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Abstract

Noting the origin of many of Tolkien's dwarf names in the Eddas; looks specifically for possible roots of the names Gimli, Gloin, and Gríma.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Dwarves—Names; Tolkien, J.R.R.— Characters—Names

Tolkien's Dwarves & the Eddas

by Patrick J. Callahan

J. R. R. Tolkien's presentation of his dwarves in his *The Lord of the Rings* is largely taken from the Old Norse Eddas. In an appendix to *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien offers a genealogy of thirty-one dwarf names, beginning with Durin the Deathless, legendary patriarch of the dwarves, and extending to Gimli Gloin, who figures prominently as a character in the trilogy.¹ Duplications excepted (Durin I, Durin II), the genealogy contains twenty different names. Of these, eight are taken unaltered from a genealogy of dwarves in the section of the *Elder Edda* entitled "Voluspa": Durin, Nain, Thrain, Thorin, Daïn, Thror, Fili, and Kili.² Many of Tolkien's other dwarf names are invented to rhyme with dwarf names from the *Edda*. For example, Tolkien incorporates the *Edda's* Thror into his genealogy, then supplies him two brothers, Fror and Gror. Oddly enough, the name "Gandalf," given to Tolkien's Merlin-like wizard in *The Lord of the Rings*, appears in the *Edda's* genealogy of dwarves.

Perhaps the most interesting name in Tolkien's genealogy of dwarves, in light of the *Eddas*, is that of Gimli Gloin. Gimli is the only dwarf in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* to figure as a major character, and perhaps for this reason his name has more etymological significance than the names of the others. The name "Gloin" is probably an adaptation of "Gloi," a name of one of the *Edda* dwarves. "Gimli" is not the name of a dwarf in the *Eddas* at all, but is rather the most beautiful homestead of the gods.³ Why did Tolkien choose such a name for a dwarf?

It is likely that his choice depended upon the Old Norse meanings of the names. "Gimli" is derived from the Norse *gimsteinn*, which means "a gem." The name "Gloin" means "the glowing," from the Norse verb *gloa*, "to glow." Thus the name Gimli Gloin means "glowing gem," a name which is most appropriate for a dwarf since it suggests the love of precious stones characteristic of dwarves in Tolkien's "Middle Earth."

A similar play upon names from the *Eddas* appears in the name of "Grima," also called "Wormtongue," who appears as a false counselor to King Theoden in *The Lord of the Rings*.⁴ The name is probably a play upon "Grimar," an Old Norse name which means "night." Grima serves the forces of night as symbolized in the person of the "Dark Lord," by bringing weakness and despair to King Theoden.



It is surprising that so little scholarship has been done in exploring Tolkien's Old English and Old Norse sources, which echo in the work's poetry of four-stress alliterative lines and in such obviously Teutonic names as that of Theoden's stronghold, "Meduseld." Examination of Tolkien's genealogy of dwarves indicates that he not only borrowed directly from Germanic literature, but reflected in his adaptation of Germanic names his very considerable philological knowledge.

NOTES

¹*The Lord of the Rings* (New York, 1965), III, 450.

²Benjamin Thorpe and I. A. Blackwell, trans., *The Elder and Younger Eddas* (New York, 1907), pp. 2-3.

³*Elder and Younger Eddas*, p. 274.

⁴*Lord of the Rings*, II, 151-158.

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