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Norse Mythology in “Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla”

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis studies the depiction of Norse mythology in the video game *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*. It analyses how mythological characters and themes are adapted and reinterpreted in the game, comparing these portrayals with traditional Norse texts, such as the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*. The thesis provides a comparative analysis of the main characters, examining their roles and storylines in both the game and the myths. Additionally, it examines narrative techniques, such as order of events, narrative voice and metalepsis, and evaluates how these elements contribute to storytelling in *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*. The game's innovative approach to integrating historical and mythological elements enriches the player's engagement with both the game's narrative and Norse mythology.

Keywords: *Norse mythology, Assassin's Creed: Valhalla, intertextuality, transtextuality, narrative analysis, comparative analysis*

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1. Introduction

The power of Norse myths has given rise to many forms of narratives, such as computer games. The analysis of myths in digital games is an exciting and expanding area of research since computer games have become increasingly important in entertainment and culture. As a result, they have acquired a strong ability to influence the opinions of players. They shape gamers' understanding of history and myths in a significant way. There are plenty of noteworthy examples of intertwining history, mythology and entertainment in video games but a few of the most widely known include *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), a story about a Celtic woman, who travels in Helheim in order to rescue the soul of her lover; *God of War* (2005), a game franchise about Kratos, a Spartan warrior, who clashes with different mythological pantheons; and, of course, *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (which will be shortened as ACV from here) (Metacritic, 2020; Maguid, 2020). It transports its players back into the Viking Age. Each player has the opportunity to travel through many elements of Norse mythology, stories filled with gods, giants, and heroic adventures. ACV gives players the opportunity to immerse themselves in a richly painted picture of the Viking Age. This results in an intense immersive experience.

The well-known game is an excellent representation of the Viking era, showing a comprehensive illustration of Northern European customs, ancient stories, and history. The game blends real historical details with mythology-inspired elements. This combination builds an appealing and immersive experience that captivates gaming enthusiasts (Ramée, 2020). This environment creates a perfect setting for exploring and studying the relationship between the cultural representation of digital games and the transformation of ancient stories and myths. Understanding Norse mythology within the context of ACV provides a new perspective. Through it we can understand how video games function as a method of storytelling and how they promote user engagement. It also reveals how myth-based narratives and characters are portrayed and modified on these media platforms, ultimately creating an immersive and fluid gaming experience. Understanding this topic is important, not just from an academic point of view. It shapes how we interact with and perceive the media. It also affects our relationship with our own cultural heritage.

1.1. Purpose and Question

This research paper aims to analyse the depiction of key characters and themes from Norse mythology in ACV. This analysis includes the comparison of these portrayals with traditional mythological texts, specifically *Poetic Edda* and *Prose Edda*. The analysis is done by studying the game's characters and

narrative, as well as thematic elements. The main aim is to understand how this video game adapts, modifies, and reimagines these ancient tales for its contemporary audience. This thesis does not only focus on ACV but, through its lens, also looks into how video games play a part in storytelling. It investigates various narrative techniques like narrative voice, order of events, and metalepsis seen within gameplay. Additionally, it evaluates the immersive elements demonstrated during the gaming experience which contribute towards effective storytelling. This study seeks to highlight what distinguishes video games from other forms of storytelling (such as books or movies). The direction this research takes is mainly determined by two key questions which form the basis for the thesis analysis:

1. How does *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* interpret and represent key figures and themes from Norse mythology compared to traditional mythological texts?
2. How do video games function as a method of storytelling?

1.2. Previous research

These days, both the old stories of mythology and video games make for interesting subjects to research that often intertwine. Nowadays, there is a considerable amount of research on mythology, intertextuality, and narrative, exploring how text and various forms of media in modern times relate to each other.

Sun-ha Hong's paper *When Life Mattered: The Politics of the Real in Video Games' Reappropriation of History, Myth, and Ritual* (2015) looks into how games weave myths and history into their narratives. He analyses several video games like *Skyrim* and *Crusader Kings II* to find out how they draw from historic or mythical themes. Hong seeks to understand how these games create a sense of significance and authenticity without being exactly accurate with historical facts.

He uses a comprehensive theoretical approach, drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminoid (used to describe video games that create their own "realities", distinct from everyday social structures), Jean Baudrillard's approach of hyperreality, and Slavoj Žižek's idea of the "effect of the real."

To understand the influence on culture overall, he examines video game content up close and explores gaming communities, user-made game modifications (mods), gameplay videos, etc.

Hong concludes in his paper that there is a unique way of experiencing the "past" via video games which combines reality and fiction. For example, *Skyrim* (2011) draws on Norse mythology and

medieval fantasy tropes to create a coherent yet fantastical world, creating an environment that feels significant and immersive. *Crusader Kings II* (2012) allows players to create their own historical narratives by blending factual history with personal storytelling. Thus, enhancing the game's depth and engagement.

Richard Cole's article *Mashing Up History and Heritage in Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (2022) provides insight into another game from the *Assassin's Creed* series. It is a famous example of blending creative storytelling with real history around ancient Greece. His main purpose is to discuss the exploration of presenting history by producing "technocultural mashups." These include combining different cultural and historical elements along with new technological aspects, thus creating an interactive form. He analyses gameplay, fan-made trailers, paratexts, and player-generated content to understand how these mashups are constructed and experienced by players. Cole concludes that *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (2018) effectively creates technocultural mashups.

Cultural mashups: blending various historical and mythological elements into its core design together with contemporary media influences like films. For example, the Battle of Thermopylae at the beginning of the game draws from both Herodotus' *The Histories* and the film *300*. This creates a hybrid narrative that is both educational and entertaining.

Technical mashups: use of digital technologies to enhance the gaming experience. For example, the game's prologue includes combat tutorials overlaid with historical narratives. This teaches players how to engage with the game while providing historical context.

Player participation: the game encourages players to become active participants in creating historical narratives through player-generated quests. This involved approach transforms players from passive consumers to active co-creators of historical experiences.

By combining all of this, *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* invites players not only to relive and experience the past but also to engage more in the game and create their own immersive gameplay.

Mia Consalvo's paper *Zelda 64 and Video Game Fans: A Walkthrough of Games, Intertextuality, and Narrative* (2003) discusses the relationships between video games, narrative, and fan interactions. Her study focuses on the game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000). This study particularly emphasises player-created detailed step-by-step guides known as walkthroughs. They help players in overcoming the game's challenges and uncovering its narrative elements.

Consalvo argues that these fan-made texts function as narratives for gamers and are read intertextually together with the game itself. Consalvo uses a theoretical framework that includes intertextuality and narrative theory, using the works of media scholars like Henry Jenkins and John Fiske. They argue that media consumers are active participants in the creation of meaning.

After her analysis, Consalvo concludes that walkthroughs do more than just guide users on what to do next in-game. They often function as narratives, which enhance the player's experience. The walkthroughs also often include fine details that turn game levels into chapters of an adventure. These narrative constructions by the fans highlight the ways in which players engage with video games by blending gameplay with storytelling.

In her book *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001), Marie-Laure Ryan examines how narrative, which is traditionally rooted in literature, is evolving through interactive digital media. It is highly relevant to studies focusing on the intersection of narrative theory and video game design. Ryan centres her attention on immersion and interactivity possibilities within digital forms of media.

She studies and compares classic literary stories with modern digital texts, such as interactive dramas, to examine readers' and players' experiences with immersion as well as how narratives become emotionally connected due to changes in the level of interactivity. Her methodology includes comparing classic literary narratives with contemporary digital texts, such as hypertext, interactive drama, and video games.

She finds that the interactivity raises reader/player involvement from passive observer to active participant. Ryan's conclusions suggest that narrative in digital media is not just an extension of traditional forms but a fundamental transformation.

While there are a lot of academic papers on mythology, narrative and intertextuality in video games, there is a lack of research that conduct a comparative analysis of ACV characters and their mythological counterparts or a narrative analysis of the game. This paper aims to fill this knowledge gap by applying a combined theoretical framework of intertextuality and narrative analysis for an in-depth analysis of the game.

1.3. Background and Historical Accuracy

Before continuing, it is very important to talk about the franchise and the game itself.

Assassin's Creed is a game franchise, first published by Ubisoft in 2007 (at the writing of this paper, there are thirteen main games). It is an open-world, action-adventure, and stealth game series. It incorporates historical fiction, science fiction, lore and fictional characters intertwined with real-life historical events, places, and people. The games are about the Brotherhood of Assassins, who fight for peace and free will, and their enemies, the Knights Templar, who want to control the world in order to bring "world peace." In most of the games, players control an Assassin from the past and a character from the present day, who is caught in the Assassin-Templar conflict. The memories of the Assassins are experienced by the present-day character through a device called the Animus. In the first games, modern day characters could only access the memories through ancestral DNA (meaning, they had to be related to the person whose memories they sought to explore), while in the later games, anyone could use the Animus to access the memories of any individual, so long as the desired target's DNA was uploaded to the device. The Animus serves as a diegetic interface to real-world players, displaying health bars, a mini-map, and target objectives. If the character from the past dies or fails a mission, a desynchronization of the genetic memory occurs, which allows the player to try the mission again.

The Isu, also known as the First Civilization, play a pivotal role in the lore of the *Assassin's Creed* series. They were a highly advanced species existing on Earth long before humanity, possessing technology and abilities far beyond what humans could achieve. The Isu are central to the series' lore, being responsible for the creation of the Pieces of Eden, powerful artefacts that are featured prominently throughout the games, and for the genetic engineering that led to the birth of humans, who they used as slaves. Almost all of the Isu and many of the humans were destroyed during the Great Catastrophe, where the Earth was on fire after a solar storm. After the catastrophe, over the years, the last of the Isu died while humans prevailed (Abayomi, 2021).

ACV is set in the Viking Age. The game follows Eivor Varinsdottir, a Viking, who is caught up in a conflict taking place between two groups known as the Assassins and Knights Templar (though here the assassins are still called the Hidden Ones, and the Templars are called the Order of The Ancients (Ubisoft, 2020), during the Viking invasions of England. The character in the Animus is Layla Hassan. She is a member of the assassins in the 2010s-2020s. The player can choose to play Eivor as either a woman or a man or have the game switch between the two at key points in the story. If this choice is taken, the female character model is used while showing Eivor's life, and the male character model depicts the physical appearance of Havi (he is more commonly known as Odin). The inclusion of mythological elements plays an important role in the story and the game world. Even though we,

as players, know the Norse deities as gods, they are depicted as part of the Isu race in the game. Such a portrayal does convey that mythological and real world-existence of gods blend together. However, Ubisoft has created its own take on this phenomenon and other themes from Norse mythology (such as reincarnation and Ragnarök), which will be expanded on in the analysis section of the paper. Players, therefore, experience a mix of historical events occurring across England and stories filled with mythological significance, unfolding across Asgard. All while traversing through a strikingly vast world influenced heavily by Viking culture along with traditions originating from Norse mythology.

While the game is praised for its detailed world-building and engaging narrative, its historical accuracy has been a subject of debate between both fan communities, and historical communities. Some creative liberties were taken in order to enhance visual impact and the players' gaming experience. The game incorporates numerous anachronisms and fictional elements that diverge from historical accuracy and authenticity. To mention a few examples, the presence of fully intact Roman ruins (Grufstedt & Houghton, 2023, pp. 75-76) and the anachronistic use of certain types of armour and weapons, such as late medieval plate armour, are historically inaccurate for the Viking Age (ibid., p. 82). These elements are included more for impactful visuals and gameplay than for historical authenticity. Moreover, some portrayals of historical figures and events were inaccurate as well. The depiction of Alfred the Great shows him fictitiously founding the Templar Order, which is a complete fabrication for the sake of the game's overarching narrative (ibid., p. 75). This reimagining serves the fictional continuity of the *Assassin's Creed* series but misrepresents the historical role of Alfred and the actual origins of the Templar Order. In reality, it was established centuries later, during the Crusades.

Furthermore, Viking-Saxon interactions are also portrayed somewhat exaggerated during conflict scenes, painting an overly sensational picture. This includes the portrayal of Vikings as predominantly noble savages and Saxons as their oppressors, which oversimplifies the complex socio-political dynamics of the period (ibid., pp. 82-83). Such representations can reinforce modern stereotypes and misunderstandings about both cultures.

The game's use of language is another point of historical inaccuracy. While efforts were made to include Old Norse and Old English, the primary language used by characters is modern English with archaic phrasing and accents. This decision, while necessary for accessibility and player immersion, further distances the game from historical authenticity (ibid., pp. 72, 84).

The inaccuracies mentioned in ACV do not significantly take away from its exploration of Norse mythology. Instead, they emphasise the game's focus on storytelling rather than overly strict historical accuracy. Mythological elements are integrated into the narrative to enrich the player's understanding of Norse myths, even if the historical background is somewhat romanticised or fictionalised.

2. Theory and Method

2.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundations of this research are based on the concept of intertextuality, which provides a lens through which the adaptation of Norse mythology in ACV can be examined. Intertextuality refers to the shaping of a text's meaning by other texts, highlighting how narratives and characters are influenced by and interact with existing stories. This is particularly relevant in the context of video games, which often draw on cultural, historical, and literary sources to create their narratives.

The term "intertextuality" was first used by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s (Allen, 2000, pp. 14-15). She built her ideas on Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts about the dialogic nature of language and texts, which suggested that all texts are in a state of continuous dialogue with each other and that no text exists in isolation.

Talking about intertextuality, it is also important to mention Ferdinand de Saussure, as some researchers state that the origins of intertextuality stem from his work (ibid., p. 2). Additionally, Kristeva combines both Saussure's and Bakhtin's theories in her own work on intertextuality (ibid., p. 3). Saussure's work on signs and language contributed key ideas for understanding the relational and arbitrary nature of signs in the language system. Saussure's theories argue that signs do not have meaning in and of themselves but acquire meaning "not because of a referential function but because of their function within a linguistic system as it exists at any one moment of time" (ibid., pp. 8-10). Signs acquire meaning through their relationships with other signs, which is similar to what Kristeva examines in her discussion of intertextuality.

As I have already mentioned, Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogic nature of texts are also the basis for Kristeva's theory of intertextuality. Although he does not use the term "intertextuality", it is Kristeva's analysis of his work that uses this term (ibid., p. 10). Bakhtin emphasised that language takes place in specific social situations (ibid., p. 20). He also mentions the concept of *otherness*, which means that the language a person uses does not really belong to them. All words have already been

used by someone else in the past and are therefore only replicated and appropriated (ibid., pp. 27-28). Kristeva, referring to Bakhtin, mentions this idea in *Word, Dialogue, and Novel* when she says that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66). Her notion of intertextuality states that a text is not an independent entity but rather part of a textual network.

Roland Barthes further developed the concept of intertextuality. He focused on the death of the author and the birth of the reader. In his essay “The Death of the Author”, Barthes argues that it is the reader, not the author, who gives the text meaning (Barthes, 1977, p. 148). In the context of ACV, this idea is particularly significant. The game’s narrative is shaped not only by the developers at Ubisoft, but also by the players who interact with and interpret the game’s story. This interaction highlights the active role of the players as co-creators of meaning, aligning with Barthes’ ideas that texts are “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.” (ibid., p. 146)

Gérard Genette expanded the framework of intertextual analysis by introducing the concept of transtextuality, which categorizes the textual relationships that texts may have with each other. In his book *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1997), Genette identifies five types of transtextuality: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality (Genette, 1997, pp. 1-5).

The term intertextuality, in this case, differs from the way Kristeva uses it. Here, it is more restrictive, used to describe a more specific relationship between texts. Genette further separates this into quoting (the most straightforward form), plagiarism and allusion (which, in order to understand it, it is necessary to be aware of the relationship between the two, or sometimes more, texts) (ibid., pp. 1-2). ACV applies intertextuality by incorporating direct references to Norse myths, such as the appearance of gods like Odin and Loki, and mythological events like Ragnarök.

Paratexts are the elements such as titles, subtitles, chapter titles, prefaces, postfaces, etc. Things outside of the text can also be considered as paratexts, for example, interviews, letters, reviews (Allen, 2000, pp. 103-104). In the case of ACV, paratextual elements include the game’s marketing materials, developer interviews, and player-made content like fan art, walkthroughs, mods, which shape players’ expectations and interpretations of the game.

Metatextuality links one text to another, yet it doesn’t require citation or naming specifically. It can be either implicit or explicit commentary of one text to another (Genette, 1997, p. 4).

Architextuality, according to Genette, is “the most abstract and most implicit of them all” (ibid., p. 4). He writes “the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text” (ibid., p. 1). For example, ACV belongs to the genre of historical action-adventure games, but it also encompasses the genres of mythological fantasy and fiction. This blending of genres allows the game to explore complex themes and create a rich and complex narrative experience.

Hypertextuality is a link connecting a hypertext (text B) with a hypotext (text A). Hypotext is an earlier text, without which text B cannot exist. It is important to mention that most other scholars use the term intertext for what Genette calls the hypotext (Allen, 2000, p. 108). The link between the texts can be more direct, where a text “speaks” about the earlier text, or it can be more subtle, expanding on or transforming the previous text (Genette, 1997, p. 5). He also notes that there are different types of transformation: simple or direct transformation, where the hypertext closely follows the hypotext, retaining its fundamental content; and a more complex and indirect transformation, where inspiration is drawn from the hypotext but tells a different story (ibid., pp. 5-6). In ACV, the game’s narrative can be seen as a hypertext that transforms the hypotexts of Norse mythology and historical records of the Viking Age. This transformation is not a simple replication but involves significant reinterpretation and innovation, creating a new narrative that resonates with contemporary audiences.

For this study, Genette’s framework of transtextuality is particularly fitting as it provides a comprehensive structure for analysing the different ways in which ACV interacts with Norse mythology. The game’s narrative incorporates intertextuality through direct references to mythological figures and events and hypertextuality by transforming traditional myths to fit its storyline. This approach allows us to examine how ACV reinterprets Norse mythology and how these reinterpretations contribute to the game’s narrative complexity and player engagement.

2.2. Comparative analysis of characters

Doing a comparative analysis of characters from ACV with their counterparts from Norse mythology requires a good understanding of both the original material, and its modern adaptations. I will draw from the works of Hilda Ellis Davidson’s (1964), John Lindow’s (2001) and Karl Mortensen’s (1913) on Norse mythology. I will systematically analyse how mythological stories and characters are transformed in the context of a modern video game. These games do not just replicate the myths and mythological elements but rather reinterpret them to suit today’s media and audiences (Guyker, 2018, pp. 157-158).

The objective is to perform a thorough comparison of narrative elements and themes between the characters in ACV and those in Norse mythology. I will select key characters from the game, based on narrative importance as well as clear ties with Norse Mythology as found in the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda*. I will analyse the roles and development of these characters and draw parallels and contrasts with how they are portrayed in mythology.

By focusing on these aspects, I want to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ACV reinterprets aspects from Norse mythology, contributing towards deeper storytelling within the gameplay.

2.3. Narrative analysis

Gérard Genette's narrative analysis is outlined in his work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980). Its focus on narrative voice, order of events, and metalepsis, provides a way for interpreting complex narratives and storytelling methods, that ACV uses. Narrative analysis is particularly good at revealing the intricacies of narrative construction in modern interactive media like video games (Murray, 2016, p. 169).

1. **Order of Events:** Genette's theory on narrative order aids in studying non-linear narratives. This type of narrative is common in modern storytelling, especially in interactive media like video games. This aspect involves analysing analepses (flashbacks) and prolepses (flash-forwards). These help to construct complex narrative timelines. Analysing these temporal shifts, gives insight into how a story reveals information, develops suspense, or builds character backstories. In video games, the player's experience can be largely influenced by the sequence of these narrative elements.
2. **Narrative Voice:** Genette's classification of narrators provides a framework for analysing the different layers of narrative perspective and their impact on the story. Genette categorizes narrators as either intradiegetic or extradiegetic. Intradiegetic narrators are characters within the story who narrate events they are directly involved in or witness. Extradiegetic narrators, on the other hand, exist outside the story world and narrate events from an external viewpoint. Understanding these distinctions allows for a deeper analysis of how the narrative is presented to the audience and how this affects the audience's perception and engagement with the story. In the context of a video game, this distinction becomes even more critical as it shapes the player's immersion and interaction with the game world.

3. **Metalepsis:** Genette introduces the concept of metalepsis to describe the breaking of narrative boundaries, where elements from one narrative level intersect with another. This separation between different narrative levels can create a unique but sometimes disorienting effect, adding complexity and depth to the narrative. In the realm of video games, metalepsis is often expressed in the interaction between the player's world and the game world. Thus, challenging the traditional boundaries of narrative and gameplay. This concept could be particularly relevant in games that employ techniques like memory reliving or time travel, as it allows for an exploration of how these narrative techniques affect the player's understanding and experience of the story.

2.4. Methodological Approach

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of thematic aspects alongside narratives notable in ACV. The main focus will be on its successful integration of Norse mythology. Critical points of the story will be noted down during gameplay sessions. This can include pivotal plot events, character conversations, and other significant interactions within the game. For the purpose of this paper, timestamps from game playthroughs on YouTube will be recorded. This ensures accurate references to the content of the game during the final stages of analysis. There will be a specific focus on the three most important characters within the comparative analysis. These characters include Eivor, Sigurd and Basim. They have rich backgrounds and a significant connection to Norse mythology. This particular selection aims to raise a deeper understanding of these characters and their roles. Furthermore, the comparative analysis will also explore key mythological events and themes, that bear significance in Norse mythology, such as reincarnation and Ragnarök, the end of the world. The goal is to analyse these events and their depiction within the game and Norse mythology. The comparative analysis will put the representation of these characters and themes side by side with their portrayal of Norse mythology in the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. This requires connecting both explicit and theme-based parts between the game and the *Eddas*. This paper will also apply the narrative principles of Gerard Genette, mentioned above, to carry out a narrative analysis. By exploring these elements, the paper aims to find how they enhance the storytelling, player immersion in ACV and how they function as a method of storytelling.

It is important to mention that since I was unable to find a full playthrough, where the player chose to let the Animus decide Eivor's gender in specific moments, I chose two playthroughs and one extra video of a cutscene and will use the appropriate videos to analyse the game the way it was canonically

intended. Also, it is important to note that the game has 3 DLC's (downloadable content for a game, that is added after the initial release), and some extra quests, that came out with game updates but in this paper, I chose to only look at the base game, the way it was released in 2020.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.1. Eivor

In ACV, the characters Eivor Varinsdottir and Odin (named "Havi" in the games) offer distinct but interconnected representations of the Norse god Odin.

In Norse mythology, Odin is depicted as a complex god, embodying wisdom, war, and poetry (Lindow, 2001, pp. 247–248). He is often portrayed as a seeker of knowledge, willing to sacrifice for greater understanding, including his eye at Mimir's well (Vijūnas, 2009, p. 45; Lindow, 2001, pp. 248-250). Odin's role extends beyond the divine to influencing mortal affairs, often through disguises and indirect guidance (Lindow, 2001, pp. 250–251). Key elements of his character include his connection to the slain warriors, who go to Valhalla, his two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, who bring him knowledge from across the world, and his relentless pursuit of knowledge (Ruseckienė, 2017, pp. 64-65, 84-85, Mortensen, 1913, pp. 117-119).

In ACV, Eivor Varinsdottir is a reincarnation of the god Odin (in the game he is called Havi) (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 21:36-22:00). Both characters demonstrate strategic judgment and physical skill, which can be seen throughout the game but especially near the ending, where Eivor fights Havi. In the fight, they both are skilful with their weapons, but both also show intelligence in strategy. As Eivor tries to leave the fight, Havi pulls her back into the fight by her axe. To outsmart that, Eivor, (or, more accurately, the player) lets go of her axe (unequipping it in the character menu), which allows her to finally leave the fight (Ubisoft, 2020; Gothic Sorcerer, 2020a, 49:00-50:05).

Eivor's portrayal as a woman brings a fresh perspective to these traditionally masculine traits by showing that a woman can also be a skilful and strategic fighter and leader. Her leadership style blends assertiveness with empathy, a contrast to Odin's more commanding and often reserved demeanour. Eivor's journey is more focused towards physical exploration and leadership, as her clan needs to settle into a new place and fight for their safety, and find alliances (Ubisoft, 2020). The Asgard section is optional, which means that the game could be completed without ever seeing the gods and delving deeper into Eivor's visions (Ubisoft, 2020). This can lead to the thought that the story happening in the real life, such as trying to cultivate alliances with other territories, clans, and

kings, trying to save Sigurd etc., is brought to the forefront as a more important story. Even though her story is less focused on spiritual quests, as mentioned above, we do see Eivor experiencing visions of Odin, of events, which we later find out, are from her past life (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 26:25-26:40), symbolizing her connection to the divine and her role as a chosen one in the game's narrative. Her visions guide her decisions and actions, reflecting the game's interpretation of the Norse belief in destiny and divine intervention (Ubisoft, 2020).

The character of Havi in the game's Asgard sequences aligns more closely with the mythological depiction of Odin. Havi is shown with various attributes and characteristics that align with the mythological Odin, as described in the *Elder* and *Younger Eddas*. These include features such as wisdom, leadership, connection to spirituality etc. (Lindow, 2001, pp. 247–250). In Norse mythology, Odin's sacrifice of his eye at Mimir's well is an extreme act to gain wisdom. He willingly gives up a part of himself in exchange for deep knowledge and understanding (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 46). In ACV, Havi also sacrifices his eye, symbolically paralleling Odin's mythological sacrifice (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 46; Ubisoft, 2020). Both Odin from Norse mythology, and Havi from the game, seek to gain knowledge from Mimir's well but for that a sacrifice must be made (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 46; Ubisoft, 2020; Mortensen, 1913, p. 118). This act in the game highlights Havi's commitment to gaining wisdom, reflecting the significant theme of self-sacrifice for greater knowledge found in Norse mythology (Ubisoft, 2020; Lindow, 2001, pp. 248-249). The knowledge they seek, for which Odin and Havi sacrifice their eyes, is different in the game and in mythology. Nevertheless, both instances highlight the value that Odin placed on wisdom and knowledge, even at the cost of personal sacrifice.

Another notable portrayal from mythology, which was shown in the game, is Fenrir. In Norse mythology, Odin's fight with Fenrir is an important event in Ragnarök (Lindow, 2001, pp. 111–112). Odin, aware of prophecies foretelling his death by Fenrir, attempts to bind Fenrir and protect himself and to change his destiny (Lindow, 2001, pp. 111–112). Despite his power and wisdom, Odin is ultimately consumed by Fenrir during the apocalypse, symbolizing the inescapable nature of fate (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 84–85). In ACV, Havi's fight with Fenrir serves as a narrative climax in the Asgard storyline. Unlike the myth, where Odin's battle with Fenrir is a fulfilment of destiny, Havi's confrontation with the wolf can be interpreted as an attempt to alter or confront his fate (Ubisoft North America, 2022a, 1:22-1:38). The outcome of this battle in the game reflects the struggle between destiny and free will, a common theme in modern adaptations of mythology.

Though it is important to note, that Odin and Havi were not the only ones, who fought wolves. In the first minutes of ACV, when we play as a child Eivor, she is attacked by a wolf and bitten in the neck (that is why throughout the game people refer to her as Wolf-Kissed) (Gothic Sorcerer, 2020b, 11:05-11:53). This shapes her identity but also simultaneously symbolises her resilience. This clear parallel foreshadows Eivor's true identity. The game connecting Eivor, Havi and Odin all together, by intertwining mythological elements together with the game's narrative. The game expands its narrative depth by employing wolves' symbolic significance from Norse mythology. This allows players to interact with ancient themes in a modern context.

ACV cleverly narrates Eivor's and Havi's story, offering a unique interpretation of the Norse god Odin. Eivor's embodiment of Odin's characteristics, highlight a blend of traditional mythological elements with contemporary storytelling. Havi, representing Odin more directly, demonstrates the divine attributes of the god. The game creatively navigates between mythological faithfulness and narrative innovation, portraying Odin's wisdom, sacrifice, and confrontation with destiny through both Eivor and Havi.

3.2. Sigurd

Tyr is a Norse deity associated with law, justice, and heroic glory (Ruseckienė, 2003, p. 150). He is perhaps best known for his role in the binding of Fenrir, a story that highlights his bravery and sense of duty. Tyr places his hand in Fenrir's mouth as a sign of good faith during the binding process but ultimately loses it, when Fenrir realizes he has been tricked (Davidson, 1964, p. 31). This act demonstrates Tyr's devotion to upholding cosmic order even if it harms him personally (Ruseckienė, 2003, p. 152).

In ACV, Sigurd Styrbjornsson is Eivor's adoptive brother. His character mirrors that of the god Tyr in various ways (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 26:42-27:22). Sigurd shows courage, leadership qualities and makes principled decisions throughout gameplay which aligns with Tyr's sense of duty (Ubisoft, 2020, Davidson, 1964, p. 57). His narrative arc involves themes of sacrifice and duty, resonating with Tyr's mythological aspects. Particularly in the Asgard section, Tyr's actions and decisions reflect the mythological Tyr's commitment to the greater good and willingness to make personal sacrifices.

Although Sigurd is a very important character in the game, he is absent from a lot of it. He is kidnapped by Fulke, a scholar, who is a member of the Order of the Ancients. She targets him because

she is aware of Sigurd's true identity and attempts to open his mind and reveal his past incarnation to him. Fulke tortures him and even cuts off his arm in order to achieve this (Ubisoft, 2020; Ubisoft North America, 2021, 26:42-27:22). Fulke attempts to mirror Tyr's legend. Just as Tyr loses his hand to Fenrir, Sigurd undergoes a personal sacrifice when Fulke cuts off his arm. So, Sigurd's story simultaneously parallels the god Tyr from the game, and from Norse mythology.

In ACV, Tyr's portrayal in the Asgard storyline requires a closer look at it due to its close alignment with, and deviation from, Norse mythology. In both the game and the myth, Tyr's role in the binding of Fenrir is pivotal (Lindow, 2001, pp. 297-298; Ubisoft, 2020). The game faithfully replicates this mythological narrative, depicting Tyr's courageous act of placing his hand in Fenrir's mouth as a guarantee of the gods' sincerity. This resulted in the loss of his hand when Fenrir realizes the betrayal (Ubisoft, 2020; Ruseckienė, 2003, p. 152). This act is a key moment in the game, symbolizing Tyr's commitment to justice and order, and his willingness to make personal sacrifices.

However, there are some nuanced differences between the game's story and the traditional myth. In Norse mythology, it is understood that Tyr was aware of the deception and willingly sacrificed his hand, knowing the gods' plan to bind Fenrir (Davidson, 1964, p. 31). This act in mythology indicates Tyr's acceptance of the inevitable and his dedication to maintaining cosmic balance. In contrast, ACV presents Tyr as a victim of Havi's betrayal, introducing a layer of complexity to his character (Ubisoft 2020).

This reinterpretation of Tyr's story in ACV aligns with modern academic perspectives on the adaptation of cultural narratives in contemporary media (Guyker, 2018, pp. 156-157), which discuss how modern adaptations often reimagine mythological characters to explore contemporary themes and ethical dilemmas. In this case, ACV uses Tyr's narrative to explore themes of trust, betrayal, and moral ambiguity. This narrative choice reflects the game's approach to recontextualizing mythological figures and narratives, showing how ancient myths are adapted to resonate with contemporary audiences' mindfulness and ethical perspectives.

3.3. Basim

Basim Ibn Ishaq is a complicated and significant character in *Assassin's Creed Valhalla*. He's introduced as a member of the Hidden Ones, a secretive global organization with the goal of protecting humanity from the Order of the Ancients and their efforts to abuse power and enforce coercive rule. By the name, the Hidden Ones' methods are primarily stealth operations, including

assassinations of high value targets that appear to be perpetrators of Order of the Ancients' motives (Ubisoft, 2020).

In the game, Basim is painted as a wise and skilled mentor figure, deeply knowledgeable about the Hidden Ones' history, practices, and goals. He is open to sharing knowledge and wisdom with others, yet somewhat secretive. This is demonstrated in the first moments of the player meeting Basim and his disciple, Hytham. In one cutscene, Eivor is given the Hidden Blade. It is a unique, retractable, under-hand bladed weapon, used by many Hidden Ones. Hytham objects to this action but is cut off by Basim, scolding him (Gothic Sorcerer, 2020c, 10:09-11:04). This implies that Basim is willing to share some of his order's resources (such as the blade), but not others (such as letting Hytham explain the significance of this action) (Ubisoft, 2020). Initially, Basim offers guidance and support to Sigurd, Eivor, and their clan, helping them navigate the political and cultural difficulties of the Viking invasion of England and the fight with the Order of The Ancients (Ubisoft, 2020).

As the player, and Eivor, finds out at the end of the game, Basim is the reincarnation of the Norse god Loki. Loki, in Norse mythology, is a figure of complexity and ambiguity. He is known as the trickster god, embodying change, and chaos. Loki's origins are somewhat mysterious, and his role in the Norse pantheon is unusual. He is the son of the *Jötunn* (giant) Farbauti and the *Jötunn* Laufey, making him a *Jötunn* by birth (Mortensen, 1913, p. 61). However, he lives among the Aesir, not as an enemy but as a companion, often helping them with his cleverness and magical abilities (Lindow, 2001, pp. 216-217). That same cleverness is also the source of much misery for the Aesir, as Loki uses his ingenuity for himself, often causing problems for the Aesir, while fulfilling his needs and interests (Ruseckienė, 2003, p. 151).

Analysing his origins, one parallel between Norse mythology and the lore in ACV is very apparent. In the game, Basim is of Arabian descent as he was born in the city of Samarra, while Loki is, a *Jötunn*, as already mentioned. As we know from the game, the Aesir gods reincarnated near each other. Odin and Tyr reincarnated into Eivor and Sigurd, who grew up as siblings; Freya, who is technically a Vanir goddess (Mortensen, 1913, p. 49), also reincarnated as a woman from their clan, Svala (Ubisoft, 2020). It could be that such separation is due to Loki's relationship with the other Aesir gods, who were chosen for reincarnation. Loki was often portrayed as somewhat of a recluse, on bad terms with other gods and generally untrustworthy (Mortensen, 1913, p. 61).

The mythological Loki, Basim, and ACV Loki's stories, while connected, have some striking differences. The most notable is the imprisonment of Loki. In Norse mythology, Loki is imprisoned

by the Aesir for his role in Baldr's death. He is bound by his son's intestines, while a serpent above him drips poison on his face (Mortensen, 1913, pp. 65-67; Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 82). While ACV's Loki is never shown to be imprisoned, Basim's fate is different. Driven by his need for vengeance against Havi for past betrayals, Basim confronts Eivor and Sigurd, and they fight (Gothic Sorcerer, 2020a, 52:06-1:02-59). For him, this battle has symbolic significance as it gives him the opportunity to confront Havi's/Eivor's past wrongdoings. Ultimately, Basim is defeated and gets imprisoned in the Yggdrasil computer. This machine serves as a modern reinterpretation of Loki's story. While it greatly differs from Loki's fate in Norse mythology, it captures the themes of punishment and binding that are significant to Loki's character. This reimagining allows the narrative to blend ancient myth with contemporary storytelling, creating a different, yet familiar version of Loki's tale.

3.4. Reincarnation

In Norse mythology, the concept of reincarnation is not defined as clearly as in other religions. Instead, themes like rebirth and renewal are seen in the stories of gods and the dead's journey to the afterlife (Davidson, 1964, p. 28). One of the most notable examples is the story of Baldr, the beloved god, whose death is mourned by everyone (Ruseckienė, 2017, pp. 53-54, Mortensen, 1913, p. 55; Lindow, 2001, pp. 66-67). It is prophesied that after Ragnarök Baldr will return to the living, symbolizing renewal and hope in the new world that emerges from the ashes of the apocalypse (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 87; Vijūnas, 2009, p. 67). While this event is not reincarnation in the traditional sense, it reflects a cycle of death and rebirth that fills Norse cosmology.

In contrast, ACV introduces a unique take on reincarnation through genetic memory and the Animus. The device allows players (and the character of Layla) to relive the life of Eivor, who also explores Asgard and Jotunheim as Havi. This exploration is not just a journey through physical spaces but a metaphorical journey through death, rebirth, and the legacy of the Isu. The Isu's story, particularly regarding their downfall and how their knowledge and power persist through artefacts and genetic memories, parallels the mythological themes of death and rebirth (Ubisoft, 2020 Lindow, 2001, p. 257). This reference to Norse mythology allows ACV to blend ancient mythological themes with futuristic concepts.

Another example that could be interpreted as reincarnation in Norse mythology is the belief in the eternal hall of Valhalla, where warriors killed in battle go to live until they are called to fight alongside the gods during Ragnarök (Vijūnas, 2009, p. 111). This concept reflects a belief in a continued existence in a different form or place, rather than reincarnation into a new body in the mortal world.

While the game also depicts Valhalla as a destination for the dead, it is explored through the lens of Isu civilization's structures powered by technology. This suggests that what the Norse perceived as spiritual realms might have actually been just echoes of Isu civilization. This is very clearly shown in the game in two particular scenes. First of them is at the ending of the game's Asgard section, when the Norns show Havi a vision of Ragnarök. He and 8 other Aesir drink a potion that ties them to Yggdrasil and ensures that they will be reborn later (MKIceAndFire, 2020, 33:58-35:29). There is another scene that can be seen after the player completes all Animus anomalies (genetic memory fragments that can be found around England and Norway in Eivor's memories) and thus unlocking a secret memory that belongs to Loki. It is the same memory as the vision Havi saw but this time, it is shown without the façade of Asgard. Here, the Isu are in a very modern room, full of technology, which they use to "upload" themselves into their version of Yggdrasil, which in reality is a sort of computer. In this scene, we see that the Ragnarök that was prophesied is actually the Great Catastrophe that wiped out most of the Isu (Ubisoft, 2020; Northalix, 2020).

While the Norse envisioned a cycle of death and renewal symbolized by stories like Baldr's return and Ragnarök itself, the game reimagines these themes through the lens of genetic memory and Isu technology, offering a modern interpretation of ancient beliefs. Both portrayals reflect a deep fascination with the mysteries of life and death, highlighting the human desire to understand and rise above our mortal existence.

ACV explores these dynamics while paying homage to Norse mythology and, at the same time, recontextualizes them, while also inviting players to think about fate and rebirth in the context of the ancient past and a possible future. This highlights how the game functions as a storytelling medium that connects ancient narratives and contemporary themes, enriching the player's engagement with both the game and the mythological content.

3.5. Ragnarök

Ragnarök, often depicted as the cataclysmic end of the cosmos in Norse mythology, is a story about the death of gods, the destruction and rebirth of the world, and the complex themes of inevitability and renewal. According to Norse mythology, there are a few signs that Ragnarök is coming:

1. Fimbulwinter ("Mighty Winter") is one of the signs of Ragnarök, where three long uninterrupted winters that last three years, occur (Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 83; Mortensen, 1913, p. 69).

2. The sun and moon are swallowed by the wolves Sköll and Hati, stars vanish from the sky, and the universe is plunged into darkness (Lindow, 2001 pp. 163, 273; Ruseckienė, 2017, p. 83).

Though these are the main signs of the apocalypse, there are also other events that happen leading to the great battle: earthquakes shake the world, releasing the bound monsters Fenrir and the Midgard Serpent, Jörmungandr; the ship Naglfar, that is made from the nails of the dead, steered by a giant named Hrym, sets sail to battle (Ruseckienė, 2017, pp. 83-84, Mortensen, 1913, pp. 69-70). During Ragnarök gods like Odin, Thor, and Freyr meet their end at the hands of various monsters including Fenrir and Jörmungandr (Vijūnas, 2009, p. 66). The apocalypse continues with the consuming of the world in flames, only for it to begin again, purified, and fertile, marking not just an end but a hopeful beginning. The *Poetic Edda*, particularly in poems such as *Völuspá*, outlines this apocalyptic structure, detailing the fall and later rebirth of the gods and the world (ibid., pp. 65-67)

Although Ragnarök itself is barely shown in the main game, the image of it within ACV is especially significant because it reflects both the Norse mythological end of the world and the disaster that befell the Isu, leading to their fall (Ubisoft, 2020). This parallel draws a direct line from the mythological stories Eivor experiences in the game to the historical events that took place in the *Assassin's Creed* universe. Ragnarök, in this sense, symbolizes not only the mythic battle and rebirth found in Norse lore but also the struggle of the Isu fighting their downfall, as mentioned before.

The game's depiction and reinterpretation of Ragnarök is a prime example of hypertextual transformation. While staying true to the core elements of Ragnarök in Norse mythology, the game reimagines it by linking the story of Ragnarök to the history of the Isu's downfall. Through blending mythological and sci-fi elements to create a unique narrative, the game not only pays homage to Norse mythology but also advances the narrative of the game series, exploring themes of the cyclical nature of destruction and rebirth.

4. Narrative analysis

4.1. Order of Events

The narrative structure of Norse mythology often follows a more linear narrative style (Ruseckienė, 2017, pp. 33-88). The sagas and stories typically progress in a chronological order, with clear lines of events. For instance, the creation myth in Norse mythology starts from an ancient void and progresses through the formation of the world and the gods and then leading up to the lives of the

gods and their interactions with other beings, such as humans and the *Jötnar*. This linear progression culminates in events like Ragnarök (ibid., 2017, pp. 33-88).

In contrast, ACV uses storytelling differently than traditional sagas. ACV's narrative structure, which its narrative director Darby McDevitt describes as unique, follows a more non-linear structure. This challenges traditional storytelling in video games (GameSpot, 2020). Instead of merely moving from past to future chronologically, ACV constructs a narrative linked by character motivations.

There are many examples to prove this non-linear nature within the game. The use of flashbacks, visions, and the blending of historical elements with mythological ones. The game begins with the protagonist, Eivor, depicted in childhood but it quite quickly transitions, transporting the player into the game's contemporary setting through the character Layla Hasan in the Animus. Upon resuming Eivor's storyline we return to her already an adult (Ubisoft, 2020). This first transition into Eivor's adulthood is recalled by another character, Kjetve, explicitly using Eivor's name and mentioning the events that happened in the first cutscene (Gothic Sorcerer, 2020b , 12:50-14:10). Throughout the whole game, the player is taken through different points in time.

The narrative's use of anachrony (Genette, 1980, pp. 34-35), particularly through Eivor's visions, enriches our understanding of her character and her motivations. These visions, a form of analepsis, in Genette's terms (ibid., p. 45), serve as a window into Eivor's past, thus revealing formative experiences that shape her actions and worldview (Ubisoft, 2020; Ubisoft North America, 2022b). For example, early on in the game, Eivor has a vision of an armless Sigurd calling her "Havi", on a ledge of a mountain. Then Sigurd disappears, and a big wolf appears in front of Eivor. This is interpreted by the seer Valka as an indication of Eivor's potential betrayal of Sigurd (Ubisoft, 2020; Gothic Sorcerer, 2020b , 1:05:33-1:11:25). This revelation then sparks Eivor's reaction, denying that she would ever do that. This strong of a reaction could influence the player to try to remain loyal to Sigurd throughout the rest of the game.

Eivor's experiences of what initially appear as premonitions are, in reality, memories from her past incarnation as Odin (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 26:20-26:40). This revelation, subtly incorporated into the narrative, remains unknown to both the player and Eivor for a significant portion of the game. These sequences, initially perceived as prolepses, foreshadow the unfolding events, creating a narrative tension that is only resolved at the end of the game (Ubisoft, 2020). It is at this point that it is revealed these visions to be anachronistic fragments of the past, rather than glimpses into the future. During Eivor and Basim's confrontation, he reveals his true identity as Loki, their shared history, and

past conflicts. Basim's taunts and dialogue make it clear that Eivor is the reincarnation of Havi, and the memories she experiences are fragments of Havi's past life, rather than premonitions of the future.

This non-linear narrative structure plays a crucial role in maintaining player engagement, encouraging a sense of exploration, and deepening the interaction with the game's world (Guyker, 2018, pp. 134-136). Interestingly, it is possible to complete the main storyline of ACV without fully engaging with the Asgard segment (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 43:05-43:15). This aspect of the game design introduces an element of choice, which allows the players to explore the narrative to varying degrees of depth. However, avoiding this questline can lead to an incomplete understanding of the overarching story, as well as a more superficial grasp of the character's motivations and the significance of Eivor's visions (Ubisoft, 2020).

4.2. Narrative Voice

In ACV, the use of narrative voice, reveals a complex and layered storytelling approach. Genette's theory of narrative voice explores the relationship between the narrator and the story (Genette, 1980, pp. 214-215). In ACV, this relationship is multilayered, involving a combination of both intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators, which enriches the narrative experience.

In ACV, the primary narrative voice is that of the Eivor. She is an intradiegetic narrator. Eivor's narrative perspective is deeply implanted in the game's world, offering players an intimate view of the Viking era and Eivor's personal journey (Ubisoft, 2020). This narrative perspective allows players to experience the story through Eivor's eyes, sometimes even hearing her thoughts. This creates a strong emotional connection, the player's self-identification with her, and encourages an immersive experience for the player. (Ryan, 2001, pp. 254-255). One particular moment that highlights this connection is during a moment between Eivor and Sigurd in Oxenefordscire, where they are having a disagreement and Sigurd is being particularly confrontational. The player then has the option to punch him (Ubisoft, 2020; Gothic Sorcerer, 2020d, 7:45-9:11). The choice and the character dialogue leading up to that is designed to evoke an emotional response, aligning the player's feelings with Eivor's frustration. All of this enhances the narrative immersion. The narrative director Darby McDevitt said in an interview that it was their intention to make the players mad at Sigurd on Eivor's behalf, and, according to him, it worked (Ubisoft North America, 2021, 29:30-30:13). On the other hand, the connection that a player might have created with Eivor, would deter them from hurting Sigurd, as it is well established at that point that he is an important part of her life.

The game also employs an extradiegetic narrative layer through the overarching *Assassin's Creed* structure, in which the protagonist's story is experienced through the Animus by a character in a future timeline (Ubisoft, 2020). This dual-layer narrative structure is a characteristic of the whole *Assassin's Creed* series and adds depth to the narrative by contrasting different temporal and spatial settings. The extradiegetic layer in ACV is primarily experienced through Layla Hassan, who interacts with Eivor's story from a future point (Ubisoft, 2020). This complex narrative structure exemplifies Genette's theory by presenting multiple narrative layers and perspectives.

Of course, noting that ACV depicts not only Layla and Eivor, it could be argued that the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators can change. For example, in the Asgard quests, Havi becomes the intradiegetic narrator, as the player experiences the game through his point of view (Ubisoft, 2020). The game's use of shifting narrators allows the player to explore the characters from a closer perspective, thus deepening the understanding of the story.

Considering the interactive nature of video games, one could argue that there is another layer of narration, where the player becomes the narrator themselves. Instead of classifying the player as an extradiegetic narrator, it would be more appropriate to call them an intradiegetic one. While the player does not narrate the story, they influence some aspects of the game directly, for instance when and where to go, which dialogue option to choose. The player is essentially living the story from within.

ACV uniquely manipulates narrative distance, another component of Genette's theory. Narrative distance refers to the proximity of the narrator to the events of the story (Genette, 1980, pp. 227-228). In the game, this distance is dynamically altered. It is close when players are immersed in Eivor's direct experiences and more distant when transitioning to Layla's modern-day perspective (Ubisoft, 2020). This shifting narrative distance not only adds to the game's complexity but also enhances player engagement by providing varied narrative experiences (Genette, 1980, pp. 233-234).

The game's narrative voice is further characterized by its level of reliability. In traditional narratives, as per Genette's framework, the reliability of the narrator is an essential aspect of how the story is understood (Herman, 2009, pp. 70-71). In ACV, Eivor's reliability as a narrator is generally consistent but the game introduces elements of myth and subjective interpretation, particularly in sequences involving Norse gods and visions (Ubisoft, 2020). These sequences can challenge the player's perception of the narrative's reliability. For instance, Eivor's vision of Sigurd and the wolf (mentioned before), which the seer interprets as a threat to Sigurd, could be seen as a metaphor for future conflicts or betrayals. Players are placed in a position where they must decide whether to act

on the information presented in these visions or to disregard it as a mere figment of Eivor's imagination. This aspect of choice reinforces the notion of subjective reality and narrative ambiguity, which is a technique that Genette notes (Genette, 1980, pp. 250-251).

ACV demonstrates a sophisticated use of Genette's narrative voice theory. By integrating both intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators, manipulating narrative distance, and exploring the reliability of its narrators, the game creates a rich and complex narrative experience.

4.3. Metalepsis

Metalepsis, in Genette's narratological framework, refers to a disruption or crossing between different narrative layers. This is observed when the story world and the world outside the narrative engage with each other (Genette, 1980, pp. 234-236). This phenomenon is especially relevant in the context of video games, because of their flexible boundaries among player, character, and game story.

In ACV, one of the most notable examples of metalepsis is the Animus device. This machine allows characters in a present-day setting to relive the memories of historical figures, thus creating a link between the past and the present. The Animus serves as a metaleptic device, creating a narrative loop where the modern-day protagonist Layla enters the historical world of Eivor (Ubisoft, 2020). This creates a dual-layered narrative, where events in the Viking era are experienced and influenced by a character from the future. The presence of Layla, an extradiegetic element within Eivor's diegetic world, illustrates Genette's concept of narrative metalepsis (Genette, 1980, pp. 234-236).

The Animus anomalies (mentioned in the chapter 3.4.), could also be considered as instances of metalepsis. The anomalies are glitches that breach the historical simulation and reveal fragments of modern-day, mainly Layla. This disrupts the story flow by forcing both the player, and Layla to acknowledge the artificial nature of the simulation.

Additionally, ACV expands the concept of metalepsis through its gameplay mechanics and narrative choices. Players, while controlling Eivor, make decisions that can alter the course of the story, thus becoming an active part of the narrative construction. For example, in the game, there are five total choices that can alter Eivor's relationship with Sigurd (Ubisoft, 2020; Ubisoft North America, 2021, 32:43):

1. In the quest *The Seas of Fate*, players have two options to choose from. They can either steal cargo from Styrbjorn, Sigurd's father, who also took Eivor in after her parents' death, and take it to England, or to leave it behind in Norway.
2. A second choice at a later point in the game, lets the player choose whether to begin a romance with Randvi, Sigurd's wife.
3. In the quest *Blood from a Stone*, the player must choose whether to punch Sigurd or not after a disagreement.
4. In the quest *A Brewing Storm*, players have to choose whether to give Dag (one of the Raven clan's members and Sigurd's friend) his axe and let him go to Valhalla, following his defeat in a fight with Eivor.
5. In a side quest *Blame and Sail*, the player chooses whether to side with Sigurd's decision regarding the dispute between Holger and Gudrun, two members of the Raven clan.

This interactivity introduces a level of metalepsis, as the player, an external agent, influences the internal logic and progression of the game's narrative. These moments of player agency illustrate Genette's concept of metalepsis by demonstrating how the narrative layers interact and influence each other. Specifically, the player's choices impact the diegetic world of Eivor and the characters around her.

By using metalepsis, the game blurs the boundaries between the narrative world and the external reality of the player, creating a rich, immersive, and self-aware narrative experience. This use of metalepsis not only enhances player experience but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the narrative possibilities within video games. Through these interactions, the game exemplifies how modern digital narratives can transcend traditional storytelling boundaries, allowing players to become co-authors of the story, thereby enriching the overall narrative complexity and engagement.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to explore how *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* interprets and represents key figures and themes from Norse mythology compared to traditional mythological texts and how do video games function as a method of storytelling.

ACV incorporates Norse mythology into its narrative and gameplay, blending historical fiction with mythological elements. The game's portrayal of Eivor, Havi, Sigurd, Tyr, Basim, and Loki reflect both true to traditional myths and innovative representations. Eivor is portrayed as a reincarnation of

Odin (Havi), embodying his wisdom and strategic nature. This dual identity allows players to experience and connect to the mythological world. Similarly, Basim, who is the reincarnation of Loki, mirrors the god's trickster and chaotic nature. His journey from mentor and friend to antagonist reflects Loki's role as a troublemaker, which adds layers of intrigue to the story. Sigurd, Eivor's adoptive brother, is the reincarnation of Tyr. His character arc involves themes of destiny and sacrifice.

The game also incorporates reincarnation and Ragnarök in its narrative, emphasising the cyclical nature of time and inevitability of fate, which are themes prominent in Norse mythology. Reincarnation in the game is depicted through Isu technology, and Ragnarök is revealed to be the Great Catastrophe. This is a clear hypertextual transformation, where a hypertext makes changes to the story to fit a new narrative, while still staying true to the core elements of a hypotext.

The themes of destiny and free will are also represented in the game's reinterpretation of mythological events. Norse mythology often portrays fate as inescapable, with the gods being unable to avoid their end. Havi choosing to bind Fenrir, as Odin did in Norse mythology as well, only sealed their fates of dying.

ACV incorporates references to Norse mythology using intertextuality. This creates rich meanings and connections that enhance the storytelling. Players, who are familiar with these references can appreciate the deeper layers of the story, while those new to Norse mythology can still enjoy the intricacy of the created narrative.

Video games are an exciting medium for storytelling. They offer unique narrative experiences that blend traditional storytelling techniques with interactivity and immersion. One of the most defining features of video games is that, unlike traditional media, they require active participation from players. They can make decisions that influence the direction and, sometimes, outcome of the story. This creates a more engaging and personalized narrative experience. Furthermore, video games nowadays often use complex narrative structures like branching storylines, multiple endings, and non-linear progression. This allows players to experience different stories, based on their choices.

ACV employs interesting narrative techniques, such as order of events, narrative voice and metalepsis. The different narrative layers, non-linear storytelling and including the player as an intradiegetic narrator, creates strong connections to the game and enriches player engagement (Ryan, 2001, pp. 254-255)

This paper's findings align with existing research on video game narratives and mythological adaptations. Sun-ha Hong's analysis on how video games reinterpret history and myth, highlights the concept of "real enough", which resonates with ACV's approach of blending historical authenticity with mythological elements.

Mia Consalvo's analysis of fan interactions in *The Legend of Zelda*, highlights the active role of players in constructing and interpreting narratives. Similarly, ACV's interactive storytelling allows players to shape the game's narrative through the choices they make.

While this paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how ACV interprets and represents Norse mythology, limitations of this paper have to be acknowledged. The focus on a single game from a massive franchise might limit the depth of the analysis, as the games are connected through deep lore. Furthermore, the nature of the analysis relies on subjective interpretations of the researcher.

Future research could expand on the analysis, including multiple games from *Assassin's Creed* franchise at the same time. Analysis of ACV could be combined with an analysis of the newest game in the series *Assassin's Creed: Mirage* (2023).

6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore how *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* interprets and represents key figures and themes from Norse mythology compared to traditional mythological texts, and to research how video games function as a method of storytelling.

The analysis indicates that *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* successfully integrates Norse mythology into its narrative, while offering faithful and innovative reinterpretations of mythological figures and themes. Eivor, Basim, Sigurd and their Isu counterparts all closely mirror the gods from Norse myths, while also adding layers and complexity to the story.

The game effectively incorporates mythological themes and events, such as reincarnation and Ragnarök through the existing lore of the games. Ragnarök is reinterpreted as the Great Catastrophe, while reincarnation is depicted through Isu technology.

Unlike traditional methods of storytelling, video games incorporate elements like interactivity, immersion, and complex narrative structures. They require active participation from players, who can make decisions that influence the story's direction and outcome. This creates a more engaging and a

personalized narrative experience for every player. Integrating historical elements and Norse mythology, enhances the storytelling, thus allowing players to appreciate the deeper layers of narrative.

While this paper provides an analysis of *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla*, it is limited by focusing on one game from a large franchise. The interconnected lore of the whole *Assassin's Creed* series suggests that examining multiple games is required for a deeper understanding. Furthermore, the analysis is based on subjective interpretations, which could influence the conclusions.

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Santrauka

Skandinavų mitologija žaidime „Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla“

Šiame bakalauro darbe, analizuojamas skandinavų mitologijos vaizdavimas kompiuteriniame žaidime *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla* ir kaip kompiuteriniai žaidimai veikia kaip pasakojimo būdas.

Šio darbo teorinis pagrindas yra intertekstualumas. Remiantis Julijos Kristevos idėjomis apie dialoginę tekstų prigimtį ir Gerardo Genette’o transtekstualumo teorija, koncentruojantis į hipertekstualumą, tyrime analizuojama kaip *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla* sąveikauja su skandinavų mitologija.

Darbo analizėje atliekama lyginamoji analizė, siekiant suprasti, kaip žaidimas iš naujo interpretuoja ir adaptuoja pagrindinius veikėjus (Eivor, Sigurdą ir Basimą, kurie yra dievų Odino, Tiūro ir Lokio reinkarnacijos), taip pat reinkarnaciją ir ragnaroką, lyginant su skandinavų mitologijos tekstais, tokiais kaip Poetinė ir Prozinė edos. Taip pat, taikant Genette’o naratyvinę analizę, nagrinėjama ir žaidimo struktūra, atsižvelgiant į tokius dalykus kaip įvykių seka, pasakotojo balsas ir metalepsė. Analizuojama žaidime naudojama nelinijinė pasakojimo struktūra ir istoriniai elementai derinami su mitologiniais pasakojimais, kurie kartu sukuria turtingą ir įtraukiančią patirtį žaidėjams.

Analizė parodė, kad pagrindiniai veikėjai, įvykiai ir temos pristatomi ir kuriami atsižvelgiant į jų atitikmenų mitologijoje vaizdavimą, išlaikant pakankamai artimą istoriją, tačiau tuo pat metu inkorporuojami ir nauji elementai, kurie įpina mitologinį pasaulį į žaidimo realybę. Šie elementai ir pokyčiai pagilina ir pritaiko istoriją kompiuterinių žaidimų žaidėjams.

Kompiuteriniai žaidimai, žvelgiant pro *Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla* analizę, veikia kaip dinamiškas pasakojimo metodas, nes juose interaktyvus žaidimas derinamas su sudėtingomis pasakojimo struktūromis. Kitaip, nei tradicinės medijos, kompiuteriniai žaidimai reikalauja aktyvaus žaidėjų dalyvavimo, kur žaidėjai gali atlikti pasirinkimus, o tai daro įtaką žaidimo istorijai ir pabaigai. Šis interaktyvumas, derinamas su išsamiu personažų kūrimu, kuria asmeninę žaidimo patirtį, kurioje peržengiamos tradicinio pasakojimo ribos ir žaidėjas tampa istorijos bendraautoriumi.

Sammanfattning

Nordisk mytologi i ”Assassin’s Creed: Valhalla”

Denna uppsats analyserar representationen av nordisk mytologi i datorspelet *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* och hur datorspel fungerar som en berättarmetod.

Den teoretiska grunden för detta arbete är intertextualitet. Med utgångspunkt i Julia Kristevas idéer om textens dialogiska natur och Gerard Genettes teori om transtextualitet, med fokus på hypertextualitet, analyserar arbetet hur *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* interagerar med nordisk mytologi.

Uppsatsen inkluderar en jämförande analys för att förstå hur spelet tolkar och anpassar nyckelkaraktärerna (Eivor, Sigurd och Basim, som är reinkarnationer av gudarna Oden, Tyr och Loke) samt teman som reinkarnation och Ragnarök, jämfört med texter från nordisk mytologi, såsom *Poetiska Eddan* och *Prosaiska Eddan*. Dessutom undersöks spelets struktur med hjälp av Genettes narrativanalys, genom att använda element som händelsernas ordning, berättarröst och metalepsis. Studien utforskar den icke-linjära berättarstrukturen som används i spelet och hur historiska element kombineras med mytologiska berättelser, vilket skapar en rik och uppslukande upplevelse för spelare.

Analysen visar att de viktigaste karaktärerna, händelserna och temana presenteras och utvecklas på ett sätt som nära speglar deras mytologiska motsvarigheter, vilket upprätthåller en nära berättelse samtidigt som nya element inkorporeras som väver in den mytologiska världen i spelets verklighet. Dessa element och förändringar fördjupar och anpassar berättelsen för spelare.

Genom att se på analysen av *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* fungerar datorspel som en dynamisk berättarmetod eftersom de kombinerar interaktivt spelupplevelse med komplexa berättarstrukturer. Till skillnad från traditionella medier kräver datorspel aktivt deltagande av spelare, där de kan göra val som påverkar berättelsen och dess slut. Denna interaktivitet, kombinerad med detaljerad karaktärsutveckling, skapar en personlig spelupplevelse som går bortom traditionell berättande och gör spelaren till medförfattare av berättelsen.