatar. After his resurrection, Gandalf's once silver beard turns white, and he turns to Gandalf the White, gaining the title of the chief of the order of the Wizards.

"Gandalf." *The One Wiki to Rule Them All*, Fandom,

[lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Gandalf](https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Gandalf).

Accessed 26 Apr. 2025.

### Appendix 3: Sauron



*Sauron in the late Second Age*

Sauron, also known as the One Enemy, is the main antagonist in the Lord of the Rings. Sauron in Tolkien's work hold mighty evil power, a force of destruction and chaos. Sauron somehow relates to Odin being the evil authoritarian figure in the novel.

*"Sauron." The One Wiki to Rule Them All, Fandom,*

[lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Sauron](https://lotr.fandom.com/wiki/Sauron).

Accessed 26 Apr. 2025.