

## The Depiction of Norse Gods Archetypes in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*

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### Abstract

This research examines the depiction of key archetypal figures from Norse mythology in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*, utilizing Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology as the theoretical framework. The analysis focuses on three central characters: Odin, Thor, and Loki, interpreted as representations of the archetypes: The Wise Old Man, The Hero, and The Trickster. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method and interpretative content analysis. The findings indicate that the novel reconfigures their symbolic meanings within a narrative structure that reflects the psychological dynamics of contemporary individuals. Odin is presented as a contemplative spiritual leader, Thor as a hero who transforms failure through introspection, and Loki as the embodiment of creative chaos. Through this archetypal lens, the novel effectively conveys the structure of the human unconscious collective. This research concludes that Norse mythology serves as a bridge, linking the symbolic legacy of the past with modern narratives and contemporary existential exploration.

**Keywords:** archetype; Norse mythology; analytical psychology; collective unconscious

### Introduction

The concept of "gods" is an integral part of the history of human civilization, formed as symbols of supernatural power and as tools to comprehend the reality of the universe. Various cultures have developed their symbolic constructions of these gods, whether in Egyptian, Greek, Indian, or East Asian mythology, or local belief systems such as the Dreamtime or The Dreaming in Australia or Balinese Hindu rituals. Within the framework of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, these gods are not merely religious figures but also archetypal symbols representing structures within the collective unconscious of humanity (Jung, 1968; Walker, 2019).

This study examines Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*, focusing specifically on the portrayal of three major Norse gods: Odin, Thor, and Loki. These figures are interpreted as representations of Jungian psychological archetypes: Odin as The Wise Old Man, Thor as The Hero, and Loki as The Trickster. This framework symbolically reflects various aspects of the human psyche (Gaiman, 2017; Asnawi, 2024; Saraswati et al., 2024). The central research question

posed is how the characteristics of these Norse gods are represented archetypically in the novel, and how they reflect the psychological dynamics of human beings.

Previous studies have explored the application of Jung's archetype theory in various literary and cinematic works, including the novel *Mahika* (Anggraeni et al., 2023), *Anwar Tohari Mencari Mati* (Roadi et al., 2024), and the film *Sri Asih* (Latifah & Asnawi, 2022). Other works have analyzed the character Leo in Farida Susanty's novel (Dasilva & Kurniawan, 2023) and the depiction of Valiandra in fantasy fiction (Noviandini & Mubarak, 2021). However, there has been limited research specifically analyzing Norse Mythology through the lens of archetypal theory in combination with Derridean deconstruction. Thus, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the narrative symbolism in Gaiman's novel.

The scope of this research is limited to the three primary gods and does not encompass all characters or the full historical context of Norse mythology. The analysis focuses on the symbolic function of these gods within the narrative structure and their connection to Jungian archetypes, while also considering the potential for meaning shifts through

deconstructive strategies (Neumann, 2015; Doostani, 2025). This approach aims not only to explain the construction of archetypes in modern mythological storytelling but also to reveal how ancient symbolic values continue to resonate in contemporary culture.

The main thesis of this study asserts that the characters Odin, Thor, and Loki in Norse mythology serve as archetypal representations of human psychological dynamics that can be reinterpreted and deconstructed. By employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines analytical psychology and deconstruction, this research emphasizes that mythology is not just a cultural relic; rather, it is a reflection of the human psyche, remaining relevant in the narratives of modern fiction. (Jung, 1968; Krippendorff, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with an interpretative approach to analyze Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*. This approach is chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of symbolic narratives and psychological dynamics within myths, enabling the researcher to interpret meanings within cultural and psychological contexts. Carl Gustav Jung's theory of archetypes serves as the primary analytical framework, providing a relevant lens for interpreting mythological figures as manifestations of the human collective unconscious (Jung, 1969). The analysis is conducted using content analysis with an interpretative orientation, following the stages of identification, classification, interpretation, and contextualization of the narrative data found in the novel (Bengtsson, 2016). These steps support a systematic examination of textual structure and symbols as expressions of universal archetypes.

In collecting data, this study focuses on extracting narrative excerpts, dialogues, and character actions that correspond with archetypal patterns such as the Wise Old Man, the Hero, and the Trickster. Central figures like Odin, Thor, and Loki are positioned as primary subjects of analysis due to their complex and symbolic psychological representations. By connecting the novel's narratives to the concepts of the collective unconscious and Nordic mythological structures, the study treats myth

as a symbolic system that continues to live within cultural and psychic consciousness (Neumann, 2015). Therefore, this research aims to demonstrate that the myths retold in Norse Mythology do not merely reflect ancient storytelling structures but also portray archetypal patterns that mirror the inner conflict and transformation of the human psyche.

## Result and discussion

This research presents a psychological-literary analysis of Neil Gaiman's Norse Mythology through the framework of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology, with an emphasis on the archetypal structures manifested in the central figures of Odin, Thor, and Loki. The foundation of this approach rests on the conviction that mythological figures are not merely cultural relics or products of collective imagination from the past, but rather symbolic projections of the collective unconscious, a concept understood by Jung as the shared psychic reservoir of humankind, filled with recurring symbols or archetypes that transcend the boundaries of space, time, and individual experience. Within this framework, myth cannot be regarded simply as an ancient tale that has lost its relevance, but rather as a latent expression of the psychic structures that continue to operate in the present. Jung himself asserted that myths, legends, and sacred symbols serve a compensatory function for consciousness: they provide symbolic language to articulate inner realities that the ego cannot directly express. Thus, the gods in Norse mythology, as interpreted by Gaiman, do not appear as frozen figures trapped in history, but as dynamic psychological representations of the human inner world. They embody fundamental archetypal energies that symbolically illustrate the drama of individuation, a process Jung described as the journey toward wholeness, the integration of unconscious aspects with consciousness.

In Gaiman's depiction, Odin, Thor, and Loki are not idealized or flawless heroes, but complex personalities marked by contradiction and inner tension. This very complexity reflects the real condition of human existence: fraught with conflicts between ego and shadow, consciousness and unconsciousness, strength and weakness, order and

chaos. Their presence as archetypes transforms these myths into more than entertainment; they become psychological metaphors for the human struggle toward integration of the self. Odin, as the leader of the gods, not only represents wisdom and vision but also carries moral burden, ambiguity, and manipulative tendencies. Thor, by contrast, embodies heroic energy and bravery, yet remains overshadowed by intellectual limitations and impulsive outbursts. Meanwhile, Loki, with his cunning, paradoxical, and treacherous nature, emerges as a symbol of chaos that both destroys and renews.

Odin, the supreme deity in the Norse pantheon, emerges as a symbol of rich significance. He is not only the formal leader but also the bearer of cosmic burdens and a seeker of truth, willing to sacrifice. From a Jungian perspective, Odin embodies two archetypes simultaneously: the Wise Old Man and the Ruler. As the Wise Old Man, he serves as a spiritual guide, a bridge between consciousness and the unconscious, between the real world and the hidden symbolic realm of the psyche. As the Ruler, he articulates the principle of organization, the ego's tendency to establish order, stability, and balance amidst the threat of chaos. Odin's sacrifice of his eye in pursuit of wisdom is deeply symbolic. Gaiman writes:

*"He gouged out his eye with a knife. The pain was hot, white, and unforgettable. He dropped the eye into the pool. It floated, open, staring upward, through the water."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 23)

This act symbolizes the renunciation of superficial egoic vision in order to attain deeper archetypal insight. Within a Jungian framework, the sacrifice of the eye serves as a metaphor for the transition of consciousness from surface perception into the depths of the psyche, a transformational moment marking the process of individuation. Odin is thus understood not as an infallible figure but as a leader who recognizes that psychic wholeness can only be achieved through suffering, reflection, and the courage to embrace paradox. Odin's role as cosmic organizer also appears in The Master Builder, when he strikes an advantageous bargain but

ultimately relies on Loki to ensure the agreement fails:

*"Let him build. If he fails, we lose nothing. If he succeeds... well, that will not happen. Loki will see to it."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 58)

This quotation reveals Odin's moral ambiguity. He is aware that maintaining order cannot always be achieved through purely idealistic means. His manipulateness demonstrates that leadership, whether in myth or the psyche, is not a matter of moral absolutes, but of embracing both light and shadow to sustain balance. In Jungian terms, this underscores that individuation is not a moralistic process but an integrative one: uniting strengths with weaknesses, wisdom with cunning, sacrifice with manipulation.

In contrast to Odin's calculated nature, Thor embodies direct, explosive, and heroic vitality. He is the protector of Asgard, symbolizing immense physical strength and bravery. In archetypal terms, Thor represents both the Hero and the Warrior, patterns expressing courage, determination, and guardianship. Yet Gaiman deliberately avoids presenting Thor as a flawless hero. Instead, he is portrayed as emotional, sometimes naïve, and even slow-witted. This makes the Hero archetype more psychologically realistic: great courage does not always come with intellectual wisdom. One of the most symbolic episodes occurs in Thor's Journey to the Land of the Giants, where Thor faces a series of challenges he seemingly fails to overcome, only to later discover that each apparent failure conceals an extraordinary achievement:

*"Thor had not drunk the sea dry. He had only drunk from the end of it... He had lifted the Midgard serpent... And he had wrestled old age to a standstill."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 149)

This episode carries profound psychological meaning. It symbolizes the ego's encounter with unconscious cosmic forces far greater than itself. Thor does not conquer the sea, the world-serpent, or old age, but he shakes them, shifts them, and even

holds them at bay for a moment. This is the true transformation of the Hero archetype: not external victory but internal recognition of one's limitations. As the Warrior, Thor also functions as the protector of the boundaries of consciousness. In The Master Builder, when the giant threatens, Thor reacts instinctively, destroying him with his hammer:

*"Thor swung his hammer and smashed the builder's head."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 66)

This scene illustrates the instinctive Warrior aspect: immediate reaction to defend order. Yet Jung cautions that the Warrior archetype is dangerous if unguided by wisdom. Great strength can easily become destruction without moral reflection. Nevertheless, Thor remains a symbol of bravery born from loyalty and determination to protect Asgard. He is the embodiment of the ego striving to maintain the boundaries of consciousness against the threat of unconscious chaos, while also learning from his failures.

If Odin symbolizes order and Thor symbolizes strength, Loki introduces the third axis: chaos. Loki personifies both the Trickster and the Shadow. As the Trickster, he disrupts order, yet his disruption paradoxically produces renewal. In The Treasures of the Gods, Loki cuts Sif's golden hair simply out of boredom. This destructive act ultimately leads to the creation of sacred artifacts central to the gods' power, including Mjölnir:

*"He had, after all, made everything right again."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 33)

This passage illustrates the Trickster's function: producing conflict that unsettles stability, but in doing so, opens paths to growth. As the narrative progresses, however, Loki's nature darkens. The climax comes with his role in Balder's death. When accused, Loki does not deny it but smiles defiantly:

*"Loki smiled and did not deny it."*  
(Gaiman, 2017, p. 215)

This moment marks Loki's shift from Trickster to Shadow. Whereas the Trickster still functions as a healing catalyst, the Shadow embodies everything consciousness represses, emerging destructively if denied. In Jungian psychology, confronting the Shadow is a prerequisite for individuation. Loki, therefore, represents the darkest aspects of the psyche: betrayal, violence, destruction. Yet the destruction he brings in Ragnarök signifies not only an ending but also total psychic cleansing, a tabula rasa for new beginnings. Loki thus operates as a transformer: without him, neither the cosmos nor the psyche could achieve renewal.

Accordingly, Gaiman's Norse Mythology is far more than a collection of ancient tales. Odin, Thor, and Loki appear not merely as mythic figures, but as representations of essential psychic functions: wisdom and order (Odin), courage and protection (Thor), and chaos and transformation (Loki). From a Jungian perspective, they form a tripartite structure reflecting the dynamics of human consciousness: Odin as the Self, Thor as the striving ego, and Loki as the Shadow to be confronted. Their interactions are not merely mythic drama but symbolic reflections of universal human struggles. Through this framework, Gaiman not only revives Norse myth but also demonstrates that myth is the symbolic language of the soul, a map of the journey toward wholeness, and an eternal expression of the collective unconscious.

In modern human life, the figure of Odin as an archetypal symbol retains clear relevance. Two primary archetypes attached to Odin, namely The Wise Old Man and The Ruler, do not merely exist within mythological narratives but are also reflected in various social and professional roles today.

As The Wise Old Man, Odin manifests in individuals respected for their wisdom and life experience. In the realm of education, this figure can be seen in professors or senior lecturers who not only impart knowledge but also instill moral values and provide guidance for younger generations. In professional contexts, many senior consultants or veteran CEOs, after years of dedication, assume roles as mentors for younger professionals. Within families, this role is embodied by grandparents who become trusted sources of advice when families face difficulties. In the spiritual sphere, religious leaders



or senior meditation teachers often serve this archetypal role, not seeking fame but being acknowledged for their depth of spirituality and inner serenity. In the public sphere, contemporary thinkers and writers such as Yuval Noah Harari or Jordan Peterson embody Odin's role as intellectual figures who invite society to engage in deeper reflection on life.

Meanwhile, as The Ruler, Odin is reflected in individuals who hold authority and bear great responsibility for the welfare of their communities. At the level of the state, presidents or prime ministers mirror Odin's archetype as sovereigns tasked with maintaining stability, establishing policies, and ensuring the survival of their people. In the corporate world, figures such as Satya Nadella or Elon Musk exemplify leaders who direct their companies not only toward profit but also toward advancing civilization. In the military, commanders-in-chief carry the heavy responsibility of defense and security, much like Odin guarding the order of the nine worlds. On a smaller scale, the archetype of The Ruler also appears within families through heads of households who maintain balance and make decisions for the common good. In social contexts, community leaders or heads of social organizations frequently serve as symbolic protectors and guardians of collective values.

Through these various roles, Odin's archetypes as The Wise Old Man and The Ruler continue to live and manifest within modern social dynamics, demonstrating that the symbolic legacy of mythology remains relevant to human life today.

In contemporary human life, the archetypes of Thor as The Hero and The Warrior also persist across diverse spheres of social existence. In Norse mythology, Thor is known as the god of thunder, the protector of Midgard (the human realm), and a symbol of bravery and strength. His character reflects universal values of courage in facing challenges, protecting the vulnerable, and engaging in selfless struggle for the common good.

As The Hero, Thor emerges in modern individuals who sacrifice themselves for the welfare of many and confront immense challenges with extraordinary bravery. In real life, this archetype is embodied by medical professionals working on the front lines during pandemics, risking their health for

the safety of others. Social volunteers, environmental activists, and human rights defenders also exemplify the heroic archetype when they resist injustice, confront threats, and remain committed to noble values despite facing severe risks. Modern heroes can also be found among firefighters, rescue workers, or humanitarian personnel who risk their lives in conflict zones to save others. Thor as The Hero is further mirrored in inspirational figures from sports and entertainment, such as athletes who embody resilience in life struggles or public figures who exert positive influence on society.

As The Warrior, Thor symbolizes physical and mental strength, the courage to fight for what is deemed right, and unwavering determination. In modern life, this archetype is embodied by military personnel and police officers who preserve order and security, confronting danger directly. Beyond the military sphere, warriors appear in professional athletes who embody discipline, hard work, and high determination in striving for victory amid fierce competition. On a personal level, many individuals embody the warrior spirit in their everyday lives: single parents struggling for their children's well-being, or small entrepreneurs battling economic pressures to sustain their livelihoods. In the community, warrior figures can be seen in organizational leaders persistently striving for positive change despite overwhelming challenges. Thor as The Warrior also reminds us that struggle is not solely physical combat but equally about steadfastness in confronting life's various obstacles.

Thus, Thor's archetypes as The Hero and The Warrior are reflected in many facets of modern human life, from struggles on the battlefield and sacrifices in the medical profession to the spirit of athletic perseverance and daily resilience against hardship. These archetypes highlight the significance of courage, determination, sacrifice, and dedication in navigating life.

In Norse mythology, Loki stands as a complex figure, intelligent, cunning, often defying rules, yet indispensable in maintaining balance between order and chaos. Two archetypes strongly associated with Loki are The Trickster and The Shadow. In modern human life, these archetypes are not only expressed in negative forms but also illuminate important

psychological and social dynamics often hidden beneath the surface.

As the Trickster, Loki reflects the human traits of creativity, intelligence, and unpredictability, while frequently disrupting norms and destabilizing established structures. In modern contexts, this archetype appears in figures who challenge social systems in unexpected ways. For instance, satirical comedians like John Oliver or Hasan Minhaj use humor to critique government policies or expose social injustices. They act much like Loki, disrupting order while simultaneously revealing truths to society. The Trickster archetype also surfaces in disruptive innovators such as Steve Jobs or Elon Musk in their early careers, whose radical ideas initially “upset” markets yet ultimately revolutionized industries. On a social scale, the Trickster appears in individuals who cleverly manipulate systems for personal gain, such as opportunistic politicians or social media influencers exploiting systemic inconsistencies to shape public opinion.

The Shadow archetype in Loki symbolizes the darker aspects of the human psyche, the parts repressed, ignored, or denied by consciousness, yet still powerfully shaping behavior. In Jungian psychology, the Shadow is that portion of the self we conceal because it does not align with our idealized image. Loki embodies this through jealousy, feelings of exclusion, hidden anger, and the desire for revenge. In everyday life, the Shadow surfaces when individuals sabotage others due to feeling undervalued, or when manipulative tendencies are masked behind friendliness. The Shadow is also evident in covertly destructive acts, such as spreading misinformation, instigating workplace drama, or fueling conflicts from behind the scenes.

Nevertheless, the Shadow is not inherently negative. In many cases, confronting one’s Shadow becomes a pathway to personal growth. By recognizing dark tendencies, whether manipulateness, anger, or fear, individuals can learn to integrate them in healthy ways. In therapy, art, or creative writing, many people channel the energy of their inner Shadow into works that are profound and authentic. Cultural representations such as the Joker in film or the numerous “anti-heroes” in modern literature and popular culture

exemplify the Shadow, enabling audiences to confront the darker sides of themselves.

Therefore, Loki as The Trickster and The Shadow stands as a vital symbol for understanding both inner and social dynamics in contemporary life. He embodies forces that provoke change, dismantle illusions of order, and compel individuals and societies alike to confront uncomfortable truths. In an increasingly complex world, Loki’s archetypes remind us that not all chaos is destructive and that within every shadow lies the potential for growth and new awareness.

Extending further into Jungian theory, the presence of Odin, Thor, and Loki may also be linked to concepts such as the Persona and Anima-Animus. Odin, with his profound wisdom and sacrifice for knowledge, can be viewed as a figure attempting to transcend the Persona, the social mask worn in external interactions, and enter the realm of the Self. He refuses to remain at the surface of identity, choosing instead the inner sacrifice necessary to seek deeper meaning. Thor, by contrast, may be understood as a manifestation of both Persona and Ego. He embodies a strong, protective self-image, yet proves vulnerable when confronted with deeper inner boundaries. Through his symbolic journey into the land of giants, Thor learns that outward strength is insufficient; he must come to terms with his limitations to grow.

Meanwhile, Loki, with his cunning, ambivalence, and destructiveness, clearly exemplifies the Shadow. He represents all that consciousness suppresses, rejects, or marginalizes, but which demands recognition nonetheless. Without Loki, the gods would stagnate; with him, they are compelled to react, adapt, and ultimately accept destruction as part of the cosmic cycle. The devastation Loki brings through Ragnarök can thus be interpreted as a symbol of inner transformation: only by accepting the destruction of the old identity can the ego open itself to new consciousness.

## Conclusion

Neil Gaiman’s *Norse Mythology* is more than a retelling of Norse legends; it is a symbolic reflection of the human psyche through the lens of Carl Jung’s analytical psychology. Characters like Odin, Thor,

and Loki embody key archetypes, Odin as The Wise Old Man and The Ruler who represents individuation and moral ambiguity; Thor as The Hero and The Warrior who grows through struggle and failure; and Loki as The Trickster and The Shadow, symbolizing chaos, transformation, and repressed aspects of the self. Their narratives depict universal inner conflicts between consciousness and the unconscious, order and disorder, ego and shadow. Through accessible storytelling, Gaiman revives myth as a mirror of the human soul. This research also suggests the potential for broader analysis of figures like Freya, Balder, and Hel, comparative studies with other mythologies, and interdisciplinary applications in literature, psychology, and education to enhance symbolic literacy and cultural awareness.

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