

Norse Mythology for Bostonians

A Transcription of the Impudent Edda

Transcribed with an Introduction and Notes by
ROWDY GEIRSSON

PUFFIN CARCASS

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Introduction

The classic tales of Norse mythology have entertained men, women, and children for centuries, albeit in very different capacities and formats as time has passed and society has evolved. While stories such as Odin's belligerent murder of a greedy witch or Thor's cross-dressing misadventure with evil frost giants may have always provided a certain degree of entertainment value through the ages regardless of time period or culture, they also significantly shaped and guided the daily lives of the pre-Christian Scandinavians who originated them. These stories occupied a central role in the spiritual beliefs of the Vikings, and the Norsemen and women who stayed behind at home while their brethren went off plundering and colonizing overseas.¹ It was only with the gradual Christianization of Scandinavia during the four centuries that straddled the year 1000 that the importance of the Norse gods among the Scandinavians faded, though the stories of their lewd, immature, and occasionally heroic exploits lived on and were eventually preserved in the written word.

"Edda" is the term that has come to be given to each of the three primary sources containing the original stories of Norse mythology. The fantastical stories preserved in the Eddas have become increasingly popular in recent decades, especially as mod-

1 It is a common present-day misunderstanding that all Norsemen and women were Vikings. This is incorrect, as only the medieval Scandinavians who sailed away from home to attack far-away cities or colonize distant lands were considered Vikings in their day. All Vikings were Norse (or assimilated into the Norse culture, if not originally Norse), but not all Norse were Vikings.

ern translations and technological advances have enabled them to reach larger and larger audiences. They have served as substantial sources of inspiration for many great writers, artists, and composers. Prominent figures such as Richard Wagner, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, JRR Tolkien (and consequently most other contemporary fantasy novelists and game developers), and Quorthon (of Swedish death metal fame) all borrowed and embellished on the original Eddic material to bring their own creative visions to life. As a result, and thanks in particular to the global audience reached by *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* film franchises in the 21st century, the average non-Norse person is now more familiar than ever with the iconography of Norse mythology, even if he or she is not fully aware of it.²

It is also important, if somewhat ironic, to note that each of the Eddas themselves were simply the culmination of a grand, oral—not written—tradition in which the stories of Odin, Thor, and all the others were passed down from generation to generation for centuries. As such, these stories certainly varied over distance as well as over time throughout the Nordic region. Thus, it is highly unlikely, for example, that the version of the story about the trickster god, Loki, tying his own hairy scrotum to a goat's beard and then playing tug of war with it was the same in Sweden around the year 900 as it was in Greenland two centuries later, if the story even existed in both places/time periods at all. As the collective repository of most Norse mythology, the Eddas provide only a very limited window into what must have once been a much more robust and nuanced mythology than that to which we are presently afforded insight today.

In addition to the Eddas themselves, short mythological tales and references also exist in the worn pages of other medieval

2 One familiar example for the average movie-goer is that of Smaug, the cruel and lazy dragon from *The Hobbit*, who was blatantly modeled after the dragons that appear in ancient Norse literature—right down to the hoard of gold and demonic-speaking abilities. Tolkien very deliberately based many aspects of his writings on the characters, themes, and environments found in the myths and sagas of the Norsemen.

manuscripts. *Flateyjarbók*, the heftiest of ancient Icelandic manuscripts, contains a wealth of saga material and some mythological material, as does the *Gesta Danorum*, the ancient history of the Danes, written by Saxo Grammaticus, although in his work the gods are presented as evil-doing mortals rather than immature but divine beings. Many other manuscripts have also preserved stories that shed light on ancient Norse thought and beliefs such as the *Völsunga Saga* and *Hrólfs Saga Kraka*, and while these certainly help to paint a fuller picture of the known aspects of Norse mythology, they nonetheless typically focus on the earthly exploits of mortal men and women rather than those of the gods. The Eddas thus remain the main primary sources devoted specifically to the deeds of the gods and in that sense they are invaluable.

The two earliest Eddas were recorded in Iceland in the thirteenth century and were the culmination of that country's long tradition of oral story-telling. The first of these Eddas was long thought to have been transcribed by a monk known as Saemundur Sigfusson the Wise (though now there is some contention about the authorship) and is known by many names: *The Codex Regius*, *The Saemundr Edda*, *The Eldest Edda* (formerly *The Elder Edda*), and most commonly, *The Poetic Edda*, because the bulk of its contents are written in poetic verse. The Norse people, as with most other ancient and medieval peoples, loved poetry and generally chose to relate their stories in long, complicated poetic verses for eager audiences. The more complicated and ornate the poem, the more respected the story-teller, or "skald" as Norse poets were called in their day.

The second Edda was written by Snorri Sturluson, a conniving and devious scoundrel who enjoyed a great degree of power and prosperity during his lifetime. As the most prominent landholder and politician in Iceland during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, he was prone to dreaming up traitorous schemes from the comfort of his own private hot-spring hot tub until one day his enemies gathered at his house, broke in, and murdered him while he grovelled in the basement. In addition to instigating blood feuds and pronouncing the laws of the land,³

3 During his lifetime, Snorri was elected to serve as the Ice-

Snorri also collected manuscripts and wrote many of his own, including the original history of Norway.⁴ However, he is best known for his Edda, appropriately enough called *Snorri's Edda*, *The Middle-Child Edda* (formerly *The Younger Edda*), and *The Prose Edda*.⁵ While Snorri wrote this Edda in prose, rather than poetic format, he nonetheless referenced and borrowed many of the same verses that appear in *The Poetic Edda*. Both Eddas are preserved and on exhibit at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavik.⁶

The third Edda was recorded somewhat more recently during the early twenty-first century, specifically on June 12, 2019, in Boston, Massachusetts. In a drastic departure in terms of recording method in comparison to the two earlier Icelandic Eddas, this Edda was not hand-written in a fine, graceful script on parchment or vellum, but rather was audibly recorded on a mobile telephone device and found abandoned in an alleyway behind a local bar next to a puddle of piss in the city's famously angry, Celtic neighborhood colloquially known as "Southie." The author remains

landic Lawspeaker twice. The role of the Lawspeaker was to officiate the proceedings of the Icelandic Althing, the oldest parliament in the world. Primary duties consisted of reciting the laws of the land and serving as an arbitrator of disputes, which frequently involved the irresponsible and reckless grazing of sheep, and ruthless murders.

- 4 In addition to his Edda, Snorri was also the author of *Heimskringla*, known in English as *The History of the Kings of Norway*.
- 5 To add to the confusion, *The Prose Edda* has survived in a total of four different manuscripts, the most substantial of which is referred to as the *Codex Regius*, which is also one of the names for *The Poetic Edda*. The more common titles of *The Prose Edda* and *The Poetic Edda* (or Elder Eddas when referred to collectively), however, will be used exclusively and consistently throughout this edition of *The Impudent Edda*.
- 6 Other copies of *The Prose Edda* exist in Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, but the copy in Iceland is the oldest, most complete, and most famous.



The dank alley in South Boston where archaeologists discovered the only extant copy of The Impudent Edda.

unknown to this day, but thanks to the remarkable preservative properties of non-biodegradable digital technology, this Edda survived the damaging passage of time and weather and has since come to be regarded—though not without some dispute as will be discussed further below—as the most important find relating to Norse mythology and pagan spiritual beliefs since the exhumation of the Oseberg Ship in 1904-1905.⁷ As with the other two Elder Eddas before it, it has taken on many names, including: *The Youngest Edda*, *The Infant(ile) Edda*, *The Wicked Retarded Edda*, *Some Dumb Masshole's Edda*, and most commonly, *The Impudent*

⁷ The Oseberg ship was exhumed in 1904-1905 in Vestfold, Norway. It was a remarkable find, containing numerous grave goods in excellent condition. The ship itself has become the basis for the world's collective imagination regarding the ideal appearance of a standard Viking sea-going vessel, replete with dragon-headed prow.

Cosmological Frost Giant Genocide

So way back, n' I mean way fuckin' back like we're talkin' 'bout back befohr the Pilgrims even knew what a fuckin' Mayflowah r'even fuckin' was, there was nothing 'cept this big ass wohrld tree that was shaped like a fuckin' gallows pole,¹ since the Vikings were a bunch'ah real death-obsessed mothahfuckahs. N' right next tah this intahstellah gallows tree was a massive black hole called Ginnungagap that swallowed evuhrything up like it thought it was the budget fahr the Big fuckin' Dig'ah somethin' n' then on each side'ah it were a couple'ah sehrious shit holes. One'ah which was called Niflheim which means "cold as fuck" in ancient fuckin' Nahrse n' the othah was called Muspellsheim fahr who the fuck knows why.²

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- 1 As identified on page xiii of *Old Norse Astrophysics* in the introductory material, Yggdrasil is the term given by the Norse to the high-energy interstellar structure that corresponds to our more modern scientific concept of the universe. The word "Yggdrasil" literally means "Gallows Pole" in Old Norse because the Norse, in addition to being "death-obsessed mothahfuckahs" as the author so acutely observes, were also keenly aware of Odin's supernatural ability to redshift his constituent electromagnetic wavelengths, reducing their frequency to suicidal potential, provided that he first dispersed his god-particles to the giant asymptotic branches of Yggdrasil. This transfiguration and its subsequent high-energy molecular dispersion is discussed further on page 25 in the section entitled, *Odin Commits Suicide*.
 - 2 Contrary to the author's confident declaration here, "Niflheim" does not mean "cold as fuck" in Old Norse. While

So anyway what I guess happened one day is that some dumb shit fahgot tah tuhrn down the heat in Muspellsheim on his way out n' by the time he got back home from wohrk not only had National Grid gone n' fuckin' bankrupted the poohr bastahd with the electrical bill but this ovah-heatin' had alsah melted all the ice next doohr in Niflheim n' so what what yah got now is this big slushy mess that's lookin' like the wohrst fuckin' mud season on rehcahd n' next thing yah know some goddamned giant emehrges from out'ah it. N' no one even knows how he got down there. Still tah this day, no one knows. No one even has a fuckin' clue n' even the scientists ovah r'at CERN ahr still tryin' tah figyah it out but appahrently their supah special supahcollidah's a fuckin' piece'ah shit.

But anyway, this giant's name's Ymir n' he's a real mean prick.

Sehriously, he's a fuckin' asshole. N' tah make mattahs wohrse, he sweats a lot. N' I mean like a fuckin' shit-ton a lot. Especially whenever he's sleepin' at night, which is a daily occuhrence even fahr a fuckin' malicious mythological creat'uh like Ymir. I mean the guy drips out so much fuckin' sweat outtah his pohres that it's like a fuckin' tahrential downpouhr floodin' the fens n' so yah can just imagine the sohrt'ah hahrendous mold prahblems any poohr bastahd livin' down at gahden level's gottah deal with when that shit finally fuckin' recedes.

But anyway, somehow all that giant sweat, it just ends up transfuhrmin' intah even mohr frost giants, yah know, like somehow that sweat just got up n' mutated itself intah giants on its own accahrd like it thought was a ninja tuhrtle ah some shit, only without all the radioactive goo ah Splintah tah teach it some sick ass ninja moves. Which all in all is kindah impressive from a sohrt'ah supah r'advanced evolutionahry point'ah view, but at the same time it's alsah fuckin' hahrible 'cause now the wohrld's

all three Eddas consistently portray Niflheim as a cold, dark place, most scholars generally agree that the word "Niflheim" involves a reference to mist rather than cold. Additionally, and while not stated specifically as such here, later inferences within *The Impudent Edda* indicate a general concurrence with the Elder Eddas of Muspellsheim as a realm of heat and fire.

ovahrn with an entiyah fuckin' race'ah inbred ovahsized assholes made outtah magical sweat that ain't even fuckin' human.

Now the thing 'bout Ymir n' all his fuckin' frost giant sweat children is that they all subsisted on the milk'ah this huge ass magical cow³ that fuckin' just—LO N' BEHOLD—alsah happened tah emehrge from outtah the same fuckin' slushpile as Ymir did. So now this cow, she stahts lickin' up all that fuckin' ice that hasn't melted yet, 'cause I mean she's a fuckin' cow right, n' so she needs her fuckin' salt lick n' so when she does that fahr long 'nough she eventually licks away 'nough ice tah free up this othah guy who was somehow fuckin' buhried down in there alsah.⁴

Now, I gottah say, I don't got a clue as tah where all these guys ahr comin' from, I mean no one knows how they all got put down there in the fihrst place. The whole thing's like a fuckin' mythological mass graveyahd from befohr the beginnin'ah time. One'ah the great mystahries'ah the univehrse n' all that shit.

Anyway, so now this new guy ends up havin' a son who tuhrns out tah be hohrniah 'en Tigah Woods on viagra, n' so soon as he gets a chance, he goes off n' he stahts fuckin' anything that moves, which basic'ly means that he fucks a bunch'ah fuckin' frost giants. So, ah'coughrse he ends up knockin' a lottah 'em up n' so then they all give bihrth to a bunch'ah fuckin' little paht-god, paht-frost-giant bastahds, one'ah whom is our dee'ah friend Odin, who's actually a pretty sick n' demented individual but basic'ly grows up tah be like the Nahrse god vehrsion'ah Joe Kennedy Sr.

Now Odin, he n' his brothahs, they don't get along so well with Ymir since it's like I was sayin', Ymir's a total fuckin' prick, n' so

3 This primordial bovine has been identified as Audumbla in the *Gylfaginning* section of *The Prose Edda*.

4 The "othah guy" as described in *The Impudent Edda* has been equated to Buri in the Elder Eddas. Buri is not generally considered to have been an evil frost giant, but rather a likeable sort of proto-god who nonetheless fraternized and copulated with the female frost giants because there were no other options at that time and online dating had not yet been invented to help him at least try to find a more compatible match outside of his own rather limited circle of acquaintances.

Odin n' his brothahs, they go n' they just fuckin' muhrdah the bastahd right there on the fuckin' spot n' they don't even think twice 'bout it.⁵ N' yah know what else? They don't even try tah covah r'it up. Evuhryone knows they did it n' they're all fuckin' glad that they did.

But Ymir, him bein' the big guy that he is, he bleeds like a mothahfuckah r'n all'ah his blood basic'ly drowns n' kills all those othah fuckin' frost giants that had stahted out as his own sweat 'cept fahr this one guy n' this one guy ends up bein' the sole progenitah fahr repopulatin' the whole wide woorld with mohr frost giants, n' I don't know how the fuck that woorked without there bein' some sohr'tah othah female frost giant there fahr him tah procreate with, but this stahry doesn't really make much sense anyway, so it's just like, eh fuck it, yah know?⁶

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- 5 Odin's brothers have been identified as Vili and Ve in the Elder Eddas. They do not figure prominently in any of the Eddas, other than serving as accomplices to Odin's primordial act of murder and subsequent creation of Middle-Earth in the case of both the *Prose* and *Impudent Eddas* (*The Poetic Edda* acquits Vili and Ve of any guilt in this particular homicidal incident).
- 6 Here, the unknown poet of *The Impudent Edda* deviates from *The Prose Edda* in his conviction that "this one guy"—Bergelmir—is the sole surviving frost giant of the cosmological genocide; the *Gylfaginning* section of *The Prose Edda* asserts that Bergelmir was accompanied by his wife as he rowed his boat through wave after wave of blood and gore to eventual safety. *The Poetic Edda* confirms the existence of Bergelmir in its constituent poem, *Vafþrúðnismál*, but remains silent on his bodily relationship to the desecration of Ymir's cosmic corpse.