Dvergatal, Shorthand for a Universe
The Dwarfs of Voluspá

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FOREWORD

No work is ever the product of a single mind. It is the sum of a great many minds, which have come together to shape the ideas of its author. I therefore have many minds to thank, the most important of which are:

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
   
   I. Key Questions and Arguments  
      1
   
   II. Approach  
      3

2. **Context**
   
   I. Introduction to the Sources  
      6
   
   II. History of Research  
      8
   
   III. Mythological Dwarfs  
      11

3. **Dvergatal**
   
   I. Detailed List of the Dwarf Names  
      17
   
   II. Statistical Observations  
      59

4. **Analysis**
   
   I. Dwarf Names and Natural Features  
      63
   
   II. Dwarf Names and Objects  
      69
   
   III. Dwarf Names and Character Traits  
      70
   
   IV. Dwarf Names and Allusions  
      72

5. **Conclusion**  
   
   75

6. **Bibliography**  
   
   77
1. INTRODUCTION

I. Key Question and Arguments

The guiding question to this thesis is a straightforward one: Why is Dvergatal in Völuspá, and what is its function? This is, in part, inspired by Ursula Dronke’s edition of the Poetic Edda (Vol. II), in which she asks more or less the same question: “[W]hy should a poet who touches so rapidly on all other myths that concern him, spend seven stanzas on dwarfs?” However, Dronke avoided providing a real answer due to her textual analysis, which led her to conclude that Dvergatal is not an ‘original’ part of the poem, rather a later interpolation, and “[w]e might then wish to improve the text... by eliminating stanzas 10-16 [i.e. Dvergatal].”¹ By condemning Dvergatal in this manner, Dronke suggests that Dvergatal does not belong in Völuspá, and it serves no useful function in the poem. This would appear to be the last word on Dvergatal’s place in Völuspá until the present day, as to my knowledge no studies have seriously attempted to challenge Dronke’s dismissal of the dwarf list.² This study seeks to renew interest in Dvergatal as a legitimate part of Völuspá and re-examine its reason for being in the poem; for if it has been included in both attested versions of Völuspá as well as in the quotations of Völuspá in Gylfaginning, it must contribute something to the overall poem, even if that contribution is not immediately apparent to a modern audience. Whether or not Dvergatal was included in the earliest formulations of Völuspá is irrelevant to the poem as we have it; because it is present, its function must be taken into consideration in order to achieve a fuller understanding of Völuspá.

To that end, the names themselves are paramount. Dvergatal is more than a list of dwarfs; it is a collection of linguistic units which contain a semantic component, and these names have the potential to convey as much meaning as any other word in the Old Icelandic lexicon. They were at some point intentionally constructed and (perhaps at another time) intentionally arranged into a list and included in Völuspá. The ways that the poet and the audience may have understood the meanings of these names thus affects the poem. Using this line of reasoning as a point of departure, this study focuses on the etymological meanings of

² Terry Gunnell is one exception; his approach to Dvergatal is to use its rhythm, meter, and sound devices as evidence for the oral performance of Völuspá. This perspective, however, ignores the content of Dvergatal and thus does not really challenge Dronke’s literary assessment of Dvergatal as a superfluous interpolation. See section 2.II for more detail on the use of Dvergatal in academic pursuits. Terry Gunnell, “Völuspá in Performance,” in The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement, ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2013).
the names and argues for a three FACETED answer to the question of *Dvergatal’s raison d’être* and function.

Firstly, at the literal level *Dvergatal* is a list of dwarfs, and it performs this function adequately – although dwarfs are not described in any way in *Völsuspá*, many of the names’ meanings conform to general characteristics of mythological dwarfs that can be distilled from the various mythological sources. This is most strongly supported by the names denoting weapons, tools, and other craftable objects, which relate to the ubiquitous mythical theme of dwarfs as smiths. The list is not a perfect picture of dwarfs, however; a few of the names, particularly those denoting heroic and warrior-like character traits, clash with the characterization of dwarfs in the *Eddas* and sagas. Still, the list as a whole (in all three of its witnesses) is not jarringly un-dwarfish and passes as a catalogue of the creatures.

Secondly, moving beyond the names as dwarfs and looking for patterns of symbolism throughout the list reveals that *Dvergatal* contains strong connections to the rest of *Völsuspá*, particularly in the category of natural features but also, to a lesser extent, in the imagery of objects and tools as well as individual character traits. The list is arranged in such a way that natural features comprise much of the first portion of *Dvergatal*, a structure which mirrors the mythical world-building in the opening stanzas of *Völsuspá* and may even supplement it. In addition, at least two of the dwarf names may refer to volcanism, the imagery of which is prevalent throughout the apocalyptic poem. In the course of my argument I identify many examples of volcanic imagery in *Völsuspá*, some of which have not been pointed out as such by previous scholars. The mirroring of structure and theme between *Dvergatal* and *Völsuspá* may also be seen in the names denoting character traits, which can mostly be divided up into positive (heroic) traits and negative ones; I attempt to show that this divide echoes the struggle between good and evil that occurs throughout *Völsuspá*, though this line of reasoning is not without flaws.

Thirdly, examining the names in a wider context – not just *Völsuspá*, but of all the Old Icelandic mythological sources – reveals a surprising commonality which has been noted but not given any serious attention in the past: Nearly half of the names can be identified (with varying degrees of certainty) as allusions to other mythological figures outside of *Dvergatal*. In some cases these figures are dwarfs, but in many cases they are not; to be specific, many *Óðinsheiti*, names of other gods, giants, and other mythical creatures and objects can be found within the confines of *Dvergatal*. In addition, it is inevitable that there has been a
historical loss of mythological material due to manuscript destruction and the dying out of the specific oral traditions which contained that material; in light of this, it is highly likely that many more allusions could originally have been identified. I do not find it implausible to argue that, in fact, all of the dwarf names in Völuspá could potentially have been allusions to other mythological figures in addition to the other functions that they serve as part of Dvergatal.

A synthesis of the above findings results in a new perspective on Dvergatal, namely that it is a dense and complex list of names which simultaneously performs several roles in Völuspá: It depicts mythological dwarfs; it contains names and groups of names which mirror themes of the overall poem, sometimes quite specifically; and it concisely collects many allusions to figures across its wider mythology. This suggests that the composer of Dvergatal was conscious of the meanings of the names and deliberately wove them into a list in such a way that they would fit well in Völuspá – it is not likely that a list which relates so well to the rest of its poem and wider mythological context would have been inserted haphazardly without regard for its raison d’être, nor would it have been copied down with the rest of the poem in medieval manuscripts if it served no purpose in Völuspá; ink and parchment were (and still are) precious. All of this points to the conclusion that Dvergatal belongs in Völuspá, and serves at least three valuable functions in it.

II. Approach

In the introduction of his article “Dwarf-lore in Alvíssmál,” Paul Acker contrasts his methods with those of Lotte Motz in The Wise One of the Mountain:3 “Her approach is essentially structuralist, paring away all extraneous details to find the synthesizing archetype. In this study I will take the opposite tack, examining a single, apparently aberrant source of dwarf-lore on its own terms, and then placing that lore within its narrative, generic and mythographic contexts.”4 I take a quite similar approach to that of Acker, scrutinizing Dvergatal closely before drawing connections to its context, Völuspá, the manuscripts in which the poem is found, and the occasional relevant piece of skaldic poetry or saga.

The scope of this study is intended to encompass dwarfs as mythical, literary beings in the Icelandic context – effectively, what is contained in the Icelandic sources. Much work

3 Lotte Motz, The Wise One of the Mountain: Form, function, and significance of the subterranean smith (Göppingen, Germany: Kümmerle Verlag, 1983).
has been done in the past in this respect as well as on dwarfs as creatures of folklore; indeed, our modern understanding of dwarfs in Medieval Scandinavia is a result of a combination of these two approaches. While I acknowledge the deeper understanding of dwarfs that this combined approach brings, I do not draw upon folkloristics for the purposes of this study, nor do I rely heavily on the information on dwarfs found in the sagas. This is because the mythical, literary dwarfs and the dwarfs of folklore appear to be somewhat different in their nature; what survives suggests that they may have diverged and even died off in active belief rather early. The dwarfs of the eddic poems and the Prose Edda are transmitted through the products of a thirteenth-century Christian literary elite with different motivations, education, and understanding of myth than the general population who may or may not have passed around folk tales containing dwarfs. Though both may of course stem from pre-Christian tradition, the one passed through the Christian elite filter while the other was subjected to probably a millennium or more of retellings before being examined in modern form by scholars of folkloristics. As such, it is not tenable to attempt to find direct connections between the dwarfs of Völuspá and dwarfs of folklore. The sagas are much closer in time to Völuspá and thus could be used as a somewhat better source on dwarfs, but as Motz has observed, the sagas follow a repeating pattern when dwarfs appear – the human character prevents a dwarf, who is always a smith, from returning to his home and extorts from him one of the treasures he has forged. The sagas are therefore of limited value to an understanding of mythical dwarfs, mostly reaffirming that dwarfs are smiths and live in stones or underground.

Because Völuspá itself provides little information on the dwarfs, the first stage is to closely examine the meanings of the names from an onomastic-etymological perspective. Etymology attempts to establish the history of a word based on documented or hypothetical changes in sound and semantic meanings, and to use these historical processes to reconstruct potentially older forms of the word when possible. Onomastics differ from pure etymology in that names do not have ‘meanings’ in the traditional sense – on the literal level a name has a one-to-one correspondence with the person, place, or thing that it designates. However, as Lena Petersen puts it, “[p]roper names are chiefly formed from morphemes that already exist

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5 Lotte Motz has been highly influential on this approach to dwarfs, writing several extensive studies discussed below in section 2.II.
in the language: root morphemes, derivational morphemes, and inflexional morphemes. These morphemes carry a certain meaning, and it is precisely this meaning you try to find when you interpret, or etymologize, a name.⁹ Personal names thus have at least two layers of meaning: the named individual and the etymological meaning. The etymological meaning(s) in some cases can be identified, but that does not necessarily mean it (or they) would have been transparent to a contemporary audience. In addition, there is the factor of individual variation, as each person’s personal vocabulary is different.¹⁰ A necessary step in the onomastics of the dwarf names is therefore to assess the transparency of their etymological meanings.

In the case of the dwarf names, unlike place names, they have no documented word history, which makes some of the aforementioned etymological strategies impossible. The only way to determine both the etymological meaning and transparency of each name is therefore to assess its probable construction. The name can be broken down into component morphemes for which a corresponding, attested lexeme or morpheme in Old Icelandic may or may not be found; if one is found, then one can presume that at least some native speakers of Old Icelandic would have recognized that lexeme and associated its meaning with the name. If one is not found, an alternative option is to compare it to related attested and reconstructed languages, especially Proto-Norse and Proto-Germanic (abbreviated in this study as PGmc), for lexemes that, through accepted theories of sound changes, may be related to the morpheme in the name. This argument for a name’s meaning is weaker but still plausible.

For these reasons, I approach each dwarf name in the following way: I assess the construction of the name and then search for possible related lexemes to determine possible meanings. I then assess the probable transparency of those meanings based on the relative certainty that the lexeme would have been known and recognized by a contemporary audience. This strategy is how most scholars in the past have analyzed the dwarf names, especially Chester Nathan Gould who, through systematic analysis of all attested dwarf names, provides statistical detail for the normal methods of construction, and determines that the names appear to have been formulated fairly close in time to the rest of the poem.¹¹ I

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¹⁰ Durkin, Guide to Etymology, 268.

differ slightly from my predecessors in that, in many cases, I do not always stick only to the lexeme from which the name was most likely constructed. I also include in my analysis lexemes that are close enough in form to the morpheme(s) in a name that they could have been perceived by the audience as an alternative meaning. This is not only because contemporary human perception would not necessarily have adhered faithfully to what etymologists would determine to be the meaning of the name, but were free to associate whatever vocabulary came to mind with the name; it is also due to the affinity to puns shown in Old Icelandic poetry, especially of the skaldic variety, as well as a medieval tendency to have multiple layers of meaning in any given text.  

After establishing the plausible etymological meanings of the dwarf names, I analyze them statistically and separate them into categories based on both meaning and possible allusions. The four significant categories are natural features, tools and everyday objects, character traits, and allusions to mythological figures. An analysis of the first three categories is presented, each with a view to their contribution to the first two functions of Dvergatal identified above – namely, representing dwarfs and connecting the list to the rest of Völuspá, echoing and supplementing the poem’s themes. This is accomplished by comparing related groups of name-meanings to the characteristics of dwarfs identified in section 2.III, as well as to themes apparent in Völuspá. Finally, the analysis of the fourth category, allusions, corresponds to the third, allusive function of Dvergatal. In that section the wider context of allusions in Old Icelandic poetry is explored and applied to the allusions in Dvergatal to support my hypothesis that Dvergatal may be comprised entirely of allusive names.

2. CONTEXT

I. Introduction to the Sources

Dvergatal, the ‘dwarf-list,’ is a section in Völuspá consisting of approximately seven stanzas (10-16) in the fornyrðislag type of eddic metre. It appears in both versions of

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12 Puns and word-play in Old Icelandic were called ofljóst (‘too clear’); see, for example, the discussion in Skálidskaparmál 74.
13 I have also found that many of the names can be separated into pairs with apparently related meanings, but the scope of this study does not allow for a proper exploration of this curious, and potentially significant, phenomenon.
14 Or eight, if stanza 9 concerning the creation of the dwarfs is included; or six, if stanza 10 mentioning only Mótsognir and Durinn is not considered part of the ‘list’ per se.
Voluspá, namely Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (GKS 2365 4to; abbreviated in this study as CR) and Hauksbók (AM 544 4to; abbreviated as H), and is quoted in Gylfaginning (four versions: Codex Regius of the Prose Edda (GKS 2367 4to; abbreviated as CRPr), Codex Trajectinus (MS 1374), Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11), and Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.)). In addition, a good number of the dwarf names in Dvergatal are also included in the Þulur in two manuscripts containing Skáldskaparmál, AM 748 I 4to and AM 757a 4to. For the purposes of this study, CR and H are the main sources used for Voluspá, but the names of Dvergatal in the manuscripts of Gylfaginning are also included because the dwarf list is quoted from Voluspá in full and therefore serves as a legitimate witness. For the text of Voluspá I use Dronke’s 1997 edition as a standard, which is based primarily on CR but includes variants in H in the apparatus. For the text of Gylfaginning I have referred to both Anthony Faulkes’ 1988 edition and Gottfried Lorenz’s 1984 edition. Variants of the dwarf names are drawn from several different sources: the standardized ones from Dronke, Faulkes, and Lorenz, and the diplomatic ones from the Medieval Nordic Text Archive cross-referenced with facsimiles of the manuscripts.

To understand the relationships between the various witnesses of Dvergatal, it is important to contextualize it in what we know about the transmission of Voluspá. It is not within the scope of this paper to make a full investigation of the composition and authorship of both Eddas, thus I must address only the points which are vital to Dvergatal. Dronke attempts to argue that the versions of Voluspá in CR (dated to c. 1270CE) and H (c. 1340CE) stem from one original manuscript (“*R I”), which was the first and only time Voluspá was converted from oral tradition into a literary work. This perspective has subsequently been challenged by Gísli Sigurðsson who considers it “an unacceptable stretch of the imagination to follow Dronke all the way in her attempts to explain the variations away;” rather, the differences between the two versions of Voluspá are better explained by two separate instances of writing down from oral tradition. That being said, Gísli admits that “[t]he two known versions are too similar for it to be possible or even likely that they should be read as

reflections of two totally independent oral transmissions of a hypothetical poem composed by a single poet just before the year 1000,”²² and that there might have been influences on the H version due to re-oralization from CR.²³ This is complicated by Gylfaginning, of which the oldest manuscripts CRPr and Codex Upsaliensis are both dated to c. 1325, but if Snorri Sturluson was the compiler of the Prose Edda, then the work must originate from his lifetime (1179-1241).²⁴ Since Völuspá is quoted in Gylfaginning it would consequently have to be at least thirty years older than CR, and it is unknown whether the quotations are from a physical manuscript containing Völuspá or directly from an oral version of the poem.²⁵ To summarize, the composition of Völuspá as a cohesive poem could be as early as the tenth century and as late as c. 1200. It has three main versions, CR, H, and Gylfaginning, which cannot convincingly be fit into a traditional stemma and seem to be from three separate sources. Nevertheless, they all seem to stem from a common version of Völuspá that contained Dvergatal.

II. History of Research

Dwarfs are often mentioned in discussions of Old Norse mythology, religion, and poetry, as well as in a concise entry for ‘dwarf’ in relevant encyclopedias and dictionaries, but recent works dealing with Scandinavian dwarfs in any depth are hard to come by. The first quarter of the twentieth century saw a flurry of scholarly inquiry into the dwarfs that was synthesized and expanded upon by Gould in his 1929 article “Dwarf Names: A Study in Old Icelandic.”²⁶ At that time, it was believed that the meanings behind the names were the key to unlocking knowledge about dwarfs in Old Norse mythology, which has remained the case up to the present day. In fact, little has changed in either scholarly approach to the dwarfs or knowledge about them since Gould’s article – one reason for this may be that there is so little information on dwarfs in the literary sources that only so much can be conclusively said about them, and even this is quite vague and debatable. It is no surprise, then, that dictionaries, handbooks, and encyclopedias of Old Norse mythology and the like have been

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²³ A simple solution to this paradox is that the poem was not, in fact, composed just before the year 1000CE but later. This shorter period of transmission would account for the proportion of similarities and differences between the two versions.
²⁴ Faulkes, “Introduction,” in Edda, xiii; xxix.
²⁵ Faulkes, “Introduction,” in Edda, xxv.
²⁶ For a summary of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on dwarfs up until 1929, see Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 959.
repeating the same few talking points for many decades.\textsuperscript{27} Most of the productive work on
dwarfs has been done on refining the etymologies of the names; to that effort, numerous
scholars have weighed in on some or all of the dwarf names, the most influential of which
have been Gould, Siegfried Gutenbrunner,\textsuperscript{28} Hugo Gering and B. Sijmons,\textsuperscript{29} Jan de Vries,\textsuperscript{30}
Gottfried Lorenz,\textsuperscript{31} and the assemblers of the \textit{Lexicon Poeticum} (LP).\textsuperscript{32} Gould’s article is the
only sequential, etymological list of all dwarf names attested in Old Icelandic literature, while
the others either tackle only one particular list, or all of them as part of a larger compendium
of Old Icelandic words and names. Also of note is Edgar C. Polomé’s 1997 article “Notes on
the Dwarfs in Germanic Tradition” which is the most recent study that provides the
etymologies for all of the dwarf names in a particular list, in his case that of \textit{Gylfaginning}
with some reference to the version in \textit{Völuspá}.\textsuperscript{33}

As mentioned, dwarfs have mostly received attention through studies of their names, for
the reason that the names appear to be the only method left to us to find out more about them.
This of course relies on the preconception that the names actually contain relevant
information, and it is worthwhile to examine in some detail the ways that some scholars have
attempted to glean meaning from the names. Helmut de Boor’s 1924 study “Der Zwerg in
Skandinavien” exemplifies the attitude towards the dwarfs in the early part of the twentieth
century, especially prior to Gould’s comprehensive list. His main points are that dwarfs are
an entirely literary and peripheral figure in Old Icelandic literature and they should not be
equated with those of folk belief of the time leading up to the \textit{Eddas}.\textsuperscript{34} He claims their
presence does, however, indicate that dwarfs must have existed in active folk belief at some
time, and their main roles in that folklore would have been as smiths and stone-dwellers.\textsuperscript{35} In
terms of their names he can make little sense of their meanings and appears to deem the lists

\textsuperscript{27} Compare, for example, the similarities in the discussions of dwarfs between E. O. G. Turville-Petre, \textit{Myth and
de Vries, \textit{Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte}, 252-6; and Rudolf Simek, \textit{Dictionary of Northern Mythology},
\textsuperscript{28} Siegfried Gutenbrunner, “Eddastudien I: Über die Zwerge in der Völuspa Str. 9-13,” in \textit{Arkiv för Nordisk
Filologi} 70 (Dec. 1955).
\textsuperscript{29} B. Sijmons and Hugo Gering, \textit{Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Erste Hälfte: Götterlieder}. Halle,
Germany: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses (Franckesche Stiftungen), 1927.
\textsuperscript{31} Lorenz, \textit{Gylfaginning}.
\textsuperscript{32} Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, \textit{Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis: ordbog over
\textsuperscript{33} Edgar C. Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs in Germanic Tradition,” in \textit{Language and its Ecology: Essays in
\textsuperscript{34} Helmut de Boor, “Der Zwerg in Skandinavien,” in \textit{Festschrift für Eugen Mogk zum 70. Geburtsdag 19. Juli
1924} (Halle an der Saale, Germany: Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1924), 546-9.
\textsuperscript{35} De Boor, “Der Zwerg in Skandinavien,” 551-2; 556.
of dwarf names mere sound devices and exercises in rote memory, as most of the dwarfs do not directly appear elsewhere in myth.\footnote{De Boor, “Der Zwerg in Skandinavien,” 547; 549.}

Just five years later, Gould published his 1929 article containing all of the extant dwarf names, which made a great impact on the study of dwarfs. His etymologies are not particularly original, nor have they all stood the test of time, but the article is notable for setting the example of grouping the names into categories of meaning. By doing this Gould is able to create a more coherent structure into which to fit the names, and subsequently make some observations about what the names tell us. Though paving the way for later, systematic approaches to the names, his study also demonstrates the dangers of arbitrarily grouping names into categories. The primary flaw in Gould’s methodology is to pull the dwarf names out of their various contexts and assemble categories from them – naturally, those categories are based on his (and previous scholars’) preconceptions about the dwarfs, and with such a large number of names he is able to find at least a few that seem to fit into each of his categories. For this reason, his results are unsatisfying and some even have a taste of outlandishness; take, for example, one instance of support for his hypothesis that the dwarfs represent the dead: “The dead dwarf may be described by his activities in life – [...] Grímr, ‘mask,’ i.e. the anonymous stranger who died without telling his name.”\footnote{Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 960.} Not all of his assessments are equally imaginative – the category of dwarf-artisans with their products as their names is still the most plausible way of understanding such names.

Lotte Motz uses the same strategy of pulling all the names out of context to the same unsatisfying effect in her 1973 article “New Thoughts on Dwarf Names.” That study attempts to draw parallels between modern European Christmas and New Years traditions and the meanings of the dwarf names, arguing that dwarf-smiths were originally part of Yule celebrations and lists of dwarf names related to the actual festivities were recited during the celebrations, but throughout the article the overall connection feels forced and arbitrary, much like Gould’s categories. Sure enough, Motz admits that about a third of the names listed in Gould’s article (her source) fit into her festive categories.\footnote{Motz, “New Thoughts on Dwarf-Names in Old Icelandic,” in Frühmittelalterliche Studien 7, No. 1 (1973), 111-2.} Considering the quite broad nature of her subject matter and the large number of dwarf names to choose from, this is roughly how many names one would expect to randomly match up with features of the celebrations. The argument is further undermined by the lack of any concrete evidence
linking dwarfs and the celebrations – without something explicit, such as parallel lists of names or a prominent place of dwarfs among the modern traditions, the article is moot. More useful are Motz’s other works on dwarfs, in particular “The Craftsman in the Mound,” which examines the recurring motif of the underground dwarf-smith in both Old Icelandic literature and Germanic folk traditions, and The Wise One of the Mountain, a study on smiths generally in Germanic myth and folklore with some focus on dwarfs. In these studies dwarfs are given much attention and many of their demonstrable characteristics based on the literary context are elaborated on; these characteristics remain part of what appears to be common knowledge about dwarfs today, and are discussed below.

Since Motz’s inquiries, the dwarfs have received only occasional attention, the names themselves even less so.\(^{39}\) Polomé’s article focuses on the names in Gylfaginning but does not contribute much new beyond a skepticism of long-held assumptions, such as the dwarfs as figures of death.\(^{40}\) One recent work on the dwarfs is Werner Scháfke’s quite extensive 2010 study “Was ist egentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypesemantische Figuranalyse der dvergar in der Sagaliteratur;” this study, however, focuses on dwarfs in the sagas, not the mythology, and is not concerned with the meaning of their names.\(^{41}\) To my knowledge, this thesis is the first study of the names in twenty years, and possibly the only dedicated study of Dvergatal with a focus on the context of Völuspá.

III. Mythological Dwarfs

The entirety of what we confidently know about dwarfs according to the Old Norse mythic texts is so small that it can be concisely summarized in just a few paragraphs; because of this, it is fairly easy to encapsulate what traits dwarfs possessed and the things they were commonly associated with in the mythology. Entries on dwarfs in encyclopedic or dictionary-style works address the same few points, as have most articles focused on dwarfs: Dwarfs are smiths and craftsmen; they can and do produce magical or wondrous objects, including the mead of poetry. They live underground or in stones, and cannot venture into the sun. Some,

\(^{39}\) One way of using the dwarf names today is to lump them in with the other lists of names in Old Icelandic poetry as mere memory-training tools; Guðrún Nordal for example writes that “[c]atalogues in verse form such as these were common in the Middle Ages and were intended for training the memory; the subjects could be as different as a library catalogue and a Latin grammar, and it is probable that this was the purpose of the þulur in the training of the young poets.” Guðrún Nordal, Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5.

\(^{40}\) Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 448.

\(^{41}\) Werner Scháfke, “Was ist egentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypesemantische Figuranalyse der dvergar in der Sagaliteratur,” in Mediaevistik 23 (Peter Lang AG, 2010).
like Alvíss, possess great wisdom. They were either created from the flesh of Ymir (Gylfaginning 14), from Brímir’s blood and Bláinn’s limbs (Völsþá 9), or simply from earth (Völsþá 10), and four dwarfs (Norðri, Suðri, Austri, and Vestri) hold up the four corners of the sky. Their physical appearance is unknown save that Alvíss has a startlingly pale complexion – descriptions of the small size and ugliness of dwarfs come from later sagas. 

That dwarfs, as a whole, are smiths chiefly comes from the attribution of many (or even most of) the magical objects in Old Icelandic literature to their craftsmanship. Dwarfs are said to have created, for example, the Brísingamen (Sórla þáttir 1), Freyr’s pocket-boat Skíðblaðnir, and various legendary swords such as Dáinsleif “er dvergarnir gerðu” (‘which the dwarfs made,’ Skáldskaparmál 50). Because of this, modern scholars approach dwarfs with a built-in assumption that they are all smiths, so much so that Motz regards the words ‘dwarf’ and ‘smith’ as interchangeable in the Prose Edda, asserting that it is sufficient that Reginn of Reginsmál is a smith to assume he is a dwarf, despite contrary indications in text; he is a dwarf in stature only, and his family is not of the dwarf race. When dwarfs definitely appear in the mythological sources, they are explicitly called dvergr (pl. dvergar). Moreover, there are other smiths in the literature who are not dwarfs – the “smíðr nøkkurr” of Gylfaginning 42 who turns out to be a giant, and Völundr of Völundarkviða; the latter possesses features strongly reminiscent of dwarfs but he is definitely not one himself. Therefore, from the available evidence it is safe to say that dwarfs generally function as smiths, but not all smiths are dwarfs.

Skáldskaparmál 57 gives an account of the creation of the mead of poetry from Kvasir’s blood by the dwarfs Fjalarr and Galarr (as does Hávamál 104-10, but it is lacking the agency of the dwarfs), and numerous kennings for mead involving dwarfs confirm this as a widely-known detail. Consequently, a conventional approach to the dwarf names would be to look for references to mead in their meanings, but only three can be plausibly connected to mead: Fjalarr ‘hider;’ Mióðvitnir ‘mead-wolf, mead-prover, mead-seeker;’ and Veigr ‘strong drink.’

42 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 68.
44 See the entry for Reginn in section 3.1; note that this suggests dwarfs are of unusual size, probably small.
47 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 209; de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte, 255.
Fialarr is undoubtedly one of the dwarfs who brewed the mead.\(^{48}\) Mióðvitnir is doubtful as a \textit{heiti} for Fjalarr or Galarr, as it works better as an Óðins\textit{heiti} because Óðinn, not the dwarfs, actually sought out, stole, and drank the mead. Veigr could indeed be a reference to the mead of poetry, but also to Gullveig (\textit{Völuspá} 21). Thus, while the connection to mead is present in \textit{Dvergatal}, it is by no means a significant portion of the names.

Although it is generally ‘known’ that dwarfs live underground and in stones,\(^{49}\) \textit{Völuspá} itself gives conflicting information on their whereabouts, and it requires some imagination to find any names in \textit{Dvergatal} that refer to dwarfs as chthonic beings. On the one hand, \textit{Völuspá} is fairly clear on the dwarfs’ habitat:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
(49) “Stynia dvergar
fyr steindurom,
veggbergs vísir.”\(^{50}\)
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

Doors made of stone (cf. the dwarf Durinn ‘door,’ perhaps) would seem to be a synecdoche for the Salarsteinn ‘hall-stone’ (i.e. a stone like a hall?) mentioned in \textit{Völuspá} 15, whence the dwarfs seek Jøruvellir; and that they are wise ones of the ‘wall-rock’ could indicate that they live in mountains (the imagery invoking a cliff, maybe) or perhaps fissures or caves. On the other hand, in contrast to these possibly underground dwellings, several of the place names where dwarfs supposedly live indicate fields – the aforementioned Jøruvellir ‘sand-fields’\(^{51}\) and Aurvargar ‘loam-fields,’ found together in \textit{Völuspá} 15. A prevailing theory is that the “\textit{salr ór gulli}” (‘golden hall’) in \textit{Völuspá} 36 belongs to the dwarfs because the mysterious figure Sindri is attested elsewhere as the name of a dwarf,\(^{52}\) even though the poem itself does

\(^{48}\) Roberta Frank has argued that parts of the creation of the mead of poetry in \textit{Skáldskaparmál} were invented by Snorri Sturluson to explain kennings such as “\textit{kvasis dreyri}” (‘blood of Kvasir’) which he did not understand. In this case, \textit{Skáldskaparmál} may be the original source for the dwarfs creating the mead of poetry, and all allusions to the mead of poetry in \textit{Dvergatal} would thus be eliminated. Although I find Frank’s arguments to be feasible, it is worthwhile to leave in discussions of dwarfs and the mead of poetry in this study for the sake of inclusiveness – in a survey of the dwarf names such as this, it is better to mention a potential connection, even if it may not be to an original myth, than to leave it out. See also the discussion of Snorri’s agency in section 4.IV of this study. Roberta Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” in \textit{Speculum Norroen: Norse studies in memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre}, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press, 1981), 157-60.


\(^{50}\) Dronke, \textit{The Poetic Edda II}, 20-1. The translation is my own.


not clarify who Sindri is, just that the hall belongs to his race.\textsuperscript{53} If it is indeed to be connected with the dwarfs, the hall stands on Niðavellir, meaning something like ‘dark plains’ or ‘waning moon plains’ (cf. the dwarf Niði ‘waning moon’).\textsuperscript{54} Here the dwarfs appear to be found somewhere above-ground. Perhaps not coincidentally, if one looks to the names of Dvergatal for help, one finds Aurvangr ‘loam-field, gleaming meadow’ and Hlévangr ‘shelter-field.’ Indeed, from the evidence found in Völuspá considered in isolation, one is forced to conclude that dwarfs seem to live above-ground. The only other evidence to the contrary would be the dwarfs Nár (‘corpse,’), Náinn (‘the nearing,’ but conceivably also ‘corpse’), and Dáinn (‘the dead’), whose names could refer to being buried, thus ‘living’ underground.\textsuperscript{55} It seems most prudent, then, to evaluate the insight from Dvergatal as to where the dwarfs live as inconclusive.

These corpse-names have been related to another quality of the mythological dwarfs, namely that they cannot venture into the sun and are correspondingly pale.\textsuperscript{56} The evidence for this trait comes solely from the dwarf Alvíss of Alvíssmál, whom Þórr asks whether he has spent the night with a corpse because he has a pale nose (Alvíssmál 2). At the end of the poem, Alvíss is caught by the sun’s rays and, it has long been assumed, turned to stone (Alvíssmál 35). Acker has argued convincingly that this assumption is deeply flawed – there is no evidence in the poem or elsewhere that all dwarfs necessarily turn to stone in sunlight, only related beings such as giants and trolls, and many of the dwarfs in myth seem to have no issues conducting business in the daylight. Some of them, however, occasionally seem to fear the sun.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, although Dvalinn ‘the delayed’ has been interpreted as a dwarf turned to stone, the connection is probably not viable.\textsuperscript{58} It would be better to interpret the name as a dwarf who has been caught in the daylight like Alvíss without assuming what the consequences are. Leaving this trait behind, the corpse-names can be interpreted one way to refer to the dwarfs’ pale skin, like that of corpses. Glói(nn) ‘the shining’ might also be a

\textsuperscript{53} Sindri is probably derived from sindr, m. ‘cinder, slag;’ Brink and Lindow connect this with the dwarfs as smiths to argue in favour of the golden hall belonging to the dwarfs. In this case Sindri would be the only name in all of Völuspá with any direct connection to smithing! Brink and Lindow, “Place-names in eddic poetry,” 178.

\textsuperscript{54} Brink and Lindow, “Place-names in eddic poetry,” 178; Dronke, The Poetic Edda II, 16.

\textsuperscript{55} Gould runs with this image, arguing that the dwarfs are dead creatures and thus related to draugr. This theory has not held up over the decades. Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 959-60.

\textsuperscript{56} Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 443.

\textsuperscript{57} Acker, “Dwarf-lore,” 219.

\textsuperscript{58} Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 220.
reflection of the dwarf’s pale skin. Besides these few names, there is no other evidence in the mythological literature for the paleness of dwarfs.

Alvíss is also the primary piece of evidence for the wisdom of dwarfs; as he engages in a wisdom contest with Þórr in Alvíssmál he is shown to process great knowledge of the names of things. A few names from Dvergatal corroborate wisdom – Vitr ‘wise,’ Nýráðr ‘new-council,’ Reginn ‘advisor, ruler,’ and Ráðsviðr ‘council-wise.’ Elsewhere, dwarfs are not sought out for their wisdom, but rather their ability to produce magical artifacts; nor is it explicitly noted that they are wise creatures, although the ability to use magic may, at the time of active transmission, have been considered a type of knowledge.59

The three contradictory origins for the dwarfs can be reconciled if one considers them poetic circumlocutions for one basic concept: that dwarfs were originally made from the Earth. Völuspá seemingly gives two separate origins for the dwarfs – that, on one hand, they were made “ór Brímir blóði / ok ór Bláinn[s] leggiom” (‘from Brimir’s blood / and from Bláinn’s limbs;’ 9), or simply “ór iǫrðo” (‘from earth;’ 10); either way it would seem that the Æsir were the agents of creation. Gylfaginning, on the other hand, says that they were quickened like maggots “í holdi Ymis” (‘in [the] flesh of Ymir’; 14). This appears to be three separate origins, which Dronke uses as support for her theory of Dvergatal as a poorly-integrated interpolation.60 However, a little investigation into Brímir and Bláinn reveals that there may be some poetic circumlocutions occurring in this section of Völuspá. Brímir is only attested in Völuspá as a giant (9 and 37) and in Gylfaginning 51 as the name of a drinking hall, which “is obviously a misinterpretation of Völuspá 37... where Brímir is the name of the giant and not the room itself.”61 Meanwhile, Bláinn is only attested in Völuspá 9 and as a dwarf listed in the Þulur.62 These beings are thus quite enigmatic and have led to the supposition that they may be alternative names of Ymir.63 This is because the various body parts of Ymir were used to create the cosmos, as recounted in Gylfaginning 8: “Peir tóku Ymi ok fluttu i mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jörðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vǫtnin. Jörðin var gor af holdinu en björgin af beinum” (‘They took Ymir and flung him into the middle of Ginnungagap, and made from him the Earth, from his blood the sea and lakes. The

60 Dronke, The Poetic Edda II, 67.
61 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 44.
63 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 38; 44.
earth was made from the flesh and the mountains from the bones’). To create dwarfs from blood and limbs in Völuspá thus parallels this formation in Gylfaginning and strongly suggests that Brimir and Bláinn are simply Ymir, especially since the specific words match in the poem and the prose (blōð, hold, jǫrð, bein, etc.). The resulting interpretation of Völuspá 9-10 is thus: Dwarfs were made from Ymir’s blood (the sea) and limbs (mountains) but also the earth (Ymir’s flesh). Gylfaginning 14 corroborates the latter origin. Since the creation of the dwarfs did not occur during the initial shaping of the Earth, it must be assumed that these were not raw materials directly from Ymir’s body but rather from the Earth once it had already taken shape. One need not give priority to any of the three components of dwarfs; suffice it to say that they were probably created from the Earth, from a mythological perspective.

Gylfaginning 8 relates how Bur’s sons set a dwarf underneath each corner of the sky to hold it up: Austri, Vestri, Norðri, and Suðri. This is corroborated by: the presence of those four dwarfs in Dvergatal; the kennings “níðbyrðra Norðra” (‘burden of the kinsmen of Norðri’ = [sky]) in Hallfreðr Vandræðaskáld’s Olafsdrápa 26, “byrði dverganna” (‘burden of the dwarfs’ = [sky]) and “hjálm Vestra ok Austra, Suðra, Norðra” (‘helm of Vestri and Austri, Suðri, Norðri’ = [sky]; Skáldskaparmál 23); and the use of dvergar in Old Norse to refer to the beams supporting a roof. De Vries postulates that this is an imitation of the four angels standing in the four corners of the sky in Revelation 7. The composition Olafsdrápa is tentatively dated to Hallfreðr’s lifetime (the second half of the tenth century) and Hallfreðr was certainly influenced by the conversion to Christianity, and in any case the verses could have been composed or modified later and still attributed to him – based on language and integration with the saga which contains it, the poem is probably not later than the twelfth century. It is plausible that all extant accounts of the dwarfs as personifying the four cardinal directions contain influences from Christianity. Nevertheless, it does appear to have been common mythological knowledge at the time of writing the manuscripts in which

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64 Text from Faulkes, Edda, 11. The translation is my own.
65 Throughout this study the kennings are quoted in the following format: “kenning in Old Icelandic” (‘literal English translation’ = [referent]).
66 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 358.
67 De Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte, 255. “And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree” (KJV Revelation 7:1).
Völuspá is found, even if that common knowledge was that of Christians and not of practicing pagans.

3. DVERGATAL

I. Detailed List of the Dwarf Names

Legend:

CR = Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda (GKS 2365 4to): Völuspá
H = Hauksbók (AM 544 4to): Völuspá
CRPr = Codex Regius of the Prose Edda (GKS 2367 4to): Gylfaginning
T = Codex Trajectinus (MS 1374): Gylfaginning
U = Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11): Gylfaginning
W = Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.): Gylfaginning
A = AM 748 I 4to: Þulur
B = AM 757a 4to: Þulur

Mótsognir (H & Gylf. Móðsognir) – ‘Wrath-Sucker,’ ‘Weary-Sucker;’ ‘Wrath-Sea,’ ‘Weary-Sea’

Variants: CR, B motsognir; H, T, U, W moðsognir; CRPr mo[ð]sognir (torn); A motsøgni

Construction: Possibly a compound of móð- from móðr, m. ‘agitated mind, wrath’ or as an adjective ‘weary,’ and -sognir from súga ‘to suck.’ In CR, the -ð- has become devoiced due

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69 This section should be considered a work-in-progress, as entire articles can be written on the etymology of one particular name, and one could spend a lifetime researching the minutiae of Dvergatal. The list therefore represents what can be realistically accomplished in the time and space appropriate to a Master’s thesis, and it does not purport to be the final word on the etymologies, merely one student’s findings from the guiding perspective of determining transparency.

70 Rather than providing all variants in all MSS, I primarily list the normalized versions of the names found in Dronke, Lorenz, and Faulkes, referring to variants when their differences seem significant. For this reason, the Gylfaginning names are not referred to by manuscript but rather the work, abbreviated as Gylf. Unless otherwise specified, names are given in their normalized form from CR. Dronke provides a table of the dwarf name variants in all extant versions of Völuspá and the Þulur (see Dronke, The Poetic Edda II, 90-2) but these variants do not always agree precisely with the more recent readings found in the Medieval Nordic Text Archive. This may be partially due to the continued degradation of the manuscripts over time; in some cases, what is legible today differs from what was legible thirty or a hundred years ago. In particular, early scholarly efforts to read the manuscripts sometimes caused irreparable damage to the pages – for example, obscuring watermarks can be seen on CR where water has been poured over the text to make it temporarily more legible.
to proximity to -s-. The latter element -sognir is probably formed from the stem sog- of súga’s preterite participle soginn plus the suffix -nir, making the agent noun ‘sucker.’

Another way to understand the second element is sogn- plus -ir; in that case, a relationship to sog, n. ‘eddy, sea, ship’ (poetic) is possible, and sogn, m. is attested in the Old Norse place-name Sogn (‘Sognefjord’) and poetically where it means ‘sea, lake.’

Transparency: The variant in H and Gylf. is probably relatively transparent. Less certain is whether native speakers would have understood the -t- in CR as a devoiced -ð- and thus interpreted the element as ‘wrath-’ or ‘weary-.’ That Gylf., which is younger, contains the -ð- may indicate that the scribe (or some other intermediary) changed it from -t- to make it look and sound more like the usual móð- found in other names. It could also mean that Mótsognir was an opaque name.

Although the intended meaning is difficult to pinpoint, móðr remains the best option as the first element, as it is present in many other compound names, both as the first and the second element, for example: Móð(h)eðr, Móðólfðr, Móðrekr, Ármóðr, Bjarmmóðr, Fjólmóðr, Reginmóðr, Þórmóðr, and Ólmóðr. However, the possibility of punning with other words should not be ignored, such as with móti, n. ‘stamp, mark’ or ‘meeting, encounter’ and móð, n. ‘hay-waste, seed, fruit.’

Attempts to construct a coherent meaning have been, to be frank, strange. De Vries translates it as “der die Kraft aus dem Körper saugt” (‘he who sucks strength from the body’) and LP translates “som suger mod i seg” (‘he who sucks courage into himself’). I choose to translate the compound relatively unaltered into English equivalents, even if this does not necessarily clarify the meaning.

**Durinn** – ‘Sleep,’ ‘Door’
Construction: Possibly derived from dúrr, m. ‘nap’ or dúra ‘to nap’ using the masculine suffix -inn; dur- is also found in the compound durvǫrðr, m. ‘door-guard’ with the meaning ‘door,’ and dura- is found in several other compounds with the same meaning.\footnote{Geir T. Zoëga, \textit{A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), dúrr, dúra, dur-vǫrðr, dura-dómr; de Vries, \textit{Etymologisches Wörterbuch}, 88.}

Transparency: Both ‘sleep’ and ‘door’ likely registered with the audience.

\textbf{Nýi} – ‘Waxing Moon/New Moon’


Transparency: Probably transparent. Nýi is also homophonous to the masc. nom. sg. weak form of the adjective nýr.

\textbf{Niði} – ‘Waning Moon,’ ‘New Moon’

Construction: The substantive nið, n. pl. ‘waning moon’ or ‘new moon’ plus the weak masculine suffix -i.\footnote{Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 443.}

Transparency: Probably transparent. Niði is also homophonous to the accusative singular case of niðr, m. ‘son, kinsman, relative,’ which may have brought to mind associations with that word; however, an accusative substantive would not have been perceived as a nominative name, and Niði’s pairing with Nýi makes the meaning ‘waning moon’ most likely.\footnote{De Vries, \textit{Etymologisches Wörterbuch}, 409; Zoëga, \textit{Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic}, niðr.}

\textbf{Norðri} – ‘North’; \textbf{Suðri} – ‘South’; \textbf{Austri} – ‘East’; \textbf{Vestri} – ‘West’

Construction: norðr, n. ‘the north;’ suðr, n. ‘the south;’ austr, n. ‘the east;’ vestr, n. ‘the west’ plus the suffix -i to form masculine names.

Transparency: Certainly transparent. The -i ending of the names is also their declension in the dative singular, which would have been familiar to native speakers in expressions such as frá vestri ‘from the west,’ and etc.\footnote{Zoëga, \textit{Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic}, norðr; suðr; austr; vestr.}
These dwarfs were probably well-known in mythology as the bearers of the four corners of the sky, and thus personified the cardinal directions in figurative language (see section 2.III for a more detailed discussion).\footnote{Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 443.}

**Alþiófr** – ‘All-thief’

Construction: The intensifying prefix *al-* (carrying the meaning ‘all,’ as opposed to the prefix *all-* which has the more general meaning of ‘very;’ cf. OI *aleiga* ‘one’s entire property’ versus *allsterkr* ‘very strong’)\footnote{Haraldur Bernhardsson, *Icelandic: 5th Draft*, 235.} combined with the substantive *þjófr*, m. ‘thief.’\footnote{Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 220; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 443}

Transparency: The name uses a common prefix combined with a common substantive, thus its literal meaning was probably quite transparent.

Could “*der, der alles stielht*” (‘he who steals everything’) potentially refer to death?\footnote{Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 220.}

**Dvalinn** – ‘Delayed,’ ‘Delayer’

Construction: Probably a nominalization of the preterite participle *dvalinn* from *dvala* ‘to delay, put off’ or *dvelja* ‘to delay.’ Scholars in the past have attempted to link Dvalinn with ‘winter sleep’ (hibernation) through *dvöl*, f. ‘delay’ and Danish *dvale* ‘hibernation,’ but there is no evidence that *dvöl* ever carried the meaning of ‘hibernation’ in Old Icelandic.\footnote{De Vries, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 88.} De Vries connects Dvalinn to *dvala*, f. ‘hesitation,’ which would require a conversion to a masculine substantive through the suffix -*inn*\footnote{Haraldur Bernhardsson, *Icelandic: 5th Draft*, 233.}.

Transparency: Any native speaker would have recognized *Dvalinn* as the masculine preterite participle of *dvala* or *dvelja*. The suffix -*in* (as well as -*an*, -*un*-) was frequently used to create nouns and it is possible the audience might have perceived Dvalinn as a noun formed by attaching a suffix to something like *dval-* or *dvöl*-. An alternative translation in light of an agent-forming suffix could consequently be ‘delayer.’

Gutenbrunner imagines Dvalinn as a dwarf turned to stone (thus eternally ‘delayed’) when struck by sunbeams, a common (but imaginative) interpretation what happens to the

\footnote{De Vries, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 88.}

dwarf Alvíss in Alvíssmál (see section 2.III for a discussion of dwarfs and sunlight). In that case the name could be an allusion to that poem and this dwarf could be Alvíss in the same way that an Öðinsheiti disguises Óðinn. On the other hand, Alvíss himself mentions the dwarf Dvalinn by referring to the sun as “Dvalins leika” (Dvalinn’s plaything; Alvíssmál 16); could the dwarf be referring to himself by another name?

Dvalinn occurs in the Öðinsheiti Hanga Dvalinn, and as a dwarf is attested in Hávamál 143, Alvíssmál 16, and Gylfaginning 15, as well as the father of Norns according to Fáfnismál 13; he was also a dwarf-smithe who helped to make the necklace of the Brisings (Sörla þáttr). Finally, Dvalinn (or variant Dvalarr) is also a stag who eats the leaves of Yggdrasill (Grímnismál 33; Gylfaginning 15).

**Bivőrr (H & Gylf. Bifurr) – ‘Trembler’**

Construction: Possibly derived from or related to the word bifask, ‘to tremble, shake’ or ‘to be moved,’ ultimately from PGmc *bibōjanan ~ bibēnan* (cf. Old English beofian ‘to tremble, to quake’). In this case Bivőrr/Bifurr might have been constructed from the stem bif- plus the suffix -őrr/-urr to form a masculine name. An alternative explanation of Bivőrr as a borrowing from Low German bever (from PGmc *bê bruż*, cf. Old English beofor) has proved fruitless and far-fetched, in part because Old Icelandic already had the attested word hjórr, m. ‘beaver, beaver pelt’ from *bebruż.*

Transparency: Unknown, but an association with bifask is quite plausible.

If ‘trembler’ is an accurate translation, this name could be the personification of an earthquake.

**Bávőrr – [Unknown]**

Variants: CR bavaːr; H, CRPr bafvːr; T bafr; U bauur; W bavur; A blavor; B bavor

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89 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 220. Unfortunately, I am unable to access Gutenbrunner’s original article at this time, thus I must rely on Lorenz for Gutenbrunner’s work throughout this paper.
91 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 67.
92 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 45; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 221; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 35.
94 De Vries deems this outright impossible. Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 22.
95 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 40.
Construction: The only suggestion for a source has been Gutenbrunner’s PGmc *babō, related to Latin faba ‘bean, barley, mead,’ which de Vries in particular dismisses as unappealing. However, both barley and mead appear as possible elements in other dwarf names (cf. below: Nipingr for barley and Míðvitnir and Veigr for mead), thus meaning alone is no reason to dismiss *babō. More significant is the lack of surviving attested words demonstrably from *babō, and furthermore *babō is not listed in Orel’s Handbook of Germanic Etymology. Factors for finding other possibilities include the following:

- The initial consonant b- would have been b- in Proto-Germanic.
- All MSS show a short -a- as the initial vowel following b-; the long -ā- is therefore editorial normalization, which could be misleading.
- The medial consonant is either -v- or -f- in all MSS, thus the corresponding consonant in the Proto-Germanic word would probably have been -b-.
- The ending -orr (MSS -aR, -ur, -R, -r) is certainly a suffix as in Bivorr/Bifurr, and could have formed an agent noun in this case.

No attested words match these criteria exactly. I have only been able to find bófi ‘rogue’ (< PGmc *bōbōn) to match the consonants, which has been related to Icelandic babba ‘to say, to talk, to chat;’ the long -ō- in the Proto-Germanic could thus potentially have resulted in a name related to bófi with a short -a-.97

Transparency: Unknown. The large number of variant spellings may indicate that the name was opaque.

Bávorr has presented much difficulty to previous scholars, leading some to consider it a mere sound variation of Bivorr. However, this is the only dwarf name for which this argument has been used – all other names which have sound variations, despite being problematic, have not been dismissed as mere phonological devices – why, then, should we abandon the search in this particular case?

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96 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 22; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 222.
97 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 51.
98 “[W]ohl lautvariation neben Bifurr” (‘Probably sound variation alongside Bifurr’); de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 22; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 444;
**Bǫmburr** – ‘Drum, Drummer, Boomer’?

Variants: CR bǫmbur; H bǫmbur; CRPr bavbavr; T baumbr; U bamba; W bumbur; A, B bvmbr

Construction: Possibly *bǫmb-* plus the suffix -urr to form a masculine noun. An Old Icelandic word containing *bǫmb-* is not attested but Old Icelandic bumba, f. means ‘drum’ and modern Icelandic bumba, f., means ‘drum’ with secondary meanings ‘paunch,’ ‘heavy-set horse,’ and ‘fat barrel,’ likely figurative terms derived from the primary meaning.99

Probably related words are Danish bumpe, ‘strike with a fist;’ Norwegian bomme, ‘to drum’ (apparently from Old Norse bumba, ‘to drum’).100 German bummen and Dutch bommen ‘to hum, buzz.’ These words have no reconstructed Proto-Germanic root but seem to have a common ancestor, perhaps of a form beginning with *bam-* to account for u-umlaut of -a- to -o- in Old Icelandic.

Transparency: Unknown, but speakers may have related Bǫmburr to bumba.

Some scholars have chosen to interpret this name as ‘the fat one’ but the above evidence shows that its meaning in Medieval Iceland was more likely to be ‘drum’ or perhaps ‘drummer, boomer’ if an agent noun/name.101 The booming of a drum could be interpreted as a thunderclap, or the explosion during a volcanic eruption (see section 4.I).

**CR Nóri (Gylf. Nori) – ‘The Small;’ ‘Ship’**

Construction: Previous scholars have translated Nóri as ‘the shrunken one’ based on similarity to Old Saxon naru and Old English nearu ‘tight, pressed, pressed together’ with the Old Icelandic word reconstructed as *nǫrr (dative *nǫrve). However, Modern Icelandic nóri now means ‘a little cut off piece’ or ‘tot, little fellow.’102 Orel connects the Old Norse word nóir ‘ship’ to the PGmc root *nōwaz, related to Sanskrit náu, Latin nāuis, etc. meaning ‘ship.’103 In this case the name is most likely the stem nō- plus the masculine suffix -ri, as the

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100 Bokmålsordboka (Universitetet i Bergen i samarbeid med Språkrådet, 2016), http://ordbok.uib.no/perl/ordbok.cgi?OPP=+bumba&ant_bokmaal=5&ant_nynorsk=5&begge=+&ordbok=begg e.
102 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 222.
103 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 289.
suffix -r in nör is the masculine nominative singular ending and would probably not have been re-evaluated as part of the stem.

Transparency: An association with nör ‘ship’ is quite likely, and the existence of Modern Icelandic nóri suggests an unattested word relating to ‘small’ in Old Icelandic.

Nóri is also a sea-king in the Æður.104

_Gylf._ Öri - ‘Quarrel, Quarreler;’ ‘Wanderer;’ ‘The Insane?’

Construction: The simplest derivation could be from óra ‘to quarrel,’ plus the weak masculine suffix -i, thus ‘quarrel’ or ‘quarreler.’105 If not, it is possibly related to Old English wōrian ‘to wander, to roam, to deteriorate from age’ and thus descended from PGmc *wōra.106 Öri could also be related to ærr ‘crazy, confused, furious’107 or órar, f. pl. ‘numbness, (fits of) insanity.’108 De Vries’ translation “der berückende” (‘the captivated one’) does not appear to be supported by any attested meaning of ærr.109

Transparency: The derivation from óra is probably transparent, and the transparency of the meaning ‘insane’ is strongly suggested by similarity órar as well as, to a lesser extent, ærr.

Óri is also the name of a serpent in the Æður (Orma heiti).110

Án – ‘The Lacking’?

Construction: De Vries considers Án a shortened form of the (reconstructed) name *Avinn, constructed out from the genitive morpheme ánar < *AwnaR < *aða-winaR. Thus, the name would be a compound of að(a)- (extant as aðal, n. ‘chief, head, noble, courtly, etc.’ in compounds) and -vinr ‘friend.’ The etymological translation would thus be ‘noble friend.’111

Transparency: The derivation from the ancestors of aðal and vinr would probably not have been apparent to the audience, as most of the recognizable elements in the words have been lost. Án is also homonymous to the preposition án ‘without,’ but it is highly unlikely that the

104 Simek, _Dictionary of Northern Mythology_, 236.
105 De Vries, _Etymologisches Wörterbuch_, 419.
106 Lorenz, _Gylfaginning_, 222; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 444;
107 Zoéga, _Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic_, ærr; de Vries, _Etymologisches Wörterbuch_, 684.
108 De Vries, _Etymologisches Wörterbuch_, 419; Zoéga, _Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic_, órar.
109 De Vries, _Etymologisches Wörterbuch_, 420; 684.
111 De Vries, _Etymologisches Wörterbuch_, 1; 9.
audience would have considered this a preposition in the midst of a list of proper names. Perhaps they could have perceived it as a nominalization meaning ‘(the) lacking,’ even though this would have been an undesirably negative connotation in a name: Án is also an Old Icelandic personal name, attested as the name of, for example, the saga character Án Hrímagni in Laxdæla saga.

Ánarr (H & Gylf. Ónarr) – ‘Hope;’ ‘Hoper’

Construction: The word ón is a variant of ván, f. ‘hope, expectation,’112 to which the suffix -arr could be attached to form a masculine name. De Vries instead derives Ánarr and Ónarr from the name Án (see Án above).113

Transparency: The meaning ‘hope, hoper’ is plausibly transparent.

Some scholars have connected Ánarr with Annar (the husband of Jørð in Gylfaginning), whose name means ‘other, second,’ but Sijmons and Gering do not find this possible, due to their reconstruction of the name in Proto-Germanic as *anu-harjis.114 Linguistically speaking the dwarf and the god probably come from different origins, but this does not mean the audience would have seen no connection between the two.

Ái – ‘Great-Grandfather;’ ‘River;’ (‘Owner’)

Construction: Identical in form to ái ‘great-grandfather,’ but alternatively it could be a derivative of á, f. ‘river’ plus the suffix -i to form a masculine name.

Transparency: Fully transparent for the meaning ‘great-grandfather,’ but uncertain for the construction meaning ‘river.’ A pun with ái, the present indicative singular of eiga ‘to own’ is also possible.

CRPr & T Óinn – ‘The Fearful’

Construction: Óinn could be derived from ó-, the stem of óask ‘to be afraid,’ plus the suffix -inn to form a masculine name. Thus the meaning would be something like ‘the shy one, the fearful one.’115

Transparency: Plausible.

112 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, ón.
113 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 9: 419.
114 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 222; Sijmons and Gering, Kommentar, 14.
115 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 223; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 417.
Óinn is the name of a serpent in the *Pulur (Orma heiti).*

**Miðövitnir** (CRPr Móðvitnir) – ‘Mead-Wolf,’ ‘Mead-Prover,’ ‘Mead-Seeker;’ CRPr: ‘Wrath-Wolf,’ ‘Weary Wolf’

- **Variants:** miðövitnir in all MSS except CRPr, which reads móðvitnir
- **Construction:** Compound; likely the variant stem *mið- of mjǫðr*, m. ‘mead’ plus *vitnir*, m. ‘wolf’ (meaning somewhat contested, see below).

**Transparency:** The name in *Völuspá* likely has something to do with mead, whereas the CRPr variant could alternatively mean ‘wrath-wolf’ or ‘weary wolf.’

*Vitnir*, m. ‘wolf’ is a poetic construction. Literally taken, *-vitnir* can be seen as the stem *vītn- of the verb *vītna* ‘witness, prove, attest (to something)’ plus the suffix *-ir* to form a masculine agent noun/name ‘witness, prover, attester.’ Alternatively, Gutenbrunner takes the stem *vīt- of the verb *vītja* ‘to go to a place, to visit’ or ‘to look for something’ plus the suffix *-nir* to form a masculine name ‘seeker.’

The scholarly consensus is that CRPr móð- is simply a variant of mjǫð-, yet in Old Icelandic móðr, m. means ‘wrath, excitement, passion’ and módr as an adjective means ‘weary, worn out.’ Moreover, the word mjǫðr must have arisen through the u-breaking of Proto-Norse *mëduR > Old Icelandic mjǫðr*, analogous to Proto-Norse *skelduR > Old Icelandic skjǫldr.* For the *-j- to drop is irregular and there is no attested variant of mjǫðr lacking it. It therefore possible that in CRPr the word instead means something like ‘wrath-wolf’ or ‘passion-seeker’ in light of the above alternatives for *-vitnir.* The scholarly desire to see móð- as a variant of mjǫð- has probably been influenced by the creation of the mead of poetry by the dwarfs Fjalarr and Galarr (*Skáldskaparmál* G57; see section 2.III); since dwarfs are thus closely associated with mead, the mythological connection has superseded what is indicated by the textual and linguistic evidence.

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Miðvitnir may at least allude to the mead of poetry; and ‘mead-wolf’ or ‘mead-seeker’ would function quite well as an Ódinsheiti, as Óðinn was the one who actually sought out and stole the mead of poetry.

Veigr, etc.\textsuperscript{123} – ‘Strong Drink;’ ‘Vigour;’ etc.

Variants: CR Veigr(i); H veggr CRPr, T, W vigr; U viGrün

Construction: Perhaps veig, f. ‘strong beverage, strength’ plus the suffix -r(i) to form a masculine name. Veig is descended from PGmc *waiȝō (whence also Gothic waihjo ‘battle’),\textsuperscript{124} itself derived from *wīxanan ~ *wīȝanan; numerous descendants thereof have the meaning ‘to fight’ (OI vega, Gothic weihan, Old English wīȝan).\textsuperscript{125} Gutenbrunner also connects veigr with Old High German weigar ‘defiant, reluctant, proud, stiff.’\textsuperscript{126}

Transparency: Several variant spellings in different manuscripts allow for multiple interpretations. This indicates that Veigr (or whatever its original form may have been) was perhaps not so transparent and reinterpreted one of several more recognizable words:

- H reads as the variant veggr, which is identical to veggr, m. ‘wall;’ ‘wedge.’\textsuperscript{127}

- CRPr, T, W read vigr, identical to vigr, f. ‘spear’ (poetic). Can also be read with a long vowel as vígr, which would relate to vígr, ‘in a fighting condition’ and víg, n. ‘battle’ (both from PGmc wīȝan, derived from *wīxanan ~ *wīȝanan).\textsuperscript{128}

- U reads viggr, which resembles vigg, n. ‘steed’ (poetic) plus the suffix -r to form a masculine name. Vigg is descended from PGmc *weȝjan and related to OEng wicȝ, Old Frisian widze, and Old Saxon wigg, all meaning ‘steed.’ *weȝjan is derived from *weȝanan whose various Germanic descendants (including OI vega), have some combination of the meanings ‘to move, to carry, to weigh’ (eg. Gothic ga-wigan ‘to move, to shake;’ Old English weȝan ‘to move, to bear, to carry’).\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{123} Veigr is normalized as such because CR appears to read thus; however, the Medieval Nordic Text Archive reads ‘Veigri.’ The manuscript is difficult to read in that place, but there does appear to be an -i written after Veigr, and it is darker than the surrounding letters – perhaps it is a later correction or addition? http://clarino.uib.no/menota/document-element?session-id=242765018157677&cpos=1269793&corpus=menota
\textsuperscript{124} Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 440.
\textsuperscript{125} Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 465.
\textsuperscript{126} Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 223-4.
\textsuperscript{127} Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 950; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 650.
\textsuperscript{128} Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 465.
\textsuperscript{129} Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 452.
Therefore, it would appear that Veigr was a complex name for the audience of Völuspá. Its variants and their likely meanings are connected with PGmc roots for strength, battle, and movement. How a native speaker might have interpreted the name is difficult to say, but it is highly possible that many of the Old Icelandic words proposed above may have come to mind, especially for a native speaker. I have thus chosen (with tongue somewhat in cheek) a similar-sounding English translation for Veigr with similar connotations (and a very distant relative of veig, etc. through Latin vigor).

Veig- is also found as an element in the compound name Gullveig (Völuspá 21-2).

Gandálfr – ‘(Magic) Staff-Elf’

Construction: Probably a compound of gandr, m. ‘magic staff, magic,’ also ‘wolf’130 plus álfr/alfr, m. ‘elf, fairy.’131

Transparency: Probably highly transparent. The meaning ‘wolf’ for gandr is found primarily as the second element in compound names, not the first, thus a meaning ‘wolf-elf’ is unlikely (cf. Vánargandr ‘wolf of the Vanir’ = Fenrir; Jórmungandr ‘wolf of the horse/ox’ (Jórmuni is also an Óðinsheiti132) = ‘wolf of Óðinn’).133

Vindálfr – ‘Wind-Elf, Storm-Elf’

Construction: A compound of vindr, m. ‘wind, storm’134 plus álfr/alfr, m. ‘elf, fairy.’135

Transparency: Probably highly transparent.

Práinn (Gylf. Próinn) – ‘The Defiant;’ ‘The Yearning;’ ‘The Twisted’?

Variants: CR, U, A B þrainn; H þrainn; CRPr, T þroī; W þroen

Construction: The suffix -inn attached to þrá-/pra-, from one of several words. Previous scholars have connected Práinn with the adjective þrár ‘defiant.’136 Other possibilities include þrá, f. ‘longing, yearning’ and the clearly related þrá ‘to long, to yearn.’137 Práinn is written as þrainn in both versions of Völuspá without the long -á-; it could thus be related to

130 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 155.
131 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 5-6.
132 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 295.
133 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 155; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 444; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 224.
134 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 665.
135 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 5-6; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 444; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 224.
136 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 225.
137 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, þrá.
PGmc *þrēanan which, according to Orel, is the ancestor of the proper name Þrainn. *þrēanan seems to have had a meaning like ‘turn, twist’ in light of Old English drāwan ‘to turn, to twist,’ Old Saxon thraian and Old High German drāen ‘to turn.’

Transparency: The connection to prár ‘defiant’ and prá ‘longing, yearning’ is most certain; a relationship to an unattested word meaning ‘twist’ is naturally much less certain, but worth taking into consideration.

CR & Gylf. Þekkr – ‘The Liked’

Construction: A nominalization of the adjective þekkr ‘agreeable, liked.’ All variants of Þekkr show the doubled consonant resulting from assimilation of -nk- > -kk- from PGmc *pankjaz, making any relation to þekja ‘to thatch, cover’ or þekja, f. ‘thatch’ unlikely.

Transparency: The name Þekkr and the adjective þekkr are identical in form, making transparency almost certain.

Þekkr is also attested as an epithet and Óðinsheit (Grímnismál 46).

Þorinn – ‘The Daring’

Construction: Possibly the stem por- of the verb pora ‘to dare (to), to have the courage to do something’ plus the suffix -inn to form a masculine name. Por- is also the first element of many personal names derived from the name of the god Þórr. In addition, -porinn is attested as an adjective in the compound adjective gunnþorinn (poetic) ‘battle-brave,’ where it means ‘brave.’

Transparency: The meaning ‘the daring’ is probably transparent due to the closeness to pora (porinn would be the masculine preterite participle of pora if the verb were not intransitive), and the affinity to personal names beginning with por- would not have been missed due to their high frequency.

H Prár – ‘The Tenacious’

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138 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 426.
139 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 226; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 607.
140 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 416.
142 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 224.
143 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 616.
144 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 617; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, gunnr.
Construction: A nominalization of the adjective þrár ‘tenacious, persevering’ (< Proto-Norse *þranhaz,145 < PGmc *þranxaz;146 cf. Modern Icelandic þrár ‘tenacious, persevering’).147

Transparency: More or less certain.

Gylf. Prór – ‘Increase’

Construction: Probably the stem þró- from þróask ‘to increase, to grow’ or ‘to thrive’ plus the masc. nom. ending -r to form a masculine name.148

Transparency: Probably fairly transparent. A number of translations have been proposed for Prór including ‘the fertile,’ ‘the inseminator/the fertilizer’ (‘der Befruchtende’),149 ‘the popular,’ and ‘the chubby.’150 I prefer to tread carefully and translate faithfully to the source verb.

Prór is also an Öðinsheiti (Grímnismál 49), as well as the name of a boar and a sword (Þulur).151

Vitr – ‘The Wise’

Construction: Most likely a nominalization of the adjective vitr ‘wise.’152

Transparency: Highly transparent. Many related words and compounds relating to wisdom have vitr- as the first element (eg. vitra, f. ‘wisdom;’ vitringr, m. ‘wise man;’ vitrleikr, m. ‘wisdom, sagacity’).153

Litr – ‘Colour;’ ‘Oar’

Construction: Probably a nominalization of litr, m. ‘colour.’154 In Völuspá 18 the word lito (litr, in the accusative plural) probably means ‘complexion’ in the context of Askr and Embla,155 although Anatoly Liberman proposes an alternative: The word litom in the line “ferk opt litom þopta” (‘I often travel by means of oars in boats’) in Berghúapátr may designate ‘oars,’ as well as in the line “langt myndir þú nú kominn, Þórr, ef þú litom fœrir”

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145 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 619.
146 Ore, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 424.
147 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 619.
149 Sijmons and Gering, Kommentar, 14.
150 Lorenz, Gyfaginning, 225.
151 Lorenz, Gyfaginning, 225; Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 329.
152 Lorenz, Gyfaginning, 226.
153 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, vitr; vitra; vitringr; vitrleikr.
154 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 359; Lorenz, Gyfaginning, 226.
155 Dronke translates lito góða as 'comely hues;' The Poetic Edda II, 11.
(‘you would have been right in it if you had worked your oars’) in Hárbarðzlióð 50. He admits this is speculative but the reading is supported by evidence of words from various Germanic languages with the consonants l-l/l-d that seem to denote a long piece of wood or stump. Liberman thus proposes the secondary/symbolic meaning ‘penis.’ As such, Litr could also mean ‘oar’ assuming a derivation with the suffix -r from the stem *lit- of a noun with an uncertain gender.

Transparency: Similarity to litr, m. ‘colour’ would have been quite transparent; the relation to lítill is (probably) less obvious; and finally, as *lit- is only possibly attested in one or two instances, it was likely a rarer word for ‘oar’ – if the audience happened know litr, m. ‘oar’ as a colloquial term it would have been highly transparent, less so if the word was not a masculine a-stem.

Litr happens to be the dwarf that Þórr kicks onto Baldr’s funeral pyre in Gylfaginning 49. It has been argued that Litr is not an original part of the Baldr tradition, but is taken arbitrarily from Dvergatal; yet, that this passage in Gylfaginning could be influenced by Dvergatal in Völuspá does not indicate that the choice of name is necessarily arbitrary. The moment when Þórr kicks Litr into the fire appears superfluous, serving only to showcase Þórr’s rage if one does not consider Litr’s name. However, one could interpret Litr’s name as meaning ‘colour’ and apply it to the story – Þórr kicks Litr, a personification of colour, into the flames, symbolically burning colour to lament the death of Baldr. Alternatively, if Litr is taken to mean ‘oar’ it is a rather appropriate scenario that Þórr should kick an oar onto a boat.

Nár158 – ‘Corpse’

Construction: Identical in form to nár, m. ‘corpse.’

Transparency: Certainly transparent; nár is used elsewhere in Völuspá to mean ‘corpse:’ “slítr nái neffól” (‘pale-beaked rips corpses;’ 47).159

H & Gylf. Náinn – ‘The Nearing;’ ‘Corpse’

Construction: Either formed from ná ‘to get a hold of, to reach, to overtake’ plus the suffix -inn to form a masculine name, or the nominalization of the adjective náinn ‘near,’ itself

157 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 226.
158 In H and Gylf., Nár comes much earlier in the list: In the place where Nár occurs in CR we find instead Nýr.
derived from ná (PGmc *nǣxwēnan ~ *nǣxwjanan\(^{160}\)). Another possibility is a construction based on nár ‘corpse.’\(^{161}\)

Transparency: Proximity to Nár results in two opposing forces. On the one hand, there is the echo of the syllable ná- and the corresponding meaning ‘corpse.’ On the other hand, in a name list it would have been jarring and redundant to have the same meaning repeated twice in a row – it is stylistically more plausible that the names have two different meanings, and that the similarity in sound is intentional wordplay. Therefore, ‘the nearing’ is more likely as a transparent primary meaning.

Náinn is also the name of a serpent in the Þulur (Orma heiti).\(^{162}\)

H & Gylf. Nipingr – ‘Drooping,’ ‘Stem of Barley’?

Construction: Probably nip- or hnip- (source and meaning uncertain, possibly ‘barley shoot’ or ‘drooping’) plus the masc. diminutive suffix - ingr to form a masculine name.

Transparency: Unknown.

No Old Icelandic words with a similar form are attested, save nipt ‘female relative, sister,’ but the lack of -t- in the stem (which goes back to PGmc *neftiz) makes this derivation unlikely.\(^{163}\) Lorenz and others have drawn a comparison between Nipingr and the Gothic verb ga-nippan and Old English ge-nīpan ‘to become dark,’ which have not yet been traced to a PGmc root.\(^{164}\)

Gutenbrunner compares Nipingr with hnipinn in Alvíssmál, roughly translated as “Gerstling” (‘slender stem of barley’), thus the reconstructed name would be *Hnípingr.\(^{165}\) The translation ‘slender stem of barley’ is rather uncertain; in the stanzas in which hnipinn is found, Óðinn asks Alviss “hvē pat sáð heitir, er sá alda synir, heimi hverjum í?” (‘what is that seed called, which sons of yore sow, in each world?’ Alvíssmál 31)\(^{166}\) – replies Alviss:

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\(^{161}\) Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 221.
\(^{163}\) Orel, *Handbook of Germanic Etymology*, 283.
\(^{164}\) Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 221.
\(^{165}\) Gutenbrunner, “Eddastudien,” as quoted in Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 221.
"Bygg heitir med mönnum,  
en barr med godum,  
kalla vóxt vanir,  
aeti þotnar,  
álfr lagastaf,  
kalla í helju hnipinn."

It is called 'grain' with men and 'corn' with the gods, Vanir call it 'growth,' giants 'eaten,' elves 'liquid-staff,' in Hel it is called ['slender stem of barley'] or 'the drooping'?

That bygg and barr here mean 'barley' is inferred because it is the most likely grain that Icelanders would have been cultivating and eating at the time the poem was written down. The attested adjective hnipinn means 'drooping, downcast;' perhaps 'the drooping' would be a more plausible translation, in which case the meaning 'slender stem of barley' might not be a valid translation outside of this passage if hnipinn 'the drooping' is being used figuratively.

This idea of the loss of initial h- opens up comparisons of Nipingr to hnípa 'to droop, be downcast' and derived hnipinn 'drooping, downcast,' making '(little) drooping one, (little) downcast one' another possible (and perhaps better) translation.

A further alternative perhaps worth exploring could be a relation to Niflheim, though the element nifl- also has a contested etymology.

H & Gylf. Dáinn – ‘The Dead’

Construction: Probably formed from the stem dá- of deyja ‘to die’ (from PGmc *dawjanan) or, alternatively, from dá, n. ‘trance, senseless state’ plus the suffix -inn to form a masculine name.

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167 Bellows translates lagastaf as 'drink-stuff' in accordance with Hugo Gering’s translation, even though he doubts it and "can suggest nothing better." My translation is based on the first element as lǫgr, m. ‘liquid,’ ‘lake’ and the second element as stafr, m. ‘staff, stick’ which at least imitates the shape of a stalk of barley, and is supported by Klaus von See et al. (see for a full discussion of lagastaf). Klaus von See et al. Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 3: Götterlieder (Heidelberg, Germany: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000), 353-6; Bellows, The Poetic Edda, 190-3 (footnotes to 24; 32); Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, stafr.
169 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hnipinn.
170 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hnípa; hnipinn; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 243.
171 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 409.
172 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 70.
173 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 221.
Transparency: *Dáinn* is the masc. nom. sg. preterite participle of *deyja*, thus native speakers would most likely have recognized the name Dáinn as such; and in proximity to the other names related to death this is the most likely transparent primary meaning. A secondary connection with the dá ‘trance, senseless state,’ is also possible.

Dáinn appears as a dwarf as a co-creator of the boar Hildisvini (*Hyndluljóð 7*); in an eleventh-century poem by Sigvatr Þórðarson; as the representative of the elves, presumably as an elf (*Hávamál* 143); and Dáinn is also the name of a stag residing in the branches of Yggdrasill. A name is also found as part of the compound-name Dáinsleif, a mythical sword (*Skáldskaparmál* 63).

**H & Gylf. Nýr – ‘The New’**

Construction: A nominalization of the adjective nýr ‘new.’

Transparency: Certain.

**Nýráðr – ‘New-Council’**

Construction: A compound of ný- ‘new’ and ráð, n. ‘plans, (wise) council, advice,’ plus the nominative ending -r to form a masculine name.

Transparency: Probably transparent.

A common interpretation of Nýráðr is something like ‘determined to execute new plans’ but this is probably overstepping the bounds of what the name can confidently tell us; I provide the more literal translation ‘new-council.’

**Reginn – ‘Advisor, Ruler’**

Construction: Probably derived from regin, n. pl. ‘the ruling powers, the gods;’ ‘the advising ones, conferrers.’

Transparency: *Regin ǫll* (‘all the powers, all the gods’) is repeated several times in *Völuspá*, and it is difficult to imagine that the audience would have missed the connection between Reginn and *regin ǫll*; however, this does not mean that the name would have been interpreted

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as ‘god.’ Instead, proximity to Nýráðr and Ráðsviðr pushes in the direction of ‘council’ or ‘advice.’

Reginn is the name of a being of dwarf-like stature who appears in Regínsmál; Fáfnismál 25, 36, 39; and Völsunga saga 13 as the brother of Ótr and son of Hreiðmarr. CR and H agree on Reginn (regíns), while all manuscripts of the Prose Edda contain Rekkr. Perhaps because the Prose Edda is a more cohesive work, the scribe or author noticed that Reginn is not a dwarf per se, only in stature (“Hann var hverjum manni hagari ok dvergr of vǫxt;” prose introduction to Regínsmál), and replaced the name with the similar-sounding Rekkr in Dvergatal.

Reginn is also an Óðinsheiti.

Gylf. Rekkr – ‘Hero, Warrior’

Construction: A nominalization of rekkr, m. ‘hero, warrior; straight, upright man’. Transparency: Fully transparent.

Rekkr has parallels in the Old Swedish place name Rinkaby, Burgundian *rinks ‘warrior,’ Old High German rinc, hrinc and Old English rinc ‘man,’ ultimately leading back to PGmc *renkaz. This is related to PGmc *rankaz, which has something to do with straightness, slenderness, and uprightness (cf. Old Icelandic rakkr ‘straight, slender;’ Old English ranc ‘proud, haughty;’ and Middle Low German rank ‘long and thin.’ Therefore, Rekkr may have carried a connotation of uprightness and tallness, which seems counter-intuitive since the aforementioned phrase “dvergr of vǫxt” from Regínsmál (see Reginn, above) seems to imply that dwarfs are short.

Ráðsviðr – ‘Council-Wise;’ ‘Council-Swift;’ ‘Council-Tree’?

Construction: One possible construction is a compound of ráð, n. ‘advice, council’ and svinnr/sviðr ‘wise’ (Orel prefers ‘quick, swift’ – the Germanic root led to cognates

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178 This is part of the Sigurðr Fáfnishani cycle. Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 262.
182 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 441.
183 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 302.
184 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 302.
185 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 297.
186 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 227.
meaning ‘strong’ or ‘hard,’ as in for example Gothic swinþs and Old English swīð
‘strong’). Svið- is also found in several words attested in Old Icelandic related to singeing, for example: sviðna ‘to be singed’ (derived from sviða ‘to singe’); svið, n. pl. ‘singèd sheep’s heads;’ sviði, m. ‘the smart from the burning’ and so on (cf. the dwarf Sviðr, below). In context, ‘council-wise’ or ‘council-swift’ make more sense than ‘singè-council.’ Another possible way to divide the compound into the genitive form ráðs- and the word viðr, m. ‘tree,’ in which case the name would mean ‘council-tree.’

Transparency: Both ways of dividing up the compound would make for highly transparent meanings. The name could very possibly be a pun with a dual meaning of ‘wise-council’ and ‘council-tree.’

Fíli – ‘Board;’ ‘File;’? ‘Elephant’?

Construction: De Vries and others interpret Fíli to mean ‘file’ by way of a loanword from Old Frisian/Low German file ‘file,’ even though the normal word in Old Icelandic for file was þél, f. Other possible derivations could be a weak masculine derivation of filla, f. ‘board’ or even a transformation of fill, m. ‘elephant’ into a weak noun.

Transparency: The meaning ‘file’ relies on the existence of an unattested (loan)word, which makes it difficult to support. In this case the previous scholarship has probably gotten carried away with the dwarfs as craftsmen and pushed for a more linguistically uncertain etymology when attested alternatives like filla and fill exist. I suggest ‘board’ as the most likely transparent meaning.

Another line of reasoning is to connect Fíli to the word fill, f. ‘file,’ attested once poetically; hesitant reconstructions of the Proto-Norse form are *finhlja or *fíhlja.

Kíli – ‘Keel’

Construction: De Vries connects Kíli with kíll, m. ‘narrow arm of sea,’ made into a weak noun though the suffix -i but he and Lorenz also give credence to Gutenbrunner’s translation ‘wedge-smith.’ Gould supports the meaning ‘wedge’ through evidence in Modern

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188 Zoëga, *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, sviðna, sviða, svið, sviði.
Scandinavian languages of a loanword from Frisian or Low German *kīl*, but admits that Icelandic never picked up the loanword and retained *veggr*, m. ‘wedge’ instead.\[193\] -*Kili* with a short vowel also exists in the compound *einkili*, m. ‘shipmate,’ a poetic term derived from *ein-*, meaning ‘together’ in compounds, and *kjǫlr*, m. ‘keel,’ also made into a weak noun through the suffix -*i* and an interpretation of the base vowel of the root as -*i*-.*\[194\]

Transparency: It is uncertain whether *einkili* was a commonly known moniker for a shipmate; however, *Kili* is nearly homonymous with *kili*, the dative singular form of *kjǫlr*. For an audience with at least a rudimentary knowledge of boats and seafaring (as is likely with an island like Iceland) the connection was probably somewhat transparent, as well as with *kíll*. It is possible that one or both meanings registered simultaneously with the audience, or that they may have extrapolated to ‘wedge’ through the (potentially) similar shapes of keels and (mountainous) inlets or narrow bays.

**Fundinn** – ‘The Found’

Construction: Probably a nominalization of the preterite participle *fundinn* of *finna* ‘to find.’\[195\] A definite form of *fundr*, m. ‘find, discovery’ missing the nominative -*r* is possible, but such a construction does not seem to be paralleled in any of the other dwarf names.*\[196\]

Transparency: As Fundinn is homonymous with the preterite participle of *finna*, a semantic connection with ‘to find’ is undoubtadable. How to interpret this is more difficult; Gutenbrunner translates this as “*der, dem man begegnet ist*” (‘that which one is confronted with’).*\[197\] Another interpretation of ‘found one’ could be ‘treasure,’ or at least something that one was looking for or was hoping to acquire.

Fundinn might be an *Óðinsheiti*, found in a kenning by Einarr Gilsson.*\[198\]

**Náli** – ‘Needle’

Construction: Possibly *nál*, f. ‘needle’ plus the weak masculine suffix -*i*, *nál* being descended from PGmc *nēþlō*. De Vries also proposes a connection to the Old High German name

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\[194\] De Vries, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 312-313. In u-breaking, -*e-* was subjected to both u-breaking and i-umlaut, causing a disappearance of the original -*e-* ablaut grade. Native speakers may have reinterpreted the root vowel therefore as -*i*- since it appears in the dative singular and nominative plural. See Haraldur Bernharðsson, *Icelandic: 4th draft*, 133; 279.
\[198\] Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, 96.
Nahilo, which he compares to Latin *nex, f. ‘murder’ and necare ‘to kill,’ although the corresponding Proto-Indo-European root *nek- does not seem to have any other descendants in Germanic languages.199

Transparency: Whether or not de Vries is correct about the etymology of Náli, it is certainly similar enough to nál that the meaning ‘needle’ would have been fairly transparent, while the lack of any Old Icelandic words with a similar form and semantic meaning to Nahilo seems to rule out its transparency, barring unattested words.

Anatoly Liberman hypothesizes that Nál (and alternative name for Laufey, the mother of Loki) means ‘earth’ through an older form *Náley ‘bud-island’ (cf. Laufey ‘leafy-island’) (nál means both ‘needle’ and ‘bud’ in modern Icelandic). His support for this form is that the two names for Loki’s mother should be synonyms. As this is relatively speculative I leave it out of my translation of Náli, but it is worth mentioning that ‘bud’ could have been another meaning that registered with the audience.200


Construction: Possibly val- from valr, m. or, more likely, val, n. II ‘the slain on the battlefield’ plus a weak masculine suffix -i. With or without a long -á-, could be identical to Váli/Vali, Óðinn’s son – possible etymologies could be: < Proto-Norse *Wanilo (diminutive, cf. valr), thus ‘the little Vanir’ (which, as de Vries points out, he is not); related to Old Saxon wanum ‘bright;’ or < Proto-Norse waihalaR ‘the warlike, ‘the little warrior’ (cf. Gothic waihjō ‘battle’). Other options include val, n. I ‘choice,’ III ‘round bar;’ or perhaps even vála ‘to moan.’201

Transparency: Since Vali is found in a mythological context, in which several other figures bear names containing val- (cf. Valkyrja, Váli, Valhöll) it seems most likely that the name would foremost be associated with valr/val (as well as Váli himself), and that the other meanings should be considered puns. Thus, the dwarf’s name is most likely transparent as ‘the slain.’

199 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 404; Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 287.
201 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 641-2.
Note only is Vali similar to Váli, but two Ōðinsheiti contain val-, namely Valyr (‘the god of the slain;’ Háleygjatal 15)\textsuperscript{202} and Valkjóandi (‘chooser of the slain;’ by the skald Kormákr).\textsuperscript{203}

**Hepti** – ‘Haft’

Construction: A nominalization of hepti, n. ‘haft, shaft.’ The name is presumably masculine, thus the neuter ending -i would have been repurposed as a weak masculine -i suffix.

Transparency: More or less certain.

**Víli (H Fíli) – ‘Will;’ ‘Hardship;’ (‘Entrails’)**

Construction: Víli, m. ‘will’ is attested (as well as vil, f./n. ‘will,’ and vil, n. pl. ‘entrails’ – both words would have been made masculine through the suffix -i). With the long vowel a relationship to vil, n. ‘hardship’ is also possible, also through the addition of the weak masculine suffix -i.\textsuperscript{204}

Transparency: All meanings likely registered with the audience; however, ‘entrails’ would probably be a pun.

Víli/Vílir is also the name of Óðinn’s brother, and ‘Vili’s brother’ has been used as a reference to Óðinn in skaldic poetry (Ynglingatal 3; Sonatorrek 23).\textsuperscript{205}

**Gylf. Heptifili** – ‘Shaft-Board;’ ‘File with a Handle’? ‘Haft-Filer’?

Construction: A compound of hepti, n. ‘haft, shaft’ and fíli. As discussed above, the etymology of fíli is controversial. Previous scholars such as Gutenbrunner and Sijmons and Gering have interpreted the combination to mean ‘haft-filer’ through the uncertain connection to fél,\textsuperscript{206} and Gould translates it as ‘file with a handle’ via fíli.\textsuperscript{207} Following my above interpretation of fíli < fíla, f. ‘board’ a possible translation could be ‘shaft-board,’ which at least makes sense conceptually.

Transparency: At least as transparent as Fíli, and possibly more with the highly transparent Hepti- to give context.

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\textsuperscript{202} Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 350.
\textsuperscript{203} Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 348.
\textsuperscript{204} De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 663.
\textsuperscript{205} Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 362.
\textsuperscript{206} Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 229; Sijmons and Gering, Kommentar, 16.
\textsuperscript{207} Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 948.
It is of note that Heptifili in *Gylfaginning* appears to have been formed from an interpretation of Hepti and Víli as a single name. This indicates that Heptifili made some sense as a compound and that its meaning was therefore fairly transparent.

**Hannarr** – ‘The Skilled’

Construction: A nominalization of the adjective *hannarr* ‘skilled.’

Transparency: Fully transparent.

**CR Svíorr (Gylf. S<ν>iarr)** – ‘The Declining;’ The Swede’? ‘Wanderer’?

Variants: CR *svoir*; H *sviðr* (see Sviðrr below); CRPr *siar*; T *sniar*; U seg”; W *sviar*

Construction: The stem *svi*- plus the suffix -orr-arr to form a masculine name. Some scholars have proposed *svífā* ‘to wander’ or ‘to turn, to swing’ as the basis of the name (notably Gutenbrunner and Sijmons and Gering), but this assumes an unexplained dropping of the -*f*.

De Vries compares Svíarr to Modern Icelandic *svía* ‘to decline, to diminish,’ probably descended from Old Icelandic *svina* ‘to subside’ (< PGmc *swinōjanan* < *swīnanan*, cf. Western Frisian *swine* and Old High German *swīnan* ‘to fade’). There is also superficial similarity to Old Frisian *swīar* ‘mother-in-law’ (from PGmc *swexrō*) and Old Icelandic *Svíar*, m. pl. ‘the Swedes’ but the former’s counterpart in Old Icelandic is *sværa* (not to mention the semantic incongruities between a female person and a masculine construction) and the latter is, according to Polomé, not valid. Nevertheless, an association with *Svíar* should not be ruled out, even if it is not the source of the name.

Transparency: Uncertain; the most likely of the proposed scenarios is that an unattested *svía* was the root of the name, and a contemporary audience would probably have perceived the similarity to *Svíar* ‘the Swedes.’ However, the spelling is drastically different in every manuscript, which suggests the name was partially opaque.

**H Sviðrr** – ‘Singe;’ ‘Spear’

Construction: Possibly *sviðr*- plus the strong masculine suffix -*r*; grammatically confusing is why the name appears to have two nominative -*r* endings. One (odd) possibility is an

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unattested feminine or neuter word *sviðr with an -r- in the stem, plus an additional -r to form a masculine name. As previously mentioned, svið- is found in sviðna ‘to be singed’ (derived from sviða ‘to singe’); svið, n. pl. ‘singed sheep’s heads;’ sviði, m. ‘the smart from the burning’ and so on.\(^{214}\) Another source could be sviða, f. ‘burning’ but also ‘spear.’\(^{215}\)

Transparency: An association with singeing or burning (thus ‘Singe’) is likely, as well as with sviða ‘spear.’

Sviðrr is very similar to the Óðinsheiti Sviðrir, Sviðuðr, Sviðarr, and Sviðurr. De Vries does not connect these with burning as I have above, but rather connects them to Old English sweðrian/swiðrian ‘to withdraw’ or sviða, f. ‘spear’ (thus ‘the spear god’).\(^{216}\)

**H Billingr** – ‘Moment-ling;’ ‘Twin;’ ‘Droopling’

Construction: The stem bil- or bill- plus the diminutive suffix -ingr to create a masculine name. De Vries proposes Billingr as a name meaning ‘twin, hybrid,’ perhaps derived from an alternate meaning ‘identical’ of bil, n. (normally ‘a stay, a moment, a, low place’), or from Proto-Norse *bila ‘twin, identical pair.’ Evidence for the latter would be Norwegian and Swedish billing ‘ hybrid’ and Middle Low German billik and Old High German billih ‘fitting’ (de Vries: “passend”).\(^{217}\) The former stems back to PGmc *bilan – *bilaz, which may be derived from *bhei ‘to cut, to strike,’ in which case the sense could originally have been ‘cut in two’ > ‘pair; twin(s).’\(^{218}\) Another possibility is a formation from bila ‘to give in, to become droop-y, to collapse.’ The meaning could therefore be ‘droop-ling.’

Transparency: With extant evidence for ‘twin, hybrid’ only scant, the audience may have been more likely to associate Billingr with bil, n., thus ‘the product of a moment’ (‘moment-ling’). ‘Droopling’ from bila could potentially have registered as well.

Billingr appears in Hávamál 97, but the poem does not specify what kind of creature he is; since he is the father of a maiden who attempts to seduce Óðinn, he might not be a dwarf. The name Billingr also shows some similarity to the dwarf Berlingr (Sǫrla þátrr), who helped craft the necklace of the Brisings.\(^{219}\)

\(^{214}\) Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, sviðna; sviða; svið; sviði.
\(^{215}\) De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 569.
\(^{216}\) De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 569.
\(^{217}\) De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 36.
\(^{218}\) Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 45.
\(^{219}\) Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 34.

Construction: Probably formed from the stem brun-/brún- and the weak masculine suffix -i. De Vries suggests brún, f. ‘eyebrow’ (from PGmc *brūwō) as the source and translates as ‘the [one] with the bushy eyebrows.’ Brún, f. can also mean ‘edge,’ which has a slightly different etymology (PGmc *brūnąz II); *brūnąz I led to the word brûnn ‘brown’ which could also be a potential source for Bruni (thus ‘the brown’). Also identical is bruni, m. ‘burning, fire’ or ‘burned lava field’ (from PGmc *brunjaz - *brunōn).

Transparency: As many different associations as above, and probably more, likely registered with the audience. Bruni should be considered a complex name; proximity to a blade-like name (Billdr, below) could plausibly speak to the primary meaning ‘edge.’

Brúni is an Óðinsheiti found in the Pulu.

H Billdr – ‘Blade,’ ‘Knife,’ ‘Arrow’

Construction: Most likely a nominalization of bíldr, m. ‘bloodletting knife’ or the stem bíld- of bílda, f. ‘arrow, dart’ plus the masculine suffix -r. The apparent short vowel -i- and doubled -ll- in the orthography is most likely due to inconsistent treatment of doubled -ll- in early medieval Icelandic manuscripts and a common scribal convention of writing -ll- before -d.

Transparency: Both words are attested and both meanings may have registered with the audience. Clearly the imagery would have been of a blade-type object.

H Buri – ‘Resident,’ ‘The Born,’ ‘Producer’

Construction: Probably the stem bur-/búr plus the weak masculine suffix -i; or, the stem bú- plus the suffix -ri to form a masculine name. De Vries connects Buri to bera 3 ‘to carry, to lead, to give birth’ and translates it as ‘the producer,’ but also considers búa ‘to live, to dwell’ as another possible source. Búri, m. ‘resident of a commercial town’ is also attested but is

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220 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 61.
221 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 60.
222 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 61.
223 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 58; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 61.
224 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 46.
225 Hreinn Benediktsson, Íslenzk Fornrit, Vol. 2 (Series in Folio): Early Icelandic Script as Illustrated in Vernacular Texts from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Reykjavík: The Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965), 47.
226 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 33; 65.
probably a loanword from Middle Low German būre ‘builder.’ Other words with similar forms include búr, n. ‘chamber, room, pantry,’ burr, m. ‘son,’ and bú ‘house, dwelling.’\footnote{Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 65.} Transparency: The numerous words containing bú(r)- and having to do with dwelling cannot have been overlooked by the audience, but whether Buri would have been associated with bera is uncertain. As a strong verb bera does not have a -u- ablaut grade as a result of a-umlaut in the preterite participle leading to borinn; however, in other verbs such as nema – numinn the a-umlaut of -u- has been blocked by the nasal. Perhaps the audience could have associated Buri and borinn by analogy to nema – numinn.\footnote{Haraldur Bernharðsson, Icelandic: 4th draft, 365-6.} Another route could be through burr ‘son,’ which is descended from PGmc *burgiz, derived from *beranan (> bera). Since the two words have a common ancestor and the same consonants there is a chance that the audience could have therefore perceived the relationship between bera ‘to bear’ and burr, lit. ‘the one that is born(e).’\footnote{Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 41; 64.}

In Gylfaginning 6, Búri is also the ancestor of the gods, as the father of Borr, father of Óðinn, Víli, and Vé.\footnote{De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 65; Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 47.}

Frár (H fror) – ‘Swift one’

Construction: A nominalization of frár ‘swift, quick’ (from PGmc *frawR < *frawaR).\footnote{De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 140.}

Transparency: Fully transparent.

Frá- appears in the Óðinsheiti Fráriðr ‘the swift rider’ or (perhaps) ‘the one riding away’ (Pulur).\footnote{De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 140; Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 89.}

Hornbori – ‘Horn-bearer;’ ‘Horn-borer;’ ‘Bastard’

Construction: Probably a compound of horn ‘horn, corner’ and -bori. A cognate could be Old English hornbora ‘horn-blower’ but de Vries finds this ‘nicht ganz befriedigend’ (‘not completely satisfying’). He points to horna, f. ‘concubine’s daughter’ (literally ‘a girl conceived in the corner’) or horna, n. ‘corner of a house’ as other possibilities; this would make the name mean something like ‘corner-born’ or simply ‘bastard’ (-bori being derived from bera ‘to bear;’ see Buri above). On the other hand, a masculine equivalent to horna...
already exists, namely hornungr, m. ‘concubine’s son’ or ‘bastard son.’ Perhaps a better parallel would be Old Icelandic hornbora, f. ‘horn-bearer;’ Hornbori could be a weak masculine form via the suffix -i. Another option is bora ‘to bore, to drill;’ bori is found in the compound holdbori ‘raven’ (literally, ‘flesh-driller’) which pushes in the direction ‘horn-borer.’

Transparency: All options are viable. The name is probably a multi-layered pun, perhaps concealing the creative meaning ‘bastard’ behind more everyday roles.

H Fornbogi – ‘Old Bow’

Construction: A compound of forn ‘old’ and bogi, m. ‘bow, blood-spurt,’ descended from PGmc *buȝōn. Bogi led to the meaning ‘inlet in a beach’ in the Norn language of Shetland; this could indicate that bogi was used colloquially to refer to curved water features in landscapes such as beaches and rivers. Therefore, the proximity to Lóni (see below) might not be a coincidence.

Transparency: The meaning ‘old bow’ is probably transparent, especially in proximity to Billdr, which could mean ‘arrow’ (see above).

Hornbori and Fornbogi are clearly variants of one name, with a change in consonants that suggests an oral tradition in which h- and -r- were misheard (or misremembered) as f- and -g- (or vice-versa). A non-intentional scribal error where the letters h- and -r- in the exemplar were mistaken for f- and -g- is unlikely due to their quite dissimilar orthographical forms, thus the difference must be either deliberate or oral.

Frægr – ‘The Famous’

Construction: A nominalization of the adjective frægr ‘famous,’ from PGmc *frōgjaz.

Transparency: Fully transparent.

Lóni – ‘Lagoon;’ ‘Idle Person?’

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233 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 249.
234 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hornungr.
235 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 49.
236 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 51; Sveinbjörn and Jónsson, Lexicon Poeticum, 274.
237 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 47.
238 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 61.
239 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 47.
240 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 145; Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 89; Sijmons and Gering, Kommentar, 16.
Construction: Possibly lón, f. ‘calm place in a river, lagoon’ plus the weak masculine suffix -i. De Vries also proposes a connection to Norn -lōni ‘lazy person,’ Norwegian lōna ‘to meekly slip away’ and Swedish lōna ‘to stop working’ (the latter two dialectical). Sijmons and Gering find the connection to lón unconvincing and instead traces Lóni back to Proto-Indo-European leųk, luk with the approximate meaning ‘the gleaming’ or ‘the dazzled,’ but this would probably not have been transparent to a contemporary audience.

Transparency: The connection to lón is fairly transparent, but an association with idleness is less certain due to a lack of attested Old Icelandic words.

Aurvangr – ‘Loam-Field;’ ‘Gleaming Field’

Construction: Possibly a compound of auurr, m. ‘loam (sand mixed with small bits of stone and clay)’ or ‘brilliant, gleaming’ and vangr, m. ‘field, meadow, hayfield.’ However, auur- is also found as the first element in several compounds and names. In words such as auurboð ‘plank of a ship’s keel,’ auurfalr ‘lower tube of a spear-shaft,’ and auurvesa ‘deceased, decrepit’ it has the meaning ‘lower, back.’ In names it makes less sense as ‘loam’ or ‘lower, back’ and more sense as ‘brilliant, gleaming,’ such as in Aurgelmir (auur- and galmr ‘sword’: ‘loam-sword’ or ‘gleaming-sword’?), Aurgrimr (auur- and Grimnr (a giant, a buck, and an Óðinsheiti) – perhaps ‘masked one?’ (cf. gríma, f. ‘mask’): ‘loam-buck’ or ‘gleaming-buck’?), Aurnir (‘mud-dweller’ or ‘brilliant one’?), and Aurböða (auur- and boða ‘boon’: ‘loam- boon’ or ‘brilliant-boon’?). All of these etymologies are problematic but overall ‘loam’ does not seem likely to be the normal meaning of auur- when found in compounds. The reconstructed PGmc form of auur- is *aƀur with no particular meaning deduced.

Transparency: ‘Loam-field’ would have been transparent. ‘Gleaming-field’ might have been more natural in light of the probability that the name is a compound, but considering that auurr appears in Völuspá 19 in the compound hvítauri ‘(with) white loam,’ it is more plausible that auur- in the case of Aurvangr would have been perceived as ‘laom.’

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241 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 366; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, lón; Sveinbjörn and Jónsson, Lexicon Poeticum, 384.
242 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 366.
243 Sijmons and Gering, Kommentar, 16.
244 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 20; 643.
245 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 20; 188.
246 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 20; 188.
247 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 20; 40.
A plural form of the name Aurvangr also appears in “Aurvanga siǫt” (‘to the) homes of loam-fields’ or ‘(to the) host of loam-fields:’ Völuspá 14) where it probably designates a geographical location called Aurvangar (Simek suggests the name simply means ‘the one from the Aurvangar’249).

Iari – ‘Conflict’

Construction: Possibly jara, f. ‘conflict, dispute’ (poetic, from PGmc *erōn) made into a weak masculine name through the suffix -i.250

Transparency: As jara is a poetic term it is uncertain how transparent the name might have been to a general audience. The common words jarl, m. ‘chieftain, nobleman, warrior’ and jórð, f. ‘earth, ground’ could also have come to mind, even though a derivation from either word is linguistically unlikely due to the final consonants.

Eikinskiald – ‘Oakenshield;’ (‘Angry Shield’)251

Construction: A compound of the adjective eikinn I ‘oaken’ or II ‘violent, angry, furious’252 plus skjǫldr, m. ‘shield, split piece of wood’ without u-umlaut, plus the weak masculine suffix -i.253

Transparency: ‘Oakenshield’ is a literal translation but the name could mean ‘the one with an oaken shield;’254 it is also impossible to ignore that the name can also mean ‘angry shield,’ which is rather strange and perhaps comical concept, but could nevertheless be a pun with ‘oakenshield.’

Lofarr – ‘Praise;’ ‘Praiser;’ ‘The Permitting’ (‘Threshing Floor;’ ‘Flat-Hand’)

Construction: Possibly lofa ‘to praise, to permit, to promise’ plus the suffix -arr to form a masculine noun.255 With a long vowel, could instead be derived from lófi, m. I ‘threshing floor’ or II ‘flat hand,’256 though this seems less likely.

Transparency: The connection to lofa (also lof, n. ‘praise, permission’) is transparent but whether the name is an agent noun (thus ‘praizer;’ ‘the permitting’) or a personification of

249 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 25.
250 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 290.
251 Translated puns in the name-meanings are indicated with parentheses.
252 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 96.
253 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 496.
254 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 231-2.
255 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, lofa.
256 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 363.
praise/permission/promise is up to interpretation. Sijmons and Gering liberally translate Lofarr as ‘the praiseworthy warrior,’ which is partially supported by the words lofði, m. ‘the praiseworthy’ and lofðar, m. pl. ‘men, warriors’ (derived from lof). Due to the similarity to lófi a pun meaning ‘threshing floor’ or ‘flat hand’ is possible.

**Draupnir – ‘Dripper,’ ‘Drooper’**

Construction: The proposed source for Draupnir has been either the weak verb dreypa ‘to let drop, to drip’ or the strong verb drjúpa ‘to drip, to hang one’s head.’ If derived from the former, dreypa has no grammatical forms with the diphthong -au-, thus the process of formation is obscure. If from the latter, draup- occurs in the preterite singular conjugations. To this stem the suffix -nir would be added to form a masculine agent noun ‘dripper, drooper.’ A derivation from the preterite form of the verb would be a deverbal process similar to that in Mótsognir (see above).

Transparency: The connection to drjúpa is the most transparent, barring any non-extant words with draup- as an element or vowel grade, thus ‘dripper, drooper’ is a relatively confident translation.

Draupnir is also the name of a magical ring possessed by Óðinn, from which eight identical rings drop every ninth night. Simek suggests that Draupnir means ‘dripper of rings’ and therefore ‘goldsmith.’

The frequency of words meaning ‘droop’ as possible components of some dwarf names (cf. Nipingr, Billingr, Draupnir) is noteworthy. Perhaps ‘drooper’ could designate a hunchback.

**Dólgþrasir – ‘Furious Enemy,’ ‘Battle-Eager’**

Construction: Possibly a compound of dolg/dólg, n. ‘hatred, enmity, battle’ or more likely the derived noun dolgr/dólgr, m. ‘enemy, troll’ plus þrasir ‘the furious’ (derived from þrasa ‘to violently storm’). -þrasir is found in a few other compound names such as Lífþrasir and

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Mǫgþrasir in which it seems to mean ‘the furious.’

Thus the meaning seems to be ‘furious enemy’ or something of the like; it would be conceptually odd for a dwarf to be named ‘troll of hatred’ unless the name were an obscure kenning. Lorenz prefers LP’s translation ‘the war-eager’ (interpreting the second element as prási ‘eager’) or ‘the one threatened in battles.’

Transparency: Probably fairly transparent with multiple layers of meaning; whether a short or long -á- was original to the name may have determined the primary meaning.

On its own, the related name Prasarr ‘the furious’ is an Öðinsheiti.

Gylf. Dólgþvari – ‘War-Spear, War-Staff’

Construction: Probably a compound of dolg/dólg or dolgr/dólgr (see Dólgþrasir above) plus þvari, m. ‘drill, stick, rod; sword, spear, bolt.’ A sensible translation would be ‘war-spear’ or possibly LP’s ‘war-staff.’

Less sensible would be the meaning ‘enemy drill,’ ‘enemy spear,’ etc.

Transparency: Probably fairly transparent.

‘War-spear’ could be an allusion to Öðinn’s spear Gungnir.

Hár – ‘High one;’ ‘Oarlock;’ ‘Dogfish Shark;’ ‘Blind one;’ ‘One-Eyed’

Construction: As a lexeme, hár has many meanings even in Old Icelandic. The name could be a nominalization of the adjective hár ‘high,’ in this context meaning ‘the high one.’

Alternatives could be hár, m. ‘oarlock, thole’ or ‘(dogfish) shark;’ hár, n. ‘hair;’ or finally the adjective hár ‘blind, one-eyed’ found in the Öðinsheiti Hár which could mean ‘the one-eyed god’ (from Proto-Norse *haiha- ‘one-eyed;’ cf. Gothic *haihs ‘one-eyed’ and Latin caecus ‘blind’).

Transparency: All meanings were probably transparent and potentially valid, especially from an oral perspective.

\[264\] De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 620.
\[265\] Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 227; Sveinbjörn and Jónsson, Lexicon Poeticum, 83.
\[266\] Falk, Odensheiti, 29-30; Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 328.
\[267\] De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 628; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, þvari.
\[268\] Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 227; Sveinbjörn and Jónsson, Lexicon Poeticum, 83.
\[269\] Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 63.
\[270\] Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 229; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 209-10; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hár; Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 160.
Hár is an Óðinsheiti meaning ‘the one-eyed.’ Hár ‘high’ was also turned into the weak masculine name Hávi, which is an Óðinsheiti found in Hávamál. Hár is also the name of one of the three gods in Gylfaginning who answer Gylfi’s questions – the scene parallels numerous other myths in which Óðinn and other gods engage in knowledge contests, sometimes disguised with an assumed name like Gylfi’s Gangleri.

Gylf. Haurr – [Unknown]

Haurr has no accepted etymology. It has been connected to hárr ‘gray, gray-haired,’ but Polomé argues that this connection is invalid because the Proto-Germanic root must have a -w-. In this case, the personal name Hávarr (< runic hau[h]aRaR) is probably the best clue for Haurr; its source hau(h)aR- likely stems from PGmc *xauxaz, the ancestor of hár ‘high.’

Haugspori – ‘Hill-Treader,’ ‘Hill-Track,’ (‘Hill-Spur’)

Construction: Probably a compound of haugr, m. ‘hill, mound’ and spor- from spora ‘to tread on’ plus the weak masculine suffix -i; thus a reasonable translation could be ‘hill-walker.’ Spor- could also be derived from spor, n. ‘track, footprint,’ with the meaning understood as ‘hill-track.’ Spori, m. is also an attested word meaning ‘spur’ (the type used when riding horses), in which case the meaning ‘hill-spur’ would likely be metaphorical. Perhaps this could refer to a rocky outcrop on a hill or even a tree.

Transparency: All three meanings could conceivably have registered with the audience; in the case of ‘hill-spur,’ the meaning would have been either understood as metaphor or a pun coupled with ‘hill-treader’ or ‘hill-track.’

‘Mound-treader’ calls to mind scenes from the sagas (eg. Grettis saga, ch. 35) in which undead spirits (draugar) rise from their burial mounds and harass the inhabitants of nearby farmsteads. The name could therefore possibly be a type of kenning for ‘draugr’ and

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271 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 212.
273 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 212; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 229; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hárr.
274 Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 446.
275 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 214.
276 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 166; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 214.
278 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, spor; spori.
the audience may have made the association between Haugspori and draugar.\textsuperscript{279} On the other hand,\textit{Gylf.} shows the variant Hugstari which may suggest that Haugspori was partially opaque or did not carry much meaning for the scribe or audience.


Construction: Possibly a compound of\textit{ hugr}, m. ‘thought, mind, courage’ and\textit{ star-} from the adjective\textit{ starr} ‘rigid, inflexible,’ thus ‘the rigid-minded’ or ‘one with inflexible courage.’\textsuperscript{280} Polomé finds this unconvincing and prefers the meaning ‘star’ for\textit{ stari}; however,\textit{ stari/starri}, m. in Old Icelandic seems to have referred to a starling (a type of bird), while the common word for ‘star’ (the cosmological object) was\textit{ stjarna}, f.\textsuperscript{281} A third option is to derive\textit{ stari} from\textit{ stara} ‘to stare at, to gaze’ with the approximate meaning ‘mind-reader.’\textsuperscript{282}

Transparency: It is possible that any of these meanings could have registered with the audience, although the derivation from\textit{ stari} ‘star’ may be a false friend for modern English and German speakers (i.e. similarity in those languages causes the meaning ‘star’ to seem more valid than it actually is). The alternation with CR and H Haugspori may also indicate that the name was partially opaque or nonsensical.

Apart from wolves, commonly used poetically, animal names are uncommon in this list of dwarfs, which would make the translation ‘mind-starling’ seem out of place. On the other hand, in light of Óðinn’s raven Huginn ‘mind, thought,’ Hugstari could conceivably be a\textit{ heiti} for this mythological bird.\textsuperscript{283}

\textbf{Hlévangr (H Hlévargr)} – ‘Shelter-Field;’ H: ‘Shelter-Wolf;’ ‘Shelter-Outlaw’

Construction: Appears to be a compound of\textit{ hlé}, n. ‘shelter, lee side’ and\textit{ vangr}, m. ‘field’\textsuperscript{284} Sijmons and Gering imagine that this name refers to the dwarf’s dwelling place, a field protected from the wind.\textsuperscript{285} In H the variant Hlévargr appears to have\textit{ vargr}, m. ‘wolf, thief, outlaw’ as the second element.\textsuperscript{286} Semantically ‘shelter-wolf’ seems to make even less sense than ‘shelter-field.’ On the other hand, the association between shelter and outlaws would be

\textsuperscript{279}I am not the first one to notice this parallel. Gould compares Haugspori to a benevolent\textit{ draugr}, but I see no reason why malicious\textit{ draugr} could not also be referenced in light of the often adversarial position of dwarfs in myth. Gould, “Dwarf-Names,” 960.
\textsuperscript{280}Lorenz, \textit{Gylfaginning}, 228.
\textsuperscript{282}Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 446.
\textsuperscript{283}De Vries, \textit{Etymologisches Wörterbuch}, 265.
\textsuperscript{284}Zoëga, \textit{Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic},\textit{ hlé};\textit{ vangr}.
\textsuperscript{285}Sijmons and Gering, \textit{Kommentar}, 18.
\textsuperscript{286}De Vries, \textit{Etymologisches Wörterbuch}, 645-6; Zoëga, \textit{Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic},\textit{ vargr}.
appealing if hlé were used in the Icelandic law codes to refer to giving shelter to outlaws (specificaly, prohibiting it), but to my knowledge, it is not. Another line of thinking is that outlaws were forced to live in the woods or in caves away from settlements; ‘outlaw-shelter’ could thus refer to a cave (or a forest), which ties in with the variant Hleðiólfr (see below; perhaps a heiti ‘wolf of the hatch’ = ‘cave-dweller’ = [bear]).

Transparency: In CR, ‘shelter-field’ seems to be fairly transparent. In H the meaning ‘outlaw-shelter’ = ‘cave’ or ‘woods’ would be likely if the audience accepted the name as such; however, the order of the elements suggests that the name should be read ‘wolf of shelter’ or ‘outlaw of shelter’ which is rather obscure today.287

Interestingly, hlé- appears as the first element in two other Óðinsheiti: Hléfreyr and Hléfǫðr. De Vries suggests a relation to hljóða ‘to silence,’ thus ‘the god who silences storms.’288 An alternative spelling of these two names is Hlæfreyr and Hlæfǫðr, which points to the verb hlaeja ‘to laugh’ (preterite participle: hleginn) as a possible source of the first element.289 Etymologically, Hlévangr and Hléfreyr/Hléfǫðr might then be unrelated, but an informed audience could have made the connection between the dwarf and Óðinn.

Gylf. Hleðiólfr – ‘Hatch-Wolf’

Construction: Possibly a compound of hleði, m. ‘hatch, shutter, sliding door’ and úlfr, m. ‘wolf’ with a variant spelling ólfr.290 Polomé translates the name as ‘the wolf of the hatch’ and postulates it as a kenning for a cave-dweller.291 This pairs well with the Óðinsheiti Jólfr (probably from PGmc *ehwaz-wulfaz, literally ‘horse-wolf,’ ie. ‘bear’). With a long vowel, the adjective hléðr ‘famous(?)’ (thus: ‘famous wolf’) is a possible alternative, but it would

287 In Old Icelandic compounds the conventional order is such that the first element modifies the second element, best expressed in English as ‘[element 2] of [element 1]’ or hyphenated as ‘[element 1]-[element 2]’ – thus, in Hlévangr the base concept is vargr ‘wolf,’ ‘outlaw’ which is modified by hlé ‘shelter.’ The result is ‘wolf of shelter’/’shelter-wolf’ or ‘outlaw of shelter’/’shelter-outlaw’ where the name designates a wolf or outlaw which is to be understood in light of shelter. A wolf of shelter might perhaps refer to one who attacks shelters; an outlaw of shelter seems to be a redundant concept, as outlaws in Medieval Iceland were by definition expelled from the protection of society. For a list of compounds demonstrating the above convention, see Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), XXXIII.
288 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 236.
290 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hleði: úlfr.
292 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 292.
have to have been nominalized with a weak masculine suffix -i to explain the -i- in Hleðiólfr, which does not make much sense in a compound.293

Transparency: Based on the orthography, ‘hatch-wolf’ is probably the most transparent primary meaning. Harder to say is whether the audience would have viewed it as a heiti for ‘cave-dweller,’ or whether it sounded close enough to Hlédiólfr for them to register ‘famous wolf.’

Of note is the semantic, but not phonetic, similarity between the second elements of the variants Hleðiólfr and H Hlévargr – both can mean ‘wolf.’ Is this a trace of oral tradition where the meaning of one element has been partially preserved across the two variants, but reproduced using synonyms?

As with Hlévangr/Hlévargr above, Hleðiólfr begins with an element reminiscent of Óðinsheiti, though the addition of -ð- may weaken that connection somewhat. The second element is also identical to the Óðinsheiti Jólfrr.294

Glói (Gylf. Glóinn) – ‘The Shining’

Variants: CR gloi; H, CRPr, T, W, A, B gloinn; U gloni

Construction: Either derived from glóa ‘to shine, glitter’ (PGmc *glōōjanan < *glōanan295) via the masculine suffixes -i or -inn, or related to dialectical Swedish glōna ‘to stare.’296 De Vries instead derives glóa from PGmc *glōwan. The only cognate for Swedish glōna is Norwegian glora ‘to stare,’ from PGmc *glōrōjanan (cf. Old Frisian glōren ‘to glow’ (> *glōraz, which probably refers to a hue of yellow or glowing; cf. Greek χλωρός ‘greenish-yellow’ and East Frisian glor ‘bright embers’).297 Glowing and staring thus seem to be distantly connected, at least linguistically.

Transparency: Only U shows the variant spelling ‘gloni’ to support de Vries’ derivation from glöna.298 The rest have forms which make the transparency of ‘shining one’ much more likely.


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293 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, hléðr.
294 Falk, Odensheite, 20.
295 Orel, A Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 137.
296 Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 446; Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 228; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 175.
297 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 137.
298 Dronke, The Poetic Edda II, 92.
Construction: Origin unknown. One clue is the seemingly-related Modern Icelandic dór ‘bore,’ Norwegian dor ‘iron peg’ and dore ‘iron rod,’ and Faroese dori ‘plug for a hole,’ ‘auger,’ ‘iron bolt,’ which could suggest an Old Icelandic word related to pegs, peg-holes, and the like; another option is a relation to Old English derian, Old Frisian dera, Old High German tarēn, tarōn, etc. ‘to inflict damage.’ A third option is to consider an unattested word stemming from *duran ~ *durō, which probably referred to a large door or gate based on the various descendants (cf. Gothic daur ‘door, gate;’ Old English dór ‘large door;’ Old Saxon dor and Old High German tor ‘gate,’ etc.). Motz suggests Dóri is related to dara (Cleasby and Vigfusson: dára301) ‘to mock, fool.’

Transparency: All of the words potentially related to Dóri remain valid routes to explore, but without an attested word in Old Icelandic they cannot be more than guesses in terms of transparency.

Gylf. Dúfr – ‘Dove;’ ‘Wave;’ ‘Diver’

Construction: Probably derived from dúfa which has several meanings: as a feminine substantive, ‘dove, pigeon’ (from PGmc*ðūƀōn303) and also ‘wave’ (origin unknown, but probably related to the verb), or as a weak verb ‘to plunge, to dive (from PGmc *ðūƀanan304).’

Transparency: Any or all of the meanings could have been transparent to a contemporary audience.

Dúfa is one of the nine daughters of Ægir and Rán (Skáldskaparmál 22; 58).306

Gylf. Andvari – ‘Vigilance;’ ‘Soul-Defender’?

Construction: Identical to andvari, m. which means ‘care, anxiety, vigilance,’307 probably constructed from the elements and- (a prefix meaning ‘against’) and varr ‘aware,

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300 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 79.
301 Cleasby and Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary, 98.
303 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 80.
304 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 80.
305 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 86; Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, dúfa; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 446; Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 80.
306 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 66.
cautious. Another possibility is a compound of ǫnd, f. ‘soul’ (lacking u-umlaut, thus and-) and verja ‘to defend’ (lacking i-umlaut, thus -var-) plus the weak masculine suffix -i, thus making the name ‘soul-defender’ or, more poetically, ‘protector of life.’

Transparency: The meaning ‘care, anxiety, vigilance’ is almost certainly transparent; meanwhile, ‘soul-defender’ is a much more speculative construction and it is uncertain whether the audience would have ignored the primary meaning and instead perceived forms of ǫnd and verja.

Andvari is also a dwarf in Reginsmál who is caught by Loki in a net and curses the eponymous golden ring of the Ring Cycle.

Skirvir (H skirf; CRPr skirpir) – ‘The Sharp’? ‘The Bunched-Up’? ‘Spitter’? (‘Bright Wire’)

Construction: Appears to be the root skirv-/skirf-/skirp- plus the masculine suffix -ir. The source of the root is uncertain; one option is to connect Skirvir with the Norwegian dialectical word skjerva ‘to join beams with a diagonal section’ or ‘to connect, seam, cut.’ De Vries points to the related Norwegian words skirvel and skjervel ‘cut-off piece’ and Middle Low German schervel ‘shard’ as clues. To the discussion I add the PGmc strong verb *skarpaz (> skarpr ‘sharp’) and weak verb *skarpjanan (> Old East Scandinavian skærpa ‘to press, to tuck’; Old Saxon gi-skerpian ‘to sharpen’). In addition, Orel points out the participle form skorpinn ‘shrivelled’ which probably came from the strong verb *skerpanan. All of this evidence points to a potential Old Norse/Old Icelandic word with a form similar to *skerpal*/skirpa (albeit skerpa, f. is attested and means ‘sharpness,’ and skirpa is an attested variant of skyrpa ‘to spit’ (etymology unknown, perhaps frpm skrapa ‘to rasp’ or *skerf*/skirfa, with the meaning something like ‘to sharpen’ or ‘to press, to tuck, to bunch up’ etc., from which Skirvir was derived.

Transparency: Due to the common alternation of flp and ile in Old Icelandic, the above Old words might have registered with the audience. In particular, the CRPr variant Skirpir might

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308 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, and-; varr; de Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 9; 647.
309 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 10; Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 446.
310 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 16.
312 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 493.
313 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 335.
314 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 501; 510.
315 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, skerpa; skirpa; skyrpa.
have led the audience of CRPr to perceive the name as ‘spitter,’ even though linguistically the origin of the name is probably unrelated.

Phonetically, Skirvir sounds relatively close to skírr vírr (skírr ‘bright, pure’ [of glass, metal, water, sky] and vírr, m. ‘wire, thread of metal’), thus ‘pure wire, bright wire,’ etc., although at best this could be a pun, not the actual meaning of the name, as vírr would have remained unaltered or acquired the suffix -i (thus ‘*Skírvíri’) in accordance with the normal patterns of name formation in Dvergatal and elsewhere. Skirvir also sounds close to Skímir (‘bright one,’ from skírr plus the masculine suffix -nir), Freyr’s servant/messenger.

Skirvir is probably related to the sobriquet skirfill, m., which also has no accepted meaning but is probably related to words discussed above. Perhaps not coincidentally, the same pattern is found in the following dwarf name Virvir, which is probably related to the name Virfill (see below).

Virvir (Gylf. Virpir) – [Unknown]

Construction: De Vries links Virvir to Virfill, the name of a sea-king and also a poetic term (virfill, m.) for a horse; he relates both names back to orf, n. ‘handle, scythe’ (< PGmc *wurfan ~ *wurfaz) due to the related Latin verpa ‘penis’ and Old High German worb ‘rod.’ It would seem that de Vries imagines an unattested Old Icelandic (or older) word *verfl*verp meaning ‘rod,’ even though the vowel change from *wurfan > orf seems to rule this out. Much closer in form is Old Icelandic verpa ‘to throw’ and verpill, m. ‘die, barrel, cask’ (both from PGmc *werpanan, led to various Germanic words meaning ‘to throw’); however, a direct derivation from either of these words (through the masculine suffix -ir) would probably be *verpir. A change to Virvir in Völuspá would subsequently have required the shift from /p/ to /f/ and then to /v/, as well as i-umlaut of /e/ to /i/. Gould takes a different approach, sourcing Virvir to a loanword from Frisian verver ‘dyer’ based on Frisian cloth exporting.

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316 Zoëga, Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic, skírr; vírr.
317 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 494.
318 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 493.
320 Orel, Handbook of Germanic Etymology, 450, 457.
321 F and p were sometimes used interchangeably in consonant clusters in Old Icelandic script; cf. the alternate spellings eftir/eptir, ofl/opt – evidence for the clusters pr and fr can be seen in the adjacent dwarf name Skirvir/skirf *skírpir. F and v were also used interchangeably for both voiced and voiceless labio-dental fricatives. Benediktsson, Early Icelandic Script, 26.
Transparency: Unknown.

**Skáfiðr** *(Gylf. Skafiðr)* – ‘Good Finn;’ ‘Crooked Finn’?

Construction: Possibly a compound of *skár* ‘good’ or ‘careful, prudent’\(^{323}\) and *fiðr*, m. (= *finnr*) ‘Finn.’\(^{324}\) Some scholars (LP, Lorenz, and Polomé) have found it useful to connect *Gylf. Skafiðr* with the word *skeifr* ‘crooked, askew, oblique’ (< PGmc *skaiƀaz*), but also admit the name might not be a compound.\(^{325}\) Simek instead goes by the spelling *Skáviðr* in the *Þulur* and translates as ‘good tree’ via *viðr*, m. ‘tree,’ but the -v- is not present in any variants in either *Völuspá* or *Gylf.*\(^{326}\)

Transparency: ‘Good Finn’ is probably transparent; ‘Crooked Finn’ is less evident due to the diphthong in *skeifr*.

**Álfr** – ‘Elf’

Construction: Identical to *álfr*, m. ‘elf.’ All MSS show a short vowel; however, with a long á- (as Álfr is normalized in Dronke’s edition of *Völuspá*\(^{327}\) and both Lorenz and Faulkes’ editions of *Gylfaginning*\(^{328}\)) the dwarf could be read as the personal name Álfr, which according to de Vries might be descended from PGmc *AþawulfaR* and thus be a compound of *aða-* (from *aðal* ‘chief, head, noble’ in compounds\(^{329}\)) and *úlfr*, m. ‘wolf.’\(^{330}\)

Transparency: In light of a mythological poem, it is safe to assume that ‘elf’ would have been the transparent meaning, not the personal name (the meaning ‘noble wolf’ in any case was probably not transparent to a contemporary audience, having lost much similarity to *aðal* and *úlfr*).

**Yngvi** *(Gylf. Ingi)*

Construction: Yngvi is a name given to the god (Yngvi)-Freyr as a by-name. It probably stems from the PGmc name of the god *Ingwaz*. The etymology of this word and its daughter forms in various Germanic languages has been hotly debated, with proposed

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\(^{327}\) Dronke, *The Poetic Edda II*, 11.


meanings/relations including (but not limited to): Greek ἕγχος ‘spear, striking weapon;’ Greek ἄγχω and Latin ango ‘to torment, to choke;’ Latin unguis ‘nail;’ High German dialectical unker ‘penis;’ Old High German engirinc ‘maggot, worm;’ Greek ὀγκάομαι ‘scream,’ Latin uncare ‘the roar of a bear;’ PGmc *angw ‘water;’ Old Icelandic Yngvinn > *Ingwanaz ‘yew-god;’ and Tocharian onk/enkwe ‘man.’

De Vries admits these relationships are all problematic to some extent, with the Tocharian words for ‘man’ “besonders weit hergeholt” (‘especially far-fetched’) In light of a lack of scholarly consensus it seems futile to choose one meaning, for Yngvi/Ingi, and unhelpful to analyze them all simultaneously.

Transparency: Whatever else the name might have meant, Yngvi would certainly have been associated with Yngvi-Freyr by an audience knowledgeable in Old Icelandic mythology. Yngvi would also probably have been associated with the Ynglings, a Swedish dynasty in Ynglingasaga.

CR Fialarr– ‘Hider,’ ‘Board, Plank;’ ‘Plenty?’

Construction: Fial- plus the masculine suffix -arr making an agent noun. De Vries derives Fialarr (= Fjalarr) from fela ‘to hide’ therefore ‘hider,’ referring to the dwarf who created the mead of poetry along with Galarr from the blood of Kvasir (Skáldskaparmál 5). Fialarr could also be derived from fjöl, f. ‘board, plank’ or (in compounds, as an adverb) ‘much, very’ although De Vries finds the latter derivation “höchst unwahrscheinlich” (‘most implausible’) because a name being derived from an adverb would be unique to fjöl. That being said, the Óðinsheiti Fiðlnir appears to be derived from fjöl ‘much, very’ and could mean ‘the one who [knows] much.’

332 De Vries, Etymologisches Wörterbuch, 679.
333 Although Yngvi-Freyr is only attested in Ynglinga saga, and thus could be an invention of the author (Snorri?), Simek raises the possibility of a long tradition: “Ynvgi could... be a derivation from *Ingwaz and be interpreted as ‘the Ingaevone’, and Yngvi-Freyr from *Ingwia-fraujaz ‘lord of the Ingaevones’ whereby a great age for the construction Yngvi-Freyr must be assumed;” he supports this with the name of the Germanic tribe of Ingaevones (Tacitus, Germania 2) and “[t]he Gothic name for the yew-rune, enguz, [which] also points to the great age of the god Ing.” None of this is direct evidence, however, and the originality of Yngvi-Freyr to Ynglinga saga remains in question. Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 379.
334 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 379.
337 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 84-5.
Transparency: A derivation from *fela* is possible and perhaps transparent, as might have been the meaning ‘board, plank’ from *fjöl* as well as ‘much’ (nominalized above as as ‘plenty’).

The aforementioned name Fjölnir is an Óðinsheiti as well as one of the Vanir. Fjalarr is also the name of several giants (*Hávamál* 14; *Hárbarðsljóð* 26) and also the rooster found in Galgviðr (*Völuspá* 41). In addition, Fjalarr is a dwarf in *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* and *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*.

*Gylf. Falr* – ‘Spear-Socket;’ ‘Hider’?

Construction: Identical to *falr*, m. ‘the tube into which the shaft of a spear is inserted’ but could also be derived from *fela* ‘to hide’ (see Fialarr above).

Transparency: The primary meaning ‘spear-socket’ would have been transparent; less certain is whether the audience would have looked beyond a familiar word and perceived a derivation from *fela*.

Falr is probably referenced in the kenning *Fals veig* (‘Falr’s strong drink’ = [poem]).

**CR Frostri (Gylf. Frosti)** – ‘Frost’

Construction: The noun *frost*, n. ‘frost’ plus the suffix -ri (or -i in *Gylf.*) to form a masculine name.

Transparency: Fully transparent.

Frostri (as Frosti) is a dwarf in *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* and *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*.

**CR Finnr (Gylf. Fiðr)** – ‘Finn’

Construction: Identical to *Finnr*, m. ‘Finn.’

Transparency: Transparent in that a person from somewhere in the region of Finland is meant, but it is not clear why only this particular dwarf received a human demonym. Polomé asserts that *Finnr* is “a frequent designation for someone indulging in magic” due to

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343 Lorenz, *Gylfaginning*, 232
the reputation of the Finns during the Middle Ages as magic-workers, and dwarfs certainly had a magical quality to them.\textsuperscript{344}

**CR Ginnarr – ‘Deceiver’**

Construction: Probably \textit{ginn}- from \textit{ginna} ‘to deceive, to fool, to beguile’ or ‘to bewitch’ (< \textit{ginn}, m. ‘deceit, falsehood’) plus the suffix \textit{-arr} to form a masculine (agent) name.\textsuperscript{345}

Transparency: Probably transparent.

Ginnarr is reminiscent of the title \textit{Gylfaginning} which contains \textit{-ginning}, and is almost certainly derived from \textit{ginn} or \textit{ginna}.

Ginnarr is an Óðinsheiti in the \textit{Pulur}, presumably due to Óðinn’s strong association with magic.\textsuperscript{346}

**II. Statistical Observations\textsuperscript{347}**

\textit{Codex Regius} of the \textit{Poetic Edda}:

CR contains sixty-one unique names (there are sixty-three names, but two are repeats).

Twelve names are also Óðinsheiti, contain elements also found in Óðinsheiti, or are reminiscent of Óðinsheiti:

- \textbf{Dvalinn} (cf. Hanga Dvalinn), \textbf{Mióðvitnir} (cf. the mead of poetry), \textbf{Dekkr, Reginn, Fundinn, Víli} (‘Víli’s brother’ = Óðinn\textsuperscript{348}), \textbf{Frár} (cf. Fráriðr), \textbf{Dolgrasir} (cf. Frásar), \textbf{Hár} (\textit{Völuspá} 21; cf. Hávi), \textbf{Hlévangr} (cf. Hléfreyr and Hléfóðr), \textbf{Fialarr} (cf. Fjólnir), \textbf{Ginnarr} (\textit{Pulur}).

Eight names are dwarfs found in mythological stories and poems, as well as sagas, besides \textit{Völuspá}:

- \textbf{Nordrî, Suðrî, Austri, Vestri} (the four corners of the sky – cf. \textit{Gylfaginning} 7),
  \textbf{Dvalinn} (\textit{Hávamál} 143, \textit{Alvíssmál} 16, \textit{Gylfaginning} 15, \textit{Fáfnismál} 13, and \textit{Sórla þátr})
  \textbf{Litr} (\textit{Gylfaginning} 49), \textbf{Fialarr} (\textit{Skáldskaparmál} 1).

\textsuperscript{344} Polomé, “Notes on the Dwarfs,” 448; Simek, \textit{Dictionary of Northern Mythology}, 82.
\textsuperscript{347} For more specific information on the connections and allusions listed, see the corresponding entry for each dwarf name in section 3.I.
\textsuperscript{348} This is not an Odensheite \textit{per se}, merely a reference, but I have included it for sake of completeness.
- In sagas: **Fialarr** and **Frostri** (as Frosti) appear as a pair of dwarfs in *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* and *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*.\(^{349}\)

Sixteen names are also other mythological beings or objects, or could plausibly allude to them:

- **Dvalinn** (cf. Alvíss), ** Nóri** (a sea-king), **Ánarr** (cf. Anarr, husband of Jǫrð), **Mióðvitnir** (cf. the mead of poetry), **Veigr** (cf. Gullveig, also the mead of poetry), **Gandálfr** (elf\(^{350}\)), **Vindálfr** (elf), **Reginn** (Regimsmál; Fáfnismál 25, 36, 39; Völsunga saga 13;\(^{351}\) also, cf. Völuspá refrain “Þá gengu regin ǫll”), **Vili** (Óðinn’s brother), **Draupnir** (Óðinn’s magic ring), **Hár** (cf. the figure in Gylfaginning), **Haugspóri** (debatable – cf. draugr), **Alfr** (elf), **Yngvi** (cf. Yngvi-Freyr), **Fialarr** (several giants and a rooster), and **Ginnarr** (cf. Gylfaginning).

**Hauksbók**

H contains sixty-five unique names. It is mostly similar to CR, although the order and spelling of many of the names is different, and it lacks some of the names but has a few additional ones relevant to the above categories:

- **Nóri**, **Pekkr**, **Fialarr**, **Frostri**, **Finnr**, and **Ginnarr** are missing, removing the corresponding allusions.

- **Billingr**, **Bruní**, **Billdr**, **Buri** are found only in H; **Billingr** appears in Hávamál 97, **Bruní** is an Óðinsheiti, and **Buri** is an allusion to Búri, the grandfather of Óðinn, Víli, and Vé (Gylfaginning 6).

- **Náinn**, **Nipingr**, **Dáinn**, and **Nýr** are found in H (and Gylf.) but not CR; **Náinn** is a serpent found in the Puluur, and **Dáinn** is a dwarf found in Hyndluljóð.

- **Ónarr** is found instead of **Ánarr**, making an allusion to Anarr less likely in H.

- **Veggr** is found instead of **Veigr**, removing the allusion to Gullveig in H.

- **Fíli** is repeated instead of **Víli**, removing the allusion to Víli in H.

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\(^{349}\) Sijmons and Gering, *Kommentar*, 19.

\(^{350}\) It is not entirely certain whether dwarfs and elves were considered distinctly different creatures, as the *Prose Edda* calls the dwarfs svartálfar (‘black/dark elves’; Skáldskaparmál 35). Most likely they and their characteristics were conflated somewhat. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, 68.

\(^{351}\) Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, 262.
- **Sviðrr** is found instead of **Svíorr**, adding allusions to the Óðinsheiti Sviðrir, Sviðuðr, and Sviðurr.

- **Fornbogi** is found instead of **Hornbori**.

- **Hlévargr** is found instead of **Hlévangr**; similarity to Hlé-containing Óðinsheiti remains.

**Gylfaginning**

*Gylf.* contains sixty-two unique names, and is more similar to H, with some differences:

- **Nóri, Ækkr, Frostri, Finnr,** and **Ginnarr** are not missing; the corresponding allusions are thus present.

- Rather than H **Sviðrr**, *Gylf.* contains forms more similar to CR **Svíorr**, thus it is lacking allusions to the corresponding Óðinsheiti.

- **Óri, Óinn, Prór, Haurr, Dori, Dúfr, Andvari,** and **Heptifili** are found only in *Gylf.*; **Óri** and **Óinn** add allusions to serpents in the *Þulur*; **Prór** adds allusions to an Óðinsheiti, a boar, and a mythical sword; **Dúfr** adds an allusion to Dúfa; **Andvari** adds an allusion to the dwarf in *Reginsmál*.

- **Móðvitnir** is found in CRPr instead of **Mióðvitnir**, removing the allusion to the mead of poetry and Óðinn.

- **Vigr/Viggr** is found instead of **Veigr/Veggr**, removing the allusion to Gullveig and the mead of poetry.

- **Vali** is found instead of **Náli**; cf. Óðinn’s son Váli and the Óðinsheiti Valtyr and Valkjósandi.

- **Próinn** is found instead of **Práinn**.

- **Rekkr** is found instead of **Reginn**, removing the allusion to *Reginsmál* and the other poems of the Sigdurðr Fáfnisbani cycle.

- **Dolgþvari** is found instead of **Dolgþrasir**; possible meaning ‘war-spear’ (cf. Gungnir).

- **Hugstari** is found instead of **Haugspori**, removing a possible allusion to draugar but adding a potential allusion to the raven Huginn.
- **Hleðiólfr** is found instead of **Hlévangr/Hlévargr**, adding an allusion to the Óðinsheití Jólfí.

- **Haurr** is found instead of **Hár**, possibly removing allusions to the Óðinsheití Hár and Hávi.

- **Falr** is found instead of **Fialarr**, arguably removing allusions to the dwarf, rooster, and giants named Fjalarr.

**Summary:**

- **Óðinsheití**: CR: 12 (19.7%); H: 10 (15.4%); **Gylf.**: 8 (12.9%)
- Mythological Dwarfs: CR: 8 (13.1%); H: 7 (10.8%); **Gylf.**: 9 (14.5%)
- Other mythological figures: CR: 16 (26.2%); H: 13 (20%); **Gylf.**: 14 (22.6%)

**Total Allusions:**

- CR: 27 (44.3%)
- H: 25 (38.5%)
- **Gylf.**: 28 (45.2%)
- Average across the three versions: 42.7%

**Other Categories:**

In addition to mythological references, it is useful to separate the potential meanings of the dwarf names into broader categories.

- Natural features: CR: 16 (26.2%); H: 15 (23.1%); **Gylf.**: 13 (21%).
  23.4% average.

- Tools or everyday objects: CR: 13 (21.3%); H: 17 (26.2%); **Gylf.**: 14 (22.6%). 23.4% average.

- Character traits: CR: 39 (63.9%); H: 39 (60%); **Gylf.**: 38 (61.3%).
  61.7% average.

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352 These numbers represent the total number of names in each version which may allude to something; names which refer to more than one thing (eg. both Óðinsheití and dwarf(s)) are not counted twice.

353 Numbers are inclusive rather than conservative; I have even included names which could potentially refer to the things in the various categories (eg. Bívǫr ‘trembler’ is included in natural features because the name could be perceived metaphorically as an earthquake). The numbers are also not exclusive – one name might fall into multiple categories.
4. ANALYSIS

I. Dwarf Names and Natural Features

Natural features and place names appear frequently throughout *Völuspá*; thus, it is no surprise that parts of *Dvergatal* appear to describe natural features immediately present in Iceland. I argue that a close examination of these names and the corresponding sections of *Völuspá* that refer to geographical features display a seemingly conscious and careful set of parallels between the dwarfs and the poem – parallels which touch on various layers of the poem from mythological creation to the apocalypse. This is especially meaningful with respect to volcanic imagery in *Völuspá*, a feature which, to my mind, has not been explored nearly enough in the past.

The overtly geographical names appear in clusters that mirror parts of *Völuspá*. The very first name, Mót sognir, could plausibly mean ‘wrath-sea’ or ‘weary-sea.’ Then, skipping Durinn ‘sleep, door,’ six names in a row – Nýi, Niði, Norðri, Suðri, Austri, and Vestri are all related to the sky and human orientation in both space and time, being two phases of the moon and the cardinal directions. Also in close proximity to these are Bívǫrr ‘trembler’ and Bǫmburr ‘drum, drummer, boomer;’ thinking in terms of natural features it is not a great leap to see how the former could designate an earthquake and how the latter could stand for the loud booming of either a thunderclap or a volcanic eruption. Following Bǫmburr four names later is Ái, the primary meaning of which is ‘great-grandfather’ but due to the regularity of derivations of names using the suffix -i the secondary meaning ‘river’ is also possible and would have been transparent. At this point *Dvergatal* takes a break from natural features and picks them up again later on with the pairs Lóni ‘lagoon’ and Aurvangr ‘loam-field, gleaming meadow;’ and Haguspóri ‘hill-treader, hill-track’ and Hlévagr ‘shelter-field’ (the H variant Hlévargr ‘shelter-wolf, shelter-outlaw’ does not work here). Ái is repeated and then near the end of the CR list, Frostri ‘frost’ is found. *Gylfaginning* adds one more name, Dufr ‘wave,’ to this category. As previously discussed, not a single name in *Dvergatal* (or indeed in the entire corpus of dwarf names) directly refers to stones or living beneath the earth, which reinforces the notion that the names of the dwarfs have to do with something other than their status as mythical beings. Instead, the concentration of natural features in certain sections suggests that *Dvergatal* is partly concerned with establishing or drawing attention to the world surrounding the audience. This mirrors the composition of *Völuspá* as a whole; the wider

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poem sometimes concerns itself with the physical world of the mythological figures, but it meanders organically in its descriptions and is not particularly systematic or comprehensive about describing the mythological world, in contrast to *Gylfaginning* which has a clear task of systematically explaining the world from a mythological viewpoint. With *Voluspá* the audience is either expected to be familiar enough with the world described that the place-names (which are often compounds of a geographical feature plus a distinguishing attribute) and natural features of the world fit in with a wider, known context; or, the uninformed are expected to piece together what they can from the scattered references to natural features. So too with *Dvergatal*: Not enough information is given in the list to form a coherent natural/geographical context, but some details are present, and a clever or informed audience may have been able to fit them in with background knowledge acquired orally or through another source now lost and unknown.

Indeed, even a not-so-well-informed audience could have made such connections between *Dvergatal* and other parts of *Voluspá*. Stanzas 4-6 establish and recount the origins of many natural features – seashores, the land, stones, green vegetation, the sun, the moon, stars, night ‘and her offspring’ (“nótt ok niðiom;” the similarity between *niðiom* and the dwarf *Niði* is hard to miss, even though the poem itself says these offspring are the times of day, not the moon phases; 6). Missing, however, are the cardinal directions, the moon phases, the seas, rivers, pools, and more, which follow just four stanzas later in *Dvergatal*. Is the list of dwarfs, then, partially completing this description of the world? It certainly adds to it, and none of the names which supports this possibility.

Some of the names appear elsewhere in *Voluspá* alone, in compounds, or in parallel formations, not describing dwarfs but rather natural features. Compare *Aurvangr* and *Aurvanga* ‘loam fields’ (*Voluspá* 14) which is probably a place name, not the dwarf due to its plural inflexion; *Niði* and *Niðavellir* ‘waning-moon plains’ (*Voluspá* 36) as well as *Niðafjöll* ‘waning-moon mountains’ (*Voluspá* 62); *Nár* (CR) / *Náinn* (H) – Nástranda ‘corpse-shore;’ and *Fialarr* (*Voluspá* 41).

Of particular interest is *Fialarr*, who is not only a dwarf in *Voluspá* (CR) but is also a rooster (*hani*; 41); I argue that *Fialarr* and *Bǫmburr* refer to a section of stanzas in *Voluspá* with strong volcanic imagery. As mentioned previously, one way to interpret the name *Bǫmburr* ‘drum, drummer, boomer’ in the context of natural features is as the booming sound of a thunderclap or a volcanic eruption. Iceland is a land full of volcanic activity, and the
audience of *Völuspá* surely knew about volcanic eruptions either from stories or firsthand.\(^{355}\) It should therefore be not just possible but expected to find references to the dramatic event of an eruption in the poetry and literature, and some scholars have located just such references in *Völuspá*, to which I add my own interpretations.\(^{356}\) The following stanzas present multiple accounts and poetic circumlocutions for such an event:

(37) “Sal sá hón standa
sólo fiarri,
Nástrðndo à,
norðr horfa dyrr.
Fello eitrdropar
inn um lióra.
Sá er undinn sal
orma hryggiom.”\(^{357}\)

That the hall is “sólo fiarri” (‘far from the sun’) could refer to volcanic ash clouding the sky. The *eitrdropar* (‘poison-drops’)\(^{358}\) falling in through the roof-vent would likely be ash and tephra (and other poisonous gasses, which the Icelanders at the time were probably not aware of), which can be deadly when inhaled.

(40) “Fylliz fiǫrvi
feigra manna,
rýdr ragna siqt
rauðum dreyra.
Svǫrt verða sólskin
of sumor eptir,
veðr ǫll válynd.”\(^{359}\)


\(^{356}\) Most recently, the above 2013 PhD dissertation *Of Fire and Water* by Valentin examines volcanism in Old Norse literature in detail, focusing on the creation myth of Ymir and the myth of Kvasir in particular. The study also contains a thorough exploration on previous research on volcanism in Icelandic literary works (see pp. 122-4).

\(^{357}\) Dronke, *The Poetic Edda II*, 17. All translations are my own.

\(^{358}\) *Eitr* is also found in the compound *eitrkvikja* ‘poisonous flows’ in *Gylfaginning* 5, where it is arguably describing the process of lava flows hardening into rock. Valentin, *Of Fire and Water*, 130-3.

\(^{359}\) Dronke, *The Poetic Edda II*, 18.
Painting homes with red gore seems to poetically describe a lava flow engulfing a house. “Black becomes the sunshine in the summers that follow, weathers all ill-natured” more or less accurately describes the effect of a massive eruption on local and global weather patterns; Iceland experienced at least some of the disastrous repercussions of such an eruption from Hekla in 1104CE, roughly a century and a half before Völuspá was included in the Codex Regius compilation, as well as from Eldgjá in 934/938CE.

(41) “Sat þar á haugi
ok sló hǫrpo
gýgiar hirðir,
glaðr Egghér.
Gól um hánom
i Galgviði
fagruaðr hani,
sá er Fialarr heitt.”

The shepherd striking his harp could be a reference to the loud explosion of an eruption, as could the crowing of the rooster Fialarr (normalized as Fjalarr), who shares a name with the dwarf of Dvergatal. The figure of a fagruaðr hani (‘bright-red rooster’) is arguably chosen...

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360 Bo Gräslund and Neil Price instead relate these passages to the so-called fimbulvetr mentioned in Gylfaginning 51; the authors argue that both descriptions of cold summers and blocking-out of the sun’s rays stem from a social memory of a catastrophic volcanic event which occurred in the mid-sixth century. That stories about such a catastrophe could survive over six hundred years through oral tradition is possible but uncertain. A source from the more immediate experiences of the Icelanders is preferable, not in the least because the aftermath of a volcanic eruption blocking out the sun is here in Völuspá connected with the more violent and lava-filled events of the eruption itself. If the story had been passed down through generations from the Migration Period, the peoples who witnessed the cold summers would not have known that it was a volcano which caused it – there are no volcanoes in Northern Europe, and Iceland was not settled until the late eighth century. For the effects on the sun and the weather to have been connected with the explosive and fiery nature of a volcanic eruption, someone (in this case, Icelanders) must have witnessed them as the dual results of a single event. Bo Gräslund and Neil Price, “The Twilight of the Gods? The ‘dust veil event’ of AD 536 in a critical perspective,” in Antiquity 86, Issue 337 (June 2012), 437.

361 The Hekla H1 eruption in 1104CE destroyed many farms and deposited a layer of tephra all over the island, thus it must have had a similar effect on the weather at least locally and temporarily. An eruption of the scale that caused the dramatic upheavals in 536CE is probably not possible or it would have been recorded in texts all over Europe and the rest of the world, thus the ‘summers after’ quote is suspicious. “Hekla Volcano” (Reykjavik: Institute of Earth Sciences, University of Iceland, 2007), https://web.archive.org/web/20070212095558/http://www.earthice.hi.is/page/ies_hekla (accessed May 5th, 2017); Sigurður Thorarinsson, Hekla: A notorious volcano, trans. Johann Hannesson and Petur Karlsson (Reykjavik, Almenna Bókafélagið, 1970).

362 This was a huge eruption in terms of tephra released (4.53 km on land), and lava flows destroyed many farms and two settlements in 934, but there is no mention of ‘darkness’ from eruptions of the Katla volcanic system in any of the literary sources until the 1264 Mýrdalsjökull eruption. Guðrún Larsen, “Katla: Tephrochronology and Eruption History,” in Developments in Quaternary Sciences 13: The Mýrdalsjökull Ice Cap, Iceland. Glacial processes, sediments and landforms on an active volcano (2010), 25-7; 28-30.

doubly for his loud call and for his red comb and perhaps bright plumage, which evokes the colours of red-hot lava during an eruption. The following stanzas continue this theme of loud animal calls; stanza 42 contains Gullinkambi (‘golden-comb,’ a volcanic caldera?), who crows over the Æsir and wakes the warriors in Valhöll, and an unnamed sótraðr hani (‘soot-red rooster’) who crows beneath the earth. Again, the imagery is strongly reminiscent of volcanos, where the colours of the roosters could invoke yellow and dark-red lava.

(43) “Geyr [nú] Garmr miǫk    ‘Barks Garmr much
fyr Gnipayelli – before Overhanging-Crag Cave364 –
festr mun slitna,  rope will snap,
en freki rena.”365  and the wolf run.’

This particular passage, repeated several times throughout the poem, seems to refer to Fenrir, tied up by magical fetters as recounted in Gylfaginning 34;366 however, the verses could also refer to a volcano about to erupt: A series of earthquakes often precede large eruptions – perhaps symbolized by the mythological wolf’s ‘barking;’ and the festr (‘rope,’ but probably better symbolized with Dronke’s ‘fetters’) holding back the lava is about to break, letting it run. This is supported by the notion that Gnípahellir is the supposed entrance to Hel;367 in both explosive and non-explosive volcanic eruptions, lava flows often emerge out of the sides or ground of the volcano, which could easily push in favour of a mythological connection to the underworld. Preceding the final repetition of this refrain in Völuspá is the following stanza:

(54) “Sól tér sortna,  ‘The sun grows black,
sigfr fold í mar,  the earth sinks into the sea,
hverfa af himni  turn from the sky
heiðar stiǫrnor.  bright stars.
Geisar eimi  Vapour rages
við aldrnara,  against fire,

364 Brink and Lindow note that Gnípahellir is most probably a compound of gnípa, f. ‘overhanging crag’ and hellir, m. ‘rock cave.’ I have translated above quite literally but a more artistic translation could perhaps be ‘Craggle Rock-Cave.’ Brink and Lindow, “Place-names in eddic poetry,” 178.
366 Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 80; Lorenz, Gylfasaginning, 412-9.
367 Brink and Lindow, “Place-names in eddic poetry,” 178.
leikr hár hiti  high heat plays
við himin siálfan.  'with the sky itself.'

Besides the earth sinking into the sea, these details are again consistent with a massive volcanic eruption.

If this interpretation is correct, then multiple types of sounds are used to signify the noise of a volcanic explosion: á slá harpu ‘to strike a harp;’ gala ‘to crow;’ geyja ‘to bark.’ In light of these metaphorical terms, the proposed meaning of Bǫmburr ‘drum, drummer, boomer,’ is even closer to the actual sound of an eruption and matches the concept of a musical instrument’s song signifying an eruption noise. In light of this, Fialarr and Bǫmburr add geographical connections between Dvergatal and Völuspá that require an interpretation beyond the literal meaning of the stanzas to arrive at the conceptual meaning, which a contemporary Icelandic audience would probably not have missed.

The inclusion of geographical features in the dwarf names can therefore be considered a multi-layered device which draws connections between the dwarfs, the creation of the mythological universe, its landscape, and the apocalyptic overtone of the poem. Though none of the dwarf names directly refer to living in stones or underground, as a race they were undoubtedly closely associated with nature. The structure of creation in the beginning stanzas as well as the brief but frequent descriptions of the mythological universe in Völuspá are both mirrored and supplemented in Dvergatal; this includes passages which require some degree of interpretation in order to understand the connection, as may be the case with Fialarr and Bǫmburr and the corresponding volcanic imagery found in various stanzas. Finally, Völuspá is ultimately an apocalyptic poem; the universe is built in the beginning only to be destroyed and built anew, and few things would feel as immediately apocalyptic as a volcanic eruption. If Fialarr and Bǫmburr do indeed refer to volcanic eruptions then the cycle of birth and death is contained within Dvergatal, just as it is the main narrative of Völuspá.

366 Simek postulates the origin of the dwarfs as either nature spirits or demons of death, but leans towards the latter interpretation. De Vries places them in the same category as local deities, nature spirits, and death-spirits without emphasizing one origin in particular. The frequency of dwarfs being associated with mountains, stones, and other natural features in various kennings supports the impression we get from the mythology that the dwarfs are fundamentally connected with the Earth – see section 2.III of this study. Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 68; de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte, 253; Meissner, Die Kenningar, 256-7.
II. Dwarf Names and Objects

One-fifth to one-quarter\textsuperscript{370} of the dwarf names in \textit{Dvergatal} may designate some sort of object or tool, and nearly all of them are human constructions that would have been made by smiths or craftspeople. The most plausible explanation of these names is therefore that they represent products made by the dwarfs themselves. Gould postulates that names designating weapons are supposed to portray that dwarf as a warrior – Billdr ‘blade,’ Falr ‘spear-socket,’ and Fornbogi ‘old bow’ are examples.\textsuperscript{371} This might be convincing if there were any examples of dwarfs fighting in \textit{Völsþá} or any of the other literary sources, but there are not – in \textit{Völsþá} the dwarfs are passive creatures when it comes to actual combat, merely groaning before their stone doors when the signs of Ragnarökkr appear (\textit{Völsþá} 49). The only violence perpetrated by any dwarfs is found in the story of the mead of poetry, in which Fjalarr and Gallar sneakily kill Kvasir, drown the giant Gillingr, and drop a millstone on his wife’s head (\textit{Skáldskaparmál} 5). These are not the actions of warriors but rather of guile. There is also no evidence in \textit{Völsþá} of dwarfs actively creating any objects, but the dwarfs appear in an active capacity as smiths and/or craftspeople in nearly every other instance except for this poem. Therefore, the other mythological sources support the smith/crafts-person role extensively (see the section 2. III, above), unlike the idea of dwarfs as warriors, which is only supported by the etymological meanings of the names (see section 4. III, below).

If one examines \textit{Völsþá} itself for objects and tools in the same ilk as those in \textit{Dvergatal}, there are only a few things to compare. \textit{Völsþá} is mostly populated with natural features (both landscapes and individual things such as trees), characters, and halls; it does, however, contain a fair number of weapons, and when they appear they designate impending doom or combat.\textsuperscript{372} Should, then, the names which designate weapons indicate dwarfs who engage in battle? That is indeed one line of interpretation, but it is a stretch lacking any combative dwarfs in the poem itself. There is also a mention of the Æsir establishing forges and making tongs and tools (\textit{Völsþá} 7), and Óðinn apparently grants “hringa ok men” (‘rings and necklaces’) to the vǫlva (29). The former instance occurs in close proximity to \textit{Dvergatal}, only two stanzas before the account of the creation of the dwarfs, and it may be

\textsuperscript{370} CR: 13 (21.3%); H: 17 (26.2%); Gyld.: 14 (22.6%). 23.4% average.


\textsuperscript{372} The Æsir kill Gullveig with geirom (‘[with] spears,’ \textit{Völsþá} 21); Skuld’s skildi (‘shield,’ \textit{Völsþá} 30); sǫxom ok sverðom (‘knives and swords,’ 35); “skeggold, skálmold / skildir ro klofnir” (‘axe-age, sword age / shields are cloven’ 44).
significant; in fact, this may be the missing link between dwarfs as smiths, *Völsög*, and *Dvergatal*. The Æsir initially establish the art of smithing, then create the dwarfs, some of whom are named for crafted objects and tools; in conjunction with the high probability that the audience would have been well acquainted with the dwarfs as smiths and craftspeople, it is likely not a coincidence that these stanzas seem to be connected. This could be why the dwarfs do not actually craft anything in *Völsög* – the audience is presumed to know that the magical objects were created by the dwarfs, especially because that information is provided elsewhere in the manuscripts. The names themselves and the fact that they are dwarves provide all the clues necessary for one to make the connections.

### III. Dwarf Names and Character Traits

Approximately sixty percent\(^{373}\) of the dwarf names in *Dvergatal* can be considered character traits. One line of reasoning is to assume that each name is the primary character trait of the corresponding dwarf, but since the dwarfs are not individual characters within *Völsög*, this does not go very far. A further step is to examine the character traits as a group and ask whether they tell us anything about dwarfs generally. Gould does this and finds three main types of character traits across all the dwarf names: death-like traits, warrior-like traits, and wisdom.\(^{374}\) Part of his conclusion is therefore that dwarfs could be warriors, even though (as mentioned above) there are no examples of dwarfs participating in combat.\(^{375}\) This also cannot be taken very far. A better approach would be to look at the character traits in the context of *Völsög*, though this approach produces only limited results: I have found some parallels between *Dvergatal* and *Völsög* which could further strengthen the notion that *Dvergatal* is composed partially to echo the poem in which it is found. The main struggle in *Völsög* is the struggle of the Æsir, intended to be perceived as a force of good by the audience, against their enemies, who are (to put it bluntly) evil.\(^{376}\) The character traits of the dwarf names can be divided up between these two opposing forces such that *Dvergatal* partly

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\(^{373}\) CR: 39 (63.9%); H: 39 (60%); *Gylf.*: 38 (61.3%). 61.7% average.


\(^{376}\) John McKinnell notes that although the Christian context of *Völsög*’s transmission might suggest some contemporaries would have viewed the heathen gods as associated with the devil, the very fact that the poem was written down indicates that it was not universally considered blasphemous; rather, it is more likely an instance of euhemerism, where the gods are perceived as partially historical charaters and thus worth cheering for. John McKinnell, “Heathenism in *Völsög*,” in *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völsög and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2013), 97-8.
mirrors the cosmic struggle. Taking this vantage point solves the problem that heroic and warrior-like traits in dwarfs are not corroborated by any of the literary sources.

A number of the character traits fall under the umbrella of what can be considered heroic or warrior-like in a Nordic context: Dólgþrasir ‘battle-eager;’ Iari ‘conflict;’ Frægr ‘famous;’ Hanarr ‘the skilled;’ Vili ‘will;’ Þorinn ‘the daring;’ Þekkr ‘liked;’ Þráinn ‘the defiant;’ Veigr ‘vigour;’ Ánarr ‘hope;’ Ori ‘quarreler;’ Vigr ‘battle,’ ‘vigour;’ Þrár ‘tenacious;’ Rekkr ‘hero, warrior;’ and Andvari ‘vigilance,’ ‘soul-defender.’ That none of these traits are part of dwarfs’ characterisations in any of the mythical sources suggests they may allude to something or someone else. In Völsþpá the natural choice for heroic and warrior-like qualities would be the Æsir, who engage in a good deal of fighting.

Other traits can be classified as negative, or at least something that might be associated with the antagonists of Völsþpá: Mótsognir ‘weary/wrath-sucker;’ Alþiófr ‘all-thief;’ Dvalinn ‘the delayed;’ Bífórr ‘trembler;’ Án ‘lacking;’ Nár ‘corpse;’ Náinn ‘corpse;’ Vili ‘hardship;’ Sviar ‘the declining;’ Iari ‘conflict;’ Draupnir ‘drooper;’ Fialarr ‘hider;’ Ginnarr ‘deceiver;’ Hlévargr ‘shelter-wolf/outlaw;’ Ori ‘the insane;’ Dáinn ‘the dead;’ and Vali ‘the slain.’ Negative character traits are more in line with the mythical characterisation of the dwarfs, but not all dwarfs are malign beings; many supply the gods with helpful equipment.

There are, admittedly, several problems with this approach: None of the positive character traits are directly applied to any of the gods; and of the negative traits, only Nár as a noun (nár, m., acc. pl. nái) is actually found elsewhere in Völsþpá, as the chew-toys of Niðhöggr. Furthermore, the above lists have a few names in common which can be positive or negative depending on one’s interpretation and which possible meaning one chooses. To that effect, Vali and Dáinn are also ambiguous, as Öðinn is closely associated with the slain. Therefore, while the good/evil dichotomy is paralleled between Dvergatal and Völsþpá, the degree to which it is convincing is largely reliant on subjectivity, both now and then: How did contemporaries truly feel about the gods and their enemies? How did they feel about dwarfs? Those questions are open to debate but are ultimately unknowable. A more fruitful endeavor concerning the dwarf names that signify character traits might be to closely examine the semantics of each name and see if they correspond to any other names or heiti in the literature in the same manner as the Óðinsheiti identified above; in that case, the character

377 “Þar saug Niðhoggr / nái fremgengna” (‘There sucked Niðhoggr / corpses of the dead;’ Völsþpá 38).
traits could potentially be allusions to other figures in the mythological universe. Such detailed inquiry is, unfortunately, outside the scope of this paper but the concept itself is dealt with in the following section.

IV. Dwarf Names and Allusions

In *Gylfaginning* 20, Þriði gives a list of Óðinsheiti, to which Gangleri replies “Geysi morg heiti hafi þer gefit honum. Ok þat veit trúa mín at þetta mun vera mikill fröðleikr sá er hér kann skyn ok dæmi hverir atburðir hafa orðit sér til hvers þessa nafns.” (‘Very many names have you given him. And it is my belief that it must take much knowledge to be able to understand and judge which events have given rise to each name.’).378 In this passage Gangleri identifies a theme in Old Icelandic literature whereby names are assumed to have arisen from some specific event or concept – a knowledgeable individual is capable of knowing the meaning and reasons behind each name, if only they are well-versed enough in the relevant lore. There is no reason why this cannot apply to names for individuals other than Óðinn. Across the witnesses of *Dvergatal* found in the Poetic and Prose Edda, I have been able to identify a good number379 of allusions to Óðinn and Óðinsheiti, dwarfs in other mythological sources, and other mythological figures, objects, or places. The allusions make up nearly half the list (42.7%, taken as an average across the three versions), which warrants serious consideration of their implications for *Dvergatal’s* function in *Völuspá*. In light of the central importance of allusions in Old Icelandic poetry, seen especially in the abundance of skaldic and eddic kennings, it is possible that the allusions in *Dvergatal* are not incidental but rather fundamental to its existence in *Völuspá*. In addition to the allusions which can be identified with more or less certainty, it may be that all of the dwarf names have an allusive function.

Besides the more than 170 identified Óðinsheiti,380 allusions in all forms are a prominent component in the Old Icelandic literary corpus, especially in poetry. In this art of the highly-educated elite, one of the main ways a poet could show off their skill and creativity was to construct complex circumlocutions in order to obfuscate straightforward concepts. Kennings in skaldic poetry, in which two nouns are paired to stand in place of another noun (the referent), demonstrate one form of allusive language taken to nearly the

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379 CR: 27 (44.3%); H: 25 (38.5%); Gylf.: 28 (45.2%).
limit of human ability, where understanding each half-stanza requires one to grasp every
metaphorical relationship between the words, otherwise the passage is more or less gibberish.
Quite often these kennings use allusions to mythology as a method of obscuring the referent,
and one must be familiar with the underlying myth to make the appropriate connections.\footnote{381}
The kenning “nðobyðrða Norðra” (‘burden of the kinsmen of Norðri’ = [sky]; Olafsdrápa
26), mentioned earlier in this study, requires knowledge of the dwarfs as the bearers of the
sky, and moreover that one of them is named Norðri, for one to recognize [sky] as the
referent. In Völuspá, kennings mostly refer to individuals and indicate kinship or
interpersonal relationships, as exemplified by “mogr Sigfður” (‘son of Victory-father’ =
‘son of Óðinn’ = [Víðarr]; Völuspá 52) and “bani Belia” (‘bane of Belja’ = [Freyr]; Völuspá
51).\footnote{382} In the former case, Víðarr is immediately named, and thus the kenning functions as a
supplement to the referent rather than outright replacing the referent; but in the latter case the
referent [Freyr] would be obscure if one did not know who killed Belja.

In some cases, we do not understand the allusions because the material which would
have provided us with the necessary background is presumably lost. The low probability of
survival for medieval manuscripts generally, combined with the high likelihood that “[t]here
was more eddic poetry in Icelandic oral tradition than ever made it into written form” (and,
indeed, not just eddic poetry but other forms of mythological material as well), means that
some allusions must unfortunately remain opaque.\footnote{383} The reference to “Heimdall[l]ar hlióð”
(‘Heimdall’s hearing’ or ‘Heimdall’s horn,’ depending on the interpretation) in Völuspá 27
has continually baffled all attempts of understanding, probably for the reason that the myth
which would make the allusion transparent did not survive.\footnote{384} A further complication with
allusions is the question of whether the form of the myths as they have been recorded is
original to the pre-Christian culture which produced them, or if they have been altered
somewhat over the course of their transmission in a Christian society. In addition, a popular
notion among scholars of the Prose Edda is that Snorri Sturluson made his own changes to
the myths as he compiled the work, a hypothesis which is ultimately unproveable but highly

\footnote{381} Judy Quinn, “Kennings and other forms of figurative language in eddic poetry,” in A Handbook to Eddic
Poetry, ed. Caroline Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
\footnote{382} Quinn, “Kennings,” 298.
\footnote{383} Margaret Clunies Ross, “The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry,” in A Handbook to Eddic
Poetry, ed. Caroline Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
\footnote{384} Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 136.
possible. In these cases both allusions and the things being alluded to could have been altered or removed, especially those which directly clashed with Christian values. Allusions could alternatively have been added if Snorri invented new myths or parts of myths, as for example with the dwarf Litr at Baldr’s funeral (Gylfaginning 49) whose name might have been lifted arbitrarily from Dvergatal. These cases would consequently be identified as allusions today even though they would not have been at the time Dvergatal was composed, and we often have no practical way of discerning whether a myth is original or Snorri’s (or someone else’s) later invention.

Since a portion of the mythological corpus has almost certainly been lost, and the allusions to that material have also been lost or become opaque, it is therefore plausible that more allusions than what I have identified (and I admit that some of the connections I have made are far from certain) exist in Dvergatal. In fact, it is possible that all of the names in Dvergatal originally alluded somehow to the rest of the mythology. This would explain the problematic dwarf names, such as those whose meanings denote heroic character traits which, as discussed above, are incongruous with the typical characterizations of dwarfs as a race in the mythological sources. It would also do a great deal to justify Dvergatal’s place within Völuspá: The poem continuously alludes to various stories throughout its narrative, but pays them only the briefest attention for the most part, leaving the audience to fill in the sketches of the stories with their own knowledge. So too could Dvergatal be considered a concise collection of allusions which supplements the material of Völuspá. As with Gangleri’s assessment of the great number of Óðinsheiti, a fully knowledgeable individual may have been able to identify the story behind each dwarf name, which did not necessarily have to do with dwarfs but could have referred to anything in the mythology. Dvergatal might be, then, a form of shorthand for a universe, waiting to be deciphered.

387 Lorenz, Gylfaginning, 226.
388 Frank’s method in “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry” of examining kennings older than the Prose Edda and how they seem to have been (mis)interpreted and turned into full myths in that work is one such avenue of approach.
5. CONCLUSION

In the quest for knowledge it is often disappointing to encounter a wall which one cannot cross. The conclusion that Dvergatal might allude to myths and stories that we will never know might be considered one such disappointment, but in arriving at this conclusion, I have unearthed several new ways of understanding the dwarf list. Not only do the meanings of the names serve as an adequate catalogue of dwarfs, but they also resound in remarkable harmony with themes in Völspá, from natural features to weapons, to the cosmic struggle between good and evil ending in apocalypse and rebirth. The list also further connects Völspá to the greater mythological context evident in the surviving Old Icelandic sources through a large number of allusions, and probably to further myths and stories that have not survived. Dvergatal may not be central to the plot of Völspá, yet it certainly enhances the themes and allusions that are already in the poem. This, then, is what its function is in Völspá, and it does not perform this function in a straightforward way. Like much of the mythological material it hides its meaning in several layers of interpretation, and one is required to keep digging to find the tendrils reaching out to various parts of Völspá and beyond. In this way Dvergatal is as riddled with hidden meanings and difficult to understand as skaldic poetry, and deserves a place in critical approaches with these masters of obfuscation, not the place it currently occupies today: an ignored set of names worthy of only occasional curiosity.

This study does not aim in any way to be the final word on Dvergatal; rather, it is intended as a touching point for future research. To accomplish this I have discussed only some of the most obvious connections to Völspá and Old Icelandic mythological literature, and I am quite certain that further avenues of approach could be found. In particular, the Christian context of Völspá has not been addressed here due to limitations of space. Such a study of dwarfs and Christianity may prove highly fruitful, for if Christian influences have been identified throughout Völspá, there is no reason why the dwarf list could not have been reinterpreted in a similar symbolic, medieval Christian way. See, for example, Pétur Petersson, “Manifest and Latent Biblical Themes in Völspá,” in The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völspá and Nordic Days of Judgement, ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2013). The dwarfs representing hosts of angels or demons comes to mind, and the meanings of the names could even allude to figures in the Bible or Christian history. Such a duality of alluding to both Old Icelandic mythological stories and Christian concepts would be a true masterpiece of multi-level
meaning and would further speak to the preservation of pre-Christian religious material in post-conversion Iceland.

A final thought on the relevance of *Dvergatal* to the present day: Dwarfs are popular today arguably due to the influence of J. R. R. Tolkien, whose literary works are largely responsible for the proliferation and standardization of the modern fantasy genre. Tolkien took the concept of the Germanic dwarf and transmuted it into a fictional race with a well-explained backstory and even a common language with a rune-like writing system; this is evident in his choice of names for the fictional dwarfs in his *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* series, most of which are lifted from *Dvergatal*. Being intimately familiar with the Old Icelandic material, he must have picked up on the mysterious nature of dwarfs and desired to breathe life into them. Consequently, our modern understanding of dwarfs is heavily coloured by Tolkien’s intervention, and when one encounters the word ‘dwarf’ today it likely calls to mind images of short, bearded humanoids with Nordic helmets and axes. Though they may share common names, fantasy dwarfs have thus diverged considerably from their ancient cousins. This modern concept of dwarfs would probably be rather foreign to a contemporary audience of *Völuspá*, who likely understood dwarfs merely as mythical creatures possessing the traits discussed in section 2.III above, and even that is uncertain. As relatively ambiguous and mysterious beings they would have been ideal to use in a list such as *Dvergatal*, where they were not bogged down by a great amount of established lore and therefore free to symbolize whatever the poet desired through clever name-weaving. The dwarfs of *Dvergatal* are thus names without faces, creatures without life; it is a *tal* told by a poet, full of sound and allusions, signifying something.


