

The Final Thunderword

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Around 1935 Joyce compiled a long list of notes from Norse mythology. There were many translations and elaborations of these myths that Joyce might have used but all derive from the *Eddas*, a collection of Medieval Icelandic poems and stories about the Scandinavian gods and goddesses. Much of the material can be found in the gentle narration by H  l  ne Guerber¹. While it is not certain that this book was Joyce’s source, it contains the kind of Index which would have made it easy to use. Other references were almost certainly taken from the series *The Mythology of all Races*² which Joyce had already used.³

In the following, page references to Joyce’s notebook VI.B.38 are given in brackets after the entry. In recording this material, famous for tales about the god Thor, Joyce may well have had his final thunderword in mind. The first entry in the list is ‘Donarthor’ (23). In Norse mythology, Thor is a god associated with thunder, lightning, and storms. His name in Old High German is Donar. Most of the notebook entries were never used. Some, although not crossed out, appeared in the compilation of the thunder. This took shape (see below) when the first likely corruption occurred, as what looks like a badly written ‘Hrimn’ (39) was read as ‘Krim’. Development continued on the backflyleaf of the notebook where Joyce miscopied ‘garm’ to ‘garn’. The four parts totalled 103 letters.

Joyce drew heavily from units related to the myth of Ragnarok.

The Mythology of all Races Vol 2, 340-1: Snorri’s account of the advance of the gods and the fighting is vivid. The Wolf rushes forward, mouth gaping, the upper jaw touching Heaven, the lower the earth, fire blazing from eyes and nostrils. The Midgard-serpent by its side blows venom. Heaven is cloven, and Muspell’s sons, led by Surt, ride forth, fire preceding and following them. They ride to a field Vigrid, and there come also the Fenris-wolf, the Midgard-

serpent, Loki, Hrym, and the Frost-giants. The people of [340] Hel follow Loki. Heimdall blows his horn. Odin rides to Mimir's well to take counsel with him. Yggdrasil trembles: all in Heaven and earth are in fear. The Aisir arm themselves and ride to the field, with all the Einherjar from Valhall. Odin is in front, with golden helmet, birnie, and spear. Thor is beside him, but cannot aid him against the Fenris-wolf, as he must encounter the Midgard-serpent. The watch-dog of Hel, Garm, is loose, doing battle with Tyr, each slaying the other. Thor slays the Serpent, strides away nine paces, and falls dead, overcome by its venom. Frey fights with Surt and falls, for he lacks his sword, having given it to Skirnir. The Wolf swallows Odin, but Vidarr sets one foot on its lower jaw, and with his hand seizes the upper jaw, and tears them in two. Loki fights with Heimdall, and each slays the other. Surt then throws fire over the earth and burns it up.

VI.B.38.040

Note: The following four units, derived from earlier entries, (notebook page references in brackets), and crossed out in black, were transferred to the backflyleaf recto in developing the final thunderword.

(a) ^{bk}**Ullhodturdenweir**

Note: Ull (38) the winter-god, was the son of Sif, and the stepson of Thor. Hod (34) was a blind god and a son of Odin and Frig. N. *Tordenveir*. Thunderstorm.

(b) ^{bk}**muddgaard –**

Note: Mudgard (24) punning Midgard (middle garden) or the Earth.

(c) ^{bk}**surtkrimgarm**

Note: Three monsters who fought the gods. Surt (39) is a jötunn, sometimes depicted as a fire giant who eventually destroys the world. Hrimn (39 – badly written: usually spelled 'Hrym' or 'Hrinnir') is a jötunn. Garm is the dog of Hel (25 and 39).

(d) ^{bk}**rackinarockar**

Note: Old Norse. *Ragnarøkkr*. Twilight of the God. (39)

Joyce had to add considerably to make up the desired number of letters.

VI.B.38.bfr

(a) **1) Ullhodturdenweirmuddgaard**

(b) **2) gungnirurdrmjølniroghfenrir**

Note: Gungnir (43) Odin's spear. / Urdr (fate) (42) - Old Norse. *Urðr*. Fate. / Mjólnir (27) Thor's Hammer. / N. *Og*. And. / Fenrir (44) the wolf who swallows Odin.

(c) **3) lukkilokkibaugimandodrerin**

Note: Lukki (29) (a pun on Lucky / Loki) / Baugi, a giant (with a pun on 'bogyman') / dodr (147) ? and without notebook entries and only a badly written holograph, the rest is speculation!

(d) **4) surtkrimgarnrackinarockar**

Unfortunately, further manuscript material is missing, and the next appearance of the thunder word is the version printed in the Galley Proofs for *Finnegans Wake*. There are no alterations, only corruptions in the first Galley, including ‘gungnir’ obviously misread and printed as ‘gringnir’ and sadly to the famous hammer, producing a total of 104 letters. Joyce was clearly aware that the number was important and carefully altered the 2nd Galley as follows: (MS 47487-153 JJA 62:275)

**Ullhodturdenweirmud~~d~~gaardgringnirurdrmolnir~~og~~fenrirlukkilokkibaugimandod~~r~~
uerinsurtkrinmgernrackinarockar!**

leaving 101 letters - 4 crossed out, (shown in red) one added (shown in green). The already composed next line presents a crux here, as it refers to ‘The hundredlettered name’ but Joyce added ‘again’ to this at the same time that he adjusted the total above to 101.

Thus Joyce *must* have intended that the total of the ten thunder words should contain 1001 letters overall.

The god bows out with ‘Thor’s for yo!’ Joyce saw that this was a bit short in the galley so he corrected ‘yo’ to ‘you’ but this never made the final text which still didn’t exactly conform to the above and of course still contained all the previous corruptions:

**Ullhodturdenweirmudgaardgringnirurdrmolnirfenrirlukkilokkibaugimandod~~r~~
erinsurtkrinmgernrackinarockar! Thor’s for yo! *FW 424.20***

If correction is desired, one could make changes as shown in red (keeping the number of letters to 101 and all as Joyce wrote in the background notes.

**Ullhodturdenweirmudgaardgungnirurdrmj~~o~~lnirfenrirlukkilokkibaugimandodr~~u~~erinsurt
hrimngarmrackinarockar!**

This would be controversial but it should be considered in future.

Finally, why did Joyce select the units that he did to build the thunderword? The *Skeleton Key* has an answer.⁴ We know he was afraid of thunder. Absent are most of the gods. Present are most of the monsters that killed the gods at Ragnarok. Sadly missing in the final text is ‘Garm’, the dog of Hel, which would have completed the picture, given Joyce’s fear of dogs! A thunderword to be dreaded! And yet Ragnarok was just the end of the old gods and heralded a new cycle.⁵ So Joyce increased the total number of letters in all ten thunderwords to 1001, a number of renewal?

References:

1. Guerber, Hélène Adeline. *Myths of the Norsemen from the Eddas and Sagas*. (London 1909)
Online at: <https://archive.org/details/mythsofthenorse00gueruoft>
2. MacCulloch, John Arnott. *The Mythology of all Races - Eddic Vol II*. (Boston 1930)
Online at: <https://archive.org/details/mythologyofallra21gray/page/182/mode/2up>
3. MacArthur, Ian and Braslasu, Viviana-Mirela. “Sumerian in Cakes & Ale, Notebook VI.B.35”. *Genetic Joyce Studies*, Issue 22 (Spring 2022).

4. Campbell, Joseph and Robinson, Henry Morton. *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*. (London 1947) p. 220 fn.3
5. *Ibid* p. 54