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## The Wolf Miracle in *Magnúss saga lengri*

The text of *Magnúss saga lengri*, as printed in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition,<sup>1</sup> is based on a paper manuscript, AM 350 4<sup>o</sup>, copied in about 1700 from the lost Bæjarbók.<sup>2</sup> Two other manuscripts (AM 351 4<sup>o</sup> and AM 325 4<sup>o</sup>) are also extant, but these are deemed to be of lesser value.<sup>3</sup> Various textual details point to a north Icelandic origin, and, on the basis of a subjective assessment of its ornate style and romantic diction, *Magnúss saga lengri* is dated by Magnús Már Lárusson to the end of the thirteenth, or the beginning of the fourteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The main sources are *Orkneyinga saga* and a lost Latin Life (which the author may or may not have had in translation).<sup>5</sup> Regarding the miracles, Finnbogi Guðmundsson considers there to be 'fátt að segja' [little to say], except that, while the later miracles (including the one currently under consideration) are 'greinilega' [obvious] additions, these may either have been written by the author of the longer saga, or copied from some earlier source or sources.<sup>6</sup>

The account of the consumption and regurgitation by wolves of a murdered man, before he is revived by Saint Magnús, is to be found at the very end of the series of miracles tales which concludes *Magnúss saga lengri* (381-3). The narrator begins by claiming that the miracle took place in Norway, during the reign of Haraldr gilli (1130-36), fixing the events he records to a period between fourteen and twenty years after the death of Magnús in 1116 or 1117,<sup>7</sup> but just before the laying of the foundation stone for the new cathedral dedicated to him, in 1137.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, the miracle concerns the resuscitation of one of a pair of brothers brutally assaulted by two 'ríkir menn' [powerful men] (381), on suspicion of disgracing their sisters. He is killed during the attack, then eaten by wolves, but his sibling survives and, despite literally losing his tongue, is able to call inwardly upon Magnús, who heals his wounds and vanishes. The wolves then return and disgorge the dead man,

before Magnús reappears and passes his hand over the vomit, bringing the victim back to life. The tale is discussed from a historical perspective by G. M. Brundsen, who points out that, since it does not appear in any other version of the legend, it is probably 'a genuine example of a very localised tradition seeping into the corpus of the sagas'.<sup>9</sup> Sigurður Nordal proposes that the wolf miracle is based on one attributed to St Óláfr in a number of sources, and Finnbogi Guðmundsson appears to accept his hypothesis,<sup>10</sup> but, although there are similarities between the narratives (such as the accusation of dishonouring a woman, the remote location and the sensual quality of the healing), the Óláfr miracle differs in many respects from that performed by Magnús; most importantly, the victim is a lone priest, and the vomiting wolves are absent. It is this added motif, combining two types of myth – the survival of swallowing (undigested), and the resuscitation of a digested animal or person – which justifies Brundsen's suggestion that the tale is local, and allows Magnús to outdo the Norwegian saint just as he does in *Magnús saga skemmri*.<sup>11</sup>

The act of swallowing fulfils a wide range of functions in folk literature, and this is reflected in the sheer variety of folk motifs which include swallowing in one form or another. The Stith Thompson index devotes a major section to 'Extraordinary Swallowings', but even this does not cover all the relevant narratives he lists.<sup>12</sup> Despite the inevitable grey areas, it is helpful to classify the swallowings as either beneficial or detrimental to the object. Motifs which suggest that the advantages of the experience may outweigh, or at least balance, the disadvantages are easily divided into three main plot types, based on themes of survival,<sup>13</sup> protection<sup>14</sup> or rebirth.<sup>15</sup> Within the group of survival stories, the Jonah narrative is best known, and immediately seems a probable influence on the wolf miracle. However, despite the fact that, at the time of writing, extracts were available in Old English,<sup>16</sup> and in Irish,<sup>17</sup> no Norse translation of any part of the book of Jonah is known to have existed.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, this or similar legends could still have influenced the wolf miracle; another good example of a narrative about the survival of swallowing with divine assistance is *Betha*

*Mochua Balla* [The Life of Mochua of Balla], in which Saint Mochua promises to assist a hunting king whose quarry has become trapped on an island guarded by a water-monster. At the king's request, Mochua guarantees protection for the man who will go after the deer, but the monster swallows the man in a single gulp. The tale continues: 'Ro-fergaig immoro in clérech risin peist, cu ro-sceith ind ocláech n-oghshlan i bhfiadhnusi na slóg, 7 ni ro-erchoidig do neoch riamh iarsin' [Now the cleric waxed wroth with the monster, so it threw up the warrior every whit whole in the presence of the hosts, and never did hurt to anyone afterwards].<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is clear that the wolf miracle concerns far more than simple survival; the experience certainly culminates in rebirth for the victim, but it also involves the protection of his remains during the intervening period in a way which calls to mind a number of Indian stories, in which cherished characters are ingested, then released at the appropriate time.<sup>20</sup> The same combination of protection and rebirth is found in the Norse romance, *Eiríks saga víðförla*, in which a dragon's gullet opens into paradise, but later allows the hero to re-enter the mortal world for a while before death.<sup>21</sup>

The close association of death and rebirth in tales about swallowing is echoed in the double function of canids in folk culture, as agents of both protection and destruction. Dogs and related species are, on the one hand, healers, talismans, sacrifices, purifiers, saints and scapegoats (Christ himself is referred to as the 'Hound of Heaven', and in Irish hagiographic literature, many saints enjoy special relationships with wolves)<sup>22</sup> and, on the other, gods of death, bad omens, hell-hounds and carriers of disease. Reconciling these opposed functions, many cultures, including those of the Muslim world, Classical Greece, Hindu and Buddhist Asia, native America, the Arctic and Borneo, allow dogs to guard the entrance to spirit worlds,<sup>23</sup> whilst Egyptian, Greek, Asian, Babylonian, American and Northern European literatures all mention canid psychopomps.<sup>24</sup> Like the sometimes protective, sometimes destructive act of swallowing, such figures present a threat as well as an opportunity. Patricia Dale-Green characterises the archetypal dog as a 'transformer',<sup>25</sup> and

Biblical literature supports the notion that canids are fully capable of changing their spots: 'habitabit lupus cum agno et pardus cum hedo accubabit' [the wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down by the kid] (Isaiah 11. 6),<sup>26</sup> and 'lupus et agnus pascentur simul et leo et bos comedent paleas' [the wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion as well as the ox will eat straw] (Isaiah 65. 25).<sup>27</sup>

The ambiguities inherent in both the act of swallowing and the character of the canid merge in three Norse mythological texts (*Völuspá*, *Grímnismál* and *Snorra Edda*), despite the fact that act and animal initially look utterly aggressive in all three works. *Völuspá* mentions the upbringing of a consuming wolf in 'Ironwood': 'Austr sat in aldna | í lárniði | ok fœddi þar | Fenris kindir. | Verðr af þeim öllum | einna nökkur | tungls tíugari | í trolls hami' [In the east the old woman sat in Ironwood, and fostered there Fenrir's kin. It comes to pass that, of all of them, a single one is *tungl*-taker in troll's form].<sup>28</sup> This account is expanded slightly in *Snorra Edda*, preceded by an explanation for the speed with which the sun courses across the heavens, as if pursued; the culprits are 'tveir úlfar, ok heitir sá er eptir henni ferr Sköll. Hann hræðisk hon ok hann mun taka hana, en sá heitir Hati Hróðvitnisson er fyrir henni hleypr, ok vill hann taka tunglit, ok svá mun verða' [two wolves, and the one which goes after her is called Sköll. She is afraid of it and it will take her, and the one which runs in front of her is called Hati Hróðvitnisson, and it wants to take the *tungl*, and that will be].<sup>29</sup> The same idea appears to be alluded to in *Grímnismál*, although only pursuit, not swallowing, is mentioned: 'Sköll heitir úlfr, | er fylgir ina skírleita goði | til varna viðar; | enn annarr Hati, | hann er Hróðvitnis sonr, | sá skal fyr heiða brúði himins' [Sköll is the name of the good wolf which follows her, the pale one, to the defences of the wood; and the other, Hati – he is Hróðvitnir's son – he shall [go] before the bride of the clear skies of heaven].<sup>30</sup> Snorri goes on to name the 'einna nökkur', of *Völuspá*, as Mánagarmr, and interprets 'svört verða sólskin' [the sunshine [will] become black]<sup>31</sup> as 'hann gleypir tungl' [he swallows *tungl*].<sup>32</sup> A similar claim is made later, when Gangleri asks about Ragnarök:

Þá verður þat er mikil tíðindi þykkja, at úlfrinn gleypir sólna, ok þykkir mönnum þat mikit mein. Þá tekr annarr úlfrinn tunglit, ok gerir sá ok mikit ógagn. Stjörnurnar hverfa af himninum ... en Fenrisúlfr ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjöptr við himni en hinn neðri við jörðu. Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til. Eldar brenna ór augum hans ok nösum. Miðgarðsormr blæss svá eitrunu at hann dreifir lopt öll ok lög, ok er hann allógurligr, ok er hann á aðra hlið úlfinum.

[Then that which [men] think a great event comes to pass, that the wolf swallows the sun, and men think that a great harm. Then the other wolf takes the *tungl*, and so also does great injury. The stars disappear from the sky ... and Fenrir-wolf goes about with gaping mouth, and its upper jaw at the heavens and its lower one down at the earth. It would gape wider if there were enough room. Fires burn out of its eyes and nostrils. The Miðgarðr-serpent spits poison, so that it sprays all the skies and sea, and it is terrible, and it is on one side of the wolf].<sup>33</sup>

The close association of swallowing and spitting (both of fire and poison) in this passage is notable; earlier, 'slefa renn ór munni' [saliva ran from the mouth] of Fenrir.<sup>34</sup> In *Snorra Edda*, the swallowing of heavenly bodies is linked to the swallowing of Óðinn himself by the wolf Fenrir, also at Ragnarök, an event alluded to in *Vafþrúðnismál*, 'úlfr gleypa mun Aldaföður' [the wolf will swallow Aldafaðir],<sup>35</sup> and also in *Lokasenna*, 'svelgr hann allan Sigföður' [he swallows Sigfaðir entirely].<sup>36</sup> In Snorri's version, the narrative is equally bald: 'úlfrinn gleypir Óðin. Verður þat hans bani' [the wolf swallows Óðinn. It comes to pass that that is the cause of his death],<sup>37</sup> but both Snorri and *Vafþrúðnismál* go on to describe the avenging of this killing by Óðinn's son, Víðar, who slaughters the wolf by grasping its upper and lower jaws, and tearing it apart at the mouth; that is, by forcing it to replicate the gaping expression which allowed it to swallow Óðinn.<sup>38</sup> In *Grímnismál*, it is claimed that 'hrísi vex | ok há gras í | Víðars landi' [plants grow, and high grasses in Víðar's land]<sup>39</sup>

and this chimes well with the description of the resurrected earth in *Völuspá*,<sup>40</sup> (paraphrased by Snorri) which would seem to be predicated on a return of the sun (at least) to the heavens, although Snorri identifies the new sun, not as the old one resurrected, but as her daughter.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, although Óðinn does not survive Ragnarök, his sons Víðar, Váli, Baldr and Höd do.<sup>42</sup> In *Snorra Edda*, then, and, to a lesser degree, *Völuspá* and perhaps *Grímnismál*, swallowing by wolves seems to be the first stage in a process of global rebirth.

In the above examples, the swallowing differs from that in the wolf miracle in that no digestion has taken place before the escape of the victim. There does, however, exist a separate group of myths concerning the resuscitation of digested beings, although not, apparently, in combination with regurgitation. In Norse literature, the best-known example is Þórr's consumption and revivification of his own goats, from their bones.<sup>43</sup> C. W. von Sydow surveys a broad range of potentially related tales from around Europe, but reaches the conclusion that the Norse version is Celtic in origin.<sup>44</sup> He regards the Þórr myth as a missing link between certain Welsh and Irish stories, with the Norse tale preserving the broken bone motif, now present in the Irish, but lost from the Welsh branch. This motif (in the Þórr tale represented by the lameness of a resuscitated goat, following the forbidden splitting of one of its thigh-bones after eating), although absent from the miracle in *Magnúss saga lengri*, is important because it highlights a widespread belief in the completeness of bodily remains as a precondition for revivification.<sup>45</sup> Such a belief could have provided the motivation for the introduction of wolves into the miracle; the power of the saint could perhaps be proven still more convincingly by having him resuscitate a body from which tissue had been removed by the wolves. At the same time, although Snorri's version of the Þórr narrative states only that the bone was 'braut til margjar' [broken to the marrow], there would have been no point in this action if the intention had not been to extract the marrow for consumption, and it is possible that the seriousness of the bone-breaking was increased by the separation of the hard and soft tissue, the

bones and the marrow. In any case, the revival seems to depend on the reunification of skeleton and skin, as well as the magic of *þórr*, since the bones must be placed on the goat skin in order to return to life. It may therefore be speculated that a similar process is supposed to be at work in the resuscitation of the wolf-victim: first, soft matter is removed by the wolves, then it is returned to the bones in the form of vomit. The concept does not seem to have been common, since a complete set of bones (or even a specific single one) was often regarded as sufficient to preserve the potential for life, but one Indian story, in which a young man is eaten by cannibals, but resuscitated from the excrement, does appear to apply such a logic of reunification.<sup>46</sup> The other major Norse narrative about the resuscitation of a digested being seems to be of little relevance, since Snorri's interpretation of *Sæhrímnir*, the 'fleska bazt' [best of meats] in *Grimnismál*, as a boar slaughtered daily in Valhalla, finds little support in the verse itself.<sup>47</sup>

The above sample of narratives containing motifs based on the survival of swallowing, or resuscitation after digestion, contains not a single reference to vomit, in the normal sense of the word. However, both Biblical and secular Icelandic literature mention the regurgitation of digested matter in ways which suggest possible approaches to the wolf miracle. The two best-known instances of vomiting in secular Icelandic literature are probably the parallel incidents in *Egils saga*, in which the consumption of large quantities of alcohol and curds result in mass-regurgitation as well as physical conflict. In both episodes, there is apparently some attempt to kill Egill by making him drink excessively (although this is not made explicit), but the first episode ends with his host lying dead in a pool of his own blood, mingled with the spew of a man who has fallen, unconscious, beside him,<sup>48</sup> whilst in the second, Egill regurgitates aggressively over another host, pinned against a pillar to prevent his escape.<sup>49</sup> Vomit becomes a weapon, either from within the victim (who has been forced to drink too much, or else to undergo an experience which has made him nauseous), or externally. If the relationship between Magnús and the wolves is antagonistic, the wolf

vomit could be viewed as a weapon directed against Magnús or the surviving brother, or even the wolves themselves, whatever they may represent. On the other hand, the vomiting could be regarded as a creative act (like Egill's verse-composition in the first incident, mentioning the two types of 'rain' – beer and poetry – passing his lips), which metaphorically strikes at the absent villains, whilst resurrecting the 'underdogs' in the narrative. Otherwise, there is little connection between the above episodes from secular literature and the Magnús miracle, except that the vomit plays a part in reversals of fortune which are 'comic', in the sense of challenging the supremacy of socially and economically privileged individuals, a plot trajectory which also loosely fits that in the miracle, and is discussed in relation to Biblical narrative in the main body of *Magnúss saga lengri* (374).

Apart from the Jonah tale, most Biblical references to disgorging focus on the foulness of vomit, as opposed to the wholesomeness or sweetness of food, and take the form of denouncements, or maledictions, directed at whole races or anonymous subjects.<sup>50</sup> Job 20:15 – 'divitias quas devoravit evomet et de ventre illius extrahet eas Deus' [the riches which he swallowed down, he will vomit up and from his belly God will draw them forth] – is particularly interesting, since it is the only verse to mention a direct divine agent, as well as the only one of the above passages to appear in any extant Old Norse text (the *Elucidarius*).<sup>51</sup> In Job, as in most of the other verses, the point seems to be to accuse the subject of some form of impurity, or to warn that pride comes before a fall. Certainly, both themes could easily have been stressed in a miracle account dealing with a foul crime, committed by powerful men, but neither are in fact highlighted in *Magnúss saga lengri* to any great extent.

The two remaining Biblical passages concerning vomit make it canine; the Old Testament 'sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum sic imprudens qui iterat stultiam suam' [as a dog which returns to its vomit, so a fool who repeats his folly] (Proverbs 26. 11), is quoted in the New Testament as 'canis reversus ad suum vomitum et sus lota in volutabro luti' [the dog



[has] returned to its vomit; and the washed sow to the hog-pool of mud] (II Peter 2. 22). The same image of the vomiting dog is employed in numerous Christian Latin texts, sometimes more than once, or in several works by the same author; a detailed examination of the distribution of texts involving this image is beyond the scope of this article, but occurrences are found in works attributed to authors from all over Europe.<sup>52</sup> The motif is found eleven times in Anglo-Saxon texts, and it has been claimed that it was 'especially popular' in England due to its double appearance in the Old English *Cura pastoralis* of Gregory the Great; Aelfric, in particular, seems to have appreciated the image, using it three times.<sup>53</sup> Later, several Northern texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries develop the motif to make vomiting specifically representative of confession: the twelfth century Archpoet, for example, comically assumes the voice of a glutton who has spewed forth his sins during confession, but serious penitential texts have also survived.<sup>54</sup> Vomiting has thus been transformed from a sign of moral 'sickness' to the means of its cure, perhaps influenced by practical experience, as well as the notion that the likelihood of being cured (and thus visibly forgiven) is directly proportionate to the severity and obviousness of the illness; such a view is expressed explicitly in *Magnúss saga lengri* (345). Finally, it should be noted that an equally positive, but radically different sort of vomiting canine makes an appearance in a life of the Irish saint, Cainnech,<sup>55</sup> who causes a dog to spew gold,<sup>56</sup> a tale which seems strikingly similar to a North German legend, in which Woden repays a peasant whose food has been consumed by the god's hounds, by giving the man a dead dog which, when thrown on the fire, bursts open in a shower of gold coins.<sup>57</sup>

The passage from II Peter appears in Alcuin's *De virtutibus et vitiis*, which was copied into the Norwegian Homily Book and a related Icelandic text of the fifteenth century (AM 685d 4°).<sup>58</sup> The relevant homily is preceded by sermons on the linked topics of *tármelti* (a rare word, translating the Latin *compunctio cordis* [heartfelt regret], and probably indicating something like 'dissolving in tears') and confession. All three homilies follow a discussion of humility in general, and in the

first of the three, *tármelti* is introduced as a product of humility, before becoming a key motif in the sermons on confession and penitence. In the homily on *tármelti* itself (not extant in the Icelandic text),<sup>59</sup> the ability 'at fljóta tár' [to make tears flow] is said to come from two 'brunnar' [sources]: remembrance of past sins, and meditation on the desire for eternal life. These tears are linked by juxtaposition to the image of God as the living water, for which the soul thirsts, and are then described as spiritual bread. The homily on confession,<sup>60</sup> meanwhile, focusses on the beneficial effect of revealing sin, asking 'Hversu má læknið grœða þat sár er hinn sjúki skammast at sýna?' [how can a doctor heal a wound that the sick man is too ashamed to show?].<sup>61</sup> The sermons on *tármelti* and confession therefore contain ideas relevant to the total interpretation of the wolf miracle: the manifestation of contrition in the form of welling liquid, which also represents grace; the re-ingestion of such liquid for sustenance; the representation of sin as a physical problem which must appear as clearly as possible in order to be healed. All of these notions are derived from the Latin source.<sup>62</sup> The homily in which II Peter 2. 22 is quoted concerns penitence, particularly true remorse, manifest in weeping for past sins, as well as in refraining from repeating them. He who both grieves and resists the temptation to repeat a sin regains spiritual purity, in implicit contrast to the dog which returns to its own vomit. 'Sárleikr hugar (andar)' [mental (spiritual) pain], is therefore a precondition for forgiveness, and the apostle Peter himself is held up as an example of a genuinely penitent sinner, who obtained divine help when he 'grét sárliga' [wept bitterly] after his triple denial of Christ. The text concludes by offering a reminder of the resurrection which awaits those who repent, as well as the danger of repenting too late. Like the preceding homilies, this one makes weeping the pivot between the twin processes of penitence and redemption, with its promise of resurrection. With such a strong emphasis on the connection between weeping and confession, it is perhaps not surprising that the evacuation of bodily fluids came to be seen as a metaphor for the evacuation of sin, and the association of this combination with the image of the vomiting dog may very

well have invited the later attachment of a similar interpretation to the act of vomiting itself.

In *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, the same Biblical verse is used to warn Josaphat about the risk of backsliding following baptism.<sup>63</sup> Josaphat has just declared his willingness to be baptised, if God will accept his *iðran* [remorse], and has concluded by asking Barlaam what else he must do in order to make peace with God. In response, Barlaam lists good and evil works, including 'lítillæti hjarta' [humility of the heart] and 'iðran' consecutively, recalling Alcuin's association of these qualities. Next, he returns to the subject of penitence, recommending 'rækilig iðran liðinna misgerða, tár ok sorg fyrir ... syndum' [solemn penitence for past misdeeds, tears and sorrow for ... sins] as means by which salvation and resurrection may be achieved. Barlaam then highlights the risk of renewed sin, and describes the enforced exile of an unclean spirit from the soul after baptism, followed by his repossession of the vulnerable new Christian with the help of demonic companions.<sup>64</sup> *Barlaams saga* thus mentions three types of return in close proximity: resurrection, the return of a dog to its vomit, and the repossession of the soul; indeed, the total may be brought to four, if the return implicit in the act of vomiting is included. As in the previous text, humility, penitence, weeping and vomit are closely interconnected.

Having discussed a selection of external literary references to vomit which could suggest possible interpretations of the wolf miracle, it will be useful to return to its immediate context: *Magnúss saga lengri* itself. Several themes present in the remainder of the saga appear relevant to the miracle, but the most obvious of these is food and drink. On the way to his death, Magnús is compared to a feast-guest (366), but elsewhere, he more closely resembles the feast itself, being first likened to a sacrificial lamb (366), then executed by a cook (368). What is more, while his enemies thirst for blood (93, 366), he is compared to wine (362). Confusingly, treachery is at one point described as a fruit (360), but presumably a bitter one; the antithetical concepts of sweetness and bitterness commonly appear together in Christian religious literature, and *Magnúss saga lengri* is no exception (362, 370).<sup>65</sup>

Ezekiel is described living amongst 'eitrfullum mönnum' [poisonous men] (354), and Hákon's repressed malice is described as poison and visualized as vomit: 'þess lengr sem hann á helt eitri illsku sinnar, þess illmannligr hann upp spjó henni, því at hans illska ok níðingskapr gekk fram með miklu megni þann tíma, er hann gat henni eigi lengr leynt' [the longer he held onto the poison of his evil, the less manfully he spewed it up, since his evil and dastardliness advanced with great force when he was no longer able to hide them] (359). Soon after, Hákon is 'fram steypandi ór sínu brjósti miklu ranglæti, er hann hafði um tíma aptr haldit' [pouring great wrongfulness from his breast, which he had for a time held back] (360). It may be that such an identification of vomit with indigestible sin lies behind the cryptic statement in *Orkneyinga saga* that, when asked to consider the possibility of transferring Magnús's relics to Kirkwall, Páll 'þagði hjá, sem hann hafði vatn í munni' [fell silent at that, as if he had water in his mouth].<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, since Northern religious literature had already begun to interpret vomit as a symbol of regret and confession, instead of sin, there is always the possibility that at least the first of these, penitence, could have contributed to the total meaning of the 'water' in Páll's mouth. Another relevant theme is that of transformation. God is a healer (345), but also a creator (336, 345), and the text is full of images of enfolding and emerging, softening and hardening. In the miracle, soft vomit crystallizes into a human body, whilst, in the main text, fleshy men are made from unyielding stone (345), and a vine twig is shown bending for survival in the harsh secular world (355). Souls are wrapped up, like the sinful former Magnús under the sand (350) or in a 'heimligri yfirhöfn' [wordly garment], or like the new man in his 'hamingju yfirhöfn ok lofs' [garment of luck and praise] (345) or in calming cold water (353); like gold in an oven (355), or treasure in a treasury (358).<sup>67</sup> But they are also released, as the new Magnús is (357), from under the soil (350), or in the pouring of his blood (354, 362), or by his translation from a hidden grave (101), just as the wolf-survivor is (perhaps along with the wolf himself), with the release of vomit. The density of such physical expressions of

transformation creates a context in which it is tempting to read the wolf miracle itself in terms of spiritual transformation, particularly given the well-established connection between the imagery of bodily outpouring, found in this saga in Hákon's tears when approached by Magnús's mother (373), and the concept of emotional revolution, as well as the strong association of both the act of swallowing and the figure of the canid with various types of rebirth.

It has not been possible to identify any definitive interpretation for the wolf miracle, but an exploration of global folk culture, religious works, and native Icelandic secular literature has suggested three broad approaches to the text. The first is that the relationship between the wolves and the saint is purely antagonistic, and that the wolves represent the forces of evil in general, or particular villains (possibly Hákon, who is described as a wolf, and Páll, or the 'rich men') returning, perhaps under compulsion, perhaps not, to their 'vomit': the scene, or victim, of their crimes. The swallowing would then fall into the category of narratives about survival (although a rebirth also takes place), with Magnús functioning as a monster-defeating hero (like Mochua of Balla), and the cycle of consumption and regurgitation as a gruesomely apt punishment, akin to the splitting of Fenrir's mouth. As in *Egils saga*, vomit would become a weapon, forged of the sort of suppressed malice earlier linked in *Magnúss saga lengri* to Hákon. Alternatively, the wolves may act as Magnús's allies, following the example of numerous canids (wolves, specifically, in Irish literature), which have a special relationship with saints. In that case, the swallowing would be a combination of a protection and a rebirth for the object, and the vomiting an act of creation for the wolves, producing a man in the same way as Egill produced poetry, and Woden and Cainnech produced gold. Thirdly, the relationship between the wolves and saint could undergo transformation during the course of the miracle, with initial antagonism giving way to alliance, and the wolves acting as 'transformers' to themselves as much as to the swallowed man; Patricia Dale-Green has commented that the dog is a 'threshold animal ... sometimes ... a barrier, sometimes a link'

to the next world, and in this tale, the wolves seem to act first as one, then the next. Magnús would then take on the role of a confessor, and the vomit would signify both repentance and its result, the release of sin, as well as rebirth for both parties.

What is clear is that the miracle as a whole underlines the reversal of fortune which has already transformed Magnús from victim to active divine agent, through a narrative which at the same time describes a literal, and possibly social, reversal of fortune for the swallowed man, when he gets the better of powerful personalities who have previously victimized him. Pairs of words, objects and narrative elements – hands and feet; tongue and eyes; the two brothers; the couples during the alleged rape; the attackers and saint (both arriving and departing wordlessly); the symbolic rape of the accused and the sensual healing; the alleged crime and the symbolic rape; staying still and running; taking and abandoning; being picked up and falling down – along with the act of vomiting itself, help to develop the central themes of the miracle: return, and reversal. The appearances and disappearances of the wolves, especially, bring the pattern into focus: first the attackers leave, then ‘hlupu af skóginum margir vargar rifandi ok slítandi hold af beinum þess, er drepinn lá, farandi eptir þat aptr í skóginn ... sér af skógi renna margra varga flokk þar til, sem hræ ins andaða lá, ok spýja þar upp öllu, sem etit höfðu af hans holdi ok beini, ok hverfa eptir þat í skóginn’ [many wolves ran from the wood, ripping and tearing flesh from the bones of the one who lay, killed, going back after that to the forest ... [the survivor] sees a flock of many wolves run from the wood to the place where the corpse of the deceased lay, and spew up all that they had eaten of his flesh and bones, and turn back to the forest]. The acts of consumption and regurgitation mirror each other not only in content, but also in style; each is in itself symmetrical, introduced and concluded by descriptions of the wolves leaving or re-entering the forest. What is more, since the wolves make their appearance first, Magnús seems to mimic their actions, appearing, disappearing, then reappearing suddenly before the survivor. However, ‘*hvarf* inn heilagi Magnús jarl brott at sýn’ [the holy earl Magnús turned (disappeared) away from

sight] before the wolves *‘hverfa eptir þat í skóginn’* [turn (disappear) after that into the forest]; adverbially, they mimic only themselves, (*‘farandi eptir þat aprt í skóginn’*), but verbally, in their ‘turning’, they now follow the example of the saint. Even if this tale is a later addition to *Magnúss saga lengri*, it is an appropriate one, in view of the dramatic spiritual turnarounds attributed to both Magnús and Hákon in the main text. As a stylized representation of the potential of these and other reversals, the wolf miracle could not be more powerful.

## Notes

1. *Magnúss saga lengri*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, pp. 381-3; *The Life of S. Magnus*, trans. by Metcalfe, pp. 110-1. All references are to *Msl.*, unless otherwise stated.
2. *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson (henceforth, *Ork.*), p. cxxxii-cxxxviii.
3. *Ork.*, p. cxxxii.
4. Magnús Már Lárusson, ‘Magnus’, 486-7.
5. *Ork.*, p. cxxxvii. Possible sources for the Latin Life are explored in Foote, ‘Master Robert’s Prologue’.
6. *Ork.*, p. cxxxvi.
7. Magnús Már Lárusson, ‘Magnus’, 492-7.
8. Cruden, ‘Foundation and Building’, p. 79.
9. Brundsen, ‘Politics and Local Tradition’, 131.
10. *Orkneyinga saga*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, p. liii, and *Ork.*, p. cxxxvi. Various versions of the Óláfr miracle are listed in Whaley, ‘Heimskringla and its Sources’.
11. Brundsen, ‘Politics and Local Tradition’, 129-30.
12. Thompson, *Motif-Index*, F910.
13. A535 ‘Culture Hero Swallowed and Recovered from Animal’; F109.2 ‘Fish Shows Hell to Jonah’; F911.3 ‘Animal Swallows Man (Not Fatally)’; F913 ‘Victims Rescued From Swallower’s Belly’; F914.4 ‘Jonah’; K565.1 ‘Boy Swallowed by Fish, Escapes’; X1723.1 ‘Swallowed Person is Discovered in Animal’s Body Still Alive’.
14. B529.1 ‘Animals Hide Boy in their Belly to Protect Him’; B541.1.1 ‘Fish Swallows Man to Rescue Him’; K649.1 ‘Animals Swallow Another to Save Him’.
15. E607.2.1 ‘Person is Swallowed and then Reborn’; E607.2.2 ‘Rebirth by Crawling into a Woman’s Womb’; T593.1 ‘Hero Enters Womb of Sleeping Woman and is Reborn’.
16. Cook, *Biblical Quotations in Old English Prose Writers*, I and II.
17. Cross, *Motif-Index*, F911.4.
18. Kirby, *Biblical Quotation*, ii, 184.

19. *Betha Mochua Balla*, ed. by Stokes, p. 140/4718-9, and trans. p. 284.
20. Thompson and Bays, *Motif Index*, F911.4 and F914.
21. *Eiríks saga víðförla*, pp. 33-5.
22. *Vitæ Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, ed. by Plummer, p. cxli-cxlii.
23. Dale-Green, *Dogs*, pp. 85-91.
24. Dale-Green, *Dogs*, pp. 94-6 and 156-7.
25. Dale-Green, *Dogs*, pp. 190-3.
26. All Biblical quotations are from the the Vulgate.
27. Kirby, *Biblical Quotation*, p. 200, finds one citation of this verse, in *Heilagra manna sögur*, ed. by Unger, ii, 393/13.
28. *Völuspá*, ed. by Pálsson, st. 39. All translations from Norse are my own. *Tungl* can mean any heavenly body or bodies, so it has been left untranslated in order to leave its interpretation open.
29. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Faulkes (henceforth *SEdda*), 14/14-17.
30. *Grímnismál*, in *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. by Neckel and Kuhn (henceforth, *PEdda*), pp. 57-68, st. 39. The orthography of all quotations and titles from this edition has been normalized.
31. *Völuspá*, ed. and trans. by Pálsson, st. 40.
32. *SEdda*, pp. 14/24.
33. *SEdda*, pp. 49/37-50/13.
34. *SEdda*, pp. 29/9.
35. *Vafþrúðnismál*, in *PEdda*, pp. 45-55, st. 53.
36. *Lokasenna*, in *PEdda*, pp. 96-110, st. 58.
37. *SEdda*, pp. 50/37.
38. *Vafþrúðnismál*, in *PEdda*, st. 53. *SEdda*, pp. 50/37-51/3.
39. *Grímnismál*, in *PEdda*, st. 17.
40. *Völuspá*, ed. and trans. by Pálsson, sts 56-61.
41. *SEdda*, pp. 53/34-54/27.
42. *SEdda*, pp. 53/35-8.
43. *SEdda*, pp. 37/3-16.
44. Von Sydow, 'Tors Färd', 103-5.
45. An extension of the notion that eaten animals may be brought to life by the enchantment of bones is found in *The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. by Stokes, i, 199: the son of a pagan is eaten by pigs, and St Patrick prays with two bishops over the remains of his body. The boy is revived, and his father converts.
46. 'The Belbati Princess', trans. by Bompas.
47. *SEdda*, pp. 32/9-20. *Grímnismál*, in *PEdda*, st. 18. See Orchard, *Dictionary*, 'Sæhrímnir'.
48. *Egils saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, p. 109.
49. *Egils saga*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, p. 234. The inspiration for Egill's association of the expulsion of alcohol and poetry is the myth concerning the acquisition of the mead of poetry by the Æsir, in *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Faulkes, 5/2-3. The verb used to describe the primary release of mead is *spýta* [spit], which suggests that the mead is undigested. However, this is linked to an involuntary discharge of mead from Óðinn's rear, implying that he cannot simply have kept the mead in his mouth without swallowing. The mead which he spits out must therefore emerge as vomit.



50. Leviticus 18. 25, Job 20. 15, Proverbs 23. 8, Proverbs 25. 16, Isaiah 19. 14, Isaiah 28. 8, Jeremiah 48. 26, Habakkuk 2. 16.
51. Kirby, *Biblical Quotation*, ii, 231-2 gives two examples of references to the verse, rather than exact quotations.
52. This information was obtained by searching the CETEDOC database.
53. Toswell, 'A Penitential Motif', 117.
54. Gray, 'Clemency', 64 and 72, n. 22. Gray goes on to discuss the employment of the motif in a comic 'mock-confession' in *Piers Plowman* (a work of the late fourteenth century). See also Toswell, 'A Penitential Motif', 118, n. 5.
55. It seems possible that the association of Cainnech with dogs may have arisen from the assumption that 'Cainnech' meant 'dog-like'; the name looks like a combination of the stem of Latin, *canis*, and an Irish adjectival ending, *-ech*. I am grateful to Jon Coe, of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, for this suggestion.
56. Plummer, *Vitæ Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, p. clxxxv.
57. Dale-Green, *Dogs*, p. 59.
58. *Alkuin*, ed. by Widding, pp. 74/18 and 75/12.
59. *Alkuin*, ed. by Widding, pp. 67/16-69/16.
60. *Alkuin*, ed. by Widding, pp. 68/17-73/18.
61. *Alkuin*, ed. by Widding, pp. 72/6-7 and 73/7. See also p. 72/29-30 (a Latin version, printed for comparison).
62. The ability to 'profluere lachrymæ' is said to come 'ex gemino fonte' (67/31); tears are 'panis' (68/24), and Alcuin asks 'Quomodo potest medicus vulnus sanare, quod ægrotus ostendere erubescit?' (72/29-30).
63. *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, ed. by Keyser and Unger, p. 43/6.
64. *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, ed. by Keyser and Unger, pp. 41/31-43/28.
65. Hallberg, 'Imagery', 419. This also applies to scent, for example, 'inum sætasta ilm smyrsla ok jurta' [the sweetest perfume of ointment and herbs] which filled the air when Martha washed Christ's feet (336), and the heavenly odour above Magnús's grave (373).
66. *Ork.*, p. 125.
67. Hákon is also a 'fésjóðr fölgins glæps' [purse of hidden evil], who wraps his treasure under 'skýi skröksemdarinnar' [a cloud of falsehood] (362).

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