

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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IX. Jörd, Thor's Mother

“It is uncertain whether the names Fjörgyn, Hlóðyn, Fold and Grund (all meaning ‘earth’) were merely poetic synonyms for the mother of Thor created by the skalds, or whether they are various names for the old earth-goddess Jörd.”¹

—John McKinnell,
Meeting the Other in Old Norse Myth and Legend, p. 46.



Frau Holle
Franz Stassen, 1903

As we have seen, Odin's wife Frigg in her role as Baldur's mother clearly possesses characteristics of an earth goddess. Yet, in spite of this, both Frigg and Earth (Jörd) remain rather opaque figures in Old Icelandic literature. Despite her high rank, we know relatively little about Frigg. The case is much the same with Thor's mother, the Earth. Physical descriptions of Jörd are few and mainly refer to her as a personification of the land. A strophe by Hallfreðr vanræðaskald preserved by Snorri refers to Earth as “Baleyg's [Odin's] broad-faced-bride,” whereas Martin L. West notes that “broad” is the most common epithet of the earth-goddess in Indo-European poetic tradition.² In the third strophe of Þjóðólfr Árnorsson's *Sexstefja* (*Fagrskinna*, ch. 51), Earth is described as *haglfaldinni*, “hail-hooded,” an allusion which compares snow-capped mountains to the white linen of a woman's *faldr* headdress. Elsewhere in Old Icelandic sources, Jörd is said to be *eiki grónu*, “grown with oak” (Guðorm Sindri's *Hákonardrápa* 5); *barrhödduð*, “fir-tressed” and *víði gróna*, “grown with woodland” (Hallfreðr vanræðaskald's *Hákonardrápa*). The expression *haddr Jarðar*, “Jörd's tresses” is a kenning for grass, just as various plants such as *galium verum* are known as *Friggjar gras*, “Frigg's grass,” throughout Scandinavia.

Several scholars assume that Jörd was once a powerful goddess in her own right, but surprisingly, we learn very little of her in the sources. In *Gylfaginning* 9, Snorri states that “the Earth is Odin's wife and daughter”³ and that with her he begot the first of his sons, Asa-Thor. Despite this, there is no evidence to support Jörd being Odin's daughter.⁴ In *Gylfaginning* 10, Snorri provides additional detail:

¹ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 179, s.v. Jörd.

² West, *ibid.*, p. 178, which notes that analogous expressions occur in Germanic verse: the Old High German poem *Muspilli* 58, speaks of *daz preita wasal*, ‘the broad wetland’; and Old English poetry of *widere eorþan* (*Genesis* 1348) and *Widsith* 51 of *geond ginne grund*, cp. *Judith* 2.

³ *Jörðinn var dóttir hans ok kona hans* (Odin's).

⁴ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 156.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

SAMPLE CHAPTER © 2018 William P. Reaves

Norfi or Narfi was the name of a giant who lived in Jötunheim. He had a daughter named Night. She was black and dark in accordance with her ancestry. She was married to a man named Naglfari. Their son was called Aud. Next she was married to someone called Annar. Their daughter was called Jörd [Earth]. Her last husband was Delling, he was of the race of the Aesir. Their son was Day. He was bright and beautiful in accordance with his nature.

If we attempt to reconcile the statements of *Gylfaginning* 9 and 10, we must accept that Annar (or Onar, Jörd's father) is another name for Odin, yet Annar is not recorded among Odin's epithets in any of our sources, including Snorri's *Edda*. In the *Prologue* to *Gylfaginning*, we find Annar as the name of a descendant of Thor, who is portrayed as the grandson of Priam, king of Troy, and a remote ancestor of Odin, a migrant from Asia who came north with his wife Frigg to establish the Aesir dynasty in Sweden.⁵ Snorri knew *Þriði* ("Third") as an Odin-name so perhaps *Annar* ("Second") designates one of his two brothers. But, however one interprets them, the two statements cannot be easily reconciled. John Lindow has labeled Snorri's statements in *Gylfaginning* 9 and 10 a "confused discussion" and attempts to sort it out, explaining that "Snorri's use of the definite article in this passage (*Gylf.* 9) suggests a desire to keep separate the earth and the goddess Jörd (Earth)."⁶ Even this explanation, however, does little to clear up the confusion.

Based on *Gylfaginning* 10, modern scholars often classify Jörd as a giantess, although her *att* is never explicitly stated in the sources. Snorri informs us that she is the granddaughter of the giant Norfi. Her mother, Night, is the giant Norfi's daughter. Because she is descended from giants, many scholars have assumed that Jörd is one too. John Lindow states: "Jörd must have been a giantess in the beginning." While this assumption sounds reasonable, upon reflection it is important to note that other beings who have giantesses as mothers are not automatically classified as giants. Although born of the giantess Bestla, Odin and his brothers are not Jötuns. Conversely, if Jörd is a giantess, her son Thor is not. Neither is her half-brother Dag, Delling's son. If we take paternity as the determining factor, we must consider that Snorri identifies Jörd as Odin's wife and daughter in *Gylfaginning* 9, and that the god Tyr's father and paternal grandmother are said to be giants in *Hymiskviða* 11 and 8. Thus we have reason to question the scholarly assumption that Jörd is a giantess. No specific source supports this supposition. Snorri himself classifies Jörd among the *Asynjes*. After enumerating the primary goddesses of Asgard in *Gylfaginning* 35, he writes: "Jörd, the mother of Thor, and Rind, the mother of Vali, are tallied among the *Asynjes*, (*Gylf.* 36)."⁷ John McKinnell remarks that "they do not really belong there,"⁸ but other scholars are equally inclined to rank Jörd as a goddess. Rudolf Simek writes:

"In the late heathen period, as recorded in our oldest literary sources, Jörð appears to have only been known as Thor's mother, and she plays no further role as an earth-goddess — as she certainly once was."⁹

Jörd is chiefly defined by her relationship to others. In a prose passage in *Skáldskaparmál* 32, Snorri provides a number of paraphrases for earth and cites some skaldic strophes as examples. Among the paraphrases for Earth provided there, Snorri lists: *móður Þórs*, "mother of Thor"; *brúði*

⁵ See Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson Edda*, p. 3.

⁶ Lindow, *Handbook of Norse Mythology*, p. 205, s.v. Jörd (Earth).

⁷ *Jörð, móðir Þórs, ok Rindr, móðir Vála, eru talðar með ásnyju*.

⁸ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 156; Her almost total lack of characterization is noticeable enough that scholars occasionally comment on it; McKinnell remarks that, even today, a young man cannot afford to acknowledge that his mother helped make him a man. Such an admission can discredit him as a 'mother's boy.' He observes: "This may explain why, although Þórr is often called the son of Jörð (or Fjörgynn or Hlöðyn), Jörð never appears as a character in the poems about Thor," p. 182. In fact, she never appears in *any* known myth.

⁹ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 179, s.v. Jörð.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

SAMPLE CHAPTER © 2018 William P. Reaves

Óðins, “bride of Odin”; *dóttur Ónars*, “daughter of Onar”; *dóttir Náttar*, “daughter of Night”; and *systir Auðs ok Dags*, “sister of Aud and Day.” Notably, not all of the expressions Snorri provides find support in the given strophes. The strophes cited confirm that the heathen poets recognized Jörd as the bride of Odin, the daughter of Onar, the sister of Aud, and Thor’s mother.¹⁰ No known strophes directly support the earth-kennings “Night’s daughter” and “Day’s sister,” although two strophes preserved in the eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* probably point in this direction:

*Heill dagr!
Heilir dags synir!
Heil nótt ok nipt!
Óreiðum augum
lítið okkr þinig
ok gefið sitjendum sigr!*

Hail Day!
Hail Day’s sons!
Hail Night and *nipt*!
With placid eyes
behold us and
give those sitting here victory!

*Heilir ásir!
Heilar ásynjur!
Heil sjá in fjölnýta fold!
Mál ok mannvit
gefið okkr marum tveim
ok lækniþendr, meðan lífum.*

Hail the Æsir!
Hail the Ásynjur!
Hail to the bounteous earth!
Words and wisdom
give to us noble twain,
and healing hands while we live.

If the above strophes are taken together and associated, Night and *nipt*, who appear in the third line of the first strophe, and who are associated with Day and the sons of Day there, may be related to “the bounteous earth” which appears in the third line of the second strophe. The word *nipt* means a female relative; it can mean a sister, a daughter or a niece.¹¹ Here it is generally taken to mean “daughter,” based on Snorri’s statement that Jörd is the daughter of Night.



Day and Night
Peter Nicolai Arbo, 1874

¹⁰ In two verses by Hallfreðr the Troublesome, cited by Snorri in *Skáldskapamál* 32, Earth is called the “tree-grown only daughter of Onar [i.e. Annar],” “Baleyg’s [Odin’s] broad-faced-bride” and “Aud’s splendid sister.”

¹¹ Cleasby/Vigfusson Dictionary, p. 455, s.v. *nipt*.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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In popular accounts of Old Norse mythology, Jörd is best known as the mother of Thor. In a strophe Snorri cites as evidence of this relationship in *Skáldskaparmál* 32, the skald Eyvind Skaldaspillir refers to Earth as “the mother of the giant’s enemy.” Thor is the well-known foe of giants and Earth is his mother. This designation is supported by several poetic passages, leaving no doubt that “mother of Thor” is a genuine Earth-kenning.¹² However, when examining the evidence contained in skaldic and eddic poetry, one finds that Earth is designated as the “mother of Thor” comparatively few times. Upon inspection, it becomes apparent that the skalds more often refer to Earth as “Odin’s wife,” typically substituting one of his many epithets for his name. At least 19 kennings of this type are found. In fact, these constitute the most common type of earth kenning, occurring about three times as often as the “Thor’s mother” type:

beðja niðjar Borr, "bedmate of son of Borr" (Egill, *lausvisa* 21, Eg.30)
vina her-Gauts, "mistress of host-Gautr" (Bragi: *Ragnarsdrápa* 5 = *Skáldskaparmál* 156)
ekkeja Svölnis, "widow of Svölnir" (Þjóðólfr, *Haustlög* 15, *Skáldskaparmál* 66)
vára Svölnis, "wife of Svölnir" (Eyvindr: *lausvisa* 12, Hkr. I.102)
brúðr val-Týs, "bride of slain-Týr" (Eyvindr: *Háleygjatal* 15, Fsk. 86)
man Yggs, "maiden of Yggr" (Tindr, *Drápa* 8)
bifkeván Þriðja (barrhödduð), "(fir-tressed) trembling wife of Þriði" (Hallfreðr, *Hákonardrápa* 3, *Skáldskaparmál* 10)
brúðr Báleygs (breiðleiti), "(broad-faced) bride of Báleygr" (Hallfreðr: *Hákonardrápa*, *Skáldskaparmál* 119)
brúðr Yggjar, "bride of Yggr" (Eyjólfur dáðaskáld, *Bandadrápa* 3, Hkr. I.118)
vif Óska (munlaust), "(without doubt) wife of Óski" (Óttarr svartir, *Óláfsdrápa sænska* 2, *Skáldskaparmál* 383)
beðja Þundar, "bedmate of Þundr" (Grettir, *Ævikviða* 7, *Grettis saga* 42)
elja Rindar (ómynd) "rival of Rindr (without a bride-price)" (Þjóðólfr, *Sexstefja* 3, Fsk.186, *Skáldskaparmál* 122)
drós Þrós, "lady of Þrór" (Haukr, *Íslendingadrápa* 17)
vif Hárs, "wife of Hárr" (*Nóregskonungatal* 20)
man Yggjar, "maiden of Yggr" (*Nóregskonungatal* 47)
mála bága ulfs, "beloved of enemy of wolf" (Snorri, *Háttatal* 3)
rúna vinar Míms, "wife of friend of Mímr" (Snorri, *Háttatal* 3)
mála geir-Týs (græn), "(green) girlfriend of spear-Týr" (Sturla, *Hákonarkviða* 21)
beðja Svölnis, "bedmate of Svölnir" (Einarr Gilsson, *Selkolluvísur* 20)¹³

In these examples, the paraphrase “Odin’s wife” is understood as a circumlocution simply meaning “earth.” Poets compare a ruler’s control over the land with Odin’s dominance over Jörd, suggesting to some scholars that Odin took her by force.¹⁴ In addition, a loose strophe by Þjóðólfr Árnorsson identifies her as *elja Rindar*, “Rind’s rival.” According to the eddic poem *Baldurs draumar* 11, Rind bore Odin a son named Vali, who was fated to avenge Baldur’s death by killing his brother Hödur. The myth must have been well known as Rind and Vali are mentioned elsewhere in skaldic and eddic poetry,¹⁵ as well as in the Danish histories of Saxo Grammaticus, who tells the story of their encounter in some detail.¹⁶ Þjóðólfr informs us that “Rind’s rival” (the Earth) was taken *ómynda*, “without a bride-price,” apparently indicating that Odin took Jörd from her father by force, despite Snorri calling Earth Odin’s wife and daughter in *Gylfaginning* 9. Likewise, much has been made of a

¹² *Haustlög* 14, 17, *Lokasenna* 58, *Þrymskviða* 1, *Þórsdrápa* 15, *Völuspá* 56.

¹³ <https://notendur.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/kennings/kennings.html> *Lexicon of Kennings* by Eysteinn Björnsson.

¹⁴ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 154, cp. Ursula Dronke, *Poetic Edda, Vol. II*, p. 397.

¹⁵ *Grougaldur* 6, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* 23, *Völuspá* 34, *Váfruðnismál* 51 and a verse by Kormak in *Skáldskaparmál*

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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single reference to Jörd as an “abandoned wife” of Odin, which occurs in a strophe by Hallfredr. The reading and the conclusions drawn from it, however, are tenuous, as most manuscripts read *bifkvan*, “trembling wife” rather than *bíðkvan*, “waiting” or “abandoned wife.” Even so, this abandonment could just as easily refer to the flight of Hakon’s predecessor from Norway (cp. *Ólafs saga Tryggvassonar*, ch. 16).¹⁷ In these strophes it is difficult to decide whether the reference is to the mythical Jörd or literally to the land.¹⁸ The interpretation depends as much on the view of the scholar as it does the text. In *Skáldskaparmál* 32, Snorri says that Earth may be called “the rival of Frigg and Rind and Gunnlod” (*elju Friggjar ok Rindar ok Gunnlaðar*). But, of these, only the expression “Rind’s rival” is supported by a poetic citation. We cannot independently verify whether the expressions “Frigg’s rival” and “Gunnlod’s rival” are genuine poetic paraphrases for Earth or if they are back-formations created by the Christian author on the model of *elja Rindar*. As it stands, neither are found in existing skaldic poetry. Relevant here too, Snorri states in *Skáldskaparmál* 27 that Frigg can *also* be called “the rival of Rind,” as well as “the rival of Jörd and Gunnlod.” Thus, according to Snorri, the poetic paraphrases “Rind’s rival” and “Gunnlod’s rival” apply equally to Jörd and Frigg. But, since the earth-kennings “Frigg’s rival” and “Gunnlod’s rival” are not found in existing poetic sources,¹⁹ it is conceivable that Snorri created them based on the genuine poetic expression “Rind’s rival” (*elja Rindar*). Therefore we have good reason to suspect the validity of the term “Frigg’s rival” as an authentic kenning for Earth, and likewise the validity of the term “Earth’s rival” as an authentic kenning for Frigg. They are otherwise unattested, and probably formed on the pattern of the genuine kenning *elja Rindar*.

While Earth is well-known as “the wife of Odin” in the poetic sources, it should be noted that Odin is never called “the husband of Earth.” Instead, he is designated as the “husband of Frigg” three times and once as the “lover of Gunnlod,”²⁰ corroborating what we know from other sources:

angan Friggjar, “delight of Frigg,” *Völuspá* 56

faðmbyggvir Friggjar, “dweller in Frigg’s embrace,” *Haraldskvæði* 12

frumverr Friggjar, “foremost husband of Frigg,” Hallfredr vandræðaskald, Lv.

farmr arma Gunnlaðar, “arm burden of Gunnlod,” Steinþórr

To this list, I am tempted to add *faðir Baldrs*, “Baldur’s father”, since Baldur is famously the son of Frigg. While Odin is known to have had other lovers than his wife Frigg, there can be little doubt that the first thing that would have occurred to a heathen audience hearing the expression “Odin’s wife” would have been his constant companion since the earliest recorded sources. Godan (Odin) and Frea (Frigg) first appear as husband and wife in the eighth century *History of the Lombards*. They next appear together on German soil in the tenth century *Second Merseberg Charm* as Wotan and Frija. On Iceland, a tenth century skaldic kenning refers to the gods as *Friggjar niðja*, “Frigg’s progeny.”²¹ In eddic poetry, she and Odin appear together as husband and wife in *Völuspá*, *Grimnismál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*. A generation before Snorri Sturluson composed his *Edda*, the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus also presents them as husband and wife. In contrast, Odin and Jörd are never shown together. Unlike Frigg, Jörd does not make an appearance in any known myth.

¹⁷ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁸ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁹ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 164.

²⁰ Odin’s relationship with Gunnlod can justifiably be characterized as a marriage, cp. *Hávamál* 104-110, which alludes to a wedding, to which Odin arrives in the disguise of the expected suitor. See David A. H. Evans, *Hávamál*, pp. 120-123.

²¹ *Egil’s Saga*, ch. 79, *Complete Sagas of the Icelanders* I, p. 151

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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Franz Stassen, 1910

In skaldic poetry, we thus encounter a logical paradox without precedent. There the recurrent poetic paraphrase “Odin’s wife”, which means “Earth”, rather than characterizing Odin’s traditional spouse as the earth-goddess, is exclusively interpreted as a reference to a virtually unknown giantess! Because Snorri presents Frigg and Jörd as distinct personalities, we have been conditioned to think of them as separate entities. Thus, in skaldic poetry, we take most references to Earth literally, accepting that she is Thor's mother, Aud's sister, Dag's sister, and Annar's daughter, except in one case — the most frequently occurring— where we are supposed to take the designation figuratively. Although Loki addresses Frigg as *Vidris kvan*, “Vidrir’s (Odin’s) wife” in the eddic poem *Lokasenna* (st. 26), we are expected to interpret the same kenning in skaldic verse as one, and only one, of his giantess-concubines. In skaldic poetry alone, the expressions: “Odin's wife, bride, lady, beloved, bedmate,” etc. are exclusively taken to mean Earth (*Jörd*). Yet in all other poetic and prose sources, “Odin’s wife” is understood to mean the goddess Frigg. This is not only illogical, but unnecessary. Following the same reasoning, we could just as easily understand the term "Odin's wife" to mean any female with whom Odin has had sexual relations. Instead of referring exclusively to Jörd, we might imagine that the kennings in question indicated Frigg, Gunnlöd or Rind, since, by this definition, they too are Odin's "wives." Yet this is clearly not the case. In the context of skaldic poetry, the expression “Odin’s wife” obviously indicates the Earth. Since Frigg is recognized as Odin’s wife in every other instance, it seems reasonable to conclude that Odin’s wife Frigg is identical to Jörd, the Earth. Only Snorri’s statements in the *Prose Edda* prevent us from drawing this conclusion with confidence.

A study of Jörd’s known epithets may shed light on this matter. Thor is unquestionably the son of Odin and Earth. This is amply affirmed by poetic examples where Thor is known as “the son of Odin” (*Völuspá* 55) and more often as Earth’s son. The poetic examples we have expand our knowledge of Jörd, providing us additional epithets by which she is known. They are:

Jarðar sunn, Jörd’s son, *Haustlög* 14
Jarðar burr, Jörd’s son, *Brymskvíða* 1, *Lokasenna* 58
konr Jarðar, Jörd’s kinsman, *Þórsdrápa* 15
Hlödýnar mögr, Hlödýn’s son, *Völuspá* 56
Fjörgynjar burr, Fjörgynn’s son, *Völuspá* 56
Grundar svein, Ground’s son, *Haustlög* 17

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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These epithets refer to the physical earth and the personal earth-goddess at the same time. They are indistinguishable. In *Hárbarðsljóð* 56, Thor is told to meet his mother Fjörgyn in Verland, the “land of men,” where she will show him the “roads of relatives (*áttunga brautir*) to Odin’s land.”²² The phrase “Fjörgyn’s eel” (*ál fjörgynr*) is a kenning for snake, while *á fjörgynju* simply means “on earth.” The name Hlódyn first appears around 950 AD in a strophe by Völu-Steinn (*Skj* I B, 93), where the poet contrasts the dark earth with the green dress of Hlódyn, when recounting the funeral of his son.²³ Similarly, the phrase *myrk-Hlódynjar markar*, the “dark woods of Hlódyn” in Einarr skálaglamm’s *Vellekla*²⁴ likens the forest to the dark hair of a woman. In many Indo-European traditions, earth is characterized as “dark” or “black”²⁵ and plants are a common alloform of hair,²⁶ demonstrating the great age of these concepts.

Scholars recognize the names Fjörgynn, Hlódyn, and Grund as synonyms of Jörd. In fact, all of the Old Norse divinities have alternate names (*heiti*). In the *Prose Edda*, Snorri Sturluson lists alternate names of Odin, Thor, and Freyja, among others. In *Gylfaginning* 3, Snorri says that Odin is known as *Alföðr*, *Herran* or *Herjan*, *Þriðja*, *Nikarr* or *Hnikarr*, *Nikuðr* or *Hnikuðr*, *Fjölñir*, *Óski*, *Ómi*, *Bifliði* or *Biflindi*, *Sviðurr*, *Sviðrir*, *Viðrir*, and *Jálg* or *Jálkr*. In the *nafnapular*, Thor is known as *Atli*, *Ásabragr*, *Ennilangr*, *Eindriði*, *Björn*, *Hlórriði*, *Harðvéorr*, *Vingþórr*, *Sonnungr*, *Véudr* and *Rymr*, while Freyja is known as *Mardöll*, *Hörn*, *Gefn*, *Sýr*, *Skálf*, *Vanadís*, and *Þrungva*.²⁷ In *Gylfaginning* 27, Heimdall is known as *Hallinskáði* and *Gullintanni*. It would be a mistake to conclude that these lists were all-inclusive or complete. In addition to those listed in Snorri’s *Edda*, more names can be discovered by turning to poetic sources. Numerous epithets of Odin are listed in *Grímnismál* 46-54, and in mythological poems that mention Odin we find more. In the prose introduction to *Rígsthula*, we learn that Heimdall is known as *Rígr* and in *Grímnismál* 21 he appears as *Þjóðvitnir*.²⁸ In *Völuspá*, Loki is called *Hveðrungr*. Oftentimes a god is called by different names in the course of a single poem. In *Hymiskviða*, Thor is known as *Hlórriði*, *Véurr*, as well as *Þórr* (Thor). In *Þrymskviða*, he is called *Vingþórr* and *Hlórriði*. Sometimes the meaning is not as obvious. For example, in a strophe preserved in *Skáldskaparmál* 58, Freyr is called “Beli’s bane” and said to ride the horse *Blóðugþófi*.²⁹ In an adjacent strophe, the same horse bears the mighty *Atriði*. Thus, *Atriði* is probably a byname of Frey. Such polyonymy is a key characteristic of Old Icelandic poetry, as well as the conceptual basis of the *heiti* and *kenning* conventions.

In *Skáldskaparmál* 70, Snorri informs us that Earth too had many names. He cites poetic passages in support of each of the following bynames: *Jörð*, *Fold*, *Grund*, *Land*, *Fief*, *Hauðr*, *Lauð*; *Hlódyn*, *Frón* and *Fjörgyn*. By turning to poetic passages outside of Snorri’s *Edda*, we can add one more: *Hlín*. In the strophe that appears in *Hávarðar saga ísfirðings*, chapter 14, lines 5-6 read:

²² In *Sonnatorrek* 21, the heathen skald Egill Skalla-Grímssonar describes Odin raising his dead son *upp í Goðheim* (‘up into the world of the gods’). Since Thor’s mother Fjörgynn-Jörd is related to Delling’s son Dag, who rides his horse Skinfaxi across the sky each day, I suggest that the expression “roads of relatives” here refers to the heavens. Thor himself drives his chariot “beneath the halls of the moon” (*Haustlöng* 14).

²³ McKinnell, *ibid.*, p. 153-54.

²⁴ *Heimskringla*, *Ólaf’s Saga Tryggvasonar* 26.

²⁵ West, *ibid.*, p. 179-80.

²⁶ Bruce Lincoln, as well as J.P. Mallory and D.Q. Adams (*Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture*, s.v. *grass*) make this point.

²⁷ Faulkes, *Edda*, p. 156-7.

²⁸ *Þjóðvitnis fiskr*, “Thjodvitnir’s fish,” is best understood as a kenning for Bifröst in the context of this strophe. The name *Þjóðvitnir*, usually taken as “Mighty wolf,” can also mean “the one with mighty senses [vit]” (i.e. Heimdall). His *fiskr* (fish) which stands still in the stream is the bridge Bifröst, since *spörðr*, “fishtail,” designates the end of a bridge in Old Icelandic. See “When is a Fish a Bridge?” <https://notendur.hi.is/eybjorn/ugm/grm21.html>

²⁹ Compare *Völuspá* 53.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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þann vissak mér manna "No man fell upon Hlin to a greater
mest alls á Hlín fallinn advantage for me, than this man."

The heathen expression means that no man's death was of greater benefit to the poet than this one's. Here Hlin is used as a byname of Jörd. "To fall upon Hlin" means "to fall to the ground," "to die." Thus Hlin is a poetic synonym for Jörd, the earth. The name means "protector" from *hleina*, "to have peace and security"³⁰ and may be related to the word *hleinn* meaning "a rock projecting like a pier into the sea" as well as a perpendicular loom used for weaving.³¹ In poetic sources, where the name of a goddess can be used as the base of a kenning for woman, the name Hlin occurs frequently, indicating her divine status. As such a base, Hlin was a favorite.³² In *Gylfaginning* 35, Snorri lists Hlin as a minor goddess, the twelfth Asynje and a servant of Frigg. Snorri portrays Hlin, Jörd and Frigg as distinct goddesses. They are all listed twice as Asynjes: once in *Gylfaginning* 35-36 and again in the *þulur* where all three names appear in a list of the Asynjur. Despite this, Hlin's status as an independent goddess is not supported by the older poetry, which is Snorri's acknowledged source. As seen above, Hlin is used as a byname of Jörd in *Hávarðar saga ísfirðings* 13, while in *Völuspá* R52, Hlin is used a byname of Frigg. The opening lines read:

Þá kemr Hlínar Then comes Hlin's
þarmr annarr fram, second grief to pass,
er Óðinn ferr when Odin goes
við úlf vega... to fight the Wolf...

According to this strophe, Hlin's "second grief" occurs when Odin goes to fight the wolf. The final lines state "then 'Frigg's delight' (Odin) shall fall." The name Hlin, which means 'protector', used here for Frigg, is probably ironic since she is helpless to protect her husband. Similarly, Snorri says of *Hlín*: "she is given the function of protecting people that Frigg wishes to save from some danger," (*Gylfaginning* 35, Faulkes tr.), which "relies upon an etymological link between *Hlín* and *hleinn*, 'peaceful refuge.'"³³ Snorri's identification of Hlin as an independent goddess while quoting this strophe from *Völuspá* has understandably caused some confusion among scholars. In the index to his translation of *Snorri's Edda* (1988), under *Hlín*, Anthony Faulkes writes: "...perhaps another name for Frigg; her first grief would have been the death of Baldr." Rudolf Simek (1984) states: "Presumably, Hlin is really another name for Frigg and Snorri misunderstood her to be a goddess in her own right in his reading of the *Völuspá* stanza."³⁴ Most translators accept the identification of Hlin and Frigg, and some go so far as to replace the name Hlin with Frigg's in this strophe. In her 1996 translation of the *Poetic Edda*, as well as her 2014 revision, Carolyne Larrington replaces Hlin with Frigg and notes that Frigg's second grief was the death of her husband Odin; her first being the death of her son Baldr. This is the most common interpretation of the strophe. The heathen skalds thus use *Hlín* as a byname of both Frigg and Jörd, but no other goddess.

³⁰ Ursula Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, Volume II, p. 149.

³¹ Richard Cleasby and Gudbrann Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd Edition, (1957).

³² The skald Kormak, who uses an unusual number of woman-kennings with goddess names as the base in his verse, utilizes the name *Hlín* most frequently (six times), "with the relatively unknown Eir a close runner up (five times)." "It is perhaps a meaningful coincidence" that "both names mean 'protector, protection': *eir* is used as a common noun with this meaning in Kormakr's verse (v.15)," *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, Vol. 3 (1971), p. 26.

³³ Ursula Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, p. 149.

³⁴ Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, p. 153, s.v. Hlín.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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At this point, the only thing that prevents us from concluding that Frigg, Jörd, and Hlin are alternate names of a single individual is Snorri's treatment of them as three distinct personalities. An attempt to explain this apparent contradiction by suggesting that the name of one of Odin's wives can be substituted for the name of any other, since in poetic kennings the name of any goddess can be used as the base for a woman-kennung, is patently absurd! It would be equivalent to saying that the name of any one of Odin's sons could be substituted for the name of any other; that Thor could be used in place of Baldur and visa versa. This ill-considered supposition finds no support in the extant poetic sources. Instead, we find that Frigg and Jörd are both referred to as Odin's wife, and that the byname Hlin (as well as the poetically unattested expression "Gunnlod's rival,") can be used to designate either. As Karin Olsen notes "Unfortunately, most goddess names are so little used outside of skaldic poetry that we have to rely heavily on Snorri's interpretations of them."³⁵ In this case, however, we have valid reasons to doubt his explanation.



Frigga Asks All Things to Swear Oaths
Maria Klugh, 1909

It should now be obvious that the heathen poets who composed these poems knew Jörd as an alternate name of Odin's wife Frigg— in other words, that Frigg represents the Earth in Germanic tradition. This is immediately apparent in *Lokasenna*. When Loki first insults Frigg, she threatens him saying:

*"Veiztu, ef ek inni attak
Ægis höllum i
Baldri líkan bur,
út þú né kvamir
frá ása sonum,
ok væri þá at þér vreiðum vegit."*

27. "Know that if I had,
at Ægir's halls,
a son like Baldur,
you would not come away from
the Æsir's sons: you would have been fiercely
assailed."

³⁵ "Woman Kennings in the *Gísla Saga Súrssonar: A Study*" in *Studies in English Language and Literature: Doubt Wisely* (1996), edited by M. J. Toswell, E. M. Tyler, p. 269.

Odin's Wife: Mother Earth in Germanic Mythology

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When Thor finally bursts into the hall to fiercely assail Loki, after he has insulted all of the gods gathered at Aegir's for a feast, the caluminator of the gods wryly quibs:

"*Jarðar burr
er hér nú inn kominn,
hví þrasir þú svá, Dórr?
En þá þorir þú ekki,
er þú skalt við ulfínn vega,
ok svelgr hann allan Sigföður.*"

58. "Earth's son has now come in;
Why do you rage so, Thor?
But you won't be so bold
that you fight with the wolf
and he swallows Victory-father (Odin)³⁶ whole."

Thus, when Frigg (who is prescient) cries out for "a son like Baldur," *Baldri líkan bur*, to defend her against Loki's bitter accusations, *Jarðar burr*, "Earth's son," Thor, arrives to drive him from the hall. Frigg's designation of the gods as *ása sonum*, which especially applies to Thor and Baldur as sons of Odin, the father of the Æsir, corresponds to Egil Skalla-grímsson's designation of the gods as *Friggjar niðja*, "Frigg's progeny." Therefore, with this tentative conclusion in mind, let's look at what other poetic sources have to say of her.

³⁶ *Sigföður*, "Victory-father," a name of Odin, used here ironically as in *Völuspá* 53, at the moment he falls prey to Fenrir.