

Gods & Goddesses of the Troth

Thor: "Thunder," son of Odin and Earth. The most beloved god of the Viking Age, perhaps seen as the chief god at that time, and often known now as "god of the common man," Thor is best-known for his ceaseless battle against the giants. He is not a bloody-minded reaver, however, but a warder who protects the folk of Midgard and Asgard against the menacing beings who would destroy the world; unlike Odin, he never involves himself in the battles of men, but the gods often seem to rely wholly on his protection. He is the only god that Loki seems to respect.

Although Thor is sometimes shown as being slow-witted in comparison with Odin or Loki, he is a practical god whose solutions to problems are usually swift, effective, and show the common sense the other two sometimes lack. He is also called the "Deep-Thinker," and in one Eddic poem, outwits the clever dwarf Alviss ("All-Wise") by engaging him in a riddle contest until dawn turns the dwarf to stone.

Thor's weapon is the Hammer Mjölnir, images of which are worn by true folk today as a sign of troth, as was also done towards the end of the Viking Age when Red Thor was called on to battle the White Christ. As well as fighting giants, Thor also uses his Hammer for hallowing both brides and funeral pyres, and several runic inscriptions from late Viking Age Denmark call on him to hallow the runes.

Thor was worshipped most by the free farmers (who were also warriors at need) and by those who "trusted in their own might and main". Today, he is also seen as the warder of his mother Earth against those who would harm her for their own gain. He is able to raise great rages in himself, in which he summons up more strength than any being in the worlds can match.

Thor appears as a big, muscular man with red hair and beard and huge fiery eyes. He drives a wagon which is drawn by two goats, Tanngrísniir (Teeth-Barer or Teeth-Gnasher) and Tanngnjóstr (Tooth-Gritter). When he travels to Jotunheim, Loki often goes with him; Thor is the only god that Loki really seems to respect. He is married to Sif, and had a daughter named Thrud (Strength) by her; he also has a giantess-concubine, who bore him his sons, Modi (Courage) and Magni (Main-strength). It is said that "Thor will help you if your prayer is sincere".

Old Norse Þórr, Anglo-Saxon Thunar (from which "Thursday"), Old German Thonar, Modern German/Wagnerian Donner, Proto-Germanic *Þunraz.

Freya: Freya is probably the best-known and best-loved of the goddesses today. Her title simply means "Lady," her original name is not known. Freya is the "wild woman" among the deities of the North: free with her sexual favors (though furious when an attempt is made to marry her off against her will); mistress of Odin and several other gods and men; skilled at the form of ecstatic, consciousness-altering, and sometimes malicious magic called seidr; and chooser of half the slain on the battlefield (Odin gets the other half).

Freya's chief attribute is the necklace called Brisingamen, which she bought from four dwarves at the price of four nights of her love. This necklace is sometimes seen today as embodying her power over the material world; the necklace has been the emblem of the earth-goddess since the earliest times.

This goddess drives a wagon drawn by two cats, perhaps large forest-cats such as lynxes, and is seen today as the patron goddesses of cats and those who keep them. As a battle-goddess, she also rides on a boar called Hildisvini (Battle-Swine).

Like Odin, Freya is often a stirrer of strife. As Gullveig ("Gold-Drunkenness"), she came among the Aesir to cause trouble. She was stabbed and burnt three times, but arose from the flame each time; through this torment, she transformed herself into Heith ("the Glorious"), mistress of magic, in a typical shamanic initiation. This also seems to have started the war between the Aesir and the Vanir.

Freya is sometimes seen as a fertility goddess, but there are no sources suggesting that she was called on to bring fruitfulness to fields or wombs. Rather, she is a goddess of riches, whose tears are gold and whose "daughters," in the riddle-poetry of the skalds, are precious objects. However, the giants are always trying to take her away from the gods, and it is clear that this would be a great disaster: she was obviously known to be the embodiment of the holy life-force on some level. Perhaps because of this, Wagner gave her some of Idunna's attributes, making her the keeper of the golden apples without which the folk of Asgard would wither and die.

Old Norse Freyja, Old English Freo, Modern German Frau, Wagnerian Freia, Modern English Frowe.

Frey: Son of Njord, twin brother of Freya. "Frey" is a title simply meaning "Lord," his original name was apparently some form of Yngvi/Ing. Together with Thor, Frey was one of the best-loved gods of the Viking Age.

Frey was the main god of kingship among the Swedes, whose royal family, the Ynglings, was descended from him. His holy animal was the boar, which appears several times on richly decorated helmets from the sixth century through the eighth.

Frey was called on for protection in battle, for frith (fruitful peace) at home, and for good weather and gentle rains. He was, and is, often thought of as a giver of riches, whose blessing is called on for fruitfulness and growth in all fields of endeavor. His priests at Uppsala were said to ring bells and clap their hands with effeminate gestures, and it has been suggested that this cryptic reference hints at a tradition involving shamanic cross-dressing.

Frey is the lord of the elves (see below), and is especially connected with the blessings and worship given to the ancestral spirits and possibly land-spirits. His image was often shown with an enlarged phallus; like his twin sister, he is sometimes seen today as a deity of love and pleasure. Frey owns a gold boar called Gullinbursti (Gold-Bristled) on which he can ride over air and water. He once had a horse named Bloody-Hooved (perhaps having to do with his role as battle-god) and a sword, but these he gave to his manservant Skirnir (the Shining One) for winning the giant-maiden Gerd for him. At Ragnarok, he will fight Surt with a stag's antler.

Old Norse Freyr or Yngvi-Freyr, Ingunar-Freyr; Anglo-Saxon Ing or Frea, Old High German Fro, Modern German (Wagnerian) Froh, Proto-Germanic *Ingwaz, also called Fro Ing (Lord Ing).

Odin: Originally a god of death, whose range later came to encompass magic (especially runic magic), battle (giving victory by choosing who should die), poetry, the fury of the berserk-warrior, and, at least in part, the

authority of the ruler descended from the gods (he is the most frequent father of royal lines - including, according to Anglo-Saxon genealogies, the current royal house of England). In the Prose Edda (written two hundred years after the conversion of Iceland), he is shown as the chief of the gods, but historical accounts of Germanic religion do not necessarily support this; it is likelier that Snorri was modeling the Norse pantheon somewhat on the Classical.

Odin won the runes by hanging on a tree for nine days and nights, wounded with his own spear. He gave up one of his eyes for a drink from the Well of Mimir ("Memory"). He won the mead of poetry by seducing the giant-maid Gunnlod who had been set to keep it, then asking for a drink and draining all three cauldrons. To his chosen ones, he gives victory, inspiration, magic, madness, and death when he sees fit. He is seen as especially a god of wisdom, a patron of poets, thinkers, and singers. Of all the gods, Odin is the one who seems to take the most active part in the affairs of humans, and the one who appears most often in the writings of the Germanic peoples.

Odin usually appears as a graybearded man, tall and thin, with a blue-black cloak and an eyepatch or wide-brimmed hat tilted to hide his missing eye. His weapon is the casting spear Gungnir, with which he dooms his chosen ones to die in battle. He has two wolves, Geri and Freki (both names mean "the Greedy"); two ravens, Huginn ("the Thoughtful" or "the Bold") and Muninn ("the Mindful" or "the Desirous"); and a gray, eight-legged horse called Sleipnir ("Slipper"). He is the husband of Frigga and the father of many gods and human heroes. As the leader of the Wild Hunt, he also brings fruitfulness to the fields.

Odin is assisted by the valkyries ("Choosers of the Slain") who work his will on the battlefield, bringing the bravest warriors to Valhall ("Hall of the Slain"), where they ready their strength against the coming of Ragnarok. It is said that "Odin will help you if he feels like it," and it is true that he is a stern tester of his children, and often seems rather capricious. However, even when he seems cruel, his purpose is always clear: to strengthen the hosts of the gods for the last battle so that life and knowledge can be preserved and the new world born after the old is destroyed. In the late Viking Age poem *Eiríksmál*, Bragi asks Odin, "Why did you take victory from him (Erik Bloodaxe), if he seemed the bravest to you?" and Odin answers, "Because of that which no one knows (that is, the time of Ragnarok): the Gray Wolf gapes ever at the dwellings of the gods." Odin is a god of foresight, careful weaving of plots, and long-term agendas.

Old Norse Óðinn; Anglo-Saxon Woden; Old High German Wodan; Modern German Wotan; Proto-Germanic *Woðanaz. "The Furious (or Mad) One".

Frigga: Wife of Odin, Frigga is the patron goddess of the home and of the mysteries of the married woman. She is seen as Odin's match (and sometimes his better) in wisdom; she shares his high-seat, from which they look out over the worlds together.

Frigga is especially concerned with keeping social order. She is called on for blessings when women are giving birth and for help in matters of traditional women's crafts (spinning, weaving, cooking, sewing) and the magics worked thereby. Frigga can also be called on by mothers who want to protect their children. In olden days, this was especially the case with sons going out to battle, for whom their mothers would weave or sew special protective items. She is also called Hlin (protectress).

Frigga is the mother of Balder, and is often thought of as still mourning for him. She is a seeress, who knows all fates, though she seldom speaks of them. Her hall is called Fensalir - "marsh-halls". She has a handmaiden called Fulla and a messenger named Gna.

Despite the likeness of names and the similar relationship to Odin, Frigga should not be confused with Freya, who shares none of her essential traits. Her only departure from strict social behavior is that during one of Odin's journeys away from Asgard, she is said to have taken his brothers Vili and Ve as husbands; however, this probably shows the queen-goddess as the embodiment of sovereignty. Her name is also not directly related to the English slang-word, though the two derive from the same original root ("love, pleasure"). Old Norse Frigg, Anglo-Saxon Frige, Old High German Frijja, Wagnerian Fricka.

Loki: An etin brought among the Aesir by Odin, who swore blood-brotherhood with him, Loki wavers between a weal-bringing culture-hero/Trickster and a woe-bringing destroyer. He is responsible for getting the gods most of their good, but only after he has led them to the edge of destruction. He often travels with Thor, sometimes leading him into trouble and sometimes getting him out of it. Loki also brings a surprising amount of humor into the Norse tales (and into the practice of the Northern religion today). The need for this function of his appears explicitly in the tale of how the giantess Skadi was reconciled to accepting weregild from the gods instead of insisting on revenge: one of her conditions is that they must make her laugh, and it is only Loki who can accomplish this.

Loki may have appeared in cultic dramas as a ritual Lord of Misrule: inversion and reversal of all sorts are typical for him. As well as being the father of the Wolf Fenrir, the Midgard Serpent, and, allegedly, Hel, he is also the mother of Odin's eight-legged horse Sleipnir, and cross-dresses in the typically feminine falcon-hides of Frigga and Freyja when he needs to fly between the worlds.

Bad nineteenth-century etymology associated Loki with Logi (fire) and, helped along by Wagner, the image of Loki as a fire-being seems to be with us to stay. Modern thought also associates Loki especially with computers, for a number of reasons.

After the death of Balder, the gods bound Loki in an underground cave, and Skadi hung a venom-dripping snake over his face. The venom is caught in a cup by his Aesir-wife Sigyn; supposedly, when she turns away to empty it, his writhings cause earthquakes. There is much debate among true folk as to whether Loki is really bound, or just how bound he is, however.

Not surprisingly, views on Loki range from those who think of him as a merry friend to those who see him almost as a Nordic Satan. Although he plays a key role in many of our holy tales, it is fairly safe to guess that he was not worshipped in the sense that the other gods and goddesses were - but whenever a drink is given to Odin, according to the terms of their oath, Loki also gets one.

Other God/esses and Wights

Aegir: the giant who embodies the sea. Aegir brews ale for the gods and hosts some of their feasts. His wife is Ran, a less friendly personification of the sea; their daughters are the waves. Old Norse Ægir.

Aesir: "the gods," used specifically for the godly tribe including Odin, Thor, and Tyr (in contrast to the Vanir, Njord, Frey, and Freya), but also used in general for all the deities. Generally more associated with air, fire,

and the mechanical or artificial; whereas the Vanir are associated with earth, water, and the natural or organic - though these are by no means firmly set boundaries. The Aesir and the Vanir once held a war, which, since their battle-might was equal, ended in a draw. The truce was settled by the creation of the being Kvasir (see below) and the trading of hostages: Odin's brother Hoenir and the giant Mimir went to the Vanir, and Njord and Frey were sent among the Aesir (Freya seems to have come along of her own choice), where, according to *Ynglinga saga*, they held the role of "priests". Old Norse *Æsir*, singular *Áss*; Modern English *Ase*, plural *Ases*.

Angrboda: Loki's giant-wife, mother of the Wolf Fenrir, the Midgard Serpent, and Hel.

Askr: "Ash-Tree"; the first human male, made out of an ash-log by Odin, Hoenir, and Lodurr. Husband of Embla, the first human female.

Audhumla: the primal cow, born at the same time as Ymir (see below), whose licking brought the first god, Odin's grandfather Bor, out of the ice of Niflheim.

Austri, Sudri, Vestri, Nordri: the four dwarves who hold up the four corners of the sky (Ymir's skull): East, South, West, and North. Sometimes also thought to be the four who forged Freya's necklace Brisingamen. Old Norse *Austri, Suðri, Vestri, Norðri*.

Balder: Son of Odin and Frigga, he is shown in the Prose Edda as a rather pallid Heathen imitation of Christ, but other sources, notably the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, portray him as a doughty and aggressive warrior. Today we often think of him as the shining young hero who embodies the hope of an age. After his death was foretold, Frigga got everything in the Nine Worlds to swear not to harm him, but neglected the mistletoe, which she thought was too small and weak to harm him. Making a game of his invulnerability, the gods cast weapons at him; meanwhile, Loki made an arrow of mistletoe and put it in the hand of Balder's blind brother Hod, aiming it for him. After Balder's death, Frigga sent a messenger to Hel to ask for him back. Hel answered that if everything would weep for Balder, she would return him. Only one old hag, who some think was Loki and others identify as Hel herself, refused to shed a tear; and so Balder stays in Hel's realm yet. After Ragnarok, he and Hod will come back to inherit Odin's seat. Balder is seldom called on, but is remembered as the hidden seed of the new world to come after the final battle. Old Norse *Baldr*, Old English *Bealdor*.

Beyla: servant of Frey, wife of Byggvir. Her name is thought to be related to a word for "cow," and she the protectress of dairy work; the alternate suggestion is that "Beyla" is related to "bee," so that Beyla and Byggvir might be the givers of mead and ale.

Bragi: Husband of Idunna, sometimes identified as the best of poets or the god of poetry. Here his function overlaps with Odin's, since Odin is the keeper and giver of the mead of poetry. Bragi is sometimes thought to be an historical poet of the early Viking Age who was taken up among the ranks of the gods.

Byggvir: "Barley"; servant of Frey, husband of Beyla. Perhaps related to the English "John Barleycorn" of the folk-song.

Disir: ancestral female spirits who look after their descendants, worshipped especially at the festival of Winternights (mid-October). The word "dis" can also mean "goddess" or "kinswoman"; for instance, Freya is

called "Vanadis" (dis of the Vanir). Old Norse *dísir* (singular *dís*), Anglo-Saxon *ides*, Old High German *idis* (pl. *idisi*), Modern English *idis* (pl. *idises*). Probably the same as the Romano-Germanic *Matronae*, or Mothers, who were worshipped along the Rhine in the first part of the Common Era and appear in votive carvings as triads of women with beehive hairdresses and baskets of fruit.

Dwarves: The great smiths of the Germanic world, the dwarves were formed from the maggots crawling in the body of the proto-giant Ymir. They dwell beneath the earth; they forged, among other things, most of the great treasures of the gods. Many dwarf-names suggest that they were originally thought of as the dead or as demons of death. Though sometimes surly, if approached with fitting respect, they can be friendly to humankind, and several of our heroes (such as Sigurd/Siegfried and, according to *Thidreks saga*, Wayland) were fostered by dwarves. If offended or forced to work against their will, they take nasty revenge. Old Norse *Dvergar*. Also called *Swart Alfs* (Old Norse *Svartálfar*), *Nibelungen* (Wagner).

Earth: Identified as a giantess, mother of Thor by Odin, she is often referred to in poetry as "Odin's bride". The traces that have survived of the worship of the personified Earth herself show that she was honored by the Germanic people, though not active in tales. Old Norse *Jörð*.

Easter: the English name of an continental Germanic Heathen goddess of spring, whose memory proved so enduring in Saxon England that the christian springtime feast was eventually called by her name. The hare may have been her holy beast. Anglo-Saxon *Eostre*; Old High German *Ostara*.

Edda: See *Prose Edda*, *Poetic Edda*.

Eir: Goddess of healing, patroness of health-care workers, called on against sickness or injury. She is one of the goddesses on the mountain called *Lyfia* ("to heal through magic"), and gives both physical and psychic means of healing; shamanic healing, especially, falls into her realm.

Elves: usually called "alfs" in the Troth to avoid confusion with the elves of Shakespeare or Tolkien. The Elves sometimes appear to be the ghosts of dead ancestors still dwelling in mounds or hills; sometimes they are more similar to land-wights (earth spirits). The Elves are worshipped together with the *Disir* (see above) and often with *Frey*. Sometimes they are kindly, as names like *Alfred* (Elf-Counsel) show; when offended, they shoot humans or animals with elf-shot, causing stroke and other forms of sickness. They are divided into *Light Elves* (often seen as wights of sun and air), *Dark Elves* (the dead in the mound), and *Swart Elves* (see "dwarves"). Old Norse *Álfar* (singular *álfr*), Anglo-Saxon *Ælf*, Modern English *Elf*.

Embla: First human female. The name is often translated "elm," though it could also refer to a sort of vine. See "Askr".

Etins: giants. "Etin-kin" is used as a general term for giants of various sorts and trolls. Usually seen as the foes of the gods, although many of them are quite helpful, and etins and gods often interbreed. In fact, at least two of the goddesses, *Skadi* and *Gerd*, are etins; and there are none of the gods who do not have quite a lot of giantish ancestry. Some true folk today see the etin-kin as the largest of the land-wights, who now need to be helped to restore the balance of being rather than battled against; others stick to the traditional view of the giants as, in general, the embodiment of destruction. Old Norse *Jötunn* (plural *jötnar*), Anglo-Saxon *Eoten*,

Fenrir: the great Wolf, son of Loki and his giant-wife Angrboda, who will swallow Odin at Ragnarok. The commonly seen form "Fenris" is a grammatical error based on a misunderstood Old Norse poetic convention of identifying things by their type and a possessive: "the ash of Yggdrasill," *askr Yggdrasils*; "the wolf of Fenrir," *úlfr Fenris*.

Forseti: Patron god of the Frisians and giver of their laws. Silence had to be kept while drinking from the spring on his holy island, which he had brought forth from the rock with his axe, and beasts on the island could not be harmed. In the Old Norse sources, he appears as the son of Balder, whose hall Glitnir, "Glistening," is pillared with gold and thatched with silver; he is also a settler of lawsuits and quarrels. Frisian: Fosite, Foseti.

Gefjon: Her name means "giver". With a plough drawn by four sons whom she bore to a giant and changed into oxen for the purpose, she ploughed the island Zealand (the main island of Denmark) away from the Swedish mainland, later mothering the chief dynasty of Danish kings. She is clearly a goddess of fruitfulness in some aspects; however, she is also the protectress of maidens and their modesty, and unmarried women are said to go to her hall after death.

Gungnir: Odin's spear.

Harrow: an altar, in early times usually made of heaped stones. Old Norse hörgr.

Heimdall: Watcher at the gates of Asgard, he can hear the grass growing on the ground and the wool on a sheep's back, and needs no sleep. He is the son of nine etin-maids, perhaps the nine waves. His hall is called Himinbjörg (Heaven-Mountain). He owns the Gjallarhorn (the Horn Resounding) which he shall blow at the beginning of Ragnarok to gather the hosts of the gods. Some see this horn as a cowhorn, others as one of the sousaphone-like lurhorns used in Bronze Age rituals. Under the name of Rig ("King"), he came to Midgard in order to father the three tribes of humans - thralls, freemen, and rulers - and to teach runes and lore to the last. Heimdall is described as very fair, with golden teeth. His horse is called Gulltoppr ("Golden-Mane"). He is a great foe of Loki: according to one tale, when Loki had stolen Freya's necklace, Heimdall changed into a seal and fought with him in that shape, winning it back. Heimdall and Loki will slay each other at Ragnarok. Heimdall is sometimes seen as a rather aloof god and lacking in humor; however, he is a great teacher, and an especially good god to call on for those who work in subjects calling for cool intellect rather than the furious inspiration given by Odin.

Hel: Ruler of the kingdom of death, the Prose Edda describes her as half-black, half-white (she is sometimes seen as half-rotting, half alive) and of grim and unmistakable appearance. Her name may originally derive from the buried slab-rock grave-chambers of the Stone Age. The Hel-word is known to all branches of the Germanic speech, and clearly very old, but there is some question as to whether the goddess was recognised as an independent person before the Viking Age. The Prose Edda, probably suffering from semantic contamination (the use of the English word Hell for the frightful Christian afterworld), describes her hall as full of horrors, but older sources make it rather pleasant, and indeed a close reflection of the idealized god-house seen in descriptions of Valhall (Hel and Odin have much in common, in fact). The specialization of the Germanic afterlife into the glorious Valhall where the chosen battle-dead go and the hideous Hel where everyone else ends up is probably a product of Christian influence on the retelling of Norse god-lore; our earlier sources offer far more options (going to the hall of the deity to whom one is closest, dying into a hill or rock where the other ghosts of one's family dwell, remaining as the guardian of a stead, being reborn in a child

who bears one's name and/or lineage), and the name Valhall does not become specialized for Odin's hall until the middle of the tenth century, when it is probably a description rather than a proper name. There is no evidence for the worship of the goddess Hel in elder times, but there are several folk who work with her today. Also called Hella.

Hod: Blind brother of Balder, who unknowingly (at Loki's direction) cast the mistletoe to slay him. Slain in turn by Vali. According to the rather different version of the story told by Saxo, Hod was not blind, nor related to Baldr; he was a doughty warrior, who fought with Baldr over the woman Nanna. Old Norse Höðr.

Hoennir: brother of Odin, long-legged and handsome, but slow of speech. Sent to the Vanir as a hostage after the war between Aesir and Vanir. After Ragnarok, he will take the role of priest among the gods. Little more is known of him, although he appears travelling beside Odin and Lodurr (or Loki) in several tales.

Hof: originally a large farmhouse, especially one at which the holy feasts were held for a whole settlement. Used in modern times for a hallowed temple.

Holda: A goddess known through German folklore, her name means "the Gracious One". She has much in common with Frigga, being the patroness of spinners and the keeper of social order, especially enforcing taboos about working on holy days. She is also said to be the keeper of the souls of unbaptized (or sometimes simply young) children, and women who want to bear children ask for them at her well. Holda also appears at times as the leader of the Wild Hunt. According to one tale, it was she who taught humans how to plant and process flax. When it snows, Holda is supposed to be shaking out her feather-bed.

Idunna: the goddess who keeps the apples of youth, by which the gods stay ever-young. Loki arranged for the etin Thjazi to abduct her, but then was forced to get her back, a deed which ended in Thjazi's death. Apples are one of the oldest and holiest symbols of life and rebirth among the Germanic folk, appearing as grave-gifts from the Bronze Age onward. The Troth's quarterly journal is named after this goddess. Old Norse Iðunn.

Ing: See Frey.

Irminsul: "Great Pillar"; a pillar which was a major center of worship to the Continental Saxons, destroyed by Charlemagne at the beginning of his genocidal war against this people in 772. Possibly a ritual representation of the World-Tree.

Jormungandr: See "Midgard Serpent".

Kvasir: After the war of the Aesir and Vanir, the two godly tribes sealed peace by spitting into a bowl and creating Kvasir from the mingled spittle. He was said to be the wisest of all creatures. He was slain by two dwarves, who brewed the mead of poetry (Odoroerir) from his blood. The name derives from *kvase* (Norwegian), *kvass* (Russian), a kind of fermented berry juice traditionally prepared by communal chewing of the berries and spitting into a bowl.

Land-wights: the beings who dwell in rocks, springs, and so forth. They are shy and easily driven away (especially by noise or strife); when they have fled, the land will not prosper. In Heathen Iceland, it was illegal to come within sight of the shore with a dragon-prow raised, as that frightened them. The land-wights are friendly towards humans who treat them well. Gifts of food and drink were often left by their dwelling

places; in America, tobacco is often added, as they have grown used to it from the practices of the Native Americans. Old Norse landvættir.

Lif: "Life," the human woman who survives Ragnarok by hiding beneath the bark of the World-Tree (or one of its shoots) and, with her husband Lifthrasir ("the one striving after life"), reproduces humankind after the last battle. Old Norse Líf, Lífþrasir.

Lodurr: possibly another name for the brightest aspects of Loki, though this is not certain. The third god of the Odin-Hoenir-Lodurr trio which shaped humankind. Old Norse Lóðurr.

Lofn: One of Frigga's women, who gets permission for folk to marry when it had been forbidden before. Especially the patroness of those whose love is criticized by outsiders.

Midgard Serpent: child of Loki and Angrboda, this great Wyrn circles Midgard, lying in the depths of the ocean. Some think that he holds the world together while the age last. Thor caught him once while fishing and struck him on the head, but Thor's companion, the giant Hymir, became afraid and cut the line. At Ragnarok, the Midgard Serpent and Thor will slay each other. The Wyrn is also called Jörmungandr (the Great Wand or the Great Magic-Beast).

Mimir: a giant, perhaps the brother of Odin's etin-mother Bestla. Keeper of the Well of Mimir, in which all wisdom lies - the spring where Odin gave up his eye to drink. Mimir was sent to the Vanir as a hostage with Hoenir, but when Hoenir's slowness of speech was discovered, the Vanir became angry. Unwilling to harm Odin's brother, they lopped off Mimir's head instead and sent it back. Odin preserved it with herbs and spells, and gains much wisdom from talking with the head. According to the Eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál*, Odin learned the runes from Mimir's head. Old Norse Mímir.

Mjollnir: Thor's Hammer; see "Thor". Old Norse Mjölnir.

Moon: The Moon is always masculine in Germanic language and culture, just as the Sun is always feminine. This is one of the most difficult things in Northern religion for those brought up on the Greco-Roman Diana and Apollo to get used to; but traces of our original way of thinking of these two survive even in English (cf. "the Man in the Moon"). The Moon is the brother of the Sun: he is seen as dressed in a gray sark (long shirt), driving a wagon drawn by a horse called Hrimfaxi (Ice-Mane) and chased by a troll in wolf-shape who will devour him at Ragnarok. Old Norse Máni (used only as a personal name or poetic term, not usually applied to the simple heavenly body).

Muspilli: The meaning of the name is not certain; it may be "destruction of the world through fire". The Muspilli are fire-giants, led by Surt, who will break through to fight against the gods at Ragnarok. The belief in the fiery destruction of the cosmos, and the association of it with the name "Muspilli," is probably very early. Other than this, we know little of them; they hardly appear in the Norse sources.

Nanna: Wife of Balder (of Hod in Saxo's version), mother of Forseti. Her name may mean "the daring one". According to the Prose Edda version of the story, she dies of grief and is burned on the pyre with Balder.

Nerthus: The "Mother Earth" worshipped by the North Sea Germans, according to the Roman historian Tacitus (writing in the first century of the Christian era). Her worship included the springtime procession of a

wagon in which her image was kept, which ended on a holy island. The name is an earlier form of the Old Norse Njörðr (Njord), who is, however, clearly masculine. Still, it is said that Njord fathered Frey and Freya on his sister, who is not named; it is possible that the feminine and masculine Nerthus/Njord could have been a similar pair of mixed twins.

Nine Worlds: The Nine Worlds of the Norse cosmos are Midgard (Miðgarðr, the Middle-Garth) where humans dwell; Asgard (Ásgarðr, the Ases' Garth) or God-World (Goðheimr); Light Alfheim (Ljósálfheimr, Light Elf-World); Niflheim (Niflheimr, Nebel-Home), the "world of mists" and primal ice; Jotunheim (Jötunheimr, Etin-World), where the giants live; Muspellheim (Muspellheimr, Muspilli-World - perhaps "home of the destroyers of the world"), world of primal fire where the Muspilli dwell; Vanaheim (Vanaheimr, Wan-World), home of the Vanir), Swart Alfheim (Svartálfheimr), where the Swart-Alfs or dwarves dwell), and Helheim, land of the dead, ruled by the goddess Hel.

Njord: Father of Frey and Freya, he is not active in the Northern tales. However, he was seen as god of the sea and of ships, and also thought of as a giver of riches and good harvest. He was usually blessed together with his son.

Norns: The three Norns, Urd (Wyrd), Verdandi, and Skuld, are etin-maidens who guard the Well of Urd from which the World-Tree springs. They reach into the Well's waters (the past) and sprinkle the Tree to shape that which shall happen. They are also said to do their shaping by cutting runes and/or by spinning and weaving. They are possibly related to the three Continental Matronae (see "disir"); Snorri, and the Eddic poem *Fáfnismál*, also describe clan-disir as "norns".

Odr: said to be Freya's husband, but the name is either the same as the root-word on which Odin's name is based, "fury," or that from which Odroerir is derived, "inspiration". It is most often thought that Odr is the same god as Odin, perhaps in an earlier form.

Odroerir: "Stirrer of inspiration"; the mead of poetry (see "Kvasir").

Poetic Edda: A collection of poems about Norse god/esses and heroes. Also called "Saemundr's Edda," as the first version was thought (erroneously) to have been collected by Iceland's beloved magician/priest, Saemundr the Wise. The manuscripts in which they are written down date from the late thirteenth century onward, but many of the poems themselves probably go back to the Heathen period (though dating them is notoriously difficult), and some of the material may be extremely archaic. The chief "holy text" of the Elder Troth.

Prose Edda: A text written by Snorri Sturluson in roughly 1220, some two hundred years after the conversion of Iceland. Also called "Snorri's Edda". Snorri's intention was to preserve the dying art of skaldic poetry, which was totally based on an intimate knowledge of Heathen god-lore. Although he often over-systematized and sometimes got his materials wrong, his book is one of our most valuable sources in learning about the deities of our forebears.

Ragnarok: The last battle, at which the Muspilli will break through the walls of the world, and the wolves that follow the Sun and Moon will swallow them at last. Most of the gods will die fighting against the etin-kin: Fenrir will swallow Odin (and be ripped open in his turn by Vidar), Thor and the Midgard Serpent will slay each other, as will Heimdall and Loki, Tyr and Garm. Frey will fall before Surt. However, a new world will rise from the sea afterwards. Balder and Hod will come back from Hel's realm; Vidar and Vali will sit in

their father's stead as well, and Modi and Magni will inherit Thor's Hammer. It is to bring the new world safely about that Odin gathers his hosts in Valhall, and works his many other subtle plots.

Ratatosk: The squirrel that runs up and down the World-Tree, bearing nasty messages between the dragon at its roots and the eagle at its crown. Old Norse Ratatoskr.

Runes: The word originally probably meant "secrets" or "whispered speech"; later it was transferred to the actual staves of the native Germanic writing, and this is the sense in which it is normally used today. The runic "alphabet" is called a futhark because that is the order of the first few letters: F, U, Th, A, R, K. The original form was the 24-rune Elder Futhark; with time and changes in speech, this later mutated to the Anglo-Frisian Futhork (ranging from 28 to 31 or 32 letters) and, in Viking Age Scandinavia, the Younger Futhark (16 letters). Runes were often used for magical or memorial inscriptions, though they were also used for mundane phrases like "Katla owns this comb" and occasionally for rather foul graffiti. Each of the runes has a name, a numerical value, and a magical use. For more information on their magic, see Edred Thorsson's *FUTHARK* and *Runelore* (pub. by Samuel Weiser), Freya Aswynn's *Leaves of Yggdrasil* (Llewellyn), and Kveldulf Gundarsson's *Teutonic Magic* (Llewellyn). Avoid any book which claims the existence of a "blank rune," which makes exactly as much sense as a "blank letter" would in our everyday alphabet. The runes are a means of writing known wholly through inscriptions.

Saga: an Icelandic prose work written in the period (roughly) between 1200 and 1400. The source of many of our stories of heroes, and most of our knowledge of Icelandic and Norwegian history.

Sága: Her name is related to the Norse word *saga*, though not the same. She is mentioned in the poem *Grímnismál* and, passingly, in the Prose Edda. According to the poem, her hall is called Sökkvabekk, ("Sunken Benches") and she and Odin drink out of golden cups there - probably, if her name is any clue, retelling old stories while they do it. She, together with Odin, cares for writers. It has also been suggested that she might also be seen as the patron goddess of Iceland - certainly she was the only one to bless that country for many years.

Saxnot: a patron god of the Saxons; since he was apparently not known to the Norse, no tales of him have survived. However, we know that when Charlemagne was carrying out his war of cultural destruction against the Heathen Saxons, those forcibly converted were made to swear an oath forsaking Woden (Odin), Thunaer (Thor), and Saxnot. In the slightly variant form *Seaxnet*, he is also recorded as the father of the East Saxon dynasty in England. The first element of his name is probably related to the word sax (a type of knife).

Sif: Wife of Thor, mother of Ull (by an unknown father), best known for her long golden hair. She appears only in one tale: where Loki cuts her hair off in the night and, to save himself from Thor's wrath, gets the dwarves to forge hair of real gold for her, along with several of the other great treasures of the gods. It has often been suggested that she is a fertility goddess, whose rippling golden hair may be seen in the ripe grain. In the prologue to the Prose Edda, she is also called a seeress. There are hints that she may be associated with the rowan tree as well.

Sigyn: Loki's godly wife, who bore him two sons, Narfi and Nari. She sits by the bound Loki with a cup, protecting him from the venom dripping onto his face (see Loki).

Sjöfn: A goddess of marriage and love; Old Norse Sjöfn.

Skadi: An etin-maid, daughter of the giant Thjazi, who came among the Aesir in full armor to take revenge for her father. As part of her wergild, she demanded a husband; she had wanted Balder, but, being forced to choose among the gods by their feet alone, ended up with Njord. His sea-home was as unpleasant to her as her mountain-home was to him, and so they parted. She later bore a son to Odin: this son fathered the line of the Jarls of Hladhir, who were some of the greatest protectors of Heathenism in Norway during the extremely bloody and brutal process of the conversion of that country. Place-names show that she was especially worshipped in eastern Sweden; in the Eddic poem *Lokasenna*, she speaks of her shrines and holy fields. Skadi is a goddess of skiing, hunting, revenge, protection of the clan, and those women who follow the path of the "Maiden Warrior". Old Norse Skaði.

Skirnir: "The Shining One"; Frey's servant and messenger. Old Norse Skirnir.

Sleipnir: Odin's gray, eight-legged horse, borne by Loki (in mare-shape) to the giant-stallion Svadilfari.

Snotra: "the wise one," a goddess of wisdom and good behavior, always ready to let folk know what is fitting at any given time. Often called on by the lady of the house when men are feasting too boisterously.

Sunna: the Sun. The Sun is always feminine in Germanic languages and culture, just as the Moon is masculine. There is fairly strong evidence showing that the Sun was actually worshipped by the Norse. She is seen as driving a fiery wagon across the sky, which is drawn by either one horse named Skinfaxi ("Shining Mane") or two named Arvaki ("Early Awake") and Alsvidr ("All-Swift"), and chased by a troll in wolf-shape who will devour her at Ragnarok. Old Norse Sól.

Surt: "The Black One," chief of the Muspilli, or fire-giants, who will lead the battle against the gods and slay Frey at Ragnarok. His name appears attached to several sources of Icelandic volcanic activities, from the Viking Age to the modern era (the volcanic island flung up off the coast of Iceland in 1963 is called "Surtsey," Surt's Island). The fire that burns the cosmos at Ragnarok is called "Surt's fire". Old Norse Surtr.

Syn: "the denier": a goddess who guards gates and doorways against those who should not enter.

Swart Alfs: see "dwarves".

Thjalfi: servant of Thor. When Thor stayed overnight at the house of a man (race unclear; sources hint variously at human, giant, or elf) named Egill, there was little to eat, so Thor slew his goats and served them up. He warned the family not to harm any of the bones, but Thjalfi cracked one and sucked the marrow. The next morning, Thor put the hides back over the bones and swung his Hammer over them; the goats jumped up alive and well, but one was lamed. To pay for the harm, Egill gave Thor his son Thjalfi and his daughter Roskva as servants. Thjalfi was best known as a remarkably swift runner. The name (Old Norse Þjálfi) has been interpreted as "serving-elf," but also appears as a personal name. His sister's name, Old Norse Röskva, is related to the verb "to grow, to mature," and may hint at an original role as fertility goddess, fitting to both Thor's role as a god of fruitfulness and to the character of his wife Sif.

Thrud: "Strength"; Thor's daughter. Perhaps abducted by the giant Hrungrir, whom Thor slew; also desired by the dwarf Alviss, whom Thor outwitted. Her name is sometimes listed among the valkyries; it is a common

element in women's names (such as Gertrude - "spear-Thrud" or "spear-strength"). Old Norse Þrúðr; English Trude.

Thurse: another term for a giant, especially used for ill-willing giants.

Troll: originally, perhaps, simply meaning "magic," though it has also been connected with "to roll". Today it is normally used for a being from Icelandic and Norwegian folklore which seems to be a cross between a land-wight, a giant, and the undead. Trolls of this sort are magical beings which kill (and perhaps eat) travellers in the mountains and are turned to stone by daylight.

Tyr: His name simply means "god"; at one time, he may have been the Germanic equivalent of Zeus or Jupiter, the "Sky-Father" of the Indo-Europeans. In Old Norse, Tyr appears only in the myth in which he gives up his hand so that the gods can bind the Wolf Fenrir. However, there are hints associating him with the Thing (the judgement-assembly of the Germanic peoples) and suggesting strongly that he may originally have been a god of justice. Tyr's justice, however, is not that of calm Solomonic legislation, but that of the often lively wrangling of the Germanic legal process, which was effectively a battle sublimated into a form where the process of working out the problem could help, rather than harm, the community. Tyr will fight Garm, the hound of Hel, at Ragnarok. No images or descriptions of Tyr have survived, except that we know he is one-handed, and the Prose Edda portrays him as a warrior. It is said that "Tyr will help you if - and only if - your cause is just". A female deity named Cisa or Zisa (Upper German feminine form of the name Tyr) is also recorded near Augsburg, but we know even less of her, though it has been suggested in modern times that she may be paired with Tyr in some way, perhaps as either a twin with similar functions or as an Earth-Mother complementing the Sky-Father. Old Norse Týr, Anglo-Saxon Tiw (from whence "Tuesday"), Old High German Ziu, Proto-Germanic *Tiwaz.

Ull: God of the bow and the snowshoe, patron of hunters and single combat, little is known of Ull from the tales of the North. His name means "Glory," and has sometimes been thought to refer to the Northern Lights. His home is called "Yew-Dales," fitting to the bow-god. Since his name often appears twinned with that of Njord or Frey in place-names, it is possible that he may have alternated with one or the other as the Winter half of a Winter King/Summer King pair. Old Norse Ullr, Anglo-Saxon Wuldor, Primitive Norse Wulþur.

Utgard: "the world outside the enclosure"; the world of giants, sometimes the evil dead, and other frightful beings. A clear distinction is made between Asgard/Midgard, which gods and humans share, and Utgard; normally the divider is seen as a river or ocean.

Vali: Fathered by Odin on the maiden Rind to avenge Balder's death.

Valkyries: "Choosers of the Slain," these maidens were originally seen as frightful battle-spirits accompanying Odin in his work of marking men for death in war. They appear in a more pleasant aspect in Valhall, where they carry out the traditional womanly duty of bearing drink. The idea of the valkyrie as the hero's supernatural lover is probably a product of romanticization by the thirteenth-century scribes who recorded the earlier poems of the heroes Helgi and Wayland (Völundr) and filled in gaps with their own prose; the poems themselves do not recognise these spirit-wives as valkyries. The most famous of the valkyries, known chiefly through Wagner's Ring Cycle, is Brunnhilde, demoted from her position for defending a hero against Odin's will and punished by being forced to fall in love with Siegfried the Dragon-Slayer (Sigurd).

Vanir: a tribe of deities which we only know about through their relationship with the Aesir. After a war which ended in a truce between equally matched forces, the two tribes were reconciled, and the Vanic Njord and Frey came to live with the Aesir. Since Frey and Njord are often called on for peace and good harvest, the Vanir are often seen as peaceful fertility deities and contrasted to the warlike Aesir in this respect, but since Frey is one of the doughtiest warriors and called "leader of the hosts of the gods," and his twin Freya is well known as a patron goddess of warriors and stirrer of strife, this can hardly be the wholeness of their being. The Vanir are especially known for their wisdom and ability to see into the mists of what shall become; the mind-altering magical technique called *seidhr* is originally attributed to them. The rock carvings of the Bronze Age seem to show a great deal of Vanic symbolism, though Aesic images (the god with the spear, the god with the double-headed Hammer or axe) are also often present. In modern speech, Wans or Wanens.

Var: "Beloved" or "goddess of contracts". One of Frigga's women, a goddess of love and marriage, especially of marriage oaths. Old Norse Vár,

Ve: "Holiness". Probably an aspect of Odin. The "three brothers" Odin, Vili, and Ve slew the proto-giant Ymir and made the worlds out of his body. Old Norse Vé, modern "Wih".

Vidar: Called "the Silent God," Vidar was fathered by Odin on the giantess Grid. At Ragnarok, he will tear Fenrir's jaws apart, avenging Odin and freeing him (or at least some important part of his spirit) from the Wolf's belly. His name may mean "the Wide-Ruling One". Old Norse Víðarr.

Vili: "Will". Probably an aspect of Odin. See Ve.

Vingolf: "The Friendly House," which, according to Snorri, is the special holy hall of the goddesses in Asgard. Old Norse Vingólf.

Vor: "The Careful One," one of Frigga's women. Old Norse Vörr.

Walpurga: "Wald-burga" (Wood-Protection), a christian saint whose name was given to the holy night May Eve ("Walpurgisnacht"). No Heathen name for this feast survives. However, for the sake of custom and because nothing more original could be found in Teutonic tradition, the Troth has taken to calling the festival "Waluburg's Night," after the second-century Heathen Germanic seeress Waluburg.

Wayland: the greatest of smiths in Germanic legend. A human who was wedded to a swan-maiden; after she left him, he was captured by the king Nidhad, hamstrung, and forced to work at the forge, but he slew Nidhad's sons, seduced his daughter and left her pregnant, and flew away on wings he had forged himself. There is a megalithic tomb in England called "Weyland's Smithy". Old Norse Völundr; also called Weyland.

Wild Hunt: the procession of the dead which rides through the night skies, especially around Yuletide. Sometimes it is said to be led by Odin; sometimes by either heroes (such as Gudrun, wife of Sigurd from the Volsung/Nibelung legends, or Theoderik the Great) or local villains.

Yggdrasill: The World-Tree. The name Yggdrasill means "Ygg's steed"; Ygg is one of Odin's many names. The title probably refers to the nine nights Odin spent hanging from it to win the runes, as a gallows is often called "the steed of the hanged". All the Nine Worlds lie within the span of the World-Tree. It is usually called

an ash, but some think that it may be a yew, since it is also said to be evergreen. At its roots gnaw the dragon Nidhogg and many snakes; an eagle nests at its crown with a falcon between his eyes, and the squirrel Ratatosk runs up and down between them. Four stags also gnaw on the World-Tree's bark; but the Norns' sprinkling of the waters from the Well of Wyrð heal it each day.

Ymir: The first giant, born from the meeting of primal ice and primal fire (according to the Prose Edda) or from the mists rising from the rivers that flow from Niflheim (according to the Eddic poem Vafthrudnismal). Slain by Odin and his brothers (or aspects) Vili and Ve. They made the sky from his skull, the earth from his body; his blood became the sea and the waters of the earth, his bones the rocks, and his hair trees and bushes.