

- I. The **poets** of Norse Mythology were the only spokesmen for the belief of the whole great Teutonic race. Everywhere else in NW Europe, the early records (the traditions, songs, and stories) were obliterated by the priests of Christianity.
- II. **Remaining Literary Works:**
- A. *Beowulf* (English poem)
 - B. *Nibelungenlied* (Germanic poem)
 - C. *Elder Edda* (Icelandic poetry)
 - D. *Younger Edda* (Icelandic prose)
- III. **Aesir:** heroic, polytheistic Norse gods (**not** immortal or invincible)
- A. gods know that one day they will be defeated by their enemies, the **Giants** (whose city was *Jotunheim*), and die
 - B. this *day-of-doom* was called **RAGNAROK**
 - C. **Norse Cultural Values and Concepts:**
 1. **FATE** ruled your life
 2. the one pure, unsullied good that men can hope to attain is **Heroism** (which depends on *lost causes*)
 3. the power of good is shown not by triumph but by **continuing to resist evil** while facing certain defeat [i.e. *a heroic death is a triumph*]
- IV. **Asgard:** home of the gods (grave, solemn place)
- A. **Gladsheim:** golden palace of the chief and ruler, Odin
 - B. **Valhalla:** [*Hall of the Slain*] elaborate mead-hall for heroic warriors slain in battle
 - C. Mankind lived in **Midgard**, the battlefield of men
- V. **Odin (Woden) also "All-father" or "sky-father"**
- A. supreme among gods and men; it's his responsibility to postpone Ragnarok as long as possible
 - B. clad in cloud-gray kirtle and blue hood
 - C. solemn, aloof; eats nothing at feasts, instead gives his food to the 2 wolves (who sit at his feet)
 - D. **Hugin** (*Thought*) and **Munin** (*Memory*): 2 ravens who perch on his shoulders & fly each day through the world to bring him back news
 - E. seeks knowledge that he uses to help gods and men, earning him the title "mankind's benefactor"

F. he drank from the **well of wisdom** (guarded by *Mimir the wise*) knowing that he would pay for it with one of his eyes

G. he won the knowledge of the **Runes** (magical inscriptions) by hanging for:

Nine whole nights on a wind-rocked tree,

Wounded with a spear.

I was offered to Odin, myself to myself,

On that tree of which no man knows.

[he passed this knowledge on to men]

H. he took the **skaldic mead** (which made anyone who tasted it a **poet**) away from the **Giants** under great peril to his life

I. **Valkyries** were his maiden attendants & "**Choosers of the Slain**"

1. *Val* means "slain"

2. their chief duty was to go to the battlefield and carry the chosen brave dead to **Valhalla**

J. **wednesday** is of course **Odin's day (Wodensday)**

VI. **Other gods & goddesses** (although women & goddesses were not as important as those in **Greco-Roman Mythology**):

A. **Frigga**: Odin's wife, tries to save Balder from his fate; very wise and silent;

symbol is a spinning wheel where the threads she spins are of gold

B. **Balder**: Odin's son; *most beloved of all gods* (whose death was the 1st disaster that fell upon the gods)

C. **Nanna**: Balder's wife, whose heart broke when she saw Balder upon his lofty pyre on a great ship; she died and her body was placed beside his, the pyre was kindled and the ship pushed from the shore

D. **Hoder**: Balder's blind brother who accidentally kills him with mistletoe and the deception of **Loki**, the son of a giant

E. **Thor**: **Thunder-God, the strongest of the Aesir** and for whom **Thursday** was named

F. **Freyr**: (Vanir god) cared for the fruits of the earth

G. **Heimdall**: **warder of Bifrost**, the rainbow bridge which led to **Asgard**

H. **Tyr**: **God of War** for whom **Tuesday** (once *Tyr's day*) was named

I. **Hela (Hel)**: *Goddess of the Dead*, dwells in **Niflheim**, the world of the dead;

(from whom we get the word Hell)

J. **Freya**: **Goddess of Love and Beauty**; oddly, 1/2 of those slain in battle went to her battle hall;

Friday is generally held to have been named for her, Frigga, or both

VII. Symbols & other Creatures:

- A. cardinal directions
- B. fire [**Muspelheim**: the land of fire]
- C. 12 rivers
- D. **dwarfs**: masterly craftsmen who lived under the earth
- E. **elves**: lovely sprites who tended the flowers and streams
- F. frost maidens
- G. **giants**: (Frost and Mountain) lived in Jotunheim, enemies of all that is good
- H. snakes

I. World Tree: Yggdrasil

1. ash tree that supports the universe
2. roots struck through all worlds
3. man & woman created from trees

J. the three Norns:

1. **Urda** (Past)
2. **Verdandi** (Present)
3. **Skuld** (Future)
4. they guard the well of white water and assign the **FATES** to the sons of men