



THE POETIC EDDA

A Dual-Language Edition

EDWARD PETTIT



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Alvíssmál

Alvíssmál (*Alv.*) ‘The Sayings of Alvíss’ is found complete in **R** (fol. 19v–20r) and derivative paper manuscripts. Variant versions of stt. 20 and 30 appear in *SnESkald*, manuscripts of which variously call the poem *Alvíssmál*, *Qlvíssmál* and *Alsvinnsmál* (*Alsvinnr* ‘All Wise’ or *Alsviðr* ‘All Swift’). This suggests that it may have existed in some form before c. 1220–41.

The poem’s metre is almost entirely *ljóðaháttir*, the usual choice for dialogue poems. The sole exception is the second half of the final stanza, which is in *galdralag*.

Alv. is the last poem—or, arguably, poetic drama—in **R**’s mythological group. It may owe its position beside *Vkv.* to their shared focus on two lesser kinds of supernatural being: respectively, the elf, represented by *Völundr*, and the dwarf, represented by Alvíss. *Alv.*’s placement after *Vkv.* perhaps reflects a compiler’s perception of narrative and stylistic similarities between *Þrk.* and *Vkv.*, but it separates *Alv.* from the other poems that either focus on Þórr or give him a prominent role (*Hrbl.*, *Hym.*, *Ls.* and *Þrk.*) and from the comparable wisdom poems at the start of **R** (*Vsp.*, *Háv.*, *Vm.* and *Grm.*).

Alv. is comparable to *Vsp.*, *BDr.* and *Hdl.* in recounting a god’s questioning of an otherworldly being. The poem’s closest Eddic correspondences, however, are with the late bridal-quest poem *Fj.* (part of *Svipdagsmál*), the wisdom contest *Vm.* (to which *Alv.* might be indebted), and the wisdom monologue *Grm.* *Vm.*, *Grm.* and *Alv.* set their wisdom passages in a simple framing narrative that culminates in the death of the god’s giant or giant-like adversary: respectively, the giant *Vafþrúðnir*, King *Geirrðör* (namesake of a famous giant) and the giantish dwarf Alvíss. In *Vm.* and *Grm.* the god is Óðinn, not Þórr, but although *Alv.*’s Þórr does not display Óðinn’s learning, he resembles Óðinn in his use of trickery, rather than brute force, to defeat his opponent. Perhaps it is surprise at the unusualness of being questioned by Þórr—and so of having the opportunity to outsmart him—that fatally distracts Alvíss.

Indeed, why Þórr does not simply slay Alvíss with his hammer is puzzling, because he shows no such restraint elsewhere. Contrast, for example, his swift slaying—in violation of sworn oaths—of the giant employed to rebuild the gods’ defensive wall after the *Æsir-Vanir* war (*Vsp.* **H** 22); also his kicking of the dwarf *Litr* onto *Baldr*’s funeral pyre in *SnEGylf* (49, p. 46). Perhaps the difference this time is that Þórr does not wish to leave evidence of his opposition (according to one possible interpretation) to Óðinn’s promise to marry his foster-daughter(?) to Alvíss. Consequently, Alvíss has

to die by non-violent means, preferably—to validate Þórr's disapproval—through his own foolishness. And foolish is how Alvið appears at the last; despite being a veritable thesaurus, the 'all-wise' dwarf lacks wisdom. He might know every name and *öll ... rök fira* 'all the history of living beings', but his own 'destiny/doom' (another sense of *rök*) takes him by surprise. In this respect we may compare Vafþrúðnir, although it is doubtful whether, given the chance, Alvið would have matched that giant's dignified resignation in defeat.

Alvið's role in the poem reinforces his giantish associations. In *Vsp.*, *Þrk.* and elsewhere, giants desire goddesses—generally Freyja, but also sometimes Þórr's wife Sif and Íðunn (for her apples). They devise various means to obtain them—some legitimate and contractual, some not—but are thwarted, usually by Þórr's swinging hammer. In *Alv.* the object of desire could well be Þórr's foster-daughter (or at least a young female in his care), though she herself is not necessarily divine. This story is otherwise unknown, but a similar one seems to have existed, again involving a giant. According to a kenning in an early skaldic verse attributed to Bragi Boddason and preserved in *SnESkáld* (I, 49, p. 69), the giant Hrungnir is the *Þrúðar þjófr* 'thief of Þrúðr', Þrúðr being Þórr's only known daughter.

Although thwarted attempts to marry or abduct goddesses seem to have been a staple topic of Norse myth, *Alv.* (if correctly associated with them) is the only instance to concern a dwarf. In early Norse sources, dwarves tend to keep to themselves. Unlike the giants, but like the elves, there is no mention of male and female dwarves, let alone of dwarf marriages. Furthermore, dwarves do not otherwise seek the gods. Rather the gods seek them to benefit from their skill as smiths; among their creations are Óðinn's spear, Þórr's hammer, Freyr's ship and Sif's golden hair. Similarly, in late legendary-heroic sagas, heroes seek dwarves and force them to forge splendid weapons. Only the first chapter of the fourteenth-century *Sörla þáttr* 'Tale of Sörlí' tells of sex between dwarves and a goddess; Freyja liked the look of a necklace they were making, they liked the look of her, and she duly provided sex as payment.

If Alvið's relations with the gods are unusual for a dwarf, other aspects of his nature are easier to parallel. Dwarf-names such as *Dáinn* 'Dead One' and *Náinn* 'Corpse-Like One' support Þórr's suspicions about Alvið's association with the dead (*Alv.* 2). That dwarves know things is confirmed by dwarf-names such as *Fjolsviðr* 'Very Wise One' and *Vitr* 'Wise One', the dwarf Þjóðreyrir's chanting in *Hav.* 160, and dwarves' description as *vísir* 'wise ones' in *Vsp.* 50. Alvið's home under a stone finds correspondence in, for example, chapter 12 of *Ynglinga saga* and in *Vsp.* 50. And although it is merely a likelihood that Alvið turns to stone at dawn (a fate that elsewhere befalls rock-dwelling giants and trolls), the sun's description as 'Dvalinn's toy' in *Alv.* 16 (see note 43), the reference to a *dagskjarr* 'day-shy' dwarf in st. 2 of the poem *Ynglingatal* 'Tally of the Ynglings' in *Ynglinga saga*, and the dwarf-name *Sólblindi* 'Sun-Blind/Hidden One' suggest that he was not the only one of his kind to be harmed or destroyed by daylight.

Having said that *Alv.*'s wisdom dialogue is comparable to that of *Vm.* (it also bears comparison with the questioning of suitors in folk-tales), Alvíss's wisdom is primarily linguistic, rather than mythological. For *Alv.* may appear to be, as Calvert Watkins has noted, essentially a 'quite artificial literary showpiece and tour de force,' and effectively a 'versified "synonymy"'.¹ Some have thought its purpose merely virtuosic, but it might also have been intended, to some extent, as an aide-mémoire for poets—or, given that most of its poetic synonyms (*heiti*) are rare in poetry, at least as a reference for them. If so, *Alv.* shares a purpose with Snorri's *Prose Edda*, for which it is, as noted above, a direct source. *Alv.* is undoubtedly, like Eddic poems such as *Vsp.* (*Dvergatal* section) and *Grm.*, akin to versified *þulur* 'name-lists' extant from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, whether as a source or a derivative.

In another regard, *Alv.*'s assignment of different words to different kinds of being is of interest because it manifests an ancient Indo-European notion also reflected in, for example, Homer's *Iliad*, the Sanskrit *Satapatha-Brahmana* and a medieval Irish treatise on grammar and poetics called *Auraicept na n-Éces* 'The Scholar's Primer'. At root, the notion is thought to be of a binary opposition between the language of humans (ordinary, semantically 'unmarked' words) and that of gods (less common, semantically 'marked' words). Accordingly, words assigned to humans in *Alv.* are still in everyday use in Norwegian, whereas those assigned to the divine powers tend to be, as Lennart Moberg has observed, 'higher up the stylistic scale ... poetic circumlocutions of various types'; unfortunately, these nuances are lost in translation to English.

The *Alv.* poet refines this opposition by assigning—perhaps sometimes inventing—words and expressions according to the nature of each being and as far as the alliterative constraints of his metre and strictly formulaic approach allow. In so doing, he indirectly imparts mythological meaning. Thus, the translations of the elves' words suggest a cheerful disposition and an appreciation of nature's beauty: 'growing', 'fair roof', 'fair wheel', 'day-soother', 'fair limb', and 'sleep-joy'. By contrast, the giants' words have a grimmer, more literal-minded and utilitarian bent: 'greenish', 'up-world', 'hurrier', 'sultry', 'eel-home', 'greedy', 'fuel', 'unlight', and 'food'. The gods' words appear more solemn, poetic or archaic.

The concept of a different world or home (*heimr*) for each kindred probably corresponds, broadly at least, to the nine worlds of *Vsp.* 2. From *Alv.* we might deduce (with place-names supplied from other sources), one world each for humans (*Miðgarðr*), Æsir (*Ásgarðr*), Vanir (*Vanaheimr*), elves (*Álfheimr*), giants (*Jötunheim(a)r*), dwarves (the earth) and the dead (*Hel*). Systematizers might want to add two more to make nine—arguably a world each for the mysterious *uppregin* 'powers above' of *Alv.* 10 and the *halir* 'heroes' of *Alv.* 28, but such an approach is often inappropriate for beliefs that were doubtless subject to change.

1 C. Watkins, 'Language of Gods and Language of Men: Remarks on Some Indo-European Metalinguistic Traditions', in J. Puhvel, ed., *Myth and Law among the Indo-Europeans: Studies in Indo-European Comparative Mythology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 1–17 at 5, 17.

Synopsis

Alv. begins with an as yet unidentified person declaring that he will bring home a wife, despite what everyone may think (1). Someone else, noting the stranger's deathly, ogreish appearance and thinking him ill-suited to marriage, demands to know who he is (2). The stranger introduces himself as *Alvíss* 'All Wise'; he lives beneath a stone and has come to see the 'man of carts(?)' (probably Óðinn), who has made him a firm pledge (3). The questioner declares the arrangement invalid because he was away when it was made—only he among the gods can give the woman in marriage (4). *Alvíss* asks who he is and declares him a vagabond (5). Þórr identifies himself and repeats his opposition to the marriage (6). *Alvíss* nevertheless declares his eagerness for the match (7). Þórr says *Alvíss* can have her if he can tell him everything he wants to know 'from every world' (8).

Þórr asks *Alvíss*, now identified as a dwarf, thirteen, mostly paired questions about how various things are called in each world: earth (9), sky (11); moon (13), sun (15); clouds (17), wind (19); calm (21), sea (23); fire (25), wood (27); night (29) (but not day!); seed (31) and ale (33). *Alvíss* answers each question in turn, telling Þórr the words for these things among principally humans, Æsir, Vanir, giants, elves and dwarves. Þórr acknowledges the dwarf's great learning, but reveals that he has tricked him into staying above ground too long; dawn has broken, the sun is shining and, it seems likely, has turned *Alvíss* to stone or otherwise destroyed him (35).

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Alvíssmál

1. ‘Bekki breiða nú skal brúðr með mér,
 heim í sinni snúask;
 hratat um mægi mun hverjum þikkja,
 heima skalat hvíld nema!’
2. ‘Hvat er þat fira? Hví ertu svá fqlr um nasar?
 Vartu í nótt með ná?
 Þursa líki þikki mér á þér vera,
 ertattu til brúðar borinn!’
3. ‘Alvíss ek heiti, bý ek fyr jörð neðan,
 á ek undir steini stað;
 vagna vers ek em á vit kominn,
 bregði engi fǫstu heiti fira!’
4. ‘Ek mun bregða, þvíat ek brúðar á
 flest um ráð sem faðir;
 varka ek heima, þá er þér heitit var,
 at sá einn er gjafi er með goðum.’
5. ‘Hvat er þat rekka, er í ráðum telsk
 fljóðs ins fagrglóa?
 Fjarrafleina þik munu fáir kunna —
 hverr hefir þik baugum borit?’
6. ‘Vingþórr ek heiti — ek hefi víða ratat —
 sonr em ek Síðgrana;
 at ósátt minni skaltu þat it unga man hafa
 ok þat gjaforð geta.’
7. ‘Sáttir þínar er ek vil snemma hafa,
 ok þat gjaforð geta;
 eiga vilja, heldr en án vera,
 þat it mjallhvíta man.’
8. ‘Meyjar ástum muna þér verða,
 vísi gestr, of varit,
 ef þú ór heimi kant hverjum at segja
 allt þat er ek vil vita.
9. ‘Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of rǫk fira
 vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir:
 hvé sú jörð heitir, er liggr fyr alda sonum,
 heimi hverjum í.’

The Sayings of Alvíss

1. ‘Now shall a bride cover¹ the benches with me,²
 come home in my company;
 it’ll seem to everyone a hurried engagement,³
 she shan’t take her leisure at home!’⁴
2. ‘What kind of living thing is that? Why are you so livid around the nose?
 Were you with a corpse last night?⁵
 There seems to me to be the likeness of giants in you,⁶
 you weren’t born for a bride!’
3. ‘I am named Alvíss,⁷ I live beneath the earth,
 I have a homestead under stone;⁸
 I’ve come to see the man of carts(?),⁹
 let no one break people’s firm pledge!’
4. ‘I shall break it, because I have most say
 over the bride, like her father;¹⁰
 I wasn’t at home when she was betrothed to you,
 [I being] the only one who is her giver(?) among the gods.’¹¹
5. ‘What kind of man are you who claims authority
 over the fair-glowing woman?
 Few will recognize you, vagrant¹² —
 who has born you to arm-rings?’¹³
6. ‘I am named Vingþórr¹⁴ — I have wandered widely¹⁵ —
 I am Síðgrani’s¹⁶ son;
 not with my consent shall you have the young maiden
 and get that marriage.’¹⁷
7. ‘Your consent is what I soon want to have,
 and to make this marriage;
 I would rather have, than be without,
 that snow-white¹⁸ maiden.’
8. ‘The maiden’s love won’t be withheld
 from you, wise guest,¹⁹
 if you can tell me all that I want to know
 from every world.’²⁰
9. ‘Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the earth,²¹ which lies before the sons of men,
 is named in each world.’

10. ‘Jörð heitir með mönnum, en með Ásum fold,
 kalla vega Vanir,
 ígræn jötnar, álfar gróandi,
 kalla aur uppregin.’
11. ‘Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of røk fira
 vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
 hvé sá himinn heitir, inn *Hymi* kendi,
 heimi hverjum í.’
12. ‘Himinn heitir með mönnum, en hlýrnir með goðum,
 kalla vindofni Vanir,
 uppheim jötnar, álfar fagraræfr,
 dvergar drjúpan sal.’
13. ‘Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of røk fira
 vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
 hversu máni heitir, sá er menn sjá,
 heimi hverjum í.’
14. ‘Máni heitir með mönnum, en mýlinn með goðum,
 kalla hverfanda hvél Helju í,
 skyndi jötnar, en skin dvergar,
 kalla álfar ártala.’
15. ‘Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of røk fira
 vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
 hvé sú sól heitir, er sjá alda synir,
 heimi hverjum í.’
16. ‘Sól heitir með mönnum, en sunna með goðum,
 kalla dvergar Dvalins leika,
 eygló jötnar, álfar fagrahvél,
 alskír Ása synir.’
17. ‘Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of røk fira
 vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
 hvé þau ský heita, er skúrum blandask,
 heimi hverjum í.’
18. ‘Ský heita með mönnum, en skúrván með goðum,
 kalla vindflot Vanir,
 úrván jötnar, álfar veðrmegin,
 kalla í Helju hjálm huliðs.’

10. ‘It’s named *jörð*²² among men, but *fold*²³ among Æsir,
 Vanir call it *vegar*,²⁴
 giants *ígræn*,²⁵ elves *gróandi*,²⁶
 the powers above²⁷ call it *aurr*.’²⁸

11. ‘Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the sky, the one known to Hymir(?),²⁹
 is named in each world.’

12. ‘It’s named *himinn*³⁰ among men, but *hlýrnir*³¹ among gods,
 Vanir call it *vindofnir*,³²
 giants *uppheimr*,³³ elves *fagrarræfr*,³⁴
 dwarves *drjúpr salr*.’³⁵

13. ‘Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 how the moon, which men see,
 is named in each world.’

14. ‘It’s named *máni*³⁶ among men, but *mýlinn*³⁷ among gods,
 in Hel they call it *hverfanda hvél*,³⁸
 giants *skyndir*,³⁹ and dwarves *skin*,⁴⁰
 elves call it *ártali*.’⁴¹

15. ‘Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the sun, which the sons of men see,
 is named in each world.’

16. ‘It’s named *sól* among men, but *sunna*⁴² among gods,
 dwarves call it *Dvalins leiki*,⁴³
 giants *eygló*,⁴⁴ elves *fagrahvél*,⁴⁵
 sons of the Æsir⁴⁶ *alskír*.’⁴⁷

17. ‘Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the clouds, which mix with showers,
 are named in each world.’

18. ‘They’re named *ský*⁴⁸ among men, but *skúrván*⁴⁹ among gods,
 Vanir call them *vindflot*,⁵⁰
 giants *úrván*,⁵¹ elves *veðrmegin*,⁵²
 in Hel they call them *hjálmr huliðs*.’⁵³

19. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — öll of rök fira
vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá vindr heitir, er víðast ferr,
heimi hverjum í.'
20. 'Vindr heitir með mönnum, en váfuðr með goðum,
kalla gneggjuð ginnregin,
œpi jötnar, álfar dynfara,
kalla í Helju hviðuð.'
21. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — öll of rök fira
vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat logn heitir, er liggja skal,
heimi hverjum í.'
22. 'Logn heitir með mönnum, en lægi með goðum,
kalla vindslof Vanir,
ofhlý jötnar, álfar dagsefa,
kalla dvergar dags veru.'
23. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — öll of rök fira
vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá marr heitir, er menn róa,
heimi hverjum í.'
24. 'Sær heitir með mönnum, en sílægia með goðum,
kalla vág Vanir,
álheim jötnar, álfar lagastaf,
kalla dvergar djúpan mar.'
25. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — öll of rök fira
vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá eldr heitir, er brenn fyr alda sonum,
heimi hverjum í.'
26. 'Eldr heitir með mönnum, en með Ásum funi,
kalla vág Vanir,
frekan jötnar, en forbrenni dvergar,
kalla í Helju hröðuð.'
27. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — öll of rök fira
vorumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sá víðr heitir, er vex fyr alda sonum,
heimi hverjum í.'

19. 'Tell me this, Alvið — I expect, dwarf, that you know
all the history of living beings:
what the wind, which travels most widely,
is named in each world.'
20. 'It's named *vindr*⁵⁴ among men, but *váfuðr*⁵⁵ among gods,
mighty powers⁵⁶ call it *gneggjuðr*,⁵⁷
giants *æpir*,⁵⁸ elves *dýnfari*,⁵⁹
in Hel they call it *hviðuðr*.⁶⁰
21. 'Tell me this, Alvið — I expect, dwarf, that you know
all the history of living beings:
what the calm, which shall lie,⁶¹
is named in each world.'
22. 'It's named *logn*⁶² among men, but *læggi*⁶³ among gods,
Vanir call it *vindslof*,⁶⁴
giants *ofhlý*,⁶⁵ elves *dagsefi*,⁶⁶
dwarves call it *dags vera*.⁶⁷
23. 'Tell me this, Alvið — I expect, dwarf, that you know
all the history of living beings:
what the sea, which men row on,
is named in each world.'
24. 'It's named *sær*⁶⁸ among men, but *silægja*⁶⁹ among gods,
Vanir call it *vágr*,⁷⁰
giants *álheimr*,⁷¹ elves *lagastafr*,⁷²
dwarves call it *djúpr marr*.⁷³
25. 'Tell me this, Alvið — I expect, dwarf, that you know
all the history of living beings:
what the fire, which burns before the sons of men,
is named in each world.'
26. 'It's named *eldr*⁷⁴ among men, but *funi*⁷⁵ among Æsir,
Vanir call it *vágr*,⁷⁶
giants *freki*,⁷⁷ and dwarves *forbrennir*,⁷⁸
in Hel they call it *hröðuðr*.⁷⁹
27. 'Tell me this, Alvið — I expect, dwarf, that you know
all the history of living beings:
what the wood, which grows before the sons of men,
is named in each world.'

28. 'Viðr heitir með mǫnnum, en vallar fax með goðum,
kalla hljóðþang halir,
eldi jǫtnar, álfar fagrlima,
kalla vǫnd Vanir.'
29. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of rǫk fira
vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé sú nótt heitir, in Nǫrvi kenda,
heimi hverjum í.'
30. 'Nótt heitir með mǫnnum, en njól með goðum,
kalla grímu ginnregin,
óljós jǫtnar, álfar svefngaman,
kalla dvergar draumnjǫrun.'
31. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of rǫk fira
vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat sáð heitir, er sá alda synir,
heimi hverjum í.'
32. 'Bygg heitir með mǫnnum, en barr með goðum,
kalla vaxt Vanir,
æti jǫtnar, álfar lagastaf,
kalla í Helju hnipinn.'
33. 'Segðu mér þat, Alvíss — ǫll of rǫk fira
vǫrumk, dvergr, at vitir:
hvé þat ǫl heitir, er drekka alda synir,
heimi hverjum í.'
34. 'Ǫl heitir með mǫnnum, en með Ásum bjórr,
kalla veig Vanir,
hreinalǫg jǫtnar, en í Helju mjǫð,
kalla sumbl Suttungs synir.'
35. 'Í einu brjósti ek sák aldregi
fleiri forna stafir!
Miklum tálum ek kveð tældan þik:
uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,
nú skínn sól í sali!'

28. 'It's named *viðr*⁸⁰ among men, but *vallar fax*⁸¹ by gods,
 heroes⁸² call it *hliðþang*,⁸³
 giants *eldi*,⁸⁴ elves *fagrlimi*,⁸⁵
 Vanir call it *vǫndr*.⁸⁶
29. 'Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the night, the one known to Nǫrr,⁸⁷
 is named in each world.'
30. 'It's named *nótt*⁸⁸ among men, but *njóll*⁸⁹ among gods,
 mighty powers⁹⁰ call it *gríma*,⁹¹
 giants *óljós*,⁹² elves *svefngaman*,⁹³
 dwarves call it *draumnjörun*.⁹⁴
31. 'Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the seed, which the sons of men sow,
 is named in each world.'
32. 'It's named *bygg*⁹⁵ among men, but *barr*⁹⁶ among gods,
 Vanir call it *vaxt*,⁹⁷
 giants *æti*,⁹⁸ elves *lagastafr*,⁹⁹
 in Hel they call it *hnipinn*.¹⁰⁰
33. 'Tell me this, Alvíss — I expect, dwarf, that you know
 all the history of living beings:
 what the ale,¹⁰¹ which the sons of men drink,
 is named in each world.'
34. 'It's named *öl*¹⁰² among men, but *bjórr*¹⁰³ by Æsir,
 Vanir call it *veig*,¹⁰⁴
 giants *hreinalǫgr*,¹⁰⁵ and in Hel *mjóðr*,¹⁰⁶
 Suttungr's sons¹⁰⁷ call it *sumbl*.¹⁰⁸
35. 'In a single breast I've never seen
 more ancient staves!¹⁰⁹
 By great tricks I declare you've been duped:
 you're up, dwarf, when it's dawned,¹¹⁰
 the sun now shines in the halls!¹¹¹

Textual Apparatus to *Alvíssmál*

Alvíssmál] Rubricated but illegible in the photograph in the facsimile volume of **R**; this reading is therefore reliant on the transcription therein

1/1 *Bekki*] The first letter is large, half-inset and green in **R**

4/6 *gjafi er*] **R** *giaufer*

10/2 *Ásum*] **R** *alfom* ‘elves’

11/1–3] **R** abbreviates here and subsequently

11/5 *inn Hymi kendi*] **R** *erakendi*

11/6 *hverjum í*] **R** abbreviates *h. i.* here and subsequently

12/1 *heitir*] **R** abbreviates *h.* here and subsequently

16/3 *dvergar*] **R** abbreviates *dv.*

18/3 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k.* here and subsequently

18/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *ál.*

18/6 *huliðs*] **R** *hvliz*

20/2 *váfuðr*] **R** *vauoþr*

20/3 *gneggjuð*] **R** *gnegiop*

20/4 *jotnar*] **R** abbreviates *iau.*

20/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *ál.*

21/6 *heimi hverjum í*] **R** abbreviates *h. i.*

22/2 *lægi*] **R** *lōgi*

22/3 *vindslof*] **R** *vinzflot*

22/4 *jotnar*] **R** abbreviates *iþ.*

22/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *al.*

22/6 *dvergar*] **R** abbreviates *dver.*

23/6 *heimi hverjum í*] **R** abbreviates *.h.*

24/1 *með*] **R** abbreviates *m.*

24/6 *dvergar*] **R** abbreviates *dver.*

25/5–6 *sonum ... í*] **R** abbreviates *s. h. i.*

26/5 *dvergar*] **R** *dauergar*

27/4 *sá*] **R** absent

27/5–6] *alda ... í*] **R** abbreviates *al. s. h. i.*

28/2 *fax*] **R** *far*

28/3 *hlíðþang*] **R** *hliþang*

- 28/4 *jötnar*] **R** abbreviates *iot*.
 28/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *al*.
 29/6 *heimi ... í*] **R** abbreviates *h. i*.
 30/1 *heitir með*] **R** abbreviates *h. m*.
 30/2 *goðum*] **R** abbreviates *g*.
 30/3 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k*.
 30/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *al*.
 30/6 *dvergar*] **R** abbreviates *dver*.
 31/5–6 *synir ... í*] **R** abbreviates *s. h. i*.
 32/2 *goðum*] **R** abbreviates *g*.
 32/3 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k*.
 32/4 *jötnar*] **R** abbreviates *iau*.
 32/5 *álfar*] **R** abbreviates *al*.
 32/6 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k*.
 33/5–6 *synir ... í*] **R** abbreviates *s. h. i*.
 34/3 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k*.
 34/4 *jötnar*] **R** *iau*.
 34/6 *kalla*] **R** abbreviates *k*.

Notes to the Translation

- 1 Or perhaps ‘prepare’.
- 2 Hosts covered their benches with cushions or straw in preparation for guests; cf. *Þrk.* 22.
- 3 Literally, ‘relationship by marriage’.
- 4 This line is ambiguous. It could mean that Alvið will not let his hastily acquired bride live quietly at *her* home among the gods, but will rather put her to work at *his* home. Or it could be a sexual boast that ‘at my home she shan’t get any rest!’ Another possibility is ‘at my home no one shall deprive us of rest’.
- 5 Dwarves live below ground, where the dead also reside.
- 6 Norse giants and dwarves have affinities: both live in rocks; *Vsp.* 9 says dwarves came from the blood of the giant Brimir and the limbs of the giant Bláinn; *SnEGylf* (14, p. 15) says dwarves originated as maggots in the flesh of the giant Ymir; *Þórsdrápa*, in *SnESkáld* (I, 18, p. 29), calls the giant Geirröðr *áttruðr Suðri* ‘relative of Suðri [a dwarf]’; wisdom is a characteristic of some giants; they share such names as Fjalarr and Fjolsviðr. Reginn, foster-father of Sigurðr, is described as *dvergr of vøxt* ‘a dwarf in stature’ in the prose prologue to *Rm.*, but as a *jötunn* ‘giant’ in *Fm.* 38.
- 7 ‘All Wise’.
- 8 The usual dwelling place of dwarves; cf. e.g., *Vsp.* 50.

- 9 Or 'I've come to see the sea of carts [i.e., the surface of the earth]', given that dwarves live below ground. Although Þórr drives a chariot (cf. *Þrk.* 21), if 'man of carts' is the (or an) intended sense here, it may instead describe Óðinn, who is called *vagna rúni* 'friend of wagons' in st. 22 of Egill Skalla-Grímsson's skaldic poem *Sonatorrek* 'The Wreck of Sons'. It may be that Óðinn promised a woman—possibly Þórr's foster-daughter—to Alviś during one of Þórr's frequent absences.
- 10 The girl might have been entrusted to Þórr's care. It is doubtful whether *sem faðir* might alternatively mean 'as (i.e., in my capacity as) her father', in which case the bride would be Þórr's biological daughter and at least partly divine.
- 11 I.e., Þórr is the only god who has the right to give her away. But the last line of this stanza is problematic and its precise meaning unclear.
- 12 Cf. Þórr's beggarly appearance as a traveller in *Hrbl.* 6.
- 13 A problematic line, but probably a riposte to Þórr's opinion that Alviś's birth disqualifies him from marriage. Alviś assumes that the 'vagrant' is not of noble birth, and that he therefore cannot have the authority he claims. This line could also be interpreted as *hverr hefir þik baug um borit?* 'who has brought you an arm-ring?'—an accusation of penury that might imply that Þórr would have to rely on charity for his daughter's dowry.
- 14 Probably 'Swinging-Þórr'.
- 15 Þórr's journeys invariably involve slaying giants.
- 16 'Broad Moustache', an alias of Óðinn.
- 17 Literally, 'gift-word', i.e., verbal permission for the 'gift' of a female in marriage.
- 18 Or 'flour-white'.
- 19 A designation presumably deduced from the meaning of the dwarf's name: 'All Wise'. Cf. *Vm.* 19.
- 20 'World' (literally 'home') as in 'region inhabited by a specific type of being'. In many paper manuscripts this stanza is followed by another in which Alviś invites Þórr to test his knowledge and claims to have travelled through all nine worlds.
- 21 Þórr, perhaps in keeping with his role as Miðgarðr's protector and god of farmers, generally uses the language of humans ('men') in *Alv.*
- 22 'Earth'.
- 23 'Field'.
- 24 'Ways'.
- 25 'Greenish' or perhaps 'inherently/very green'.
- 26 'Growing'.
- 27 The identity of the *uppregin*, literally 'up-powers', is unclear; cf. *vís regin* in *Vm.* 39 and *ginnregin* in *Alv.* 20.
- 28 'Clay' or 'mud', 'loam'.
- 29 The unemended text (*erakendi*) is corrupt here. The likely parallel of *Alv.* 29 in *Nþrví kenda* suggests that a proper noun alliterating on *h-* has been omitted. Hymir was a giant who, according to *Hym.* 5, lived at *himins enda* 'at the sky's end'; his presence here, being dependent on an emendation, is conjectural.
- 30 'Sky/heaven'.
- 31 Literally, '(one with) faced heavenly bodies (i.e., sun and moon)'.

- 32 'Wind-weaver'.
- 33 'Up-world'.
- 34 'Fair roof'.
- 35 'Dripping hall'. Cf. the list of names for the sky in *SnESkáld* (I, 56, p. 85).
- 36 'Moon'.
- 37 Possibly a term for the waning (crescent) moon.
- 38 'Whirling wheel'.
- 39 'Hurrier'. Cf. *Grm.* 39 and *SnEGylf* (12, p. 14 and p. 60 n.), according to which the moon is pursued by the wolf Hati Hróðvitnisson.
- 40 'Shine'.
- 41 'Year-counter'. Cf. *Vsp.* 6 and *Vm.* 25.
- 42 'Sun'.
- 43 'Dvalinn's toy/plaything' or 'Dvalinn's playmate'. Dwarves were probably believed to turn to stone, or at least to be destroyed in some way, if they were above ground during the day. It is likely that Dvalinn, a dwarf whose name is interpretable as 'Delayed (One)', played with at least a piece of stolen sun too long and paid the price at dawn.
- 44 'Ever-glow'.
- 45 'Fair wheel'.
- 46 The 'sons of the Æsir' are perhaps just Æsir.
- 47 'All-pure/bright'. Cf. the lists of names for the sun in *SnESkáld* (I, 56, p. 85; 75, p. 133).
- 48 'Clouds'.
- 49 'Prospect of shower'.
- 50 'Wind-floating'.
- 51 'Prospect of drizzle'.
- 52 'Weather/wind/storm power'.
- 53 'Helmet of hiding'.
- 54 'Wind'.
- 55 'Waverer' or perhaps 'roamer'. Elsewhere this term is an alias of Óðinn.
- 56 It is unclear who the 'mighty powers' are.
- 57 'Neigher'.
- 58 'Howler'.
- 59 'Din-farer'.
- 60 'Squaller'. *SnESkáld* (I, 59, p. 90) quotes a variant version of this stanza.
- 61 This line is metrically suspect; possibly *fyr alda sonum* 'before the sons of men' has dropped out.
- 62 'Calm'.
- 63 'Laying(?)'.
- 64 'Wind-end'.
- 65 'Sultry'.
- 66 'Day-soother'.

- 67 'Day's existence/shelter'.
 68 'Sea'.
 69 'Ever-calm' or perhaps 'ever-lying'.
 70 'Surge'. Cf. *Alv.* 26.
 71 'Eel-home' or perhaps 'home of the ocean-current'.
 72 'Waters' stave/(source?)', a puzzling term.
 73 'Deep sea'.
 74 'Fire'.
 75 'Flame'.
 76 'Surge'. Cf. *Alv.* 24.
 77 'Greedy'.
 78 'Burner up'.
 79 'Hurrier'.
 80 'Wood'.
 81 'Field's mane'. Cf. *Grm.* 40.
 82 The distinction from 'men' is unclear.
 83 'Slope-seaweed'.
 84 'Firewood'.
 85 'Fair-limb'.
 86 'Wand'. Or, given the Vanir's association with the sea, 'mast', a frequent meaning of *vǫndr* in skaldic poetry.
 87 Nǫrr is the father of night; cf. *Vm.* 25.
 88 'Night'.
 89 'Darkness'.
 90 Cf. *Alv.* 20.
 91 'Mask'.
 92 'Unlight'.
 93 'Sleep-joy'.
 94 'Dream-Njörun'. Njörun is a goddess whose name appears in kennings for 'woman'. *SnESkald* (I, 63, p. 99) quotes a variant version of this stanza.
 95 'Barley'.
 96 'Barley'.
 97 'Growth'. Or *vaxtr*.
 98 'Food'.
 99 'Waters' stave/(source?}'. *Lagastafr* makes no sense here; it is presumably a mistaken scribal repetition from *Alv.* 24, where it is the elves' word for 'sea'. The elves' word for 'seed' is apparently lost.
 100 'Hanging down'.
 101 Or 'beer'. Þórr follows a question about 'seed'/'grain' with one about ale presumably because malt was used in the brewing process.

- 102 'Ale'.
- 103 'Beer'.
- 104 'Liquor'.
- 105 'Bright liquid'.
- 106 'Mead'.
- 107 Giants again. Suttungr was a giant who owned the mead of poetry; see *Háv.* 104, 109 and *FSk.* 34 (Suttungi).
- 108 'Drink'.
- 109 I.e., (rune-)staves, which represent wisdom (cf. *Vm.* 55). Here the term probably also alludes to the sun's rays, imagined as piercing staff-like weapons.
- 110 Literally, 'you're dayed up, dwarf'. Alvíss is above ground at daybreak.
- 111 Alvíss is presumably destroyed, probably by petrification, having been tricked by Þórr into being above ground at dawn. Cf. *HHv.* 29–30, *Hdl.* 49(?).

